



THE N.J. NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM NEEDS TO BE STRONGER


PPA sponsors the Partnerships for New Jersey Plant Conservation (PNJPC), which consists of concerned private citizens, including several of the state's foremost botanists, and representatives from major conservation organizations in the state. We are all deeply concerned that, in the past, conservation of rare plants and ecological communities in New Jersey has not gotten due attention. In meetings of the PNJPC over the last few years, it has become clear that conservation in New Jersey could make significant progress if we can strengthen the state's Natural Heritage Program.

We believe the state needs to adopt a more modern view of biodiversity and make the conservation of plants and ecological communities an equal priority with the conservation of animals. Indeed, our native ecological communities are the habitats within which our native wildlife creatures evolved and upon which they depend. The New Jersey Natural Heritage Program is the only state agency that champions this perspective.

The New Jersey Natural Heritage Program provides plant and ecological community data that is essential to federal agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service; state agencies, such as the Land Use Regulation Program, the Highlands Commission, and the Pinelands Commission; county and municipal governments; Environmental Commissions; public and private land conservation organizations; environmental advocacy groups; and private citizens.

We all know that natural resource conservation depends on having good information, yet this Program is unable to deliver much of the information it is intended to provide, because it is under-funded and therefore understaffed. The PNJPC wants to establish a new level of teamwork among the state government agencies, the federal government, and the public to help this program perform to its maximum potential.

Knieskern's Beaked-rush
Rhynchospora knieskernii



State Status:
ENDANGERED

Federal Status:
THREATENED

State Rank: S1

Global Rank: G1

Habitat: damp, open, sandy barrens, or in standing water, where soil has clay or loamy substrates; often in disturbed sites.

Restricted to the Pine Barrens of New Jersey

Knieskern's Beaked-rush
Detail of watercolor by Robin A. Jess

Size: up to about 20 inches high.
Fruiting period: late July - late September

The New Jersey Natural Heritage Program is well known for its database, which is regularly used to:

- ◆ Prepare environmental impact assessments.
- ◆ Identify the highest quality areas for natural diversity and those areas in most need of protection.
- ◆ Supplement field surveys conducted to assess project impacts on natural diversity.
- ◆ Plan government, commercial, and residential development.

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- ◆ Foresee potential problems related to development in specific areas before commitments are made by planners, developers, and government.
- ◆ Minimize adverse impacts on the environment.
- ◆ Avoid unnecessary conflicts and costs.

Users of the reports generated by the Program tend to rely heavily on those reports, and often assume their accuracy, but, in fact, the reports are frequently deficient, simply because an enormous amount of available data remain undigitized, and field surveys have not been performed where they are needed. These deficiencies result in a common and costly mistake. Government agencies and consultants often assume the absence of rare species and communities in places where those species and communities need to be protected.

We believe the single most important thing needed for this program is a reliable source of funding. As currently funded, it simply cannot provide the services that we all need. We believe that new levels of public

and private support now must back up the time, money, and energy that have been invested in the program up to now. The importance of the program to the people of New Jersey demands it.

The New Jersey Natural Heritage Program is part of a prestigious international network. This program has a small, but highly qualified staff. It can lead the way toward better protection for our natural resources, if we give it the financial resources it needs.

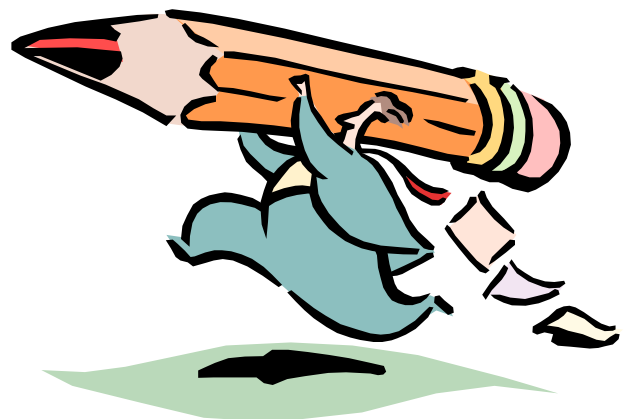
What can you do?

The PNJPC is calling on DEP Commissioner Lisa Jackson to help in our effort to promote better awareness and conservation of New Jersey plants through the Natural Heritage Program. Individuals concerned about these issues can join PNJPC at our regular meetings scheduled for:


May 8
July 10
September 11
November 13
 at PPA's headquarters

Please visit the website for additional information:
http://www.pnjpc.njpinelandsanddownjersey.com/Mission_Statement.htm

New Jersey has talented, dedicated, expert people that want to help conserve rare plants and communities, but we need to be better organized, and we need the enthusiastic cooperation and leadership of the government. We need a fully equipped and well-functioning Natural Heritage Program.



Bog Asphodel
Narthecium americanum



Detail of watercolor by Robin A. Jess

The only remaining populations are in the Pinelands of New Jersey. This plant is dependent on a stable water regime.

State Status: ENDANGERED
Federal Status: CANDIDATE
State Rank: S2
Global Rank: G2
Habitat: along open stream corridors, streamside savannas, and quaking sphagnum mats with or near Atlantic white cedar; also openings in cedar swamps.
Size: Up to 1½ ft. tall
Blooming period: mid-June - July
Blossom color: yellow

ELEMENT STEWARDSHIP ABSTRACT:

www.natureserve.org/nhp/us/nj/nartham.txt

Preserved Farmland Potentially Up for Grabs?

Not in the Pinelands

The New Jersey State Legislature in the lame duck session for 2005 approved bill S206/A559, which allows commercial nonagricultural activities and personal wireless service facilities on preserved farmland. A special permit is provided by the State Agricultural Development Committee if the applicant meets certain conditions (i.e. no pre-existing commercial nonagricultural activity), but even this requirement can be waived by the committee.

The other conditions (for both the personal wireless service facility and commercial nonagricultural activity) provide that:

- ♦ the commercial activity or personal wireless facility does not interfere with agricultural production;
- ♦ no more than one permit may be valid at any one time;
- ♦ development of structures are required to be an expansion of an existing structure and cannot exceed 500 square feet in footprint area;
- ♦ the permit cannot be transferred when selling the land;
- ♦ the permit is for a maximum of 20 years;
- ♦ the commercial nonagricultural activity or personal wireless facility does not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area, and
- ♦ the development does not include creation of parking spaces or is not a high traffic volume business.

The committee is supposed to issue guidelines for implementing the act within 60 days after enactment, which occurred on January 12, 2006. The committee is also supposed to prepare a report on the implementation of this act every two years. The reports are available to the public upon request and free of charge, and will be posted on the website of the State Agriculture Development Committee.

So what does this mean for the Pinelands? Fortunately, the Act states that farmland deed-restricted for preservation is not eligible, and requires the applicant to meet "local zoning and land use approvals and any other applicable approvals that may be required by federal, State or local law, rule, regulation, or ordinance." Therefore, the applicant has to go through the Pinelands Commission. Based upon the language within the Comprehensive Management Plan, these applications will be inconsistent with the Pinelands standards.

To review the farmland development Act, visit the state legislature website at www.njleg.state.nj.us/ and use the bill search for 2004-2005 to enter the Senate or Assembly bill numbers, S206 or A559.

How Can You Help Protect Threatened & Endangered Species Habitat?

Our state government has an official process whereby citizens may report the presence of Threatened and Endangered species. The process begins when a citizen recognizes a protected plant or animal by sight or, in the case of birds or frogs, by hearing a call distinctive of the species. It's also possible, in many cases, to recognize the presence of an animal species by finding clear evidence in the way of "sign," such as tracks.



Sick-leaved Golden Aster

The NJ Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan protects a specific list of 54 plants, and in addition, all state-listed endangered plants that occur within the Pinelands National Reserve. The number of state-listed endangered plants that occur within the PNR is approximately 150. Perhaps a third of them are easily recognizable. The rest can be recognized after a little study and with the help of some reference material.

Approximately thirty-six Threatened or Endangered animal species may be encountered in the Pinelands: at least twenty-one birds, three snakes, two frogs, two turtles, two salamanders, one fish, one mammal, and four butterflies. Most of these creatures are either immediately recognizable or can be learned with a little study and field experience.

Once a citizen has recognized a protected species, he or she may fill out a Rare Species Reporting form and send it to the NJ Natural Heritage Program (NHP), or a Threatened and Endangered Species Report form, and send it to the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP). All reports of plants should go to the NHP, where Heritage staff review each report and determine its validity. Reports of animals may go to either agency, but in this case ENSP biologists make determinations.

The report forms are available from the websites of the two agencies. For the NHP form, call 609-292-9400 or go to: www.natureserve.org/nhp-us/nj/nhprptg.htm. For the ENSP report form, call 609-984-0097 or go to: www.state.nj.us/dep/fwg/ensp/rprtform.htm.

Within the Pinelands Protection area a copy of the completed form should be sent to the NJ Pinelands Commission, P.O. Box 7, New Lisbon, NJ 08064.

A citizen report of a protected species should be supported by plenty of detail, photographs, if possible, and a map showing exactly where to find the site. State biologists may need to visit the site to verify the report.

Not all reports of protected species are accepted. In the case of most birds, for example, state biologists are primarily concerned with nesting habitat. But, in any case, citizen participation in documenting protected species sightings can often make the difference between new inappropriate development and a protected wildlife community.

Illustration by Mary Pat Finelli, courtesy Plexus Publishing, from a *Field Guide To the Pine Barrens of New Jersey* by Howard P. Boyd

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All members receive:
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A Sponsor will receive an *Exploring the Pine Barrens of New Jersey* map
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