



## New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Pinelands Commission, Nature Conservancy Protecting Pinelands** *First acquisitions approved under cooperative open space program*

NEW LISBON, NJ - Permanent protection of ecological resources continues to be a primary focus of the Pinelands Commission. Through oversight of an agreement with the New Jersey Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, using mitigation monies, the Pinelands Commission today issued a reimbursement check for \$238,494 to the non-profit group. The payment covers half the acquisition cost of 382 acres of critical Pinelands habitat in Atlantic and Ocean Counties.

The purchase is the first to be funded under a 1995 mitigation agreement between the Pinelands Commission and the Cape May County Municipal Utilities Authority (CMCMUA), under which the CMCMUA pledged \$2.25 million in mitigation fees for the acquisition of conservation and recreation lands in the Pinelands National Reserve. In 1999, the Pinelands Commission and The Nature Conservancy agreed to work together to enhance the program, whereby The Nature Conservancy pledged to administer the project and to match, dollar-for-dollar, funding for lands acquired under the agreement.

“This acquisition demonstrates how government and non-profit agencies can achieve great things by working together and pooling resources,” said Jerrold Jacobs, Chairman of the Pinelands Commission. “The Pinelands Commission is proud of our work with The Nature Conservancy to develop a program that provides the maximum flexibility to leverage funding and ensure the most effective use of the available resources.”

Four properties in two project areas have been acquired under this round of funding. The first is comprised of two parcels totaling 367 acres in the East Pine Plains of Barnegat Township. The Pine Plains region is known for the extensive tracts of pygmy pine forests. One of the only dwarf tree forests of its type in the nation, the Pine Plains are dominated by a race of four- to ten-foot-high Pitch Pine trees that are dependent on forest fires to release seeds. The property is in very close proximity to the 17,600-acre Stafford Forge Wildlife Management Area, 25,685-acre Bass River State Forest and the 28,224-acre Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management Area.

## **Pinelands Acquisitions**

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"We're delighted to partner with the Pinelands Commission to protect New Jersey's natural heritage," said Michael Catania, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy of New Jersey. "The East Pine Plains Preserve, created, in part, by funds from this agreement, is a wonderful addition to our Pine Barrens portfolio."

Pinelands Commission Vice Chairman Alan Avery, who represents Ocean County, explained, "The East Pine Plains are a one-of-a-kind landscape and ecosystem. Permanent protection of the area has been a long-standing goal of the County, and today is a landmark day in preserving this special resource. The Pinelands Commission, through all of its resources and partnerships, will continue to work to protect more land like that announced today."

The other two properties acquired, totaling 15 acres, will expand The Nature Conservancy's 340-acre Hirst Ponds Preserve in Galloway Township. The Conservancy began acquiring land in the area in 1984 to protect a pair of large, high-quality Pinelands vernal ponds, which provide critical habitat for Pine Barrens Treefrogs and other species. Vernal ponds are waterbodies that are fed by the water table. They are seasonal in nature and may periodically dry out depending on rainfall and groundwater levels.

"Our sincere thanks goes out, not only to our partner agencies in this effort, but also to the land owners who chose to permanently protect these properties, rather than develop or sell for development," said Pinelands Commissioner Candace McKee Ashmun. "This program is a key component in the Pinelands Commission's permanent land protection initiative. Thanks to everyone involved, we have now protected land for wildlife habitat, groundwater protection and overall protection of the Pinelands ecosystem."

George Marinakis, Executive Director of the Cape May County Municipal Utilities Authority, said, "We were pleased to reach an agreement with the Pinelands Commission in 1996 regarding the continued use of the County's only sanitary landfill, in order for this Authority to continue to provide an essential service for county residents, visitors and businesses. The mitigation fees paid to the Pinelands Commission will now be used to address another important public need: the preservation of open space. We are confident that the agencies involved will continue to work to acquire additional publicly desirable and environmentally significant lands under this program, including properties within Cape May County."

The Pinelands Commission and The Nature Conservancy are working to identify additional acquisition projects under this program. At this time, the Pinelands Commission is reviewing a 367-acre purchase in Cape May County for funding, expected to be approved shortly. Additionally, the Pinelands Commission and the Nature Conservancy have recently met to begin work on establishing a \$400,000 grant program to assist non-profit organizations and local governments in acquiring ecologically valuable open space. A provision for the grant program was included as part of the 1999 agreement.

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