



PINELANDS
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

Spring 2021

Volume 28

Number 1

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INSIDE THE PINELANDS



*Jessica Rittler Sanchez, Theresa Lettman, Jennifer Coffey, Robert Jackson, and Edward Lloyd.
(Names are listed clockwise starting in the upper left.)*

Pinelands Commission Nominations Stalled

by Rhyan Grech, Policy Advocate

Sometimes progress is so painfully slow, the temptation to throw your hands up in defeat feels overwhelming. You may feel this way about the stalled nominees to the Pinelands Commission. If you do, we understand.

For those who haven't followed this two-year long saga, here's a little background. The Pinelands Commission is the critical state agency charged with overseeing land use, natural resource protection and implementing the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) within the Pinelands National Reserve. A board of fifteen Commissioners heads up the agency: seven gubernatorial appointees, one federal appointee, and one appointee from each of the seven Pinelands counties.

In 2019, Governor Murphy nominated four highly qualified candidates to serve, and re-nominated Commissioner Ed Lloyd. All five candidates, including Theresa Lettman, Bob Jackson, Jessica Rittler-Sanchez and Jenn Coffey, needed a vote in Senate Judiciary Committee

prior to advancing to the full Senate. However, months passed without any of the nominees making it on to the Judiciary agenda. The reasons vary, but the result for all five was the same; the legislative session ended in January 2020, and the process started over.

Fortunately, the Governor made the same nominations again in early 2020, but history repeated itself. To date, none of the candidates have advanced in the Senate.

Meanwhile, the Pinelands Commission is currently operating with three vacant seats. A number of current Commissioners have made clear their desire to step down, or their disinterest in attending meetings. As a result, the bare minimum for a quorum (eight Commissioners) has been the normal attendance month after month.

This slate of Commissioners has failed to take real action on off-road vehicle damage, protecting water supplies in the face of climate change, and other

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Published three times a year by the Pinelands Preservation Alliance

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Distributed to

PPA members & volunteers,
state legislators,
Pinelands municipalities,
elected officials,
and planning boards

*Mailing services generously
donated by Swift Mailing
www.swiftmailing.com*

Printed on 100% recycled paper.

Circulation: 5500

Available online at
www.pinelandsalliance.org

Getting outdoors in nature is good for our health and well-being. Studies have shown that if people feel safe, time in nature can lower blood pressure, stress hormones, and improve mood among many other benefits.

Despite being the most crowded state in the nation, New Jersey has a large amount of open space, including the 1.1-million-acre Pinelands National Reserve. The forests, streams and ponds found here are an important resource for residents in the region.

Unfortunately access to the vast natural areas found in the New Jersey Pinelands can be difficult if not impossible for people with physical or other disabilities. Visiting natural places can be uncomfortable, unsafe or impossible. Barriers may include a limited number of accessible sites or a lack of comprehensive and reliable information of the accessible sites that do exist.

The Pinelands Preservation Alliance wants to help overcome these barriers so everyone can enjoy the benefits of time in nature and visit the parks, forests and preserves which our state and communities have protected.

We are collaborating with two extraordinary partner organizations, Disability Rights New Jersey and Hopeworks. Together, we will work with the disability community to make the Pinelands more accessible to everyone.

We will engage with individuals, government agencies and other non-profits to listen and learn from people with disabilities about the obstacles they find in enjoying the Pinelands' natural places.

We will create a unified hub of online, mobile-friendly information about existing facilities and opportunities. We will identify the improvements and new facilities that are needed and propose specific new projects in underserved communities.

We will establish an ongoing forum for sharing insights, ideas and information about nature accessibility. This will keep accessibility on the agenda for public and private land managers who care for our natural public spaces.

This initiative is funded by an Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant from the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services. This is a new state program that is funding great work around New Jersey to help people with disabilities improve their health and quality of life.

Interesting in learning more? Visit our website www.pinelandsalliance.org/the-pinelands-is-for-everyone. Read about the project and sign up to get updates about opportunities to share your thoughts and experiences and provide feedback on the project.

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*Pinelands Adventures is an initiative of the
Pinelands Preservation Alliance and our members
get 10% off all trips and programs.*

Located within beautiful Wharton State Forest.

Meet our New Staff

We have some new people joining our team! In February, Erin Tobiassen was hired as our Bookkeeper and in March Carlos Martínez-Rivera joined PPA as Director of Conservation Science.



Bookkeeper – Erin Tobiassen

For the past 17 years, Erin has worked as a full charge bookkeeper and office manager in the non-profit sector at a church in Howell, with responsibilities that included managing all aspects of the finance department.

Erin enjoys her field of work because she believes that bookkeeping is an integral part of all organizations. Being analytical and detailed oriented, she likes the fact that accounting has checks and balances to ensure and validate data accuracy. Working in the finance department gives her the satisfaction of being a part of all the various projects in the organization even if she may not be directly involved.

The more Erin learns, the more she understands the threat to the Pinelands and therefore the need to protect the woodlands and the beautiful pristine waters of the aquifer, the plant life, and the habitat for the local wildlife. Erin has loved nature and wildlife from childhood and is extremely pleased to be working at PPA. In addition to knowing that her work contributes to the protection of the Pinelands, it is of special significance to her that the PPA promotes education and

awareness of all that the Pinelands has to offer to the surrounding communities.

Another benefit, Erin loves to watch the birds on the property and to see the golden sunlight light up the red barn in the late afternoon. She is looking forward to spring when the flowers bloom and the vegetables on the farm start sprouting. An avid photographer, Erin enjoys capturing and sharing the beauty of the outdoors with others. At home, Erin and her husband Ted contribute to a healthy environment by leaving patches of grass, dandelions and other native growth in the yard for the bees, butterflies, birds, squirrels and groundhogs to feed on and hide in.

Erin also has a special connection through her husband's ancestry with the people of the Pinelands including but not limited to Thomas Luker, Elizabeth White, the Horner family and the Burke family.

Erin says, "When outdoors, breathing the fresh air, enjoying a gentle breeze and the warm sun, seeing a beautiful sunrise or watching the colorful birds and listening to their cheerful songs, I am filled with joy and peace. It is my hope that by helping to protect the Pinelands, ours and future generations will continue to experience the beauty that New Jersey has to offer".



Director of Conservation Science

Carlos Martínez Rivera

I am from the island of Puerto Rico, where I completed my BSc in biology with

a minor in botany at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez in 2001. I obtained my doctoral degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2008. The focus of my dissertation was to understand how sexual selection shapes the evolution of frog calling behavior and male-male interactions in noisy, competitive environments (frog choruses), and how females select individual mates from the chaos of the chorus.

During my graduate career I worked with Reserva Ecológica Comuna Loma Alta in Ecuador helping them protect one of the few remaining tracts of coastal cloud forests and dry forests in the region, a unique and fragile habitat home to many Critically Endangered animals and plants.

In July 2008 I became Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles and Amphibian Conservation Biologist at the Philadelphia Zoo, and developed holistic Amphibian Conservation Programs for critically endangered amphibians in the Tropical Andes and the Caribbean through ex situ (captive breeding) and in situ (on site) conservation, as well as policymaking and advocacy. In Philadelphia, I helped establish empathy-building programs with animals where children learn prosocial skills and develop empathy towards wildlife. We carried out citizen science initiatives through our local FrogWatch® chapter and by helping environmental groups in the region.

I am thrilled to join the PPA as Director of Conservation Science, where I hope to be able to combine science data with policy making and outreach programs to effect real conservation actions at the state, regional, and local level in New Jersey. The Pine Barrens region is a unique habitat that deserves immediate protection. By joining the awesome team at PPA I can continue to carry out conservation projects and actions that translate to meaningful and beneficial impacts to the local wildlife and habitats around us.

Welcome Erin & Carlos!

New members of our team to protect the New Jersey Pinelands!

Land, Trails and the 30 x 30 Plan

by Jason Howell, Public Lands Advocate

The federal government has recently set a goal to preserve 30% of the country's land and waters by 2030 to protect biodiversity and natural resources. Reaching this goal will help mitigate the impact of climate change, preserve nature, and ensure access to clean water, clean air, and outdoor spaces for all communities.

While New Jersey is small compared to California or Alaska, our population density makes each acre of land extremely valuable. Luckily, New Jersey is well ahead of the country's new minimum standard because of the hard work and foresight of citizens and government officials over the last century. The seven counties within the Pinelands contain over 50% of the state's total open space holdings at 691,925 acres preserved with the vast majority of that acreage falling within Pinelands boundaries.

In total, the state has preserved 34% of its land area including 1,355,035 acres in open space and another 230,040 acres in farmland preservation as of 2018. But the rate of development in some Pinelands counties is among the highest in New Jersey. This means the race is on to preserve land. PPA plays a role in this effort by discussing the prospects of public acquisition with large landowners and the New Jersey Green Acres program, purchasing some parcels in fee ourselves, and working with partners like the Rancocas Conservancy, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation to further their mission.

While the acquisition of lands for the public trust continues to be successful, there remain challenges in the management of preserved lands. Specifically, as land has been preserved, the budget for managing these areas has not risen in

proportion to the acreage. Most state agencies face the lowest staffing levels of any year in this century, making the management and stewardship of lands even more difficult. For example, New Jersey Natural Lands Trust, which holds and manages 26,000 acres statewide, has only one field employee. Both NJ Parks & Forests and NJ Fish & Wildlife have critical maintenance positions yet to be filled. In the coming months, PPA and our partners will advocate for agency budget increases. Volunteers can help in the interim. We continue to organize volunteer projects to protect habitat from off-road vehicles, to clean up, and if possible prevent, illegal dumping, and to create and maintain hiking and multi-use trails.

Recently, we partnered with NJ Parks & Forests to create the Tulpehocken Connector Trail, an 18.1-mile route that starts at the Batona Trail at Penn Swamp in Wharton State Forest and reconnects to it at Apple Pie Hill. When finished this trail will link Penn Swamp, Jemima Mount, the Tulpehocken Lowlands, Hawkings Bridge Campsite, the area of Friendship and its old cranberry bogs, Sandy Ridge, and Ore Spung, giving hikers the chance to see some unique locations in the Pines.

Additionally, we are working with the Rancocas Conservancy to create a 3.1-mile trail at the Bucks Cove Run Preserve. This loop trail will start from the Whitesbog Village Parking area and traverse the 212-acre Bucks Cove Run Preserve, an inholding of Brendan T. Byrne State Forest. Nearby, the Rancocas Conservancy is working on another two-plus mile trail at the North Branch Preserve, along the North

Branch of the Rancocas Creek at Sunbury Village on Browns Mills Road in Pemberton Township. We are also working with the Crossly Preserve Alliance and the NJ Natural Lands Trust to rehabilitate and expand an existing trail at the Crossley Preserve in Tom's River. This trail links Whiting Wildlife Management Area and Manchester Wildlife Management Area on the New Jersey State Long Trail, a 380-mile trail that PPA and volunteers have helped blaze throughout the Pinelands. The NJ State Long trail will extend from High Point State Park in the north to Cape May Point in the south. This trail highlights and connects many of the beautiful spots in New Jersey.

The more people enjoy sustainable recreation in the Pinelands the stronger the case for preservation and stewardship. Our government officials must prioritize funding for preservation and proper management of our public lands.

Pinelands Commission

The Commission's offices are closed due to the COVID-19 crisis. Monthly meetings are open to the public via livestream on YouTube.

Next meeting dates:

May 14th, 9:30 am

June 11th, 9:30 am

July 9th, 9:30 am

The link to livestream meetings and a number to call in with public comment can be found on their website:

www.nj.gov/pinelands

Questions? Contact Rhyan at RhyanG@pinelandsalliance.org

Pinelands Commission Nominations Stalled

continued from cover

important issues. Without the addition of the experienced conservationists who have been nominated, the Commission is unlikely to take the bold action needed to protect the Pinelands against increasing development pressure.

One recent bright spot was the appointment of Burlington County's representative to the Commission. The County Commissioners have appointed Shannon Higgenbotham, the owner of a local family-run, sustainable farm and popular produce market in Evesham. She will bring her unique experience in environmentally-conscious management of productive farmland to the Commission. She has also agreed to serve on the Commission's Climate Committee.

Back in Trenton, the confirmations seem stuck. The Judiciary agenda is set by Chairman Senator Scutari, as well as Senate President Sweeney. Despite thousands of phone calls and emails from New Jersey residents and Pinelands enthusiasts, neither Senator has budged. Many of the Governor's nominees to other boards have been confirmed, so this seems to be a specific Pinelands issue.

It is time for Governor Murphy to step up and push for his nominees. And we must step up and push the Governor. In this election year, he needs to hear just how much the Pines mean to us. He needs to know that there is no more time to waste on essential actions where the Commission has failed to act. He must use the power of his office to move these confirmations because of what it will mean for the Pinelands. It will mean Commissioners with demonstrated dedication to science-based solutions, and to conservation of precious ecological resources. It will mean Commissioners with fidelity

to the mission of the Pinelands Commission: to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the Pinelands National Reserve.

Instead of throwing your hands up, dig your heels in! It will take all of us to get this process moving and ensure we have a strong Pinelands Commission.

Take action today by visiting pinelandsalliance.org/take-action

Life Science Field Training Institute

June 28 - July 1, 2021

A multi-day field science experience for educators to strengthen field-based investigations in their teaching and improve student performance.

Fee: \$50 refundable deposit.

Register online:
www.PinelandsAlliance.org

This event is made possible thanks to the support of the Bonazzi Foundation for the Promotion of Science Education.

Guided Bird Walks

May 1st & May 20th

Burlington County Nature Program

Burlington County Naturalist Jen Bulava will lead two bird walks on our property. Pre-registration is required and attendance is limited.

Register here:
www.co.burlington.nj.us

Join the CSA!

RANCOCAS CREEK FARM

Buy a farm share and you get a weekly pickup of fresh vegetables, flowers & herbs from June to October.

Share pickup days are Tuesday (10 am - 6 pm) & Friday (9 am - 4 pm) at the Rancocas Creek Farm.

Rancocas Creek Farm
17 Pemberton Rd
Southampton NJ 08088
609-859-8860 ext 130

The cost of a share is \$560 which can be paid in full or in separate payments.

Current PPA Members get \$20 off using the code RCF.

Learn more or sign up here:

pinelandsalliance.org/join-the-csa

Shop all things Pine Barrens

Online Store

Our visitor center and gift shop remain closed to the public but our online store is always open!

Purchase books, maps, t-shirts and hats! Items are shipped to you or your loved one or you can arrange a curbside pickup at our offices.

Find the store here:
www.pinelandsalliance.org

News and Updates from the Rancocas Creek Farm

by Jeff Tober, Farm Manager Rancocas Creek Farm

Hello and greetings from Rancocas Creek Farm. It is spring and the farming season has begun. Our winter was busy and productive! In March we had a well drilled, completed our high tunnel construction, installed a walk-in cooler, added Asian Pear trees to our orchard, and made tons of rich, fertile compost. We also purchased a used cultivating tractor (from Kentucky no less – a stylin’ International 274 circa 1984) and a used Chevy pick-up truck. And we are about to install a deer fence. The latter will encompass about a third of the farm’s 72 total acres. Deer damage in this part of the world can be ruinous. Crops such as lettuce, beets, sweet potatoes, carrots, melons and winter squash are among the crops that stand little chance of surviving deer munching; I have experienced this level of crop destruction first-hand. So, we are taking advantage of a state program that helps farms fund the construction of deer fencing. Since we don’t have a greenhouse yet, we have been using space at Walking Bird Farm in Galloway where our friends Jen and Ryan LaMonaca manage a farm. We started onions, parsley, scallions and cabbage toward the end of February and since then we have been filling the house with all sorts of veggies, flowers and herbs. It is great hang out and see their beautiful farm.

2021 is year two of Rancocas Creek Farm. Our focus on capital improvements, equipment purchases, infrastructure updates; soil building and perennial plantings are all designed to set the farm up for long-term success and sustainability. We are also working to develop the farm as a healthy ecosystem. My farming experience over the past 20 years has led me to believe that growing food for people does not have to be mutually exclusive from creating a diverse natural landscape. I would

argue the opposite, that a healthy, diverse farmscape enhances food production. We envision a farm rich in bird and insect life, perennials and annuals in flower all season long to support our native pollinators, and soils enriched by short term and multi season cover crops, compost applications, and mulches. The native trees we planted with funding from the Watershed Institute in 2020 in the farm’s wet areas will act as a wind break and provide shade and permanent roots to reduce erosion and add habitat for the prementioned birds and pollinators. We will raise some pastured heritage breed pork this year. Livestock can be managed on a rotational basis to build soil fertility while producing food and farm income.

On the business side we are excited to launch our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) this year and we are over halfway to achieving our goal for 2021 shares. We are also looking forward to growing food for weddings and events at PPA through our partnership with Jeffrey Miller Catering who is thrilled to be using fresh, chemical-free produce from our farm in their dishes. On the people side we are pleased to be hosting several part-time farmers and two Summer Interns, Katie Green and Alex Robb.

With all this work, I was very excited to be able to hire our new Assistant Manager Jess Brandeisky. I worked with Jess at Fernbrook Farm for many years and considered myself lucky to hire her this winter. Jess became interested in sustainable agriculture while she was studying Biology at Ramapo College, especially during a Study Abroad program to South India. While there, she saw how agriculture directly relates to social and economic rights, environmental justice, and community health. From that point Jess couldn’t stop thinking

about our global food systems and their impacts. After graduating from Ramapo College in 2011 with a degree in Biology, she started working in a biotechnology lab. During this time she discovered Fernbrook Farms and began volunteering in 2014. She quickly realized that she was itching to leave the lab and get to the farm as often as possible so in 2015, she joined Fernbrook’s full-time farmer apprentice program. Jess worked with me at Fernbrook from 2015 to 2020, gaining more responsibility each year and eventually working as Assistant Farm Manager for the final three years. After managing Fernbrook’s CSA in 2020, Jess decided to make change and come work at Rancocas Creek Farm. She is thrilled to be farming in a way that helps further PPA’s focus on community engagement and environmental protection. She is very excited to bring her enthusiasm for farming to PPA and to help in regenerating the farm’s soil, increasing its biodiversity, and growing delicious food for local folks!

We look forward to seeing you at the farm to get produce, look for birds, take a walk and see what we have going on. Learn about the farm or buy a CSA share on our website here: pinelandsalliance.org/join-the-csa



Jess Brandeisky, Assistant Farm Manager

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Calendar of Events

Pinelands Trips & Events

Spring 2021

Pinelands Adventures is our outdoor recreation program! Make your reservation today.



Pinelands Adventures is an initiative of PPA.

PinelandsAdventures.org

Pre-Registration is required for all trips and can be done online or by calling 609-268-0189.

Self-Guided River Trips

April thru October - Meet at Pinelands Adventures, 1005 Atsion Rd, Shamong NJ

Most visitors to Pinelands Adventures take a self-guided canoe or kayak trip down the Batsto or Mullica Rivers. Trips take from 2-8 hours depending on your choice. Trips are available everyday from April through October but reservations are required. Canoes, single kayaks and double kayaks are available. You can also bring your own boat and they will handle the transportation.

Book your trip online at www.PinelandsAdventures.org or call 609-268-0189.

Rancocas Creek Farm - CSA Shares Available

Rancocas Creek Farm is located at 17 Pemberton Rd, Southampton NJ

The Rancocas Creek Farm is program of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. This 72-acre farm is located at our offices and we grow fresh, chemical-free vegetables. Buy a farm share and get a weekly pickup of fresh vegetables, flowers & herbs from June to October. You pick up your share at the farm. Learn more or sign up on our website:

www.pinelandsalliance.org

Cost is \$560. PPA members get \$20 off with the code RCF.

Guided Bird Walk at the Pinelands Preservation Alliance (Hike)

Hikes take place May 1st and May 20th. Registration with Burlington County Parks program is required.

Burlington County Naturalist, Jennifer Bulava will lead two bird walks through the fields at the Pinelands Preservation Alliance as part of the Burlington County spring nature program. The May 1st walk focuses on migratory songbirds and May 20th on grassland birds and shorebirds. Space is limited and masks must be worn. For ages 12 and up.

Reservations are required.
www.co.burlington.nj.us

Native Plant Sale

April 22 to April 28th - Our Native Plant Sale will take place online this year.

Purchase native plants from Pinelands Direct located Columbus, NJ. They have generously agreed to make a donation to the Alliance from the proceeds of this sale. A link and a code to place your order will be placed on our website on April 22nd. Have plants shipped to your home or make arrangements for a curbside pickup.

Life Science Field Training Institute for Teachers

6/28 to 7/1. Meet at Pinelands Preservation Alliance, 17 Pemberton Rd, Southampton NJ

Teachers are invited to join us for a multi-day field science experience to strengthen field-based investigations in their teaching and improve student performance. Instruction includes field sampling methods, biodiversity inventories and Pine Barrens ecology with a canoe trip on the Batsto River plus much more. Visit our website for more information and to register.

Cost is \$50 per person that is refunded upon successful completion of the course.

NJ Pinelands Commission Meetings

May 14th, June 11th, July 9th at 9:30 am. Live streamed via YouTube with a call in number for

the public

The Commission's offices are closed due to the COVID-19 crisis. Monthly meetings are open to the public via livestream on YouTube. Visit www.nj.gov/pinelands for the link and call-in number. Questions? Contact Rhyana, Policy Advocate at PPA at: RhyanaG@pinelandsalliance.org

Shop our Online Store for books, apparel, maps and more!

Our visitor center and gift shop remain closed to the public but our online store is always open! Purchase books, maps, t-shirts and hats! Items are shipped to you or your loved one or you can arrange a curbside pickup at our offices. Find the store here:

www.pinelandsalliance.org

Visiting the Pinelands Preservation Alliance

Pinelands Preservation Alliance, 17 Pemberton Rd, Southampton NJ

PPA is headquartered at the historic Bishop Farmstead in Southampton, New Jersey. Our headquarters include offices, a nature trail, the Rancocas Creek Farm and a renovated dairy barn. The grounds and nature trail are open Monday - Friday, from 9:00 am - 4:00 pm. During the COVID-19 crisis, our visitor center and our buildings are closed. Call us at 609-859-8860 for more information.

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Do you have an event that takes place in the Pinelands?

Let us know so we can put it on our calendar.

Email:
becky@pinelandsalliance.org



Pinelands Preservation Alliance
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ALL MEMBERS RECEIVE:

- ◆ PPA membership card
- ◆ Year-long subscription to Inside the Pinelands
- ◆ PPA window sticker
- ◆ 10% off at Pinelands Adventures and on PPA merchandise

Sponsors receive a copy of *The Pine Barrens: Up Close & Natural* DVD
 Patrons receive John McPhee's seminal book *The Pine Barrens*
 Benefactors receive *The Pine Barrens of New Jersey*, a photographic history of this region
 Chairman's Circle members receive the book *Seasons of the Pines* and a personalized tour of the Pinelands

Our mission is to protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources of New Jersey's Pinelands.