

New Jersey Pinelands and South Jersey Gas Pipeline

The 1.1 million-acre National Reserve protects the globally rare Pine Barrens ecosystem, home to plants and animals found nowhere else in the United States. One of the largest freshwater aquifers in the United States can be found within the sandy soils of the Pinelands.

Pinelands National Reserve: A National Reserve is not a National Park. It is a landscape where people live and work. Some areas are designated for conservation and some are designated for development. This is done through a set of rules called the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP).

Pinelands Commission: When the Pinelands Protection Act was passed in 1979, it established a 15-member independent public body known as the Pinelands Commission. The Commission is responsible for enforcing the CMP.



Pinelands Commission Members: Seven Commissioners are appointed by the Governor, with advice and consent of the Senate. Seven members are appointed from each of the seven counties with land in the New Jersey Pinelands region. These counties are Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Ocean County. The final member is appointed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and serves as the federal representative. All Commissioners are unpaid volunteers.

The South Jersey Gas Pipeline

South Jersey Gas, the gas utility for the southern-most part of New Jersey, wants to put a 22-mile natural gas pipeline through the Pinelands National Reserve, in violation of the rules that protect the Pinelands. It would go through the Forest Management Areas of Cumberland, Atlantic and Cape May County to the B.L. England Plant at Beesley's Point, Upper Township, Cape May.

The Power Plant: The B.L. England Plant at Beesley's Point, on the Great Egg Harbor, was built in 1961 and burns coal and oil. It is under orders to close down or convert to natural gas, and for the past several years has only operated for peak demand.

Why is the Pipeline a Problem for the Pinelands? The proposed pipeline violates the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). The CMP only permits infrastructure like gas pipelines in the Forest Management Area if it is "intended to primarily serve the needs of the Pinelands" – that is, only if needed for the towns and villages within the Pinelands. N.J.A.C. 7:50-5.23. To the extent it operates at all, the B.L. England plant primarily serves demand outside the Pinelands, where the great majority of residences and businesses in our region are located. There is no exception for pipes run along or under roads. **This is to protect against the immediate harms this type of construction brings to forests and wetlands. It also protects against future development of the Forest Area that these projects bring in their wake.**

What Impact Will the Pipeline Have on the Pinelands? In addition to weakening the Pinelands protection plan, the proposed pipeline would go along populated roads and under Mill Creek, the Tuckahoe River and Cumberland Pond. Any accidents, errors or failures during and after construction would impact county residents and natural resources.

How Would Approval of the Pipeline Impact the Pinelands? The survival of New Jersey's Pinelands is entirely dependent on the regulations that were created to protect it in the first place. The Pinelands Commission would have to waive the rules of the CMP in order to allow this pipeline to go through the Forest Area. **If the Commission can't uphold their own rules, then no one will!** This will not be the last project looking for an exception to the rules. The future of the natural resources found in the Pinelands and Cumberland County are at risk.

Where Do Things Stand? In January 2014 the Commission declined to pass a resolution that would have waived the rules of the CMP and allowed South Jersey Gas to build the pipeline. The final vote was tied 7-7 and they needed 8 votes in favor for the project to move forward. **But now the Commission is being pressured to overturn this decision.** In May 2015 South Jersey Gas made minor changes to their application and resubmitted it to the NJ Board of Public Utilities and the Pinelands Commission. This application is pending with both agencies.

Will Shutting Down BL England Harm South Jersey's Electrical Supply? The simple answer is "no," because that's not how the electrical grid works. According to the Director of the Center for Energy, Economic & Environmental Policy at Rutgers University, there are procedures in place to make sure there aren't reliability problems when plants retire. PJM Interconnection, an independent entity chartered by the federal government, is responsible for maintaining the electrical grid. Whenever one plant leaves the grid, other suppliers fill the gap because it is profitable to sell power into the grid.

On August 14, 2015 the Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission issued a "consistent certificate of filing" for this project!

This action is unlawful on several grounds and sets the stage for this project to be approved by Commission staff with limited input from the public or from the Commissioners - who already found that this project violates Pinelands rules.

The Executive Director declined to clarify whether and when the public may comment on the application. She also stated, incorrectly, that the Commissioners have no role in the review process and that there will be no public hearing before the Commission. The Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) does not give the Executive Director the right to make a final decision, but instead accords that power to the Commission itself after holding a public hearing.

Tell the Pinelands Commission to Protect the Pinelands and Deny the South Jersey Gas Pinelands Pipeline!

You can email them at comments@njpines.state.nj.us. The subject line must include your name and *South Jersey Gas Pinelands Pipeline*. Or mail your comments to New Jersey Pinelands Commission, Attn: South Jersey Gas Pipeline Project, PO Box 359, Springfield NJ 08064. **Get more information here www.pinelandsalliance.org/support/take-action-south-jersey-gas-p**

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