



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Contact: Paul Leakan

Phone: 609.894.7300

E-mail: info@njpines.state.nj.us

Pinelands Commission approves two amendments to Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan

Changes will strengthen protection of Pinelands resources

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its regular meeting today, the Pinelands Commission approved two amendments to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), the rules that govern land use, development and natural resource protection in the million-acre Pinelands.

The first change provides specific guidance for those interested in restoring wetlands in the Pinelands while the second authorizes a detailed plan of maintenance practices for 233 miles of electric transmission rights-of-way in the Pinelands.

"These carefully-conceived measures will better protect the Pinelands and the sensitive and unique environment that it supports, including critical habitat for rare plants and animals," said John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission.

Wetlands are an essential element of the Pinelands' ecology because they provide critical habitat for many rare plant and animal species and they maintain ground and surface water quality. They also provide critical stormwater storage capacity that helps control flooding.

Development is generally prohibited within all wetlands in the Pinelands, and activities that have an irreversible effect on wetlands' ecological integrity are strictly prohibited. However, these limitations pose a dilemma when the Pinelands Commission receives proposals to restore natural wetland vegetation communities that have been impacted or altered due to human activities such as agriculture or urban development. These restoration projects might be viewed as inconsistent with Pinelands rules despite the beneficial effects they might provide to these wetlands.

Changes to the CMP seek to solve this dilemma by authorizing certain management activities in wetlands. Examples of these activities include allowing the establishment of characteristic wetlands on inactive farmland, the removal of exotic plant species or Phragmites from a wetland (**see photo on page 2**) and activities that achieve ecological goals such as preventing the loss of a rare wetland community through succession, expanding a rare type of wetland community or creating more favorable conditions for the viability of rare plant or animal populations.

A second amendment to the CMP establishes a pilot program that authorizes a plan to maintain electric transmission rights-of-way in the Pinelands. The plan sets forth a variety of vegetation management practices for each of the roughly 3,000 spans along approximately 233 miles of right-of-way. The primary objectives of the plan are to create and maintain early successional (low-growth) habitats that are characteristic of the Pinelands, provide habitat for native and rare

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plant and animal species and ensure the reliability and safety of the electric transmission system in the Pinelands.

The CMP was amended to permit utility companies to carry out these prescriptions without prior approval by the Commission for 10 years. This period will allow for the Commission's Science office to undertake an extensive monitoring program to evaluate the effectiveness of the prescriptions and to determine whether the goals are being met. The utility companies are required to remit annual payments to the Commission to help finance these monitoring responsibilities. At the end of the 10-year period, the Commission's Executive Director will recommend whether to permanently incorporate the plan into the CMP, extend the pilot program or propose other measures.

The Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan has guided land-use and development activities in the million-acre Pinelands Area since it took effect on January 14, 1981.

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ATTENTION EDITORS/REPORTERS: High-resolution jpeg photos as seen below can be obtained by contacting Paul Leakan at (609) 894-7300 or info@njpines.state.nj.us.



The Pinelands Commission approved a measure to allow certain wetlands restoration activities, such as those to remove invasive Phragmites as seen in the wetlands above. Photo by John Bunnell/Pinelands Commission.

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The Pinelands Commission adopted an amendment that authorizes a detailed plan to maintain electric transmission rights-of-way in the Pinelands, including the one above in Berkeley Township, Ocean County. Photo by John Bunnell/Pinelands Commission.

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