



PINELANDS
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

WWW.PINELANDSALLIANCE.ORG

STATE OF THE pinelands

2024 ANNUAL REPORT BY THE PINELANDS PRESERVATION ALLIANCE



The New Jersey Pinelands

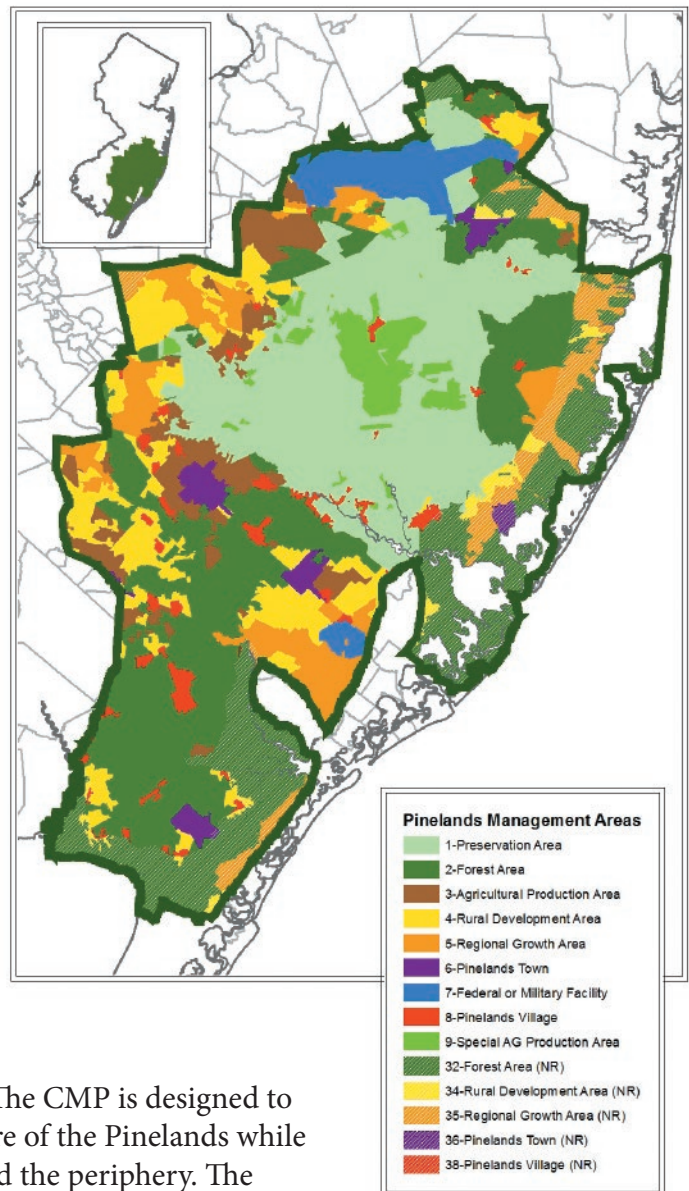
The Pine Barrens is a vast forested area extending across South Jersey's coastal plain. This important region protects the world's largest example of pitch pine barrens on Earth and the globally rare pygmy pine forests. One of the largest fresh water aquifers, the Kirkwood-Cohansey, lies underneath its 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.

In the 1960's, the Pine Barrens were threatened by a proposal to build the world's largest supersonic jetport and an accompanying city of 250,000 people. 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 2024

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*.

Whitesbog Sunset by Joseph Perno



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!

Board of Trustees

Patricia A. Butenis, *Chair*
Barbara Trought, *Vice Chair*
Michael Gallaway, *Secretary*
John Murphy, *Treasurer*
James Barnshaw, M.D.
Timothy J. Byrne
Charles M. Caruso
Charles M. Chapin
Emile DeVito, Ph.D.
Bill Fisher
Lamar Gore
Ivette Guillermo-McGahee
Anne E. Heasley
Joann Held
Ron Hutchinson, Ph.D.
Christopher Kosseff
David F. Moore
Luis Olivieri
Laura Palazzo
Loretta Pickus
Sarah Puleo
William A. Rodio
Amy Vasquez, Esq.

Staff Members

Carleton Montgomery,
Executive Director
Stephen Elliott
Becky Free
Rachel Grace
Audra Hardoon
Jason Howell
Sean Kane-Holland
Jade Latham
Seigha Omuso
Jennifer Presidente
Kathia Ramirez
Jaclyn Rhoads, Ph.D.
Erin Tobiassen
Kellie Westervelt
Kevin Whitley
Heidi Yeh, Ph.D.

Pinelands Adventures

Andy Giles, *Director*
Monica Cahill
Allison Hartman
Krissy Raudys

Rancocas Creek Farm

Jeff Tober, *Manager*
Alex Robb, *Assistant Manager*

Dear Friends of the Pinelands,

Last year marked my 25th as executive director of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance.

When I came to PPA in the last millennium, we were seven staff members and we focused pretty much all of our attention on the Pinelands Commission. From that crew in 1998, which included such great advocates as Theresa Lettman and Rich Bizub, only Mike Pippin and I are still here at PPA. Thankfully, a steady stream of committed individuals have come to PPA as staff members and volunteers over the intervening years to grow and sustain our work.

We have fought some epic battles with the Pinelands Commission – over such things as rattlesnake habitats, schools being built on (supposedly) protected land, and unneeded natural gas pipelines. We often lost those specific battles, as evidenced, for example, by the “Sanctuary” development that destroyed a population of timber rattlesnakes.

However, I’ve learned that you still have to take on the struggles you expect to lose, because something good usually comes, even out of the losses. Defending nature based on the facts, good science, and the law will always be a core principle of PPA’s identity and work.

As an organization, we have come increasingly to see that we have to find new ways to connect with more people and connect more deeply – as only people will move politicians and officials to do the right thing.

We need to think a lot about how to reach people where they live, how to connect natural resources with their concerns in ways that shift their thinking and our own.

This broadening vision of what environmental advocacy means is shaping many of PPA’s activities and partnerships with both public agencies and other advocates. For example, we created Pinelands Adventures, through which we have taken more than 60,000 people, including thousands of young people, into the Pine Barrens for great nature experiences.

With *The Pinelands Is for Everyone* project, we are making new friends and collaborating to make sure people can enjoy the natural places they help protect, regardless of disabilities.

We had the incredible good fortune to receive the donation of 72 acres of farmland in 2019, on which we founded Rancocas Creek Farm, which has provided the launching pad for projects promoting environmentally-friendly farming and equitable food systems.

Our Landscape Makeover program and forest stewardship projects engage people in new ways by showing how natural systems – even small rain gardens – can provide habitat and mitigate impacts of the ways our society uses and abuses the landscape.

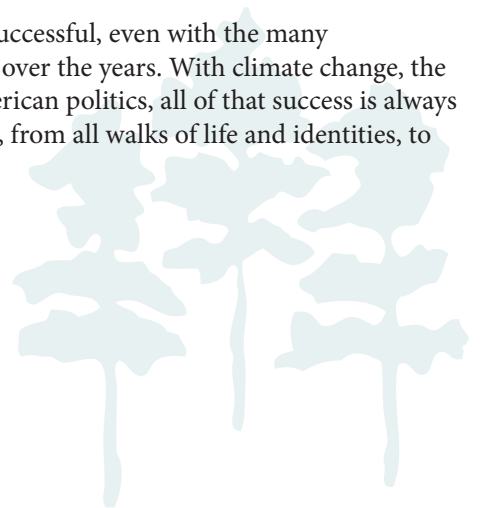
And finally, we are developing new partnerships with people working in South Jersey, both inside and outside the Pinelands boundaries, who are doing great work for society in fields like community development, healthcare, and racial equity. These fields are usually separated from environmental work, but we have come to see that they are deeply related to and supportive of PPA’s mission. When towns outside the boundaries of the Pinelands succeed, it reduces the social and environmental pressure on the undeveloped lands of the Pinelands.

The fundamental mechanisms of the Pinelands protection laws have been incredibly successful, even with the many compromises, political shenanigans, and plain bad decision making that we have seen over the years. With climate change, the unpredictable dynamics of our economy, and the even greater unpredictability of American politics, all of that success is always at risk. Those who love the Pinelands need to connect with as many people as possible, from all walks of life and identities, to share that love and bring them on board the Pinelands movement.

Best wishes,



Carleton Montgomery
Executive Director



Issues Spotlight – Accessible Trails

Passive outdoor recreation like hiking, biking, and canoeing is something that many of us take for granted. We drive our cars to our favorite spots and can hit the trails with relative ease. However, enjoying a day out in nature is not always so easy: there is a disparity in who is able to access these majestic natural areas. *The Pinelands Is for Everyone* initiative was envisioned at the height of the pandemic lockdowns in 2020, following the realization that public lands were not accessible to all members of the public. In many cases, physical improvements are needed to improve accessibility to natural areas in our community. The mental and physical health benefits of being in nature are well-documented, but for people living with disabilities, options are severely limited. They do not have the same opportunities to explore the outdoors or reap the benefits of being in nature. There are too few accessible natural areas and those that have some level of accessibility are not widely known or advertised.

In 2021, PPA launched *The Pinelands Is for Everyone* initiative and hired its first Access Nature Disability Advocate. We are extremely optimistic that *The Pinelands is for Everyone* and *Access Nature* initiatives open new avenues for New Jersey residents and visitors with disabilities, who seek to enjoy outdoor activities within New Jersey's beautiful open public spaces. We are bringing together a diverse selection of like-minded individuals, non-profit organizations, state and local government, advocacy groups, individuals from the disabled community, and organizations focusing on disability services to form a united front for change.

Recently, there has been great interest in making New Jersey's natural areas more inclusive. An important step to make a trail accessible is providing a level, smooth surface that mobility devices such as wheelchairs can move over with relative ease. Three projects are currently in the planning phase in Burlington County. The first, in Pemberton Township, is a collaboration between the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, Pemberton Township, and NJ Fish and Wildlife to improve an existing 0.65-mile trail along the perimeter of Pemberton Lake that links two parking areas. A rain garden will also be installed at this site. Similarly, Evesham Township is working with PPA and the Friends of the Black Run Preserve to improve a 0.7-mile section of the existing trail network which includes a bird blind and two fantastic scenic overlooks of the surrounding preserve. The third project is being planned independently by leaders in

Stafford Township to improve approximately 0.5 miles of existing trails around Forecastle Basin/Lake. Features have been planned to provide a better experience for residents and visitors to enjoy the scenic nature of this area, as well as to provide easier access to fishing.

Two of these projects are in the midst of a 13-step Memorandum of Agreement process to seek Pinelands Commission approval for these projects. The Commission is doing its due diligence to ensure that the sensitive ecological makeup of these natural areas is not compromised while trying to provide improved accessibility to these sites. Members of the Pinelands Commission have been very receptive to efforts to expand accessibility.

We have great expectations for what we can accomplish through these improvements. Where parks and open space are plentiful and recreation services strong, residents enjoy the closest attachment and engagement within their families and communities; and studies indicate higher levels of local gross domestic product and economic well-being. These spaces introduce benefits in mental and physical health, as parks and outdoor recreation can reduce the impacts of chronic diseases, especially in vulnerable populations. Communities are safer as a result of the atmosphere created by well-managed parks and recreation services in communities designed for all people. This is a great opportunity to advance social equity within our parks and natural spaces, bringing universal benefits that can be enjoyed by all. At some point in the not-so-distant future, we hope that South Jersey will be replete with recreational opportunities for people of all abilities, affirming that the Pinelands truly are for everyone.



Testing out the Eagle electric wheelchair in the Pinelands.

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 their authority and power to bypass Pinelands protections or make exceptions for special interests.*

Interagency Council on Climate Change

It is no doubt that climate change has become more evident in recent years—impacting our temperature, precipitation, sea-level, and other aspects of the environment. In 2019, Governor Murphy signed E.O. 89 to establish the Interagency Council on Climate Change which requires each state government department to think about actions that can be taken through their work to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Building upon the Statewide Climate Change Resilience Strategy that was produced in 2021, state level agencies are now having regular conversations about specific aspects of climate change: this year's focus was on extreme heat. However, this initiative needs monetary resources to support the staff-time that it diverts from regular state agency work. This must be a priority for the new year.

Corporate Business Tax Surcharge Expiration

Governor Murphy is holding firm to his commitment to end the Corporate Business Tax surcharge of 2.5%, which is set to expire at the end of 2023. The expiration of the surcharge on the 2% wealthiest corporations would mean the loss of \$480 million in critical open space funding over just 10 years and will do irreparable harm. The CBT surcharge provides necessary funding for the acquisition, preservation and stewardship of open space, farmland and historic sites throughout New Jersey through the Garden State Preservation Trust. This and other unmet public land and program needs require additional funding – not cutting funding sources.

PILOT Funding

The program, Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT), was created to assist municipalities with significant amounts of state-owned open space. PILOT is essential for Pinelands municipalities that have a fair share of state-owned land and limited sources of tax revenue. Funding for the program is approximately .01% of the entire state budget, yet Governor Murphy has reduced PILOT funding in recent years, dropping from \$9 million in 2021 to \$7 million in 2022. This funding has only made a partial recovery to \$8 million in 2023. Ideally, PILOT should be increased to above \$10 million and revamped to evaluate where other municipalities could benefit from support.

FY2024 Pinelands Commission Budget

Good policies are only as good as the money invested. The Pinelands Commission requested support for three additional staff, but this request was ultimately denied by Governor Murphy. The allocation was not included in this fiscal year's budget, and the Commission is suffering from stagnant funding levels. The Pinelands is an excellent example of a well-designed transfer of development rights program, but the threats to its existence never go away. The Governor and Legislature treat the Pinelands as if “the job's all done.” Stormwater, climate change, and warehouses are the most critical problems today, and three additional staff members can really help to deal with these threats.

Nominations to the Pinelands Commission

One vacancy was recently filled, as the last of Governor Murphy's nominees from years ago was finally confirmed to join the Pinelands Commission: Dr. Jessica Rittler Sanchez. However, two seats remain empty on the Commission that must be filled with gubernatorial appointees. These seats were vacated in January and August of 2023, yet the Governor has made no indication of when he intends to fill these vacancies. Governor Murphy and the legislature need to fix this problem in the 2023 budget.

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).*

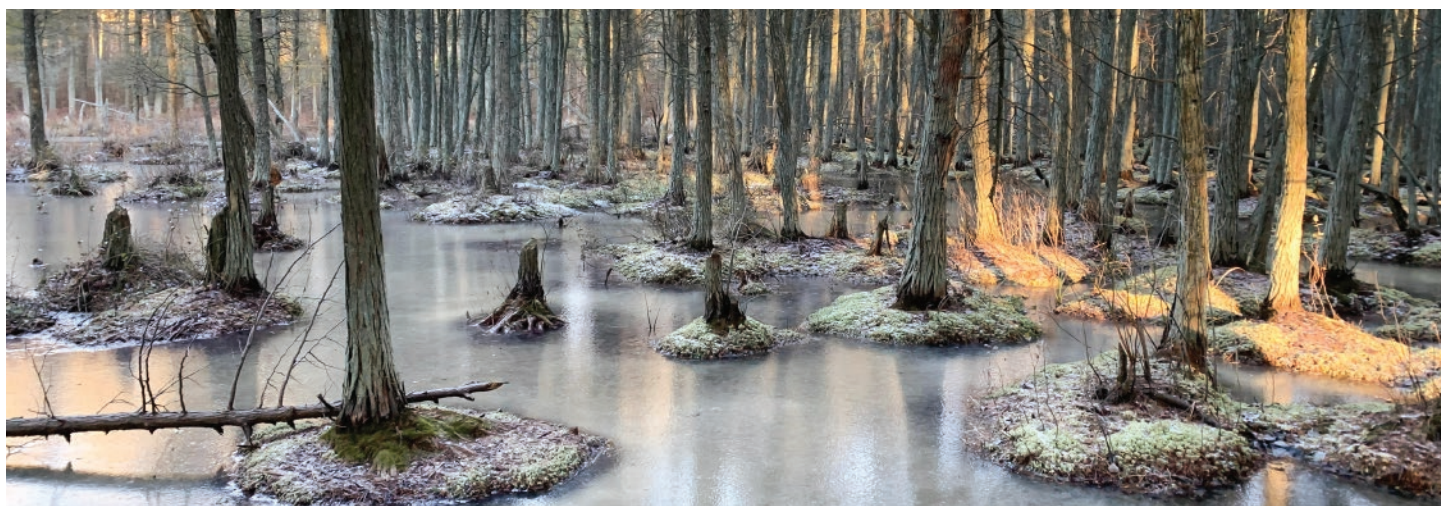
SCOTUS Sackett Decision

Wetlands across the US are now significantly less safe, thanks to the Supreme Court's disastrous ruling in the Sackett vs. Environmental Protection Agency case. The ruling changes the definition of what counts as the "waters of the United States"—and as a result, what is protected by the Clean Water Act. The EPA is now limited to protecting waters that have a contiguous surface with 'navigable waters.' However, pollutants do not respect these legal boundaries; streams and ponds that are separate at the

surface are often connected underground in vast aquifers. Vernal pools are inherently disconnected from other water bodies at the surface—this very fact makes them vital for frog and toad reproduction. This ruling would leave the Pinelands vulnerable to destruction and pollution if not for the Pinelands Protection Act. This underscores the importance of having multiple layers of protection—lest the federal environmental protections that we take for granted are compromised.

EPA-PFAS Rules

The EPA recently finalized a rule requiring manufacturers to report information about their use of PFAS, and have set limits for allowable levels in our drinking water; however, we fear that this may be too little, too late. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as 'forever chemicals', have been around since the 1940's. Despite having information about potential health risks as early as the late 1990's, the EPA is only now playing catch-up to address this prevalent threat to public health and the environment. When a new chemical is formulated, the EPA largely relies on information submitted by the manufacturer. By the time that a chemical compound is scientifically linked to a health condition or type of environmental degradation, decades may have passed. However, the blame may not fall completely on the EPA; the agency's ability to meaningfully regulate industry to protect public health and the environment can be tenuous depending on the administration.



Atlantic White Cedar swamp in the Pinelands. Photo credit James Gunardson.

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.*

NRD Settlement with BASF

DEP negotiated a Natural Resource Damages (NRD) settlement with BASF that would apply a cookie-cutter model for restoration to the former Ciba-Geigy site in Toms River in its possession. This was done without consulting affected towns or local organizations; the agency didn't even intend to hold a public hearing on the matter until Save Barnegat Bay (SBB) hosted its own 'speak out' session to give residents a venue to air their concerns. SBB contends that the agency is not following its own process for 'monetizing NRD injury' and that the settlement was prepared in a haphazard manner that only recognizes about 10% of the injury. Despite these substantial objections, DEP finalized the settlement that will allow BASF to continue to profit from the land that it compromised.

Wharton State Forest Visitor Use Plan and Vehicle Use Map

After years of advocacy by Pinelands Alliance members, staff, and allies for sustainable recreational use of Wharton State Forest, the NJ State Park Service launched a public input process on how the Parks Department can best balance recreation and the protection of the values and habitats that we hold dear. This process focused on the designation of routes in Wharton appropriate for legally registered motor vehicles. The Wharton State Forest

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.

Visiting Vehicle Use Map draft will be released during an information session at Batsto Village on January 24th. You can provide written comments on that draft until March 9, 2024. We are encouraged by the Park Services' latest actions. We look forward to continuing the dialogue with our membership and providing comments to inform the final version of the plan.

NJPACT Inland Flooding Rules

The storms impacting our state are becoming more intense and the frequency of these severe weather events is increasing. Historical precipitation data and the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program requirements no longer accurately inform decision-makers in determining appropriate locations or design standards for safe and resilient development. To remedy this, New Jersey became the first state to utilize "climate-informed precipitation data" or modeling in order to define areas at risk of flooding more precisely. Developers and their engineers will now have to account for the projected rainfall over the course of a project's lifetime in their designs for potential flooding and stormwater management plans. This means that new development and major reconstruction will be built for future safety and resilience. By using best management practices, this will also mitigate the anticipated increase in stormwater runoff, which would otherwise negatively impact surface water quality. Prior to the new rule, the DEP relied on rainfall data collected up to 1999 in their flood hazard and stormwater management calculations. With the new rule effective this year, the DEP has taken an important step towards better preparing New Jersey for the impacts of climate change.

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:** Jonathon D. Meade. **Gubernatorial Appointees:** Theresa Lettman, Mark Lohbauer, Laura Matos (Chair), Mark Mauriello, and Jessica Rittler Sanchez. **County Appointees:** Jerome Irick (Atlantic), John Holroyd, Jr. (Camden), William Pikolycky (Cape May), Nicholas Asselta (Cumberland), Daniel Christy (Gloucester), Alan Avery, Jr. (Vice-Chair, Ocean), and Doug Wallner (Burlington). The Executive Director is Susan Grogan, who reports to the commissioners.

Appointment of Executive Director

Following an 18-month period without an Executive Director, the Pinelands Commission finally appointed its interim ED to officially fill the position: Susan Grogan. She brings extensive experience to the position—having worked at the Commission since 1988—and she has already instituted culture changes that have had a positive effect on interactions with the public and organizations like PPA. The ED has the power to directly approve some applications, direct negotiations around waiver requests, and influence the stringency of environmental regulations in the Pinelands. We are heartened to see that Susan has been performing her role with integrity and a clear concern for the environment.

Public Engagement

The Commission has forged into the post-pandemic era with the return to in-person educational events (with recordings available on their YouTube channel @PinelandsCommission) featuring experts on the flora and fauna of the Pinelands. These aren't your typical seminars: many feature highly interactive components, such as live animal specimens and demonstrations. One highlight was a native plant seminar, which featured a fruit-tasting, rare seeds for participants to grow at home, and a tour of the Commission's native landscaping. Those living further afield can also follow the Commission's prolific Instagram and X (Twitter) accounts (@njpinelandscommission and @nj_pinelands, respectively) for an abundance of Pinelands content, including regular celebrations of 'Turtle Tuesday' and 'Frog Friday'.



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.

For group program information contact:
Allison Hartman, Education Director at
allison@pinelandsadventures.org.

K-C Aquifer CMP Amendments



The long-awaited Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer protections were formally adopted at the September meeting of the Pinelands Commission. These CMP amendments will protect important ecosystem functions in the Pinelands and drinking water for about one million people. This is the culmination of over 20 years of effort, including scientific studies commissioned by the NJ legislature with \$5.5 million in funding. These studies highlighted that water table levels must not be allowed to drop more than 4 inches in order to protect critical aspects of Pinelands ecology. The new rules include several measures meant to prevent over-withdrawal of water from the aquifer, such as lowering the threshold for which a new well must be reviewed and approved by the Pinelands Commission from 100k gallons per day to 50k.

Action Needed on Climate Change



Progress on larger reforms related to climate change have been steady, but slow due to staffing and funding constraints. However, this should not prevent the Commission from taking action on the 'low-hanging fruit' that PPA staff highlighted in our 2021 white paper, such as updating the list of Endangered and Threatened Plant Species to include protection of all listed plant species of concern. There are also measures that were previously developed, but never completed, such as restructuring the Pinelands Development Credit (PDC) program to remove perverse incentives for sprawling development that threatens our forests—and the carbon sequestered therein.

Land Preservation Summit



The Pinelands Commission convened a Land Preservation Summit at its headquarters in New Lisbon which brought together representatives of the many organizations involved in land preservation in South Jersey. The event featured presentations on different funding programs and round-table discussions on topics such as climate change and the economics of open space. This gathering of minds represents a significant step towards the reinvigoration of Pinelands preservation efforts, with greater collaboration among NGO's and government.

Requiring New Pine Snake Studies



The Pinelands Commission has required new surveys for threatened and endangered species at the Pole Bridge Forest in Pemberton Township. The original studies were performed over 20 years ago, so it would be unreasonable to rely on them to accurately represent the present state of the forest. The corporate applicant that is attempting to bulldoze the Pole Bridge Forest is lobbying the Commission to loosen their standards. Commission staff have remained committed to thorough survey protocols, which they are not allowing to be compromised by the circumstances of the property in question. You can join us at the monthly meetings of the Pinelands Commission to express your support for endangered species survey protocols that are held to scientifically rigorous standards.



The Northern Pine Snake is a threatened species making its home in the Pinelands. Photo credit Robert Zappalorti.

State Legislature

Expectations: *The principal 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. Ideally, they will sponsor legislation that protects and enhances environmental diversity in the Pinelands.*

FY2024 State Budget for State Parks 🗨️

New Jersey's state parks and forest have over 17 million visitors per year. Despite this, the facilities, roads, and other frequently used parts of our state parks and forests have been allowed to deteriorate. According to our Fix Our Parks report, New Jersey has a \$600 million dollar maintenance backlog. This amount doesn't include the ongoing maintenance needs or destruction caused by illegal off-road vehicle use and illegal dumping. Twenty-one conservation groups called on Governor Murphy last year to dedicate a portion of the American Rescue Plan Funds towards this maintenance backlog. He didn't answer our call for help and neither did the legislature. If we want the Garden State to continue to bring in visitors, then it's time to fix up our state parks and forests.

Forest Stewardship Task Force 👍

Senate Environment and Energy Committee Chairman Bob Smith convened a Forest Stewardship Task Force in 2022 to seek consensus and prepare a report on actions needed to better protect and manage New Jersey's public forestlands. New Jersey Conservation Foundation, New Jersey Sierra Club, New Jersey Audubon, and New Jersey Forestry Association chaired a series of meetings, from which a final report was created and presented with testimony to the joint Legislative Environment committees this year. PPA was invited to provide information as a task force participant. The task force chairs completed a very difficult task by bringing together nearly 200 people throughout the state. Everyone is still waiting for a bill or bills to be introduced by Senator Smith, and the translation of the report to regulations will be a difficult task.



Fix Our Parks campaign volunteers.

Senate Judiciary Committee – Commission Appointment 👍

Although the process took much longer than we had hoped, the senate judiciary committee has finally approved the nomination of Dr. Jessica Rittler Sanchez. She was nominated by Governor Murphy years ago, but progress to confirm her nomination was stalled by 'senatorial courtesy' until early 2023.

Green Amendment 🗨️

It is often taken for granted that a healthy environment, clean air, pure water, and ecologically healthy habitats will remain abundant in perpetuity. If surveyed, most people—even politicians—would likely agree that people have the right to these basic necessities. Therefore, it is surprising that attempts to codify this right in our state constitution as a 'Green Amendment' have been met with such great resistance. First introduced in December 2017, New Jersey's Green Amendment (now Bill ACR72) has been stalled in committee, effectively tabled without the necessary hearings. The bill has gained bipartisan support over these six years, but there are still holdouts preventing it from moving forward and being included on the ballot for New Jersey voters. Our political leaders have a rare opportunity to concretely establish the equitable primacy of human life and healthy environments over short-sighted economic interests. Citizens of other states with Green Amendments such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Montana have demonstrated the importance of making this a constitutional right. Without our own Green Amendment, New Jersey residents are left to rely on elected leaders and their administrations to "do the right thing".

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).

Ocean County Natural Lands Trust

The Breton Woods are a rare example of mature oak and pine forest that has persisted on the highly developed Jersey Shore. This 30+ acre tract of land was slated to become a housing development. Brick Open Space Savers (BOSS) and many other organizations advocated for the land to be preserved. The Ocean County Natural Lands Trust heeded their call, partnering with Ocean Township to seal an \$8.5 million dollar deal with the would-be developer. This move protects an area of special concern for the Eastern box turtle, migratory bird habitat, and walking trails enjoyed by local residents.

Camden County Stormwater Utility

Flooding is the most costly natural hazard in the country and New Jersey has its fair share of it. This flooding also contributes to water quality problems. Flooding from minor storms has become more commonplace, but can be reduced if we trade our concrete landscapes for green infrastructure. Although PPA and many conservation partners help municipalities and residents transform their landscapes through the Landscape Makeover Program, it can never completely fix flooding without consistent, dedicated funding. Municipalities, counties and other regional entities have the opportunity to create a funding stream through a stormwater utility. Camden County just completed a feasibility study that provides a comprehensive analysis of how much impervious coverage exists in the county and how much money must be dedicated to transform their community. There are many places in New Jersey that can benefit from a stormwater utility, so we thank Camden County for being a leader on this front.

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.

Pemberton Township Council and Residents

Hundreds of Pemberton Township residents have organized to save the Pole Bridge Forest, protect farmland, and resist warehouses that threaten their community. Municipal meetings often have a reputation for being poorly attended, with very little public engagement. This is not the case in Pemberton, where planning/zoning board and town council meetings have often been standing-room-only, with public comments stretching far into the night. A subset of residents who have been showing up to meetings in matching orange shirts since spring 2023 were successful in getting plans for a warehouse rejected. In December, residents rallied for the Pole Bridge Forest, successfully persuading their township council to repeal a redevelopment plan that targeted this forest. If we can work together, organize, and make a plan—we can often win.



Residents Advocate for the Pole Bridge Forest in December 2023.

Illegal ORV Confiscation Ordinances 👍

The Borough of Woodbine, Hamilton Township, and Pemberton Township have enacted ordinances to confiscate any illegal off-road vehicles (ORV's) found on public roads and punish gas stations that knowingly provide gasoline to them. These changes are expected to significantly improve the ability of law enforcement to deter illegal ORV use that has been a persistent source of damage to our Pinelands resources. The Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association is recommending every town in the river's watershed to also adopt this rule. You can make a difference by asking your town to adopt a similar ordinance.

Hamilton Township Residents 👍

Hamilton Township residents organized this year to save a 268-acre forest adjacent to the Pomona Woods Preserve that was slated to be 'redeveloped' into a youth sports complex. Proactive residents made their concerns known to the Pinelands Commission, highlighting the incompatibility of the proposed development with the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan. Residents elected a new mayor and council person to ensure that their interests would be represented. These efforts culminated with the town ending its redevelopment agreement with the developer and taking substantial steps towards permanently protecting this forest.

Defunct Pinelands Municipal Council 🗨️

This council is responsible for uniting leaders of various townships to discuss environmental concerns and enact plans for improvement. The council has not met since September 2022, due to technical issues: all of the organizing documents and bank accounts were tied to a single individual who has rendered them inaccessible. Even when the council was active, nearly half of the Pinelands municipalities did not send a representative to a single meeting (2019). Engagement was already low, and the discontinuation of meetings seems to have gone unnoticed by town leaders. The by-laws of the council

require an annual meeting to be held in the month of March—the council has failed to meet this minimum requirement, and should thus be declared defunct to clear the way for a revitalized council to start afresh.

Businesses

New Jersey American Water 👍

As part of its mission to provide safe drinking water, this company has been taking action to protect water quality in our region. NJ American Water funded a tree-planting project in Lumberton Township that was executed by PPA and an army of volunteers in November. Fifty trees were planted around the municipal building and sports fields. Trees have a huge impact on stormwater, climate change, and wildlife.



New Jersey American Water funded a tree planting project in Lumberton Township.

Non-Governmental Organizations

NJ League of Conservation Voters: Educational Webinars 👍

NJLCV has been hosting a series of high-quality webinars to raise awareness about important environmental issues in New Jersey such as the energy transition and development trends. A highlight has been a series of four webinars on the topic of ‘warehouse sprawl’, which has featured planning experts, elected officials, and advocates to cover different aspects of the problem. These webinars have been highly engaging and easy-to-understand. The recordings (available on YouTube @newjerseylcv1058) have served as a lasting resource for organizations like PPA to educate our members.

NJ Conservation Foundation and The Nature Conservancy 👍

The Cohanzick Nature Reserve in Bridgeton NJ is the traditional homeland to the Cohanzick Lenape People. Who better to steward this land than the indigenous communities who have been working with the land for thousands of years? Recognizing this heritage and the important role that indigenous communities can play in the future of this land, several organizations agreed to ‘rematriate’ the preserve, defined by some as returning to a way of life in alignment with mother nature. A ceremony was held in August, at which the NJ Conservation Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and the Green Acres program of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, celebrated the rematriation of 63 acres of land to the Native American Advancement Corporation (NAAC). Now vested with complete ownership, the NAAC intends to use the land for educational programs, allowing the community to learn about the Cohanzick Lenape People’s traditions and become engaged as environmental stewards. For more information on NAAC and the Cohanzick Nature Reserve, visit nativeadvancement.org.



The Opportunity League interns at Rancocas Creek.

The Opportunity League 👍

The Opportunity League (TOL), is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Burlington City that has been working in the area for the past 15 years. Burlington City is ranked among the top 50 cities in NJ classified as Food Desert Communities and is classified as an environmentally overburdened community by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. TOL often weaves sports into their programming as a way to attract youth and engage them in other activities. TOL recently established a non-profit grocery store: Villages Community Marketplace. This will serve as a central hub that will provide healthy fresh groceries and a community garden to residents of Burlington City. Benefits extend beyond just bringing fresh produce to the community, as it will also create a local economy that provides jobs and opportunities for community members to shop and recirculate their money locally.

PPA and TOL have an ongoing collaboration in work pertaining to food access. This is the second year that TOL and PPA have collaborated by hosting 15 Farm-to-Table Summer Interns to learn about farming at Rancocas Creek Farm. Additionally, TOL enrolled 11 CSA Box Shareholders, who receive weekly produce deliveries without the need to trek out to the farm. TOL is the first to be awarded PPA’s Catalyst of Change Award, honoring innovation, and collaboration inspiring environmental and agricultural sustainability.

Individuals Who Made a Difference

Edward Lloyd, Esq

We at PPA were very sad to hear the news in August that Ed Lloyd, one of the great leaders of New Jersey's environmental movement and a mentor to many, had passed away. Among Ed's many contributions to preserving and restoring our state's natural resources, he served for 20 years on the Pinelands Commission. He also founded the Eastern Environmental Law Center: the nonprofit law firm that represents PPA and many other organizations in important legal challenges when government goes astray in enforcing Pinelands and other environmental laws. Ed was a trailblazing litigator who brought major lawsuits in the early days of the environmental movement, including essential litigation against Ciba-Geigy and the State of New Jersey over contamination of Toms River, a major tributary of Barnegat Bay.

On the Pinelands Commission, Ed argued and voted against assaults on the Pinelands regulations like the South Jersey Gas and New Jersey Natural Gas pipeline projects. As the director of the former Rutgers Law School environmental law clinic and then the director of the Columbia Law School environmental clinic, he taught legions of up-and-coming environmental advocates and represented nonprofit organizations in key legal battles for the environment.

Ed's legacy can be found both in the generations of environmental advocates whom he taught and inspired, and in New Jersey's broader conservation legal culture, which—for all our government's occasional failings—is one of the strongest in the nation.

Rob Auermuller

Rob Auermuller has been a consistent champion for the protection of critical habitat and visitor enjoyment as the Superintendent of Wharton State Forest. During his time as superintendent, he played a major role in protecting critical habitat from threats like off-road vehicles and illegal dumping, shepherding projects to establish new hiking and biking trails through scenic areas—including accessible trails—and working closely with volunteer groups to help maintain park facilities. This year, he was hired as the Regional Superintendent for the Southern Region, in which he will expand his innovative approach to park management to Double Trouble, Belleplain and Bass River State Forest, and the many other state park service properties we enjoy in the Pine Barrens. However, he can't do it alone; he needs people like you to step up for the parks in NJ and demand that they receive the funding and respect that they deserve.

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





PINELANDS
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

Bishop Farmstead
17 Pemberton Road
Southampton, NJ 08088

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Philadelphia, PA
Permit #164

The 2024 *State of the Pinelands Report* was released to our members and the public in February 2024 and covers actions that took place over the course of 2023.

Address Service Requested

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY

Top: *Red Carpet* by Tom Jenkins; Middle Center: *Fall Morning in the Pines* by Phil Domitrowsky; Bottom Right: *Red Fox at Sunset* by Matt Baron

Photo of screech owl sunbathing in the Pinelands
by Christina Kovacs



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

