



PINELANDS
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

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INSIDE THE PINELANDS



Wharton State Forest is the largest state forest in New Jersey and offers many recreational opportunities.

It is Time to Fix Our Parks

by Jason Howell, Public Lands Advocate

For more than a half a century, New Jersey has invested billions of dollars creating a public lands system which houses tremendous beauty and biodiversity and should be the envy of every state in the union. It is critical to our society to have a well-funded and well-managed park system.

But New Jersey's State Parks, Forests, Wildlife Management Areas, and Natural Areas have become neglected. Natural resource and law enforcement staff have been reduced due to inappropriate budget cuts, natural resource inventories and protection plans are not being implemented, and natural beauty is becoming spoiled by destructive activities that undermine ecological health, the public trust, and our previous investments.

Our members and the visiting public have made it clear that we need more accessible walking trails, more scenic viewing areas, and more biking trails in the state. We need to prevent destructive uses like illegal dumping and illegal off-road vehicles that harm the parks and the peo-

ple who use them. Both New York and Pennsylvania have accomplished many of these goals and are moving progressively forward, yet New Jersey is falling behind.

Although the symptoms appeared first in the Pinelands on issues such as lack of swimming areas and trails, illegal dumping, and staffing cuts, this is now a statewide issue. We teamed up with the Highlands Coalition, the New Jersey-New York Trails Conference, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation to launch a grassroots campaign, Fix Our Parks NJ, to restore the resources, staffing, and pride in New Jersey's state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas.

In preparation for this campaign we hired Michael Van Clef, Ph.D., of Ecological Solutions LLC., to conduct an assessment of New Jersey's public lands management. Dr. Van Clef earned his Ph.D. in ecology from Rutgers University and has over 25 years of experience in land stewardship, planning and research. He has consulted

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You can't help but notice the sweet smell of the pines in July. The days can be long and hot but are made bearable by witnessing the variety of life flourishing everywhere one looks. From mid-summer wildflowers in bloom to fantastic fungi displaying themselves and spiders roaming the pine needle-covered ground, there are always flora and fauna to be seen.

During midsummer in the Pine Barrens, we will see fewer wildflowers in bloom than in springtime, but we have the privilege to see the Turk's-cap lily, *Lilium superbum*, blooming in early July. The six yellow-orange petals with red dots make themselves easily known against the green and tan shades of the Pinelands. Keep your eyes peeled for the Turk's-cap lily in swamps or low grounds with moist soil. This native perennial wildflower plant is well-liked by pollinators, butterflies, and hummingbirds due to its nectar. According to stories passed down over the years, the lily got its common name from the petals and sepals resting in an inverted position while in full bloom, which resembles a traditional Turkish hat.

Spiders don't seem to be the favorite arachnids for most people, but there are plenty of them to be found while exploring the Pinelands. The jumping spider is a member of the *Salticidae* family and is a hunting spider, which means it hunts its prey instead of catching prey in a web. The jumping spider has eight eyes, but the middle two are larger than the others so that the spider can identify its predators or prey within four to eight inches away. When the jumping spider hunts, it will create a dragline so that once the prey is captured the spider can easily return to its starting location.

Fungi make up a large classification of living organisms from bacteria and slime

molds to earthstars and mushrooms. When looking at fungi, we often see the fruiting bodies above ground and below ground exists mycelium. Mycelium is what creates the fruiting bodies and is made up of hyphae, a network of filamentous structures. Fungi cannot create food for themselves and rely on organic matter, such as decaying wood. The earthstar, *Geastrum triplex*, is commonly found on the sand in the Pine Barrens. In the middle is a soft sac that holds thousands of spores used for reproduction. Around the protective sac are four to eight sections that lay out like a star. If external pressure is applied to the inner sac, spores release and travel until they find a new place to grow.

There are always new species to meet or learn about when exploring the Pinelands. Although the Pinelands might seem like just a vast forest of pitch pine trees, it reveals secret wonders to those who slow down and explore the world around them.



Earthstar fungus in the Pines.

Building Bridges for a Common Good

by Kathia Ramirez, Policy Advocate

PPA is a founding member of the Hammonton Health Coalition (HHC), which is dedicated to improving the health of Hammonton's people by making Hammonton a more inclusive community for all residents.

Hammonton is a Pinelands town that relies on Pinelands protections for the health of its water supply, farming economy, and recreation-based tourism. As members of the coalition, PPA brings our understanding of the local environment, the recreation capacity of Pinelands Adventures, fundraising experience, and our enthusiasm for connecting more people to the natural landscape around them.

In addition to PPA, Coalition members include Allies in Caring (AIC), Comite de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agricolas (CATA), ARH Associates, Atlantic Division of Public Health, Excellence in Education, Greater Hammonton Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Hammonton, Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers, The Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton University, and the Town of Hammonton.

The mission of the Hammonton Health Coalition is to “foster collaborations among members of our community and public and private agencies to help all residents improve their physical and psychological health by implementing creative programs that draw on local wisdom, respect residents’ needs and aspirations, and take advantage of Hammonton’s unique economic, cultural and natural landscapes.” The HHC is an informal partnership of individuals, organizations, and businesses. The HHC acts as a bridge to link communities not currently working together but that face the same challenges. PPA has been a member and close partner of the HHC since its beginning.

The Coalition’s early focus has been

on making Hammonton more inclusive for its growing Latino population through dialogue, events and programs, and sharing information and services. More recently the Coalition has expanded its efforts to promote inclusivity and public participation among other parts of the community, such as families living in poverty, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The Coalition works to address ACE known as Adverse Childhood Experiences that correlate strongly with the health and well-being of residents.

Our journey together has come a long way given that before we began doing the “actual work” we first needed to build a foundation of trust to get some of our work done. Some of the conversations that come up can be painful and uncomfortable and this work will keep evolving as we move forward.

HHC received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - NJ Health Initiatives Upstream Acceleration Program specifically to engage with the Latino community. This permitted us to create a program well known as Connectors. The Connectors program is composed of bilingual community members who have an interest in helping the community and making sure they are aware of resources and opportunities to engage in town efforts. Additionally, being able to keep an inventory of some of the talents and gifts in the community that is not often recognized or acknowledged.

One of the main accomplishments of this program has been promoting town wide events in Spanish. Connectors are the heart of the Hammonton Health Coalition as they are the bridge to connecting the underrepresented communities, share their stories, and close the gap. Various projects have emerged as an outcome of the Connectors Program; a Latino Leadership Scholarship

which provides seed money to individuals embarking on their educational career since most are first generation college students; Hispanic Heritage Month which allows us to promote and build consciousness on culture, history and traditions; a resource fair which brings together organizations and agencies providing services and resources to the community; a women’s group which creates a safe space for women to talk about some of the issues affecting them but also learn from each other; and lastly, a youth podcast which will create a platform for youth to engage and talk about topics of their interest, while developing and enhancing their communication skills.

PPA is also providing staff support for the Coalition, and that person is me! In May, I was hired as Policy Advocate for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance and I have two roles. I assist in tracking development activities in the Pinelands and I staff the Hammonton Health Coalition. It was critical that HHC had a paid staff member to keep the Coalition organized and on track. Being employed by both organizations helps better link our cross-pollinated work and will lead to new collaborations and projects. At PPA, we strive to make the Pinelands more accessible to ALL regardless of their ethnicity, language barriers and abilities. We aim to be more inclusive and help create a sense of belonging so that we can build a bigger movement, more consciousness on issues affecting the Pinelands and be ready to act in protecting their home.

Thank You!

To our members and volunteers who support the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. You really make a difference! We are so lucky to have your support.

Volunteers are Essential

By Rhyan Grech, Policy Director

Like many small non-profits with a small staff, Pinelands Preservation Alliance, along with Rancocas Creek Farm and Pinelands Adventures, relies heavily on our supporters. This includes our incredible corps of volunteers - people who give their time to the organization, our programs, and our initiatives. We took some time this June to share a day with our volunteers and recognize them for all they do for the Pines.

Since our beginnings in 1989, PPA volunteers have been helping us achieve our goals. We believe there is a place for anyone willing to donate their time, so we work with people to find a match for their interests, skills and schedule. From administrative tasks (stuffing envelopes) to stewardship work (cleaning up illegal dump sites) to advocating for Pinelands protections (making comments at public hearings), volunteers are at the heart of what we do. In fact, the Pinelands National Reserve only came into being thanks to the dedication of a coalition of advocacy volunteers, so it is fitting that passionate, generous individuals still keep the Pinelands protected today.

It was volunteers who helped install barriers in spots where illegal off-road vehicles had severely damaged valuable habitat. As you can see from the before and after pictures, simply blocking access to impacted areas will allow nature to bounce back.

Volunteers attended agency hearings and contacted decision-makers year after year, which ultimately led to the defeat of the South Jersey Gas pipeline. That six-year fight was driven by volunteers, who successfully delayed the

pipeline construction again and again until the energy plant decided the project wasn't worth it and withdrew.

PPA volunteers also spend a lot of time educating others about the Pinelands, and the incredible natural resources found here. Annual events, such as the Tour de Pines bicycle ride and the Pinelands Juried Photo Exhibit, are organized by volunteers, providing unique ways for the public to connect with the Pines. Even taking just a few minutes to email a legislator or call the Governor is valuable volunteer work!

According to Independent Sector, along with the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute, the value of a volunteer hour in the United States is estimated to be \$29.95 based on data collected in 2021 and hourly earnings released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This valuation not only emphasizes the importance of volunteers to a non-profit, but also allows organization like ours to leverage more funding to do even more important work.

The contribution of volunteers to our communities and our environment is impressive, but the highlight for us is getting to know and work alongside the best volunteers in all of New Jersey (we may be a little biased). The Volunteer Recognition Event at PPA's headquarters was a chance for the staff to express our thanks, and to share some good food, drinks and conversation with the people on the front lines. More than just a fun day, it was a chance to exchange ideas and deepen our relationships with our volunteers. Hearing from the most dedicated fans of the Pinelands gives us valuable perspec-

tives and ideas, which helps us do our jobs better.

So from all of us at PPA, Rancocas Creek Farm and Pinelands Adventures, **THANK YOU** to our volunteers for everything you do for the Pines! If you missed the email invitation, please let us know. We hope to make this an annual event. Interested in volunteering? Visit our website and click on Protect and then How you can Help.

Tour de Pines

Sept. 29 to Oct. 2, 2022

Tour New Jersey's largest wilderness by bike!

See the Pinelands National Reserve! Travel thru forests, historic villages and farms.

Rides are 40-55 miles with shorter loops available on some of the days.

2022 Rides:

9/29 No Whining Ride

Laurita Winery
New Egypt NJ

9/30 Bridge to Nowhere

Belleplain State Forest
Woodbine NJ

10/1 Pinelands Meets the Bay

Bass River State Forest
Tuckerton NJ

10/2 Cranberry Cruiser Ride

Pinelands Preservation
Alliance HQ

For more information:

www.TourdePinesNJ.org

Fix Our Parks

continued from cover

with over 30 organizations in New Jersey including the NJ Invasive Species Council for which he prepared the New Jersey Strategic Management Plan for Invasive Species.

The result of Dr. Van Clef's work is the New Jersey State Lands Management Report available at www.FixOurParksNJ.org, (publicly released in June). It provides a detailed look at the state's public lands and the resources allocated for management and protection of those lands. An excerpt from the report states:

“New Jersey parks face significant challenges. Staffing has decreased by 28% since 2006, leading to reduced services including seasonally staffed or closed nature centers, swim areas closing early, and delayed storm cleanup. There are now only 15 Park Superintendents responsible for over 50 parks. For naturalists and historians, there are now less than ten full-time staff across the entire system, which leads to an undervaluing of parks by the public. The ratio of Park Service staff to visitors is 1 to 36,000 and there is 1 Forest Service staff for every 5,500 acres of land. In addition, there has been a 13% increase in acquired park acreage since 2008. The combination of reduced staffing and increased lands requiring management is severely stressing the park system. Some have said that ‘collapse’ is inevitable and these trends are demoralizing remaining staff. It is certain that the integrity of park resources has been significantly reduced.”

New Jersey's investment in public lands has given us 389 State Parks, Forests, Historic Sites, Natural Areas, and Wildlife Management Area covering 882,000 acres across the State, representing an incredible

inventory of accessible opportunities for healthy, outdoor recreation. Clearly, we must do a better job protecting them and ensuring they are accessible and safe.

That is where you come in. Non-profit groups can sound the alarm, but we need the political support of individuals who care about their parks and open space to bring about change. Join the campaign at www.FixOurParksNJ.org. You will be able to take part in public demonstrations, cleanup projects, tours and receive a free #FixOurParks yard sign. You will be connected with other like-minded individuals and can make a positive impact on our parks. Share your story with us. Is there a state park or forest that you love? Is there an issue impacting your experience? Reach out to Jason at 609-859-8860 ext. 125 or send an email at jason@pinelandsalliance.org.

The Fix Our Parks Campaign is a statewide campaign with four main objectives. First, we want to increase funding for state parks and forests operations and maintenance through both public and private funds which means a commitment by all leaders from the NJ Legislature to Governor Murphy. Second, we support more flexibility and resources for state park superintendents. Third, we advocate for greater enforcement to stop the illegal activities that continue to cost the state and advocate for new technology that can help with enforcement even with limited personnel. And fourth, we want to partner with the state in creating a statewide/regional Friends Organization that can bring volunteers and private resources to help with maintenance and stewardship.

You can help make this vision a

reality by joining the movement. Read the report and sign up at fixourparksnj.org to learn about events and how you can participate.

Let's keep putting pressure on decision makers like Governor Murphy, state legislators, and Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn LaTourette to make the best decisions possible to protect and enhance the Parks. If we don't build the movement strong enough, then the trend of blight and destructive uses of our open space will only continue. Fortunately, many people are hearing the call, understanding the issues, and joining the movement to #FixOurParks. With your help, we will establish New Jersey's Parks as a health and well-being resource for residents and visitors alike and generations to come.

Sign up and learn more at www.FixOurParksNJ.org.

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

JULY 19TH TO JULY 23
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Stop by our table!



PPA Staff helped students at Helen Fort Middle School in Pemberton plant a rain garden in May.

Summer and Reptiles in the Pine Barrens

by Carlos Martínez Rivera, Director of Conservation Science

Summer is the best time to be out in the Pine Barrens. The cool mornings followed by hot sunny afternoons and those sporadic evening showers mean long days full of activity from sunrise to sunset, and then again from sunset to sunrise. It doesn't matter where you are or how muggy it is, there's so much to do outside and so little time! Forage for food, soak up some sun, find a mate, go dig a nest and finally lay those eggs! Summer in the Pine Barrens is where all the fun is at. Especially if you're one of the 20 or so species of snakes or the 10 species of turtles that call the Pine Barrens home.

The farther away you move from the equator, the more critical summer is for plants and animals. Energy is the currency of nature, and the sun provides the energy all life forms use on land. Plants use the energy from the sun to produce food, animals that eat plants get energy from the sun in the form of calories by eating those plants; predatory animals get the energy from the sun by eating the animals that ate the plants. That is the real reason animals have been dormant (or away somewhere sunny in the tropics as is the case with migratory birds) all winter and early spring. Not because it was too cold, but because there was little sunlight for plants to produce food for themselves and little to no food for animals to eat. So, everyone either goes to sleep or goes somewhere else.

Reptiles, including snakes and turtles on the other hand, have no choice. They are poikilotherms, a fancy, more accurate word for "cold blooded" that means "of changing temperature". Their body temperature changes with the environment so they also depend on direct sunlight and heat to warm themselves up and speed up their metabolism. In other words, they need the sun twice. However, the 14 plus hours of sun we get all summer in New Jersey, means they're busy using that energy from the sun and is why we see so much wildlife around us.

The most iconic reptiles you can see in the Pine Barrens are Northern pine snakes (*Pituophis melanoleucus*), a large, robust tan or cream-colored snake with darker brown saddles and markings. They're threatened and protected by the state. Pine snakes need pine forests and good habitat with a mix of pines and open spaces on sandy soils where they burrow with the help of a special scale on the tip of their nose. They can travel long distances looking for food and nesting sites and don't mind crossing roads or past your house on their way to their destination. Females are out now looking for places to lay their eggs.

Another beautiful snake is the eastern hognose (*Heterodon platirhinos*), its color pattern is very variable, some individuals are drab black, others have irregular markings that range from a few rectangular blotches to almost fully checkered. Colors can range from yellow, gray, brown, tan, or black, but some individuals have stunning reds and oranges as well. Their main food are toads and are considered mildly venomous. They would rather perform an elaborate aggressive display, including death feigning than try to bite, but as with all snakes, it is best to leave them alone if you see one outside.

A pair of beautiful lookalikes are black racers and black rat snakes. In both species, juveniles have a particular color pattern of irregular tan and brown markings that helps them blend in the leaf litter and forest understory. It also makes them look like timber rattlesnakes. As they grow, the pattern in both species fades into black with white chin and light-colored underbelly, with some individuals having a very glossy jet-black color. Racers are thin and have a blunt, rounded face while rat snakes are more robust and larger.

All of the snakes above have one thing in common, at some point in their lives the color pattern consist of brown and tan markings over a

lighter background color. This is considered a classic cryptic coloration that helps them blend in the forest floor and may also help them confuse predators while traveling. But the colors and pattern also make them look somewhat similar to a timber rattlesnake, the only truly venomous snake in NJ. Timbers are also iconic, but harder to come by unless you know where and what to look for. As with all venomous snakes and wildlife in general, it is best not to disturb them when we encounter them in the wild.

Turtles are also on the move these days, especially females looking for nesting sites. Be on the lookout for Eastern box turtles, those lovely and beautifully patterned high domed denizens of the forest. As their name suggest they can box themselves shut inside their carapace with the help of a special hinge in their underside and muscles to pull it shut.

Red bellied turtle females are also out and about. They are the large black turtles with red underside that you will see at ponds and sometimes near a trail or road as they are digging up a cavity in the sand to lay their eggs.

Summer is the time to see wildlife, especially reptiles, so be on the lookout when you're in the pines. Let us know if you find anything interesting. If you see a snake, take a picture if you can, but observe from a safe distance. If you see a turtle crossing the road and can help, please be aware of traffic and other cars around you. Helping a turtle cross the road is a noble act, but must be done safely.

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Calendar of Events

Visit the Pinelands!

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Visit the Pinelands!

Now is a great time to explore the Pinelands. Here is a list of state parks and forest begging for you to visit. Make sure you check with each location before you visit.

Atlantic County

Estell Manor County Park

This is a large, user-friendly park where you can hike, bike, picnic, fish, go sightseeing, exercise, visit the park's nature center, and really enjoy the Pine Barrens. The Fox Nature Center provides programs for enjoying the outdoors as well as displays about the local ecology. With its location on tributaries to the Great Egg Harbor, the park provides an excellent point to launch all manner of water craft. Historic ruins in the park are well-explained in interpretive signs.

Burlington County

Bass River State Forest

Home to one of the first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, Bass River State Forest now provides easily accessible camping, swimming and hiking facilities. In addition to a swimming beach on Lake Absegami, the State Forest has eight walking of 1 to 3.2 miles through typical Pine Barrens habitats. Bass River State Forest is located at 762 Stage Road, Tuckerton, NJ. This state forest is in Burlington and Ocean County.

Brendan Byrne State Forest

Brendan Byrnes State Forest is over 37,000 acres lovely trails that crisscross the forest and pass historic sites. A great place to visit is Pakim Pond. A beautiful small pond in the heart of the Pine Barrens, Pakim Pond is a wonderful place to explore forest and wetland habitats. A short trail wraps around the entire perimeter of the pond, and also connects to the Batona Trail. Accessible by paved road, the pond has a gazebo, picnic tables and grills, and restrooms. Another lovely spot is historic Whitesbog Village the historic site of a company town where the blueberry was first culti-

vated for commercial production by Elizabeth White. The village, now incorporated within Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, includes historic buildings and houses, cranberry bogs, blueberry fields, reservoirs and surrounding woodlands. The village area is managed by the Whitesbog Preservation Trust, and JJ White Cranberry Company, owned by the descendants of Elizabeth White, cultivates some of the cranberry bogs at the edge of the village.

Wharton State Forest

Wharton State Forest is New Jersey's largest state forest at 125,000 acres. There are many trails, roads and historic places to visit. A great place to start is historic Batsto Village. Batsto is one of the most popular stops in the Pinelands. Originally founded as an ironworks in 1766, a restored village surrounds the original ironworks with information and displays on site to show how things were done "in the old days". The mill dam in the heart of the village creates Batsto Lake, a beautiful lake on which most Batsto River canoe and kayak trips end. The mansion is restored and open for tours, and the village includes a nature center, saw mill, general store and other early buildings. Batsto's Visitor Center is also the main office for Wharton State Forest, where camping permits, trail maps, and a gift shop can be found.

Ocean County

Double Trouble Village in Double Trouble State Forest

Double Trouble is the site of an old village dedicated to cranberry farming. Many of the historic buildings, including the cranberry packing house and the sawmill are intact and can be toured. Cedar Creek runs next to the village and is one of the Pine Barrens' most beautiful. The State Forest contains excellent hiking trails.

Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge

The Forsythe Refuge includes more than 47,000 acres of southern New Jersey coastal habitats and represents the fragile estuary ecosystems

which are sustained by fresh water flowing from the interior Pine Barrens forests into the coastal marshes and bays. Located on one of the Atlantic Flyway's most active flight paths, the Refuge provides world-class birding opportunities. The Refuge includes walking trails through rare coastal pine forest habitats. Start at the Visitor Center and Wildlife Drive on Great Creek Road in Galloway Township.

Pinelands Commission Meeting

7/8, 8/12, & 9/9 starting at 9:30 am. Monthly meetings are open to the public and are held via livestream on YouTube.

The Pinelands Commission is the state agency that oversees conservation and development within the Pinelands. They meet on the 2nd Friday of the month. They continue to conduct meetings virtually. Meeting agendas, link to livestream and a phone number to call can be found at www.nj.gov/pinelands.

Tour de Pines Bicycle Ride from Sept 29 to Oct 2

Various starting locations in the Pinelands.

All rides are loop rides and take place in and around the Pine Barrens. Organized by Kermesse Sport to benefit the PPA. Bicycle through state forests, nature preserves, trails, ghost towns and farms. Register tourdepinesnj.org

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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

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

Let us know so we can put it on our calendar. And make sure to check out our online calendar for tons of events and programs!

Email:
rachel@pinelandsalliance.org



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- ◆ Year-long subscription to Inside the Pinelands
- ◆ Annual State of the Pinelands Report
- ◆ 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 a personalized tour of the Pinelands

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