



STATE OF THE PINELANDS REPORT THE FAILURE TO USE SCIENCE TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

About the First Annual Report

June 28, 2007 marked the 28th anniversary of the signing of the state's Pinelands Protection Act, the law that implements federal legislation creating the Pinelands National Reserve (PNR), establishes the Pinelands

Commission, and requires the creation of a Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). In addition, last year marked the 25th anniversary of the CMP, the rules that govern land use, development and natural resource protection within the 1.1 million acres of the PNR. On reflection, many wonder how the Pinelands will fare during the next 25 years considering that New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation and still growing.

Since the fate of the Pinelands ultimately rests with decisions by government agencies, PPA believes the public needs a way to hold these agencies accountable for their performance through a comprehensive annual report. To meet that need, we have created the first annual *State of the Pinelands Report*. The report sums up the state of Pinelands conservation and rates how specific actions of government agencies, elected officials

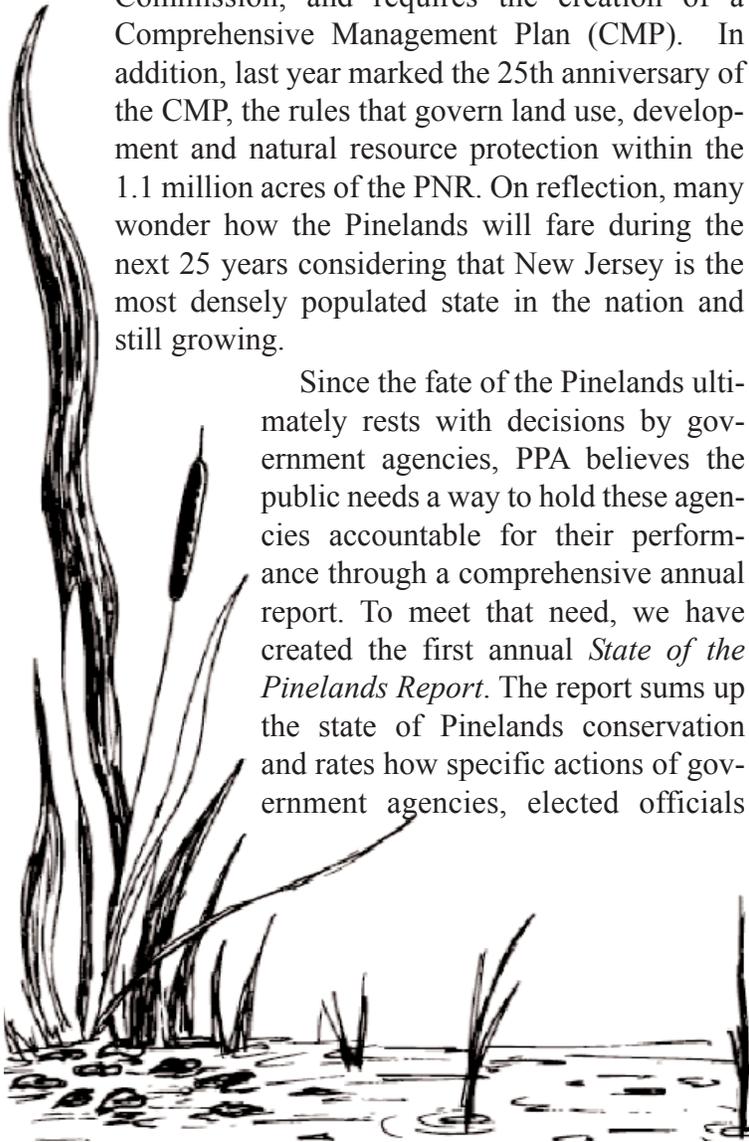
and the courts have either helped or harmed the Pinelands during the previous year. The report will be released each year during the last week in June to coincide with the signing of the Pinelands Protection Act. The following modified excerpt on water quality is from the report. The complete *State of the Pinelands Report* is available at <http://www.pinelandsalliance.org>.

The 20 year Science-Policy Gap

In what can only be described as a failure to use science to make sound policy decisions, or more simply, a failure to connect the dots, the Pinelands Commission has not taken action to improve water quality on a regional basis even though data collected by its own scientists indicates that the government needs to take action. Perhaps one of the greatest long-term threats to the Pinelands ecosystem is the slow but steady degradation of Pine Barrens waters from developed areas in and around the Pinelands, or what is commonly known as non-point source pollution.

During January 2006 the Commission released a report entitled, *White Paper on Preserving Ambient Water Quality - Policy Implications of Pinelands Commission Research Projects*. The report was the culmination of about three years of deliberations by the Pinelands Commission, including public comments and suggestions. The report discusses how research projects conducted by the Pinelands Commission Science Office can contribute to policy and planning decisions. The effort was described by the Commission as a means to "bridge" the gap between science and policy. In addition, the report gives examples of how the Commission can integrate regulatory and incentive strategies to reduce and/or mitigate water quality impacts from development and agricultural activities. The intent was for the various committees of the Commission to undertake the report's

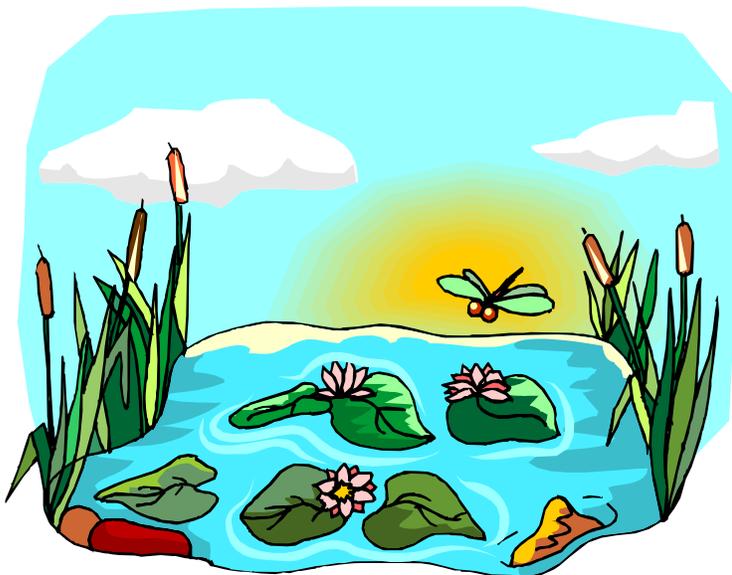
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recommendations, and move those initiatives forward to fruition.

PPA made recommendations with regards to wetlands buffers, headwater area protection, limiting impervious surfaces for new development, and clustering in the Rural Development and Forest Areas. Unfortunately, since the report was issued during January 2006, the whole effort appears to have died and the Commission has taken no action since that time. To add insult to injury, the Commission never even responded to PPA's letter. In our opinion, this was a clear indication that the Commission was not really moving forward.

The Pinelands Commission Science Office staff consists of highly qualified scientists that routinely publish peer-reviewed journal articles and reports. These scientists, either as individuals or through the Commission, have produced some 53 articles, reports, proceedings and/or book chapters since 1983. Except for some recent planning initiatives on a local level, the Commission has been unwilling or unable to take action on the vast body of data its own scientists have collected - data showing that contamination of ground and surface waters is slowly degrading the ecosystem. The trend that the science staff has discovered is that once a watershed exceeds approximately 10-percent disturbance (buildings, farm fields, parking areas, roads, lawns, etc.), water quality starts to become degraded and native plant and animal communities begin to be replaced by non-natives. In other words, the greater the percentage of disturbance, the greater the amount of water quality and biological degradation. The Science Office has documented this trend in a number of reports for the major watersheds in the Pinelands - Mullica, Rancocas, Great Egg Harbor and Barnegat Bay.



The complete *State of the Pinelands Report* is available at <http://www.pinelandsalliance.org>.

It is disturbing that the Commission has not moved forward to institute Pinelands-wide changes for protecting water quality and aquatic habitats.

PPA is a strong proponent of using "sound science" to make the best possible policy decisions. That is why, for example, we strongly supported the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer study knowing that ultimately it will lead to better decisions resulting in less impact to wetlands and the aquatic ecosystems from groundwater pumping. Unlike colleges or universities, where professors and scientists ponder scientific questions for the sake of science, the Commission's scientists are charged with finding answers to questions that will ultimately be used for the betterment of the Pinelands. We need action, and we need it now! After twenty plus years of studying the Pinelands, it's time for the rubber to meet the road, and for the Commission to make the necessary changes to the CMP to improve water quality on a region-wide scale. The data is undeniable. It is now time to use this valuable information to protect this special place we call the Pinelands.

What You Can Do?

Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, and directly to the Pinelands Commission. Express your concern that the Pinelands Commission is ignoring its own scientific data and failing to protect Pinelands streams, rivers and wetlands. That it is dodging the thorny issue of instituting Pinelands-wide measures needed to address water quality problems identified by its own staff of scientists. You can use the sample letter on the next page, modify it as you see fit, or write one of your own.

Some general points to remember when writing a letter to the editor. Letters should be brief (200 to 300 words), clear and to the point. Short letters are much more likely to be printed than long ones. You must include your address and phone number. If you cannot be contacted by phone to verify that you wrote the letter, it will not be printed. If your letter isn't printed immediately, keep trying. You can send your letter via email. We have included email contacts for you convenience.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Pinelands Waters Quality Neglected

This past June marked the 28th anniversary of the Pinelands Protection Act, the law that created what we know today as the Pinelands. It was a monumental achievement and one of the main reasons that it came about was to protect the unique water resources of the region.

Yet today, despite the Herculean efforts of forward thinking people 28 years ago, and an innovative land-use plan, the Pinelands Commission, the state agency charged with its protection, is letting it slowly slip away by their failure to use science to stop water quality degradation. According to a recent "State of the Pinelands" report by the nonprofit Pinelands Preservation Alliance, the Pinelands Commission is failing to use water quality and biological data of its own scientists to make necessary Pinelands-wide changes needed to protect water quality. The Commission's scientists have documented a lowering of surface water quality in their reports for the Mullica, Rancocas, Great Egg Harbor and Barnegat Bay watersheds (most of the Pinelands), resulting in loss of precious native plant and animal species. Yet it appears that nothing is being done to address this Pinelands-wide problem.

After twenty plus years of studying the Pinelands, it's time for the Commission to reform its policies before more of the Pine Barrens is lost through contamination of its waters.

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