



**Pinelands
Alliance**

INSIDE THE Pinelands

PUBLISHED BY THE PINELANDS ALLIANCE

Summer 2026

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Why the World Cup gave the boot to artificial turf and why New Jersey should too3

A New Way to Camp in the Heart of the Pinelands..... 4

Upcoming Events4

Five Months In, Gov. Sherrill Needs to Do More for People and the Environment5

2026 Pinelands Alliance Membership Survey6



Aerial view of the Mullica River. Photo by Jason Howell

Staff Members

Jaclyn Rhoads, Ph.D.,
Executive Director

Andy Alvarado, MBA

Stephen Elliott

Becky Free

Andy Giles

Audra Hardoon

Kayla Harris

Jason Howell

Sean Kane-Holland

Michael W. Klein, JD, Ph.D.

Jennifer Krumins, Ph.D.

Jade Latham

Carleton Montgomery, JD

Seigha Omuso

Annie Preston

Jennifer Presidente

Marianne Thatcher

Erin Tobiasen

Kelvin Wagner

Kellie Westervelt

Jonathan Wetstein

Kevin Whitley

Heidi Yeh, Ph.D.

Pinelands Adventures

Vince Iannone, *Manager*

Monica Cahill, *Asst. Manager*

Megan Bailey

Bill Sherwood

Rancocas Creek Farm

Jeff Tober, *Manager*

The Mullica, New Jersey's Wildest River

by Jason Howell, *Public Land Advocate*

In early 2024, Stephen Fielder, a tireless local environmental advocate, was working to rehabilitate an area known as Clarks Landing along the south bank of the Mullica River that had been subject to illegal dumping. The site is a former historic village, now returned to nature but for two marked graves of the first known inhabitants at the site, Ruth and Thomas Clark, who passed away in the mid-1700s. Fielder knew the local waters well from his days clamming to the south in Absecon Bay as well as his more recent explorations by canoe and kayak on the meandering tributaries that flow through the 568 square mile watershed of the Mullica Valley. The river is truly a natural wonder of the state, but too often it feels as if the river itself and the land surrounding it are neglected.

Understanding this gap, Fielder decided to make a local documentary film he called "Friends Along the Mullica" while he continued to organize cleanups of the Clarks Landing area. He then began to pursue having the Mullica designated as a National Wild and Scenic River, just like two other significant rivers of the Pines, the Great Egg Harbor and the Maurice. Designations for those rivers were secured decades before, but for some reason lost to time, the efforts to designate Mullica were not sustained.

Knowing that past efforts to designate the river had flagged, Fielder began to build a strong base by reaching out to local groups, including the board of trustees and staff at the Pinelands Alliance, and received widespread support for the endeavor. I helped enlist a few other river folks to the idea, including Lauren Lamantia of Pine Barrens Post and Monica Cahill at Pinelands Adventures.

Bishop Farmstead
17 Pemberton Road
Southampton, NJ 08088

609-859-8860

info@pinelandsalliance.org

PinelandsAlliance.org

continued on page 2



Paddling on the scenic Mullica River.

We began outreach to municipalities, elected officials, and river lovers across the area. Fielder organized a meeting to discuss the concept at the Rutgers Marine Field Station in Tuckerton in September of 2024. At that meeting, we heard from Paul Kenney, who was the Wild and Scenic River staff lead for the National Park Service in our region at the time. We also heard from Rutgers University Professor Emeritus, Ken Able, who described the Mullica and its estuary as among the most pristine waterways in the state and maybe even on the East Coast, based on his decades of research and experience.

A small team was formed, including Fred Akers from the Great Egg Harbor River Association, and we began the long and uncertain process of petitioning the government and gaining community support for designation. Over the next few years, Mullica River enthusiasts submitted hundreds of letters in support of this designation. We arranged tours for congressional staffers, got resolutions of support from a few river towns, and we were joined by a youth organization group known for their public outreach called CRAN (Climate Revolution Action Network).

All this momentum led to the introduction of a congressional bill, the *Mullica River Watershed Wild and Scenic River Study Act of 2026*, on May 20, 2026 by Representatives Herb Conaway and Jeff Van Drew. A companion bill was introduced by Senators Andy Kim and Corey Booker that, if passed, directs the National Park Service to “study” the Mullica River for inclusion in the National and Wild Scenic Program using the Partnership Model.

The Partnership program is different than the National Rivers of the American West, where

ivers often flow exclusively through federal lands. The Partnership model depends on local municipalities and organizations appointing a River Council, as well as state entities like the Pinelands Commission, to protect the outstanding values of the river. The Council creates and helps implement a River Management Plan by utilizing existing local and state regulations to protect the river. The Act does give the National Park Service some leverage over federally funded or directed projects (Section 7 review), but it does not create any additional land use regulation. This model was pioneered in New Jersey with the Great Egg Harbor and Maurice Rivers, thanks to the work of Julie Akers, Warren Fox, Dick Colby, Jane Galetto and legions of other river enthusiasts.

On certain parts of the Mullica there exists a vision of place that would be recognizable to people who traveled up this river hundreds of years ago. It is a challenge to explore the voluminous extent of tributaries that flow into the river and out to Great Bay. But every new stream you explore opens a window on the entire system. When the Dutch sailed upriver from Great Bay in the early 1600s, they remarked at the incredible wildlife and natural resources of the river. At that time, the region’s original inhabitants, the Lenni-Lenape, lived in settlements at places like Lower Bank and fished, gathered, hunted, and planted crops along the Mullica for thousands of years. If Henry Charleton Beck was correct in his book *Jersey Genesis, The Story of the Mullica River*, during the Lenape era, the river may have been called the Amintonck, renamed to “Little Egg Harbor River”, and renamed again “The Mullica”. Eric Mullica was the first European colonist to settle on the river at what is now known as Lower Bank, but what was once likely a Lenni-Lenape settlement known as Takokan.

It is quite clear to me that we must do everything we can to protect our last special places. Thanks to the hard work of people like Stephen Fiedler, Julie Akers, Fred Akers, Jane Galetto and legions of others, we have a chance to keep places like the Mullica as mysterious and magical as it has always been. River designation is not a cure-all, but it is a step in the effort to protect wild nature by the thousands of New Jerseyans who care for and depend on it.

Why the World Cup gave the boot to artificial turf and why New Jersey should too

by Heidi Yeh, Ph.D., Policy Director

This summer, as millions of fans tuned in to the FIFA World Cup, it was worth paying attention to what lay beneath the athletes' feet. FIFA's biggest stage rejected fully synthetic fields.

Following a landmark challenge from women's teams who objected to being forced onto artificial turf while men played on natural grass, FIFA shifted its standards. Fully synthetic fields are no longer acceptable for top-level competition. Today, World Cup matches are played on either fully natural grass or hybrid systems—surfaces rooted in real soil, with living grass reinforced by only a small percentage of synthetic structure.

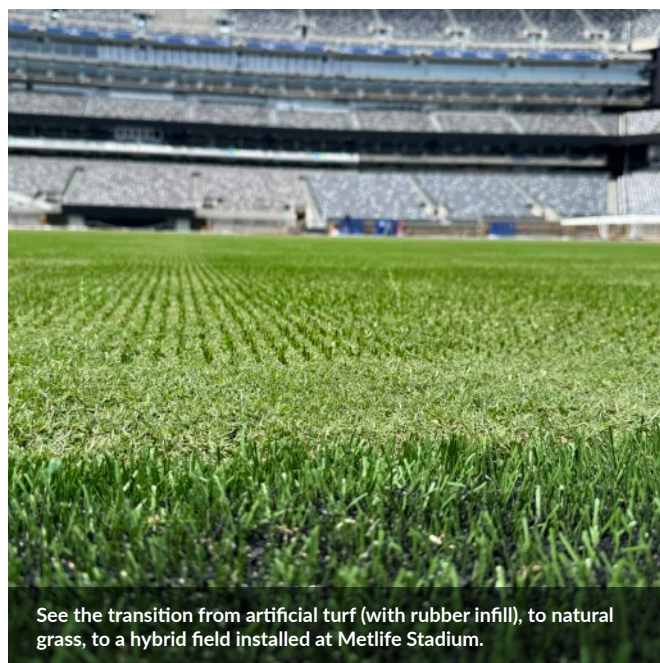
If plastic fields were truly superior, FIFA (the governing body for the world's most played and watched sport) would use them. It doesn't. Yet across New Jersey and the United States, municipalities continue pouring taxpayer dollars into synthetic turf under the assumption that it provides more playing time, greater prestige, and better value.

The reality is far more complicated. Properly designed natural grass fields with modern drainage can often provide similar usability at lower cost and with far fewer environmental impacts, while artificial turf's promised "more playable hours" frequently ignores dangerous heat that can limit use and increase health risks for athletes. Playable hours are also variable depending on who is using the field and for what activity.

It is hard to justify the enormous environmental and financial costs of plastic fields. Artificial turf carries well-documented risks: microplastic pollution, PFAS contamination, urban heat island effects, landfill waste, and the fossil fuel demands of manufacturing petroleum-based surfaces. These fields must be replaced every eight to 10 years, creating recurring costs towns underestimate, costs made even more volatile because artificial turf is derived from petroleum products. Meanwhile, well-managed natural grass (or potentially a hybrid surface) is often significantly cheaper over the long term.

Governor Mikie Sherrill highlighted artificial turf fields as a common "Christmas tree item" in state budgeting—showing how expensive and heavily subsidized these projects have become. New Jersey's Green Acres program has awarded millions for synthetic turf installations, even as the state faces structural budget challenges. Because programs like Green Acres often subsidize artificial turf projects, municipalities have less incentive to seriously consider what strategic investment in natural grass fields, modern infrastructure, and skilled field management personnel could accomplish. That's why we are pushing for Senate Bill No. 3254, which would prohibit the use of those funds for turf projects, and Senate Bill No. 2936, which would prevent public entities from installing artificial turf altogether. At a time when taxpayers are being asked to tighten their belts, continuing to subsidize costly plastic fields is increasingly difficult to defend.

If your town is considering artificial turf, contact our Policy Director, Heidi Yeh at heidi@pinelandsalliance.org



See the transition from artificial turf (with rubber infill), to natural grass, to a hybrid field installed at MetLife Stadium.

A New Way to Camp in the Heart of the Pinelands

by Vince Iannone, Ph.D., *Manager, Pinelands Adventures*

In 2025, the Pinelands Alliance acquired the 162-acre Pine Tree Center in Tabernacle, NJ from the Boy Scouts of America. Located next to Wharton State Forest, the Center connects several hundred thousand acres of preserved land. The Alliance acquired the Pine Tree Center thanks in part to an extraordinary bequest it received from a donor for the purpose of buying land for conservation. The New Jersey Conservation Foundation also contributed significant funding through its grant from NJ's Green Acres Program.

The property is now permanently protected for conservation, recreation, and the study of nature. The Pine Tree Center is managed by Pinelands Adventures and is also home to the Pinelands Research Institute. The Center features rentable cabins, spacious campsites, and flexible indoor and outdoor program spaces ideal for meetings, educational programs, workshops, and special events. Whether hosting a small group or a larger organized retreat, guests will find comfortable accommodations and versatile facilities to support meaningful and memorable experiences.

Just a short distance away, Pinelands Adventures offers guided and self-guided kayaking and canoeing trips along the Batsto and Mullica Rivers—two of the region's most scenic waterways. Guests can easily extend their stay with paddling, hiking, biking, and exploration throughout Wharton State Forest, or visiting historic destinations like Batsto Village.

With its combination of natural beauty, accessible amenities, and adaptable rental options, Pine Tree Center provides the perfect setting for connection, learning, and outdoor adventure - making it an ideal destination for families, schools, organizations, and retreat groups alike.

The Pine Tree Center is located at 110 Butterworths Bogs Rd in Tabernacle, NJ.

For more information, visit www.pinetreecenternj.org or call Pinelands Adventures at 609-268-0189.



Entrance to tent camping at the Pine Tree Center.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Pinelands Adventures

Paddling Season Open until October 31st!

Explore the Pine Barrens by canoe or kayak! You can paddle on your own, paddle with a guide, or rent a boat with Pinelands Adventures. We also offer guided hiking and history tours.

Learn more at:
www.PinelandsAdventures.org

Nature: Accessible for All Soiree Under the Stars

September 19, 6 to 10 PM

at Highlawn Pavilion
1 Crest Dr., West Orange, NJ 07052

The evening will feature a performance by Broadway and television star Ali Stroker who made history as the first actor in a wheelchair to appear on Broadway. Enjoy gourmet food, fine wine, and craft beer. Proceeds benefit Nature Accessible for All, a statewide effort to improve access to nature for people with disabilities and their families.

Learn more at: accessnaturenj.org/soiree

Tour de Pines

October 4 - 7, 2026

at Pinelands Alliance
17 Pemberton Rd, Southampton, NJ 08088

Sponsored by Pinelands Alliance and organized by Kermesse Sport, the Tour celebrates Pinelands Month in October. Enjoy four single-day bicycle tours of the New Jersey Pinelands. Proceeds benefit the Pinelands Alliance. There is no other bike ride like this in New Jersey!

Learn more at:
tourdepinesnj.org

Five Months In, Gov. Sherrill Needs to Do More for People and the Environment

by Stephen Elliott, *Director of Watershed Programs*

Five months into Governor Mikie Sherrill's administration, New Jersey environmental advocates are deeply concerned about the lack of protections for New Jersey's communities and environment as data center proposals pop up throughout the state.

In May, more than 60 environmental, labor, and community organizations along with nearly 9,000 New Jersey residents urged the governor to enact a three-year moratorium on new data centers. The request was straightforward: pause the rapid data center expansion while New Jersey develops safeguards to address impacts on water supplies, energy demand, air quality, land use, and local communities.

The administration released a comprehensive data center strategy. Despite its ambitious branding, the proposal offered no meaningful mechanism to limit data center growth or address its impacts. Rather than establishing safeguards, it became clear that the strategy is not a plan to manage data centers; it is a plan to accommodate them.

Governor Sherrill made clear that she wants New Jersey to "lead in AI innovation," despite recent

polling showing broad bipartisan opposition to data center development. Her strategy fails to address the realities of the AI arms race driving unprecedented data center expansion. Technology companies are investing billions of dollars to build facilities, secure electricity, and consume water. Against that backdrop, New Jersey's response amounts to little more than additional studies, reporting requirements (after the projects are built), and stalling any real guardrails.

There are no statewide siting restrictions, no meaningful protections for environmentally sensitive areas, and no enforceable limits on water or energy consumption. Some of our state leaders seem to be operating under the delusion that hyperscale data center developers will come to New Jersey and build sustainably – minimizing water use, using clean energy, and plugging in to geothermal systems that recycle "waste heat" despite no requirements in place to do this. How did that work out when million-square-foot warehouses invaded the state?

But New Jerseyans do not plan on letting the warehouse bubble repeat itself.

continued on page 7



On June 22nd 20 people joined the Alliance in a lobby day to demand a data center moratorium in Trenton.

2026 Pinelands Alliance Membership Survey

by Becky Free, Director of Development & Engagement

We are in the process of creating our next strategic plan to set the course for our work protecting New Jersey's Pinelands over the next five years. From March 30th to April 1st we surveyed our members as part of this process. Member feedback is critical as we determine the projects, programs and initiatives that will best serve the public and the Pinelands.

We distributed survey links by email and sent postcards to members that we could not reach by email. We offered a paper survey option and entered those responses by hand into our survey tool. In total, 867 surveys were completed.

Members were asked a wide range of questions, and a full summary of responses can be found on our website. When asked what aspects of the Pinelands they valued the most, the top three answers were forests, rivers and other water resources, and plants and wildlife. Members were given a chance to share more information, and one of my favorite sentences is this one:

Being in the woods brings me back to my childhood and reminds me of how simple life was then and still can be as long as we have the Pinelands. Above all, I love the smell of the pine trees. I can close my eyes, breathe in, and transport back in time 50 years just from the scent of the forest. We need this to remain as is forever.

The most popular recreation activities included hiking, scenic drives, and bird watching. When

asked what threats to the Pinelands concern them the most, more than 50% of respondents ranked warehouse and data center development, off-road vehicle damage to habitats, excessive water use and housing development as threats of "extreme concern".

We asked people to share with us what actions the Pinelands Alliance should prioritize in order to protect the Pinelands over the next 10 years. People ranked options as low, moderate, high and critical priorities. The top critical priority for respondents was protecting water quality and supply, followed by protecting more land from development, and protecting and restoring plant and wildlife habitats. People were given a chance to share their thoughts, and I think this response speaks to the heart of what the Alliance does:

Keep your eye on the political aspects that could upset the entire apple cart. Political forces for good established the Pinelands National Reserve, alternate political forces could erase the protection just as quickly.

You can see a summary of the survey results on our website. Questions? Email me at becky@pinelandsalliance.org or call 609-859-8860 ext. 121.

Enjoy this final thought:

What makes the Pinelands special to me is that it feels like a place that still knows what it is. There's a quiet integrity to it—the way the forests, rivers, and small towns exist without trying to be anything else. You can be out on the water or walking a trail and feel a kind of stillness that's increasingly rare. Not empty—but alive in a quieter, deeper way. I'm especially drawn to the sense of continuity there. The Pinelands carry layers of history—indigenous roots, maritime traditions, the legacy of working the land and water—and yet it doesn't feel like a museum. It's living history. You see it in the boats, the towns, the people who still have a direct connection to place. There's also something wonderfully quirky about it. The tea-colored rivers, the unique ecology, the folklore, the unexpected beauty in what at first glance might seem simple or even sparse—it rewards you the more you pay attention.



The Pinelands provide peaceful places to enjoy with friends and our four-legged family members. Photo credit: Karl Jonsson.

continued from page 5

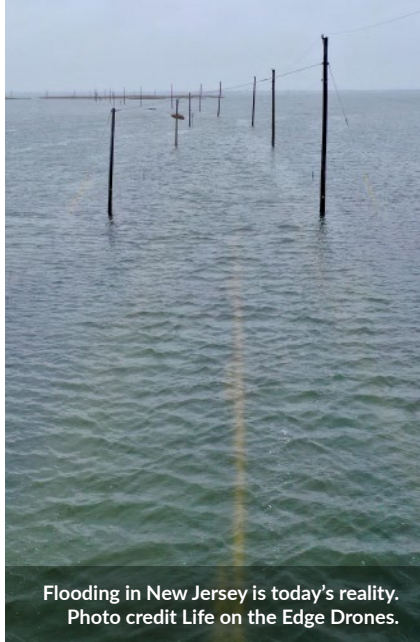
Five Months In, Gov. Sherrill Needs to Do More for People and the Environment

Local ordinances banning data centers are spreading throughout the state. As of June 1st, at least 30 municipalities have passed, introduced, or are considering a municipal ordinance limiting, pausing, or completely banning data centers. Residents are demanding action, and since the governor is not acting quickly enough, local leaders are answering the call in her absence.

And if there were any doubt about whose corner the governor was in, it largely disappeared with the decision to delay implementation of New Jersey's PACT REAL rules until July 2027. These regulations were based on the latest climate science and designed to protect communities from worsening flooding, sea-level rise, and other climate-driven hazards. They require development decisions to account for current and future climate conditions rather than relying on historical data that no longer reflects reality.

Industry groups opposed the rules, claiming increased costs and limits to where some projects could be built. Rather than standing behind protections developed through years of scientific review, the administration gave developers another year to pursue permits under older, weaker standards. They can also consider amendments that will further diminish these rules. At a time when climate risks and household costs are accelerating, New Jersey should be strengthening protections for vulnerable communities and lowering insurance rates, not delaying them to accommodate industry concerns. NJ was once viewed as a leader in climate resilience, yet now states like Florida, Louisiana, and Texas are implementing policies that recognize future flood risks and changing climate conditions. The administration's press release repeatedly emphasized the need for a "balanced approach," but when given the choice between implementing climate protections developed through years of scientific review and accommodating industry concerns about compliance costs, it is clear which way the scales tipped.

Five months into her term, Governor Sherrill's response to New Jersey's growing data center challenge is clear. Rather than establishing meaningful protections, her administration is opening the door for continued expansion. New Jersey deserves more. In the most densely populated state in the country, every project carries a cost to community and environment. The scales need to be tipped in favor of the people of New Jersey, not corporate or other short-sighted economic interests. The Governor still has time to do the right thing for New Jersey and put a moratorium in place before it's too late.



Flooding in New Jersey is today's reality.
Photo credit Life on the Edge Drones.



**Pinelands
Alliance**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Ambassador (Ret.) Patricia A. Butenis
CHAIR OF THE BOARD
Retired, U.S. Foreign Service

Barbara Trought
VICE CHAIR
Community Activist

John Murphy
TREASURER
Retired Attorney

Laura Palazzo
SECRETARY
Retired Casino Industry Finance Executive

Jaclyn Rhoads
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
(Officer)

James A. Barnshaw, M.D.
Retired Physician

Timothy J. Byrne, Esq.
Attorney, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton

Charles Caruso
Retired Patent Counsel, Merck & Co.

Michael Filippone
OceanFirst Bank N.A.

Bill Fisher
Retired Architect, Liberty Property Trust

Lamar Gore
*Refuge Manager, John Heinz National
Wildlife Refuge*

Ivette Guillermo-McGahee
CEO, Allies in Caring

Joann Held
Hopewell Valley Green Team

Christopher Kosseff
Photographer; Retired Rutgers Executive

Frank Latham
*Advocacy Coordinator/Principal Presenter
NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities*

Luis Olivieri
Director of GIS, Hopeworks Camden

William A. Rodio
Attorney, Eisenberg, Gold & Agrawal PC

Joseph Sikora, RLA, ASLA
President of Sikora Wells Appel

Amy Vasquez, Esq.
Attorney, Law Office of Amy Vasquez



Pinelands Alliance

Bishop Farmstead
17 Pemberton Road
Southampton, NJ 08088

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Bellmawr, NJ
Permit #403

CONNECT WITH US

-  pinelands
-  pinelandsalliance
-  Pinelands Alliance

PinelandsAlliance.org

609-859-8860 | info@pinelandsalliance.org



I will protect New Jersey's Pine Barrens!

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift to help protect streams, forests, and wildlife habitat in the Pine Barrens.

☐ \$150 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 ☐ Other \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ (night) _____

Email Address _____

☐ My check, made out to Pinelands Alliance, is enclosed.

☐ Charge my: ☐ Visa ☐ MC ☐ Discover Amount: _____

Card# _____ Exp. _____ CVC Code _____

Signature of Card Holder _____

Pinelands Alliance MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS



Pinelands Adventures Map

For a gift of \$25 receive this full-color map of the roads, rivers, forests, and historic sites of the Pinelands National Reserve. The only one of its kind! Unfolded it measures 36" by 28" and is printed on rip-resistant paper.



A year's subscription to
Inside the Pinelands.



State of the Pinelands
Annual Report



10% off Pinelands Alliance
merchandise and at
Pinelands Adventures.

Give online at:

pinelandsalliance.org/support