



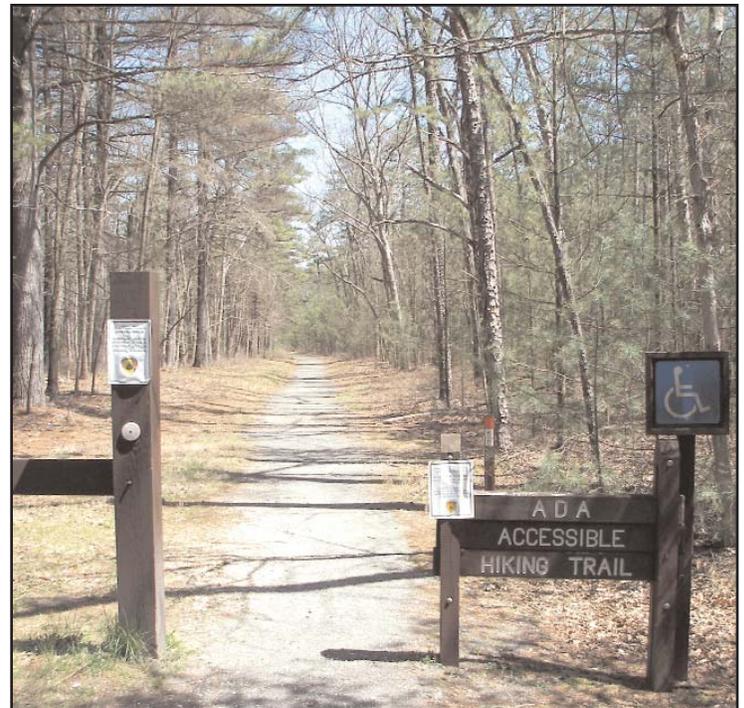
PPA CALLS ON THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE TO MODERATE PROPOSED STATE BUDGET CUTS TO AVOID PERMANENT HARM TO THE PINELANDS

Governor Corzine's proposed FY 2009 budget presents big challenges to the cause of preserving the Pinelands' natural and historic resources, because it calls

for drastic cuts in funding for the Pinelands Commission and the State Park Service. The Pinelands Preservation Alliance is asking the Governor and Legislature to reexamine and reduce the proposed cuts in order to avoid irreversible harm to the Pinelands.



The Alliance recognizes that New Jersey faces a budget crisis this year and that budget cuts must be borne fairly by all segments of state government and their constituents. The proposed budget, however, calls for cuts of more than 20% for both the Pinelands Commission and the State Park Service. Such drastic cuts are far more severe than proposed for other, comparable agencies.



Hiking trail in Brendan T. Byrne State Forest

Such drastic cuts will make it impossible for these key conservation agencies to do their jobs in controlling development and safeguarding the public lands.

Pinelands Commission: The proposed budget calls for state funding to the Pinelands Commission to fall by \$780,000 for FY 2009. That represents a cut of 23% in

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Press Conference - Public Welcome
 10 am Friday, May 2, 2008
 Pakim Pond - Brendan T. Byrne State Forest

Local elected and appointed officials have been invited. For more information, please contact Jaclyn Rhoads (609) 659-8860 Ext. 18.

funding from the current year level. In fact, the proposed state funding of \$2,618,000 for FY 2009 is less than the funding the Commission received in FY 1996. The 23% cut is actually much worse than that number alone suggests, because, unlike most state agencies, the Commission is required to pay all its employee health benefits and retiree pensions out of its own operating budget. Health care and pension costs are continuing to rise much faster than inflation. All this means a 23% cut in state funding will actually translate into more than a 30% cut in the funds the Commission actually has to do its job.

The Pinelands Commission is the main government agency charged with protecting the environment and natural resources of one-fifth of the state of New Jersey. It is charged with planning growth, and reviewing all development plans for conformance with its strict environmental standards throughout the 936,000 acre Pinelands Area. To do it right, this job requires highly skilled professionals with the time to review complex policy issues and development plans that range from individual homes to massive commercial and residential developments. As time goes on, and land in the growth zones in and around the Pinelands gets built out, the Commission's job is getting harder, not easier.

What impact will big cuts for the Pinelands Commission have on the Pinelands? We expect it to have three negative consequences:

- The Commission will lose a disproportionate number of expert staff and not be able to replace and train new professionals. This will be on top of the fact that the Commission's staff is already 11% under its authorized levels due to the hiring freeze and tight budgets.
- Commission reviews will be shortchanged, problems will not always be found and addressed, and bad or poorly designed developments will be approved as remaining staff are simply stretched beyond the limit of what they can do.
- Innovative policy changes that are needed to solve the massive threats facing the Pinelands environment today will be put on the back burner or lost in the shuffle of day-to-day project reviews and crises.

It is also possible that many projects will face ever greater delays in Pinelands Commission review, regardless of whether they meet Pinelands standards and are good or bad for the overall success of the Pinelands protection

laws.

It is important to remember that when it comes to controlling development, mistakes are permanent. Once a housing subdivision, shopping mall or road is built, it is never going to be un-built. The loss of habitat, aquifer recharge and plant and animal life that comes with developing Pinelands forests is a loss forever.

We propose that the Governor and Legislature reexamine the Pinelands Commission budget and make two changes to the current proposal:

- 1. Include the Pinelands Commission in the statewide interdepartmental accounts for benefits and pensions. This would put the Commission on an equal footing with other agencies, such as the Highlands Council.**
- 2. Reduce the cut in state funding for the Commission in FY 1999 to a 10% cut, or a reduction of \$340,000. This level of reduction would represent an equitable distribution of the inevitable pain and permit the Commission to do its job under difficult, but not impossible, circumstances.**

State Park Service: The Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection has now announced the changes that the proposed 25% cut in Park Service funding will bring - principally, the closure of many state parks or significant recreational facilities within those parks on a statewide basis. These measures include staff reductions statewide and, among other closures, the closure of the park office, camping and picnic areas and trails at Brendan Byrne State Forest in the Pinelands.

A park like Brendan Byrne State Forest cannot be "closed" to the public, because there are simply too many ways to get in - too many sand roads running into the forest, too many trails and paths in. "Closing" state parks and facilities just means the law-abiding will stay out and the renegade users will have the place to themselves - with ever fewer rangers to protect our public assets.

Because the Parks Service has not been adequately funded in the past, park staffs are already stretched too thin. This means bad actors are already running roughshod over our public lands. Irresponsible Off-Road Vehicle riders illegally take their quads, monster trucks and motorcycles into the forests and wetlands, tearing up wetlands, stream banks and rare plant populations; greedy collectors search out and steal rare plants and wildlife;

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people of many ages party at remote sites, setting fires and leaving their debris for someone else to clean up; and those too lazy to drive to the local transfer station continue to dump garbage and toxic wastes in the woods.

Further reductions of park staff and "closures" will only make this situation worse. Many of the harms our forests suffer from irresponsible visitors are cumulative and/or irreversible. When ORVs destroy a rare plant population - as has happened on a number of documented occasions - that population is lost. When someone dumps oil or cleaning fluids in the woods, those chemicals enter the aquifer, streams and wetlands and can stay in the system for decades or hundreds of years. When illegal party-makers light a fire and burns out of control, they threaten lives and homes.

The Parks also represent the state's primary resource for public recreation. The State Parks are open to all, generally at no charge. For many New Jerseyans, the State Parks are the only place they can get into nature or hold family picnics. The Governor and Legislature need to support these great public assets and acknowledge the important role they play in our society as a common good for all New Jerseyans to enjoy.

We believe the proposed cut to the Park Service is excessive and recommend that the Governor and Legislature reexamine this element of the FY 2009 budget. Understanding that this agency must bear its fair share of the burden of tightening budgets, we recommend its budget also be cut no more than 10% in FY 2009.

What can you do?

Call the following and ask them to act on PPA's proposals:

Governor Corzine
Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
(609) 292-6000

<http://www.state.nj.us/governor/govmail.html>

Senator Barbara Buono (D) - Dist 18
Chair of Budget and Appropriations
Phone Number: (732) 205-1372
Fax number: (732) 205-1375

Senator Paul A. Sarlo (D) - Dist 36
Deputy Majority Leader
Vice Chair of Budget and Appropriations
Phone number: (201) 804-8118

Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald (D) -Dist 6
Budget Committee Chair
Phone number: (856) 435-1247

Assemblyman Gary S. Schaer (D) - Dist 36
Vice Chair of Assembly Budget Committee
Phone number: (973) 249-3665

Senate President: Richard J. Codey - Dist 27
Phone number: (973) 731-6770

Assembly Speaker: Joseph J. Roberts, Jr.
Dist 5
Phone number: (856) 742-7600



Second Annual State of the Pinelands Report

*PPA will release its second annual **State of the Pinelands Report**. The report will detail how the specific actions of government agencies and appointed & elected officials either helped or harmed the Pinelands during 2007. This will include, but not be limited to, the Pinelands Commission, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New Jersey State Legislature, Governor, mayors, township committees, federal representatives and actions by the courts.*

The report will be released each year during the last week in June to coincide with the signing of the Pinelands Protection Act on June 28, 1979.

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- Discounts on PPA merchandise and events

- A Sponsor will receive an *Exploring the Pine Barrens of New Jersey* map
- A Patron will receive a copy of *Exploring the Pine Barrens of New Jersey* book
- A Benefactor will receive a Pinelands Botanical Print by Robin Jess
- A member of the Chairman's Circle will receive a personalized tour of the Pinelands



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