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# STATE OF THE pinelands

2023 ANNUAL REPORT BY THE PINELANDS PRESERVATION ALLIANCE





# The New Jersey Pinelands

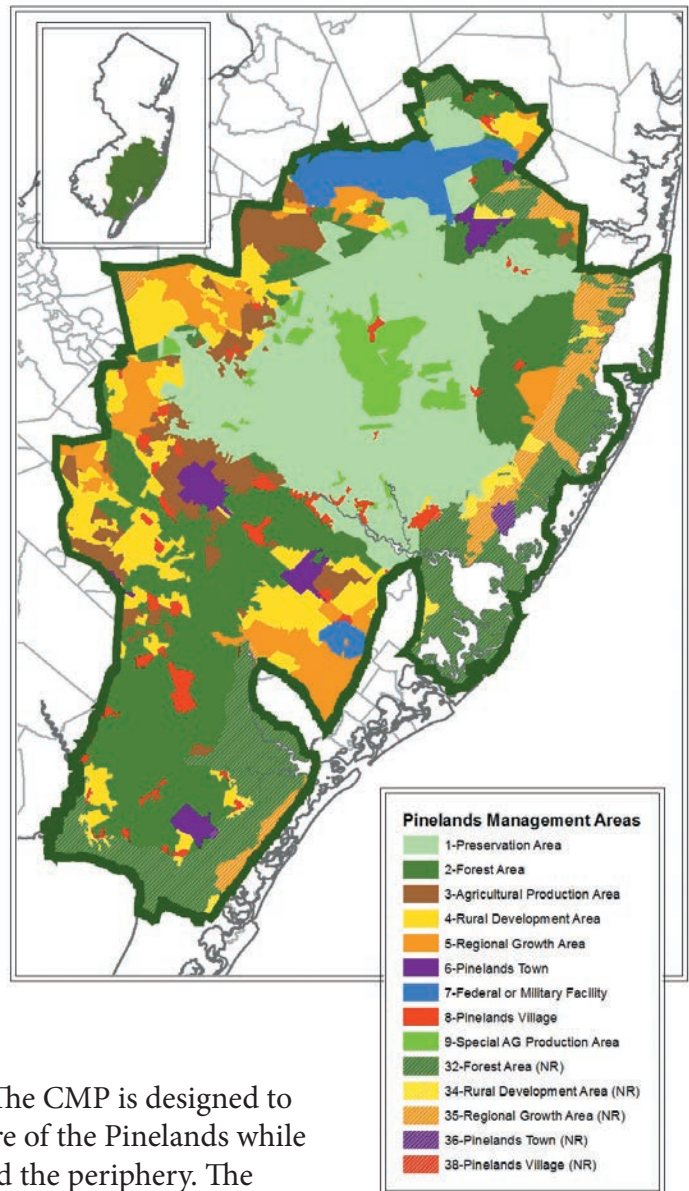
The Pine Barrens is a vast forested area extending across South Jersey's coastal plain. This important region protects the world's largest example of pitch pine barrens on Earth and the globally rare pygmy pine forests. One of the largest fresh water aquifers, the Kirkwood-Cohansey, lies underneath its forests and wetlands. The Pine Barrens is home to many rare species, some of which can now only be found here having been extirpated elsewhere.

During the 1960's construction of the world's largest supersonic jetport and an accompanying city of 250,000 people was proposed for the Pine Barrens. This proposal galvanized citizens, scientists and activists to find a way to permanently protect the Pinelands. In 1978 Congress passed the *National Parks and Recreation Act* which established the Pinelands National Reserve, our country's first. In 1979 New Jersey adopted the *Pinelands Protection Act*. This Act implemented the federal statute, created the Pinelands Commission, and directed the Commission to adopt a Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) to manage development throughout the region.

Many residents do not know that all new development in the Pinelands is controlled by the nation's most innovative regional land use plan. The CMP is designed to preserve the pristine conditions found within the core of the Pinelands while accommodating human use and some growth around the periphery. The Pinelands Commission's staff of approximately 40 professionals is directed by 15 Commissioners who serve voluntarily. Seven Commissioners are appointed by the Governor with approval of the state Senate, seven by the counties in the Pinelands, and one by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) also plays a key role in protecting the Pinelands. In addition to its job of implementing the CMP in the coastal zone, the DEP regulates the distribution of fresh water from the aquifers that lie beneath the Pinelands.

The Pineland Commission and DEP's accomplishments in the Pinelands are remarkable. But this region faces an onslaught of threats in the form of political interference to benefit development projects, and the failure of state agencies to enforce Pinelands rules on a consistent basis. Through public education and advocacy the Pinelands Preservation Alliance works to protect this great wilderness and give the public a voice in its preservation.



# State of the Pinelands 2023

The Pinelands Preservation Alliance presents this annual report to sum up the health of the Pinelands preservation efforts by our federal, state and local government agencies. We seek to provide the public and the agencies themselves with a report card that we can all use to move forward and do better in protecting this unique natural treasure.

This annual review of select actions or inactions of the last 12 months is the most comprehensive account of public policy actions that affect the Pinelands National Reserve.

We applied six criteria in assessing each action –namely, whether each action:

1. upholds the integrity of the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP);
2. protects native habitats, for plants and wildlife;
3. safeguards the quality of Pinelands aquifers and surface waters;
4. insures the integrity of the water supply for people and the ecosystem;
5. enhances the cultural and historic resources of the area; and
6. advances education about the Pinelands.

Where a government agency followed its rules and took appropriate action we gave the agency a *thumbs up*. In cases where the agency drifted from its regulatory mandate and took an action that, in our opinion, was detrimental we gave the agency a *thumbs down*.

Photo by Shawn Burns



*The Pinelands Preservation Alliance depends on donations from concerned citizens just like you. You make it possible for us to advocate for the Pinelands each and every day. Thank you for protecting the Pines!*

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Dear Friends of the Pinelands,

The past year has brought new people onto the Pinelands Commission, making it possible for the Commission to make progress in ways it was unwilling to do for the last 10 years due to members who had no interest in stronger protections for the Pinelands.

We believe the unifying theme for the policy reforms the Commission should take on now is climate change by doing our part to reduce greenhouse gases and adapting to the impacts that are coming to the Pinelands. The beauty of focusing on climate change is that the steps the Commission should take are also the right steps for protecting biodiversity, water supplies, water quality and forests.

PPA is advocating for policy reforms on protecting the aquifers from overuse, protecting native species through prudent prescribed fire and better stewardship of public lands, and stopping any expansion of unnecessary fossil fuel infrastructure while promoting renewable energy that is consistent with preserving the Pinelands undeveloped forests. We are also working with other organizations and farmers on promoting regenerative, as opposed to industrial, agriculture – a key part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions that also brings all sorts of benefits to the health of human beings, the soil and wildlife.

On one of the essential reforms, the Commission is taking overdue but real steps towards adopting rule changes that have been in the works for many years. These are changes to better protect the Kirkwood-Cohansey and related aquifers from over-exploitation. PPA strongly endorses these rules changes and expects the Commission to adopt them after the public comment process is completed.

There is a lot more to do, however.

Fortunately, there are champions for policy change on the Pinelands Commission. The question is whether they can move the Commission through the process of deliberation, discussion and public comment to adopting real changes to the Comprehensive Management Plan. The Commission needs to hear from all of us that this is the time to act.

Good government actions are critical to saving the Pines. But so are the myriad civic, private sector efforts of activists, nonprofits and community groups. PPA is in a good position to support people who are improving lives in their communities with our communications, recreation, organizing and farming skills. Making new friendships with people where they live always seems to create unexpected opportunities for connecting more people with the Pinelands and the natural resources on which they depend (even if they don't always know it). So in addition to our advocacy before the Pinelands Commission, the governor and the powers that be, PPA is also dedicated to forging ties with people in and outside the Pinelands boundary, within or outside the "environmental" sector, with an eye to building bridges back to nature and making New Jersey a more just and equitable society. Three of those current efforts are highlighted in this report: Our initiative to make natural places accessible for people with disabilities and our partnerships with Allies in Caring and The Opportunity League of Burlington City.

Best wishes,



Carleton Montgomery  
*Executive Director*



# Issues Spotlight – Fix Our Parks

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. However, New Jersey's state parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and natural areas have become sorely 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 has been spoiled by destructive activities that undermine ecological health, the public trust, and our previous investments.



Fix Our Parks is a movement organized by the Pinelands Preservation Alliance (PPA), New Jersey Conservation Foundation, New Jersey Highlands Coalition and New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to ensure that New Jersey's state parks and forests and wildlife management areas are protected and enhanced for future generations.

We started by hiring Michael Van Clef, Ph.D., of Ecological Solutions LLC., to research and write *The New Jersey State Lands Management Report* which we released in June 2022. The report showed that parks are in desperate need of more funding, more personnel, and more amenities for visitors. The report further illustrated the great disparity in park funding in New Jersey compared with other nearby states. New York for instance spends \$24 dollars per resident on operating costs for their parks, while New Jersey only spends a paltry \$4 per resident. This was not always the case, but for more than twenty years our governors and state legislatures have failed to invest in the places that New Jerseyans rely on for recreation, exercise, and peace and tranquility.

This campaign has four main goals:

1. Ensure enforcement is taking place with appropriate fines and penalties against activities such as illegal off-road vehicle riding, poaching, and dumping of trash and debris.
2. Give more power/authority to the Superintendents to have the flexibility to complete projects.
3. Advocate for more funding for state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas, so there are more resources and personnel to complete projects and monitor these lands.
4. Partner with groups and volunteers to create a statewide or regional Friends organization for New Jersey state parks and forest areas.

Since June we have held volunteer events, activist planning meetings, and meetings with our state-elected representatives about how to improve state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas in New Jersey. Now Fix Our Parks activists are working to advance these issues in their communities. In the coming months, we will be offering tours, promoting resolutions within park-adjacent municipalities to support more funding from the state, and building up our base of supporters. Our focus so far has been derived from citizen advocates who want to improve funding, maintenance, and rule enforcement in open space areas like Winslow Wildlife Management Area, Wharton State Forest, the D&R Canal State Park, Kittatinny Valley State Park, Round Valley Reservoir, the Hamilton Preserve, and the Crossley Preserve.

If we can grow our support base wide enough, build effective relationships with elected officials in positions of influence, and create the broad attention necessary for this issue – then we may be able to get our parks the resources that they need. However, we can only do this with your help and participation. The most important thing now is to make sure you have joined the campaign at [FixOurParksNJ.org](http://FixOurParksNJ.org). After signing up, we will need your creativity and energy to advance a pro-parks agenda within your community. This will benefit all of us who love to spend time in these places and count on them as a critical resource for our lives and our families.



## The Governor

**Expectations:** *The governor should propose and support statewide and regional initiatives that have a positive impact on the Pinelands and its environs. It is imperative that the governor appoint people to the Pinelands Commission who believe in the bedrock environmental mission of the Pinelands. The governor should not use his authority and power to bypass Pinelands protections or make exceptions for special interests.*

## PILOT Funding

PILOT, which stands for Payment in Lieu of Taxes, was started in 1970 to help municipalities off-set their loss in real estate tax revenue from open space acquisitions. Payments were dependent upon the percentage of open space in the particular municipality. Over time, budget allocations for the PILOT program were greatly decreased and payments were “frozen” at 2010 rates, resulting in inequities, such as some municipalities receiving no payments for more recent acquisitions while others receive more than originally projected (as rates prior to the freeze were intended to decline over time). In 2021 funding was stuck at \$6.6 million. Governor Murphy restored levels to \$9.9 million the last two years, but for FY 2023, the funding went down again. This time the funding level dropped further than 2021 to \$6.4 million, and we don’t know why. This is critical funding for municipalities and open space. Governor Murphy and the legislature need to fix this problem in the 2023 budget.

## PACT Rules

Governor Murphy put New Jersey on a roller coaster ride this year regarding the New Jersey Protecting Against Climate Threats (NJ PACT) reforms. This package of rules is supposed to make New Jersey more resilient against climate change, protect residents from flooding and also help slow down the changing temperature by reducing carbon. The rules have been ready for release for the past year, but the Governor stopped their release. Just when there was a glimmer of hope to release a portion of the rules the Governor put a hold on them. After significant backlash from the environmental community, a small fraction of the rules were released to address inland flooding. The proposed rule will update New Jersey’s existing flood hazard and stormwater regulations by replacing outdated precipitation estimates with modern data that accounts for observed and projected increases in rainfall. These changes will help to reduce flooding from stormwater runoff and increase the elevation of habitable first floors by two feet in certain new developments located in flood-prone inland areas. It is a very small step forward, but the progress on climate change is being blocked by preventing these rules from coming into effect.



*Images like this one from Hammonton, NJ are all too common following severe rain events in New Jersey.*

## Pinelands Commission Nominees

Governor Murphy nominated two people, Jessica Sanchez and Mark Mauriello, who both bring very strong environmental credentials to join the Pinelands Commission. Jessica Sanchez, PhD, worked in water supply planning for the Delaware River Basin Commission and served as a Trustee of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance for many years, and Mark Mauriello rose to serve as Commissioner of the NJ Department of Environmental Protection to cap a 30-year career with the Department. Dr. Sanchez was nominated to fill a vacant seat, and Mark Mauriello was nominated to replace Gary Quinn from Lacey Township. Mauriello was confirmed by the Senate in December but Dr. Sanchez is still waiting sign off from her Senators before her nomination can move to the Senate Judiciary Committee and then the full Senate for a final confirmation.

## Federal Government

**Expectations:** *In 1978 Congress created the Pinelands National Reserve, the country's first Reserve. As provided in the federal law, Governor Brendan T. Byrne established the Pinelands Commission, and a Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) was prepared and approved by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus on January 16, 1981. The federal government's primary roles in the Pinelands protection effort are to provide a representative on the Commission, to finance public land acquisition and to monitor the implementation of the CMP. At a minimum, the federal government should enforce federal environmental laws, vote responsibly on actions before the Commission, support the CMP, and provide the necessary funding for land acquisition through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).*

## Delaware River Watershed Funding

In a historic high, the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act Fund received a \$26 million investment from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that will span the next five years in addition to the Act's

annual funding. The Fund is used to improve wildlife habitat, enhance resilience to climate change, and engage underserved communities in conservation. A portion of this money, \$4.7 million, will be used to support green-infrastructure projects that contribute to the health and economic vitality of communities in the watershed. According to the Delaware River Basin Commission, just over 13 million people (about four percent of the nation's population) rely on the waters of the Delaware River Basin for drinking, agricultural, and industrial use, including those in Philadelphia and New York City. This money is a huge investment in the water supply for the region.

## Inflation Reduction Act

This bill signed into law by President Biden on August 16, 2022, revives many of the climate provisions that were originally introduced as part of the Build Back Better Act. Over \$350 billion will go towards greening our economy, including expanded production of green technology on American soil, as well as incentives to electrify the transportation sector and make buildings more energy efficient. It is counter-intuitive that more government spending could reduce inflation, but the efficiencies we gain will lower energy costs for everyone in the long-run. Since this is one of the main drivers of the inflation that we are currently experiencing, this bill promises to be beneficial for both the planet and our wallets. This is especially important for people with lower incomes, who must spend a disproportionate amount of their income on energy and fuel costs.

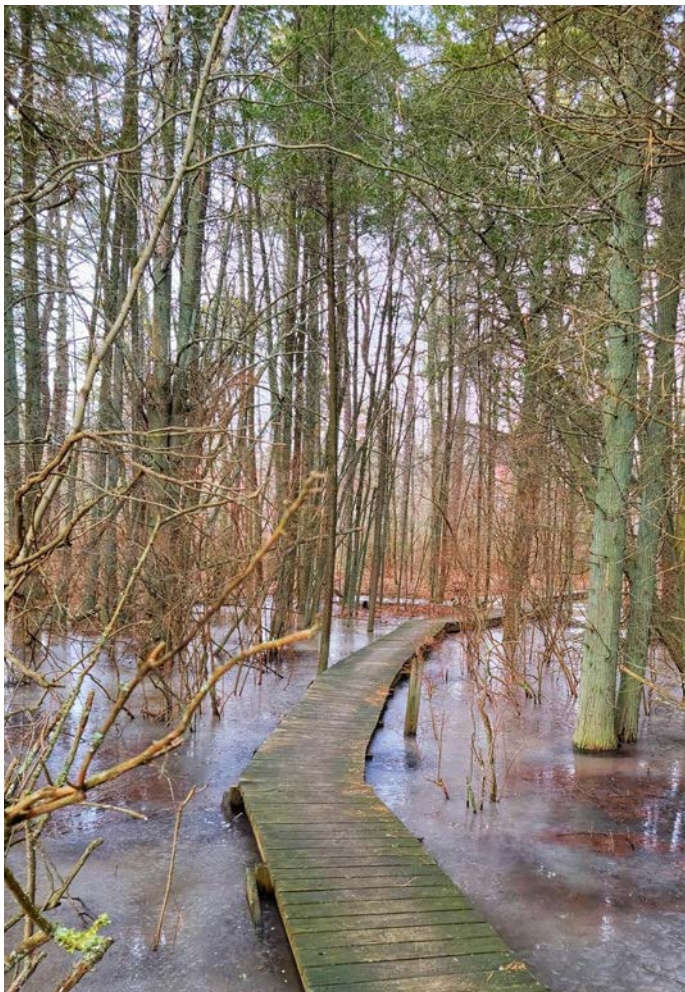
### Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

The staff and trustees of Pinelands Preservation Alliance recognize the importance of achieving justice and genuine community among the people of our region, and pledge to work toward that end. Fighting racism is essential to the success of our mission to protect the natural resources of New Jersey's Pinelands for all to enjoy and benefit from.



## New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

**Expectations:** *The DEP is responsible for protecting the state's environmental resources. It does this by developing and enforcing regulations that protect water quality, threatened and endangered species, and air quality; by overseeing state parks and wildlife management areas; by ensuring that there is enough water for both people and environmental needs; and by setting standards for contaminated site cleanup. Since there is significant overlap with Pinelands regulations, it is imperative that the DEP develops programs and enforces rules that are protective of the Pinelands.*



*Whitesbog Boardwalk on Ice by Victoria Gordon, located in Brendan T. Byrne State Forest.*

## Public Lands Management for Wharton State Forest

After many years of advocacy, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has begun a process to take public input on wildlife and recreational concerns in Wharton State Forest. The intention behind this process is to formally designate a complete map for the state forest, something that has never been done in Wharton, which is the largest state park east of the Mississippi. Detailed Travel Management Plans have been required on federal parks and forests since 1979 and state parks within the Pinelands National Reserve should follow their lead. The DEP collected input from the public using an online survey. They will hold three stakeholder meetings and say they will finalize plans for Wharton this spring. This initiative will protect dozens of critical habitat sites within the forest, which is located in the Pinelands Preservation Area. The Preservation Area must be protected with the highest standards to ensure the long-term ecological integrity of the Pinelands as a whole. When DEP first looked at this issue in 2015, it made many mistakes in public outreach and communications that eventually lead to the whole plan being withdrawn by Governor Chris Christie. The DEP allowed a disinformation narrative to take hold and failed to create an adequate public process. If the Department holds steady through the current public process, then we may finally have a travel management plan that enhances the visitor experience and protects sensitive habitat in Wharton State Forest.

## Stormwater Management Grants

The DEP offered several grants this year aimed at improving stormwater management. Grants included resiliency planning for communities impacted by Hurricane Ida and shovel-ready stormwater management demonstration projects. The DEP also announced a grant to fund stormwater utility feasibility studies to help communities assess the costs and benefits of establishing a stormwater utility. Plus, communities that form a stormwater utility within two years of completing a grant-funded feasibility study are eligible for funding priority for future stormwater-related funding and the opportunity to receive up to \$100,000 in reimbursement upon implementation. In addition to these targeted grants





*Eastern Fence Lizard by Keara Giannotti*

for stormwater management, the DEP has several funding opportunities for green stormwater infrastructure through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund open to municipalities and government entities.

## MS4 Permit

The goal of the municipal separate storm sewer system permit (MS4) standards is to restore, maintain, and enhance the waters of the state. This requirement is derived from New Jersey's Water Pollution Control Act and the Clean Water Act. The most recent Integrated Water Quality Assessment Report demonstrates that a significant portion of New Jersey's waterways throughout the state and even in the Pinelands are impaired and that a significant contributor to the impairments is polluted runoff. DEP has taken steps to improve the MS4 permit for 2023 which includes a dedicated webpage for stormwater management, the addition of community-wide ordinances including a tree ordinance and salt storage ordinance, increased street sweeping, measures to address roadside erosion control and stormwater infrastructure inspection, and requiring the creation of a watershed improvement plan. The environmental community did request additional changes, but this is a great next step.

## Pinelands Commission

**Expectations:** A Commission whose members, although of diverse viewpoints, have a shared commitment to the purposes of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), the courage to debate tough issues at meetings, and a respect for public process.

By statute, the Pinelands Commission has fifteen commissioners who make up the governing body of the agency: seven appointed by the Governor; one appointed by each of the seven Pinelands counties; and one person appointed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The gubernatorial appointees are subject to the review and consent of the New Jersey Senate. Members of the Commission serve staggered three-year terms. The commissioners have final say on all activities regulated by the CMP and, through the Executive Director, guide a staff of approximately 40 people.

The Commission today consists of the following fifteen members: **U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Appointee:** Johnathan D. Meade. **Gubernatorial Appointees:** Edward Lloyd, Mark Lohbauer, Laura Matos (Chair), Theresa Lettman, Davon McCurry, and Mark Mauriello. One seat is vacant. **County Appointees:** Jerome Irick (Atlantic), John Holroyd, Jr. (Camden), William Pikolycky (Cape May), Jane Jannarone (Cumberland), Daniel Christy (Gloucester), Alan Avery, Jr. (Vice-Chair, Ocean), and Doug Wallner (Burlington). The Acting Executive Director is Susan Grogan, who reports to the commissioners.

## Stormwater Regulations

The Pinelands Commission's new rules, which went into effect in early 2022, now exceed DEP's standards and employ more protective methodology for measuring and recharging stormwater generated by development. While DEP does allow routing stormwater from high pollutant loading areas directly into wetlands as part of water treatment, the Commission holds firm that this is still not allowed in the Pinelands. The Commission also holds development to a higher standard regarding nitrogen removal, given the added sensitivity of Pinelands habitat to excess nutrients. The new rules build upon the updated DEP requirements to incorporate green infrastructure into new buildings to handle the runoff generated during

rain events. The Pinelands Commission extended these requirements to all ‘minor’ developments (less than 5 housing units), which comprise over 93% of development applications received by the Commission over the last 11 years. We applaud the ways in which the Commission has adapted the DEP rules to the Pinelands and improved its efficacy for this unique environmental context.

## Pinelands Educational Programs

The Pinelands Commission continued the webinars that carried it through the pandemic, covering topics such as communication in nature and stormwater management, all of which can be found on their YouTube channel. It has also diversified its offerings of educational programs, including live musical performances and an experiential moth night. Visit their website at [www.nj.gov/pinelands](http://www.nj.gov/pinelands) to sign up on their email list so you get information about their 2023 Pinelands Speaker Series. They continue to offer a high-quality educational experience with the Pinelands Short Course held in March and a shorter version in the summer. The Commission’s Twitter and Instagram account celebrates the beauty of the Pinelands with abundant photos of moths, birds, forest scenes, and lake vistas, including many cameos by the Jersey Devil!

## Stronger Protection for Aquifer

The Pinelands Commission (Commission) has finally proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) to clarify and strengthen protections for the Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer. This is being done in response to the persistent petitions that groups such as PPA have made over more than a decade of scientific studies and debates demonstrating the need to protect our aquifer systems from over-pumping. We are happy to see these amendments move forward. The new rules would establish a minimum water level that must be maintained to sustain sensitive species in the Pinelands and sets a maximum withdrawal amount that is more conservative than what DEP requires. Whereas smaller wells (less than 100,000 gallons/day) are currently exempt from testing requirements, the new rules will require this of any well greater than 50,000 gallons/day. This would also put important protections in place that prevent the transfer of water between basins. A few weaknesses remain, such as the exemption of agricultural and horticultural uses from regulation, as well as language that maintains a loophole for developers to claim that aquifer withdrawal is their only option. However, the proposed rules are a vast improvement over the status quo, so we are optimistic that the Commission will adopt these measures into the CMP and take the steps necessary to implement them effectively to protect our communal resources.

### RANCOCAS CREEK FARM

Rancocas Creek Farm is a sustainable, chemical-free farm located on 72-acres donated to the Pinelands Preservation Alliance in 2019. We grow food and involve people as volunteers and apprentices. CSA shares are available for our 2023 farm season.

**For more information visit:**  
[www.RancocasCreekFarm.org](http://www.RancocasCreekFarm.org)





## State Legislature

**Expectations:** *The principle function of the State Legislature is to enact laws for the benefit and protection of New Jersey. At a minimum, legislators should not sponsor bills that undermine the intent of the CMP, and at best will sponsor legislation that protects and enhances environmental richness and diversity in New Jersey and the Pinelands.*

### Stalled Rare Plant Protection Bill 🗳️

New Jersey has 850 plant species designated as either Endangered (340 species) or Species of Concern (510 species). This includes everything from several species of carnivorous plants, orchids, and sphagnum moss, all of which require very specific conditions to grow and may be of special interest to collectors and poachers, to several species of trees such as red pine and pumpkin ash, which have been negatively impacted by insects and disease. Some of these species like Hammond's yellow spring beauty, are only found in the Pine Barrens, while others such as swamp pink, are found at selected localities in several states, but are considered endangered throughout the country. The number of Endangered and Special Concern species is high when you consider that there are about 2,100 species of native plants recorded for the state. This means that roughly 40% of the native flora needs protection. With this in mind, Assemblyman Conaway and Rooney sponsored bill A985, the *New Jersey Endangered and Threatened Plant Protection Act*, which "Prohibits certain actions relative to endangered and threatened plant species and directs the DEP commissioner to take certain actions to protect such species." The bill includes a definition for what is a threatened species, a list of prohibited actions and a series of penalties for people who knowingly harm these species. There are exceptions for farming, aquaculture, and scientific purposes. The bill is a well-crafted comprehensive strategy aimed at protecting plants and their habitat in NJ. Unfortunately, no action has been taken by the Senate since its introduction in the Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Committee in January 2020.



*Warehouse construction in Pemberton, NJ*

### Warehouse Development 👍

Poor warehouse siting and development are taking a toll on New Jersey's landscapes. Warehouses are popping up on open spaces and farmland without regard for impacts to the natural environment and community dynamics. A bill designated S104/A2436 is a good first step at addressing this problem. Senator Stanfield, Senator Singleton, Assemblyman Parker, and other Assembly co-sponsors call for the exclusion of farmland from definitions of "redevelopment area" and "rehabilitation area" in "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law." This law is being misused to designate farmland and forest area open spaces as blighted or in need of redevelopment. This is all to ease the way for inappropriate forms of development. We applaud these legislators for trying to address this problem, but much more is needed by the NJ Legislature, local elected officials, and NJ Department of Community Affairs.

### Forestry Task Force 👍

Back in February 2022, Senator Bob Smith announced the formation of the Forest Stewardship Task Force for New Jersey. This initiative would allow the public to discuss ways in which the state, counties, municipalities and other entities responsible for forest management can fight climate change, prevent forest fires, improve ecosystems, and protect soil and water quality, among other things. The task force is led by four co-chairs Sierra Club NJ,

NJ Conservation Foundation, NJ Forestry Association, and NJ Audubon. The subject of forest management is a highly contentious issue in New Jersey as with most states throughout the country. The Task Force is designed to develop consensus items, so that we have a path forward to address deer herbivory, invasives species, pest management, climate changes, and other forest related issues. There is a significant amount of work that needs to be done, but PPA is pleased that there is an opportunity for all voices to come together.

## County Government

**Expectations:** *In New Jersey, county governments provide essential services such as road and bridge maintenance, wastewater planning, recycling, parks and recreation, social services, and other functions. We expect county governments to implement programs and plan for the future in a manner consistent with the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP).*

### Burlington County Commissioner

In August 2022, Doug Wallner was appointed as the Burlington County representative to the Pinelands Commission. We applaud this decision since he brings a scientific educational background (with multiple degrees in Biology and Ecology) as well as extensive experience in natural resource and fire management from his career in the National Park Service. He enters at a critical juncture in New Jersey's path, following a summer of wildfire in the Pinelands and growing discussion of forestry practices in the New Jersey legislature. Mr. Wallner has a strong record of involvement in environmental initiatives, so we are optimistic that he will be a vocal supporter of environmental causes in the Pinelands. This seat was vacated earlier this year by Shannon Higgenbotham, who was a strong advocate for environmental causes.

## Local Government

**Expectations:** *There are 56 municipalities entirely or partly within the Pinelands National Reserve. The Pinelands Protection Act envisioned that local governments would be primarily responsible for implementing the CMP. While some things are mandatory such as density requirements, municipalities have flexibility with implementation of resource management goals of the CMP as they revise their land use regulations. PPA therefore expects municipalities to propose ordinances and master plans consistent with the conservation goals of the CMP.*

### Medford Township Rain Gardens

This past spring, PPA installed two municipal rain gardens in the Township of Medford as part of the South Jersey Landscape Makeover Program. We worked closely with township officials, who helped make sure these projects were a success. The first rain garden, at Still Park, is a beautiful addition to its already existing butterfly garden, picnic area, and playground. This green stormwater infrastructure installation is located next to an impervious roadway, allowing it to easily catch and filter any stormwater runoff. The second rain garden is located off Stokes Road Bike Path at 352 Stokes Road near a gazebo allowing residents to enjoy the pollinators and colors that the native plants provide while taking a break from their workout. This rain garden is also in an optimal location, positioned right next to Stokes Road and complements an existing rain garden nearby.



*These native plants are ready for their new homes in the rain garden at Still Park.*





### PINELANDS ADVENTURES

Pinelands Adventures provides canoeing, kayaking, nature and history programs for the general public, schools and community groups.

**Learn more about our trips and programs at:**  
[www.PinelandsAdventures.org](http://www.PinelandsAdventures.org).

**For group program information contact:**  
 Allison Hartman, Education Director at  
[allison@pinelandsadventures.org](mailto:allison@pinelandsadventures.org).

### Pemberton Lake Accessible Trail 👍

Towns and counties throughout South Jersey have been receptive to efforts that would improve park and trail accessibility so that all residents are able to utilize natural areas and parks regardless of their physical capabilities. Pemberton Township in Burlington County has been especially cooperative, working with PPA to create an accessible nature trail around Pemberton Lake. We are currently in the permitting process with the Pinelands Commission in order to utilize a stabilizing surface on the 1-mile lollipop trail around the north side of the lake. This trail could be an important resource for the community, including some of the disabled veterans who live in Pemberton Township and other areas near the Joint Base. The effort is challenging because the Pinelands Commission interprets its current regulations to prohibit improving an existing trail in a wetlands buffer with the crushed stone needed to make a stable surface. We hope Pemberton Township will stay the course with us to

navigate the regulatory issues and create a truly inclusive natural amenity at Pemberton Lake.

## Non Governmental Organizations

### Allies in Caring 👍

Allies in Caring (AIC) celebrated their 10-year anniversary in September 2022. PPA is proud to work in close relationship with AIC. In the past few years, PPA and AIC have collaborated to bring awareness to health issues and access to recreation to low-income communities in the Pinelands. PPA and AIC also collaborate in other spaces such as the Hammonton Health Coalition. Allies in Caring was founded by Ivette Guillermo-McGahee with the intention to provide health services to the underserved and to build a community. AIC works to bring health equity to communities by offering their services to families with members who are monolingual (Spanish speakers), deaf and hard of hearing, living with disabilities or low income. They opened *Con Vivir Wellness Hub* located in Hammonton NJ where they offer workshops, classes, and space for children, youth, and families to engage. AIC exposes new communities to the Pinelands allowing us to expand our impact across sectors. As their mission states: “We work together to build strong communities where we bridge the disparity gaps of care and create an all-inclusive culture where everyone can recognize their power and purpose. We imagine an exciting, new South Jersey where the entire community joins efforts to generate a true shift in promoting health for everyone.”

### PINELANDS COMMUNITY NETWORK

Play a key role in advocating for the protection of the Pinelands National Reserve by joining the Pinelands Community Network. Meetings are held on a rotating basis among the different Pinelands counties.

**Learn more at:**  
[www.pinelandsalliance.org](http://www.pinelandsalliance.org).

# Individuals Who Made a Difference

## Governor Florio

*Written by Carleton Montgomery*

Governor Jim Florio died this year, and we lost one of the few remaining champions of the Pinelands among our state's leaders. He was indeed a champion of the Pinelands until the day he died. He was always available to me and others for wisdom and action on the Pinelands, other environmental issues, and many other realms of public policy where he had made a lasting mark in his extraordinary life.

Florio was, of course, one of the great heroes of the Pinelands protection movement. He was in the U.S. Congress, Brendan Byrne was the governor, and the two shared a commitment to devising and instituting the nation's strongest, most successful regional conservation and growth management system. Florio led the passage of the federal statute, Section 502 of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, that set the stage for the state Pinelands Protection Act of 1979. Forty-three years later, these extraordinary laws are very much alive, robust and saving one of Earth's unique natural treasures. That is true in part because Florio never stopped advocating for the Pinelands and supporting fellow advocates, right up through joining former governors Brendan Byrne, Tom Kean and Christie Whitman in opposing the misguided South Jersey Gas pipeline proposal that was finally defeated in 2019.

For others, Florio's most important achievements lie in the federal Superfund Act, New Jersey's gun control laws, and any of several other areas of public policy, but for us, his most extraordinary achievement in public life was the essential role he played in creating and sustaining the Pinelands program.

In thinking about Governor Florio for this State of the Pinelands, I read the dozens and dozens of comments readers left on the New York Times obituary. They tell you far more about the man than the obituary does! The comments described Florio as unlike other politicians, courageous, decent, honest, hardworking, laser-focused, with a clarity of thought that set him apart, and utterly genuine. While this praise may not reflect well on people's views of other politicians, it perfectly captures my personal experience of the man and all that I have learned about him over the years.

## Assemblyman Ron Dancer

Assemblyman Ron Dancer was one of the very few in Trenton that cared about the Pinelands. He spent hours talking with PPA about issues, and truly spent the time considering his decisions on important matters and often stepped outside of his political party stance to support environmental causes. He was the first Republican Assemblyman to support dedicated open space funding and signed on as a co-sponsor to legislation back in 2013. He started his career as an elected official in the 1980s and was a representative on the Natural Lands Trust for many years. He worked closely with PPA's own Theresa Lettman, who now serves as a Pinelands Commissioner. He was first elected to the New Jersey State Assembly in 2002 and was reelected nine times. During his two decades in the Assembly, Ron served as deputy minority leader and assistant minority leader and spent most of his career on the Assembly Agriculture Committee. Ron's passing this year was truly a shock and he was working up to his last days. He will be deeply missed, but his passion and respect for the environment and public involvement will not be forgotten.

### THE OPPORTUNITY LEAGUE

Located in Burlington City, The O League creates opportunities to build community health. This summer PPA collaborated with them to offer young people the chance to learn about farming at our Rancocas Creek Farm. This ten-week program was a huge success and has resulted in deeper collaborations between our organizations.

**Learn more about them at:**  
[www.theopportunity.org](http://www.theopportunity.org).







## PINELANDS PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

Your Eyes, Ears and Voice for Saving New Jersey's Pinelands

The **Pinelands Preservation Alliance (PPA)** works 365 days a year to protect the land, water, plants and wildlife of New Jersey's Pinelands National Reserve. We have unparalleled expertise in Pinelands laws and regulations. This expertise allows us to engage thousands of people each year in actions to protect the wildest place in New Jersey. These accomplishments are funded by generous donors like you. Here is a small sample of our work in 2022. Learn more at [www.PinelandsAlliance.org](http://www.PinelandsAlliance.org).

### Advocacy



#### FIX OUR PARKS

There is an estimated \$400 million backlog in maintenance for New Jersey's Parks and Forests. Projects include including parking lot and bathroom facility repair, accessibility improvements, stabilizing historic structures and repairing storm damage. Additionally the state has failed to take steps to stop off-road vehicles from damaging habitat and roads in Pinelands and in other parts of the state. We launched the Fix Our Parks grassroots campaign in June to mobilize residents and take action. Over 450 people have joined to volunteer for stewardship projects, to organize and pressure their elected leaders and government officials for change and to learn more about the Pine Barrens. Join the campaign at [www.FixOurParksNJ.org](http://www.FixOurParksNJ.org).

### Outreach



#### ACCESSNATURENJ.ORG

We are committed to working with people with disabilities to make natural places more accessible, spread information about accessible trails, and create inclusive guided trips for the public. As part of this effort we created a mobile-friendly website, [AccessNatureNJ.org](http://AccessNatureNJ.org), that highlights trails and scenic places in and around the Pinelands that are, to some degree, accessible. We will continue to improve the site based on feedback from users. We also hired our first Nature and Disability Advocate. This new staff position will engage with government agencies, nonprofits and community members to ensure that the Pinelands' natural places are accessible to people with disabilities.

### Stewardship



#### PROTECTING WATER

Stormwater is one of the main culprits polluting waterways in the Pinelands. Runoff is contaminated with fertilizers and pesticides and changes our water quality impacting plant and animal species. We created the Landscape Makeover Program to build green infrastructure in the Pinelands that captures and treats stormwater in a more natural way. Since 2017, we have installed projects in 18 different municipalities in South Jersey which capture 3.4 million gallons of stormwater per year. These include rain gardens, bioswales, cisterns, rain barrels, and naturalized storm basins. In 2022 we installed 10 projects! We also offer rebates to residents who build rain gardens in certain municipalities. Learn more at [www.sjwatersavers.org/makeover](http://www.sjwatersavers.org/makeover).

### Education



#### PHILADELPHIA FLOWER SHOW 2022

We were proud to present a garden at the Flower Show for the second year in a row. Thanks to staff and volunteer help we were able to create "Crackle, Crinkle, Chirp, Croak, Croon" which tells the story of the Pinelands from seed to abundant life. Visitors could listen to the fire that opens pinecones in order to release their seeds. They could hear the ripples and the whisper of the wind brushing the sand of the Pinelands. We won the "Gardening for the Greater Good Award" which recognizes the fact that gardens have the power to make positive social and environmental change.



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The 2023 *State of the Pinelands Report* was released to our members and the public in February 2023 and covers actions that took place over the course of 2022.

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Cover Photos by:

Top left – Michael Kaliss All others - Keara Giannotti

Island by Jay O'Brien



**The Pinelands Preservation Alliance**  
is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization established in 1989  
to protect New Jersey's Pinelands National Reserve.

Our unparalleled expertise in Pinelands laws and regulations allows us to engage thousands of people each year in actions to protect the wildest place in New Jersey.

Using science, education, litigation, and grassroots advocacy, we work to make sure the Pinelands are always here for you.

Our work is possible thanks to generous donations from people like you.

**PLEASE DONATE TODAY!**  
[www.PinelandsAlliance.org](http://www.PinelandsAlliance.org)

