Pinelands Alliance

INSIDE THE Pinelands

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Making Nature More Accessible, One Trail at a Time.....3

The Fight Against Data Centers Continues..... 4

Upcoming Events.....4

Sometimes Even the Pinelands Need a Lawyer.....5

Revolutionary Microbes of the Pinelands.....6



The 162-acre Pine Tree Center in Tabernacle, NJ was recently acquired by the Pinelands Alliance.

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A Legacy That Will Last

Becky Free, *Director of Development & Engagement*

Many people who love New Jersey's Pinelands see the Alliance as their champion in saving the Pines forever. To ensure our work continues, they have joined the Pinelands Legacy Society and included the Alliance in their estate plans.

Since our founding more than 35 years ago, planned gifts have made an enormous difference to our work. These extraordinary gifts have enabled us to purchase the historic Bishop Farmstead, weather economic recessions, and carry out innovative projects critical to expanding public support for the Pinelands.

An Extraordinary Gift Impacts Generations

In 2025, the Alliance purchased the 162-acre Pine Tree Center from the Boy Scouts of America. This project was possible because of an extraordinary bequest we received specifically to buy land for conservation. The property is now permanently protected for conservation, recreation, and scientific study.

The Center is located in the heart of the Pinelands National Reserve. It consists of 162 acres of upland and wetland forests; buildings for classes, gatherings, and overnight accommodation; and campsites. Adjoining the 122,000-acre Wharton State Forest, the Center connects to a network of several hundred thousand acres of preserved lands. The Pine Tree Center is the home of the Pinelands Research Institute and a hub for nature-based recreation and environmental education. The Pinelands Research Institute is a science-based field station and an initiative of the Alliance.

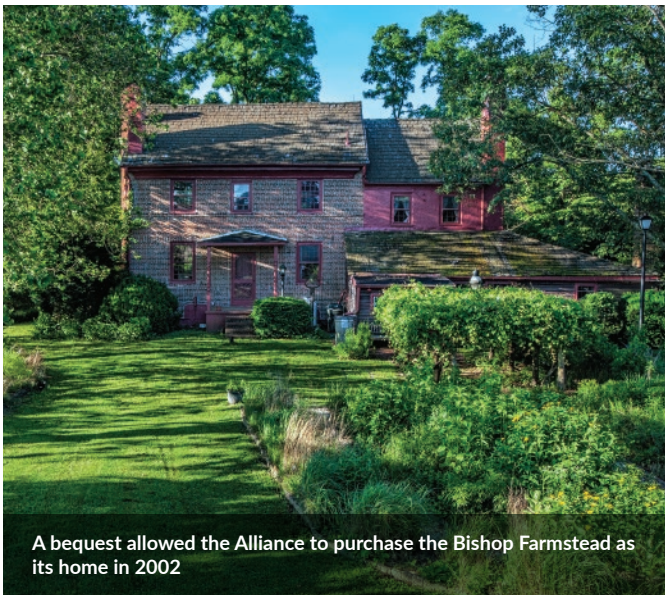
continued on page 2

The Institute's mission is to be a center for scientists, educators, naturalists and the public to generate knowledge and understanding of the unique forested ecosystem that is the New Jersey Pine Barrens, its broader region, and the Pinelands growth management program.

Beverly Ellis, niece of Herman Pagel whose generous bequest enabled the Alliance to purchase the property, said, "My uncle Herman Pagel bequeathed his entire estate to Pinelands Alliance. He was one of a kind, and my family are pleased to know that this is his legacy."

Estate planning is a great way to meet your philanthropic and personal financial goals. Through your planned gift, you can defend the Pinelands, preserve its 1.1 million acres, protect its 17 trillion-gallon freshwater aquifer, its rivers and wetlands, and all of the flora and fauna that depend on this unique ecosystem. These actions truly matter to future generations.

Patricia A. Butenis, Pinelands Legacy Society Member and Pinelands Alliance Board President
Pat grew up in Atco, NJ and retired back home after a 34-year career as a Foreign Service Officer which included assignments as ambassador to Bangladesh and to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Her favorite project in Sri Lanka was promoting the welfare of its wild and captive elephant populations. "I grew up in the Pinelands and spent a long career largely overseas. I became increasingly concerned about environmental degradation and destruction of species and habitat in the countries I worked in. When I retired and moved back to South Jersey, I knew I wanted to focus my time and energy and donations to help preserve what we have here."


A bequest allowed the Alliance to purchase the Bishop Farmstead as its home in 2002

"I could not do much for the wild elephants in Sri Lanka, though I tried, but I know the Alliance is doing what's needed in the Pinelands. I wish I could leave at least the Pinelands, if not the global environment, safe and protected and in even better shape than it is now – or at least help stop the deterioration."

"I am so impressed with the Alliance's range of activities, its advocacy, and its track record in protecting the Pinelands. Leaving a bequest to PPA to continue its work in some small measure is comforting to me now. I like the sense of making one last contribution to such a crucial effort."

Ways of Giving
There are many planned giving strategies to be considered in consultation with your estate attorney. Leaving a bequest to the Alliance in your will is a simple way to create a conservation legacy. Estate plans should be prepared by and with the advice of an attorney to ensure that your intentions are carried out. If you do not know an estate law attorney, we can suggest ways to identify an attorney you would like to work with.

Another way to create your conservation legacy is to make a contribution from your Donor Advised Fund, IRA, or a gift of stock. These gift strategies may provide you with greater tax benefits while advancing Pinelands protection. For gifts like these you need our Federal Tax ID number (52-1641512) and for stock gifts, our broker and account information (Charles Schwab, DTC 0164, Account 83989526).

We would be happy to speak with you and answer any questions you might have. And we would love the opportunity to thank you personally for your generosity. The Alliance established the Pinelands Legacy Society to recognize the people who have made these special gifts to the organization.

For further information, or to let us know about your gift, please contact Kellie Westervelt, Director of Philanthropy by phone at 609-859-8860 ext 124 or by email at Kellie@pinelandsalliance.org.

Making Nature More Accessible, One Trail at a Time

by Sean Kane-Holland, *Access Nature Disability Advocate*

In 2021, Pinelands Alliance launched the *Pinelands Is For Everyone* project to make recreation in the Pinelands National Reserve more accessible for individuals with disabilities. This work was amplified through funding from the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Disability Services, through the Inclusive Healthy Communities (IHC) grant program. These funds supported trail assessments, trail building, forums, and other efforts to make the Pinelands Region more accessible.

Since then, the campaign expanded to a statewide initiative, "Nature: Accessible for All" (NAFA), with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. With our partners, we lead a statewide effort to make natural spaces and nature-based programming inclusive and accessible for individuals of all abilities.

We have established a website (accessnaturenj.org) and interactive map that serves as a hub of nature accessibility resources for individuals and organizations. The map includes nature sites with detailed information about features and amenities that promote inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Our statewide coalition has three main objective. First, we work with the disabled community and both public and private land managers to develop accessible and inclusive nature trails and sites. We work with individuals, agencies, and volunteers to complete site evaluations and assist with development and implementation of plans.

Second, we seek to establish inclusive, accessible land and water-based eco-educational/recreational programs. This includes researching and testing assistive equipment and technologies, creating workshops on best practices for leading specific groups, and developing frameworks all in collaboration with the disabled community and land managers. With Pinelands Adventures, we have acquired seven rugged-terrain wheelchairs, both powered and manual, to offer programs to residents in the disabled community.



Kerry Pflugh (NJ School of Conservation), Sally Basile, and Amelia Basile with her Service Dog at Soiree Under the Stars

Third, the AccessNature Forum provides opportunities for discussion and presentations on accessibility barriers, and resources for making New Jersey's outdoors accessible to all.

Recent accomplishments

On Saturday, September 19th we held our first awareness and fundraising event – Soiree Under the Stars at Highlawn Pavillion in West Orange, NJ. We thank everyone who supported, attended, and helped make the event possible. The Soiree was a fun and successful occasion; we will use what we have learned to further our mission.

Plans for future

There are ways to get involved in the Nature: Accessible for All campaign. We are seeking organizations, individuals and advocates to join the coalition, identify accessible parks using our map, and complete site assessments. We also welcome suggestions for parks or recreation areas that could be made more accessible.

Finally, the NAFA Steering Committee helps guide the collaborative efforts of participants and supporters and is free and open to the public. Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month at 2:00 pm on Zoom.

To get involved, contact Sean Kane Holland at sean@pinelandsalliance.org or call (609) 859-8860 ext. 117.

The Fight Against Data Centers Continues

by Stephen Elliott, *Director of Watershed Programs*



Manchester residents showed up en masse to stop the construction a data center in their community.

While the state lags in fully addressing data center impacts, leaders are emerging from the ground up. As of this printing, more than 100 municipalities have stepped in to protect their residents from data center disasters. Many have passed bans, while others have enacted moratoriums while awaiting state action.

Thanks to Manchester residents, who answered the call and showed up en masse to hold their local leaders accountable, there is currently not a single parcel in the Pinelands where data center development is permitted. The township remains reluctant to ban data centers outright, but it did repeal the redevelopment ordinance that had rolled out the red carpet for one.

Meanwhile, Assemblywoman Annette Quijano has introduced bill (A5482). It calls for only a six-month statewide pause to study the impacts of these resource-hungry projects. State Senator Joseph Cryan also introduced a bill directing the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to study data center impacts and pause any new projects until that study is complete.

A complementary bill, SCR27, would provide some assurances and give additional tools to communities – the creation of a green amendment to the State Constitution. A green amendment would give communities a lasting constitutional tool to challenge ill-conceived projects, from massive data centers to whatever comes next, that threaten their health and environment.

Pinelands Alliance will keep watch for any whisper of a data center in and around the Pinelands, and we will stand with every community that wants no part of these projects. We will keep calling on the Governor and legislators to do what more than 100 towns already have: pause data center development.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Green Trading Post

December 5-6, 12 to 4PM

at Pinelands Alliance
17 Pemberton Rd, Southampton, NJ 08088

Our annual Green Trading Post offers merchandise and memberships from local non-profit organizations. We also feature local artists and local authors whose work arises from or focuses on the Pine Barrens. Shop local and shop green!

The Oceanography of the Pinelands

November 18, 12 to 1PM

Live via zoom

The New Jersey Pinelands may seem far removed from the ocean today, but its history and ecology are deeply intertwined with the sea. This presentation explores the geologic formation of South Jersey and the powerful role that ancient oceans played in shaping the region's landscape, soils, waterways, and ecosystems. Hear from our Director of Policy, Heidi Yeh at this members only event!

RSVP: pinelandsalliance.org/speaking

Kelvin Wagner: Sustainable Urban Agriculture

December 16, 12 to 1PM

Live via zoom

Learn from Kelvin Wagner, whose mission is to cultivate an ecosystem within the Pinelands that not only provides access to fresh, nutritious foods but also fosters entrepreneurial opportunities for underprivileged communities. This is a members only event.

RSVP: pinelandsalliance.org/speaking

Sometimes Even the Pinelands Need a Lawyer

by Michael Klein, JD, Ph.D, *Director of Government Relations*

In the 2007 film *There Will Be Blood*, Daniel Day-Lewis plays a ruthless oil tycoon who boasts that he has already "drained dry" a proposed new oil field, explaining: "If you have a milkshake, and I have a milkshake, and I have a straw…my straw reaches acroooooooss the room and starts to drink your milkshake. I... drink... your... milkshake! I drink it up!"

There is no oil in the Pinelands, but the Pinelands Alliance works hard to keep giant straws from sucking up the precious 17-trillion-gallon Kirkwood Cohansey aquifer. This underground water supply provides clean drinking water for residents, healthy habitats for animals and plants, and irrigation for farms across the Pinelands.

The Pinelands Commission has the authority to establish rules for how much water can be withdrawn from the aquifer. The Pinelands Protection Act established the Pinelands Commission and required it to make "recommendations for water quality standards for surface and ground waters in the [P]inelands."

The Pinelands Commission's initial water-withdrawal regulations – which exempted agricultural uses – permitted diversions of more than 100,000 gallons per day from the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer only if users could demonstrate that:

1. No viable alternative water supply sources were available; or

2. The proposed use of the aquifer would not result in any adverse ecological impact on the Pinelands Area.

After an extensive study, called the Kirkwood-Cohansey Project that was completed in 2022, the Pinelands Commission strengthened its water-withdrawal regulations. Under the amended rules, a new diversion or an increase in allocation resulting in a diversion of 50,000 gallons or more per day must meet seven criteria and conditions, including that "no alternative water supply source was available or viable" and that "the diversion would not have an adverse regional or local ecological impact."

The rules do not apply to agricultural or horticultural use, or to "a resource extraction operation that constitutes a nonconsumptive use," meaning water is returned to the source.

Clayton Sand, a sand-mining business in the Pinelands, objected to the new rules for several reasons, including they found it "virtually impossible" to calculate the exact amount of water it returned to the source and qualify for the exemption for nonconsumptive use.

After the Pinelands Commission formally adopted the amended rules on December 4, 2023, Clayton Sand appealed.

continued on page 7



Image from a sand mine in the Pinelands. Sand mining kills all vegetations surrounding it

Revolutionary Microbes of the Pinelands

by Sean Kane-Holland, *Access Nature Disability Advocate* and Heidi Yeh, Ph.D., *Policy Director*



Historic mansion at Batsto Village

When British and Continental soldiers traded volleys on the battlefield, the iron flying between them had a unique story how it got to the battlefield. The iron had been harvested — pulled, still forming, from the bogs and streams like those found in the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

For over one-hundred years, ending in the mid-1800's, the Pine Barrens of New Jersey was a major contributor to the iron industry. Few people realize that during this time over thirty iron industrial sites dotted the landscape along its waterways. Even fewer are aware of the unique Pine Barrens ecology that created the deposits and set the stage for the industries to come.

The soils of the Pinelands are rich in acidic, sandy soils laced with dissolved iron which is carried into low-lying streams and bogs by natural springs where it accumulates for centuries. There, iron-oxidizing bacteria like *Leptothrix* and *Gallionella* get their energy by taking electrons from dissolved iron and turning it into solid iron oxide. That process, repeated by uncountable microbial colonies over decades, is what actually built up the region's bog ore: a spongy, rust-colored, roughly 50%-iron limonite deposit, formed in the mud.

Turning bog ore into iron took skill and local materials. Three resources were essential: the ore itself, a flux, and fuel. The ore was limonite, the iron-rich deposit that forms in Pinelands' wetlands. Marine shell from South Jersey served as flux, drawing impurities out of the iron as it smelted and leaving them behind as slag. Charcoal from the region's abundant pitch pine forests provided fuel, and dammed Pine Barrens waterways powered the furnace bellows.

Before the Revolutionary War ignited in 1775, New Jersey's iron sites, like Batsto, and most other colonial-era ironworks, produced "Pig Iron". This is an unrefined wrought-iron product which would then be taken to a forge to produce refined domestic products; wagon tires, tools, nails, horseshoes, stoves, water pipes, pots, kettles, salt pans, firedogs (Andirons), and firebacks.

Shortly after the fighting at Lexington and Concord, many colonial ironworks began casting military equipment. Batsto, and Taunton Forge produced cannonballs, hollow shot, and later, cannon barrels for George Washington and the American Military. Finished product was transported overland to Philadelphia through dense woodland rather than risk encountering British patrols along the Mullica or Delaware rivers. During the Revolutionary War numerous ironworks facilities in the colonies were acquired by and managed by members of Washington's inner circle, either in roles of Public Safety or various roles of the Army's Quartermaster.

Although South Jersey's ironworks are long gone, outcompeted by Pennsylvania's higher-quality, more efficient iron production, the iron-forming microbes of the Pinelands never stopped working. You can watch this happen right now. Walk any tannin-stained Pine Barrens stream and look for an oily, rainbow-colored sheen on the water's surface. It looks like a fuel spill, but it's actually a bacterial biofilm: a living iron-oxidizing mat doing exactly what its ancestors did for the Continental Army. Rub it between your fingers and, unlike petroleum, it breaks apart into flakes rather than swirling back together. Orange-stained cobbles and streambeds nearby are the same process, further along. The Pine Barrens' iron was — and still is — being made, one bacterial cell at a time, in the same bogs you can walk past today.

continued from page 5

Sometimes Even the Pinelands Need a Lawyer

Before the Appellate Division, they argued that the Commission did not have authority to regulate water diversions in the Pinelands. (It also argued that the Commission acted arbitrarily, capriciously, and unreasonably in adopting the amendments.)

Pinelands Alliance retained the expert lawyers at the Eastern Environmental Law Center (EELC), first to make a motion for us to appear as amicus curiae ("friend of the court"), which was granted, and then to file a brief – written by Kaitlin Morrison – to support the Pinelands Commission.

Our primary argument was that the Pinelands Protection Act grants the Commission "unambiguous authority to regulate water, including to preserve groundwater quantity and quality," which is clear from the plain text of the Act and its goal of protecting connected land and water resources.

The court agreed with us. After oral arguments on October 29, 2025 – where we were again expertly represented by Kaitlin Morrison from EELC – the court rendered its decision on July 15, 2026 stating that the Pinelands Commission is the State entity with responsibility over the Pinelands' water resources.

Emphatically concluding its analysis, the court wrote, "Clayton Sand's argument to the contrary fundamentally misconstrues the [Pinelands Protection Act] by disregarding its overarching purpose of protecting and preserving the water resources as well as the land of the Pinelands and the authority the Commission was given to fulfill that purpose."

Daniel Day-Lewis won the Academy Award for best actor in a leading role in *There Will Be Blood*. I wish we could give an award to the EELC for its excellent representation in the Clayton Sand case. We continue to rely on the generosity of our members and supporters to provide us with resources to engage in important litigation to protect and preserve the Pinelands.

We encourage you to consider donating to our Pinelands Legal Defense Fund, because even the Pine Barrens needs a lawyer sometimes.

You can see details about the fund on this webpage: www.pinelandsalliance.org/legal



Fall Rockwood Bogs in Wharton State Forest

Pinelands Alliance

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