



The BMPs

The good news is that protecting native roadside habitat in the Pinelands is relatively simple, and should result in cost- and time-savings for state, county and municipal road departments responsible for maintenance. The guiding principle of the best management practices, or BMPs, is to work with the naturally occurring conditions.

- When roadwork or other disturbance results in a need to restore a roadside, match the fill soil to the existing soil conditions in the area (low pH, low nutrient capacity, porous sands) - or better yet, use the existing soils after stockpiling them on-site prior to completing the roadwork.
- Don't add lime, fertilizer, or any other amendment to the soil on the roadside.
- Mow a narrower area along the road as needed, and mow the remainder less frequently.
- Avoid mowing rare plant populations, especially during the growing season.
- Avoid mowing sparsely vegetated areas.
- Don't mow lower than 6 inches.

For more information on Pinelands roadside habitats and the BMPs, please contact the Pinelands Commission at:

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P.O. Box 359
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or

(609) 894-7300

or

visit us on the web at:

[www.state.nj.us/pinelands/landuse/
current/roadhab](http://www.state.nj.us/pinelands/landuse/current/roadhab)



Background photo: Low groundcovers like teaberry and reindeer lichen are common along Pinelands roadsides. Mowing lower than 6 inches can be lethal to these excellent soil stabilizers. Photo - Robyn A. Jeney



Roadside Habitat

IN THE



New Jersey Pinelands



The Roadsides

Many Pinelands roadways traverse rural and forested areas. In spots where the roadsides are relatively undisturbed, Pinelands habitats are well-represented. Pine and oak or maple and cedar trees line the forested edges, and the area immediately adjacent to the roadway contains grasses and wildflowers.

Transportation safety is always the paramount goal in roadside maintenance, and that can go hand in hand with quality roadside habitat. Although turf lawns have long been popular in developed areas to allow safe emergency pull-off zones, more rural roads often have wider areas than are needed for errant vehicles. These areas can accommodate a narrow, mowed safety strip next to the roadway, with gently waving grasses and brilliantly colored wildflowers just beyond.

Preserving and enhancing native roadside habitat goes beyond simple aesthetics. Many of the Pinelands native flowering plants and grasses are residents of open, sunny areas that historically resulted from wildfires. Today's policy of wildfire suppression, while essential to protect life and property, results in fewer sunny openings for these native plants – which makes open and sunny roadside habitats so much more important!

Retaining native vegetation along roadsides offers many other benefits, such as better erosion control; habitat for native wildlife, including pollinators; reduced maintenance (watering, fertilizer, mowing); traffic-calming effects; a healthy, diverse ecosystem; and a sense of place and natural splendor in the Pines.

Look for native Pinelands habitats and plants along Route 563 in Burlington County, Route 539 in Ocean County, and Route 624 in Atlantic County, as well as many other rural roads in the Pinelands.

To better protect and enhance the roadside habitat for native and rare Pinelands species while maintaining safe transportation corridors, the Pinelands Commission recommends the following practices (see back panel) for Pinelands roadsides.



Goldenrod, blazing star and boneset light up a Pinelands roadside in autumn. Photo - Robyn A. Jeney

The Pinelands

The Pinelands of New Jersey represent a unique ecosystem underlain by coarse, sandy soils. These soils are extremely nutrient-poor, offering little nutritional sustenance to the vegetation. Pinelands sandy soils are also relatively low in pH, which means a more acidic growing environment for plants. Upland sandy soils drain extremely quickly, making water scarce for plants too. These factors are largely why the Pinelands were called "pine barrens" by early European colonists.

Given these conditions, it sounds like it must be tough for a plant to survive, let alone thrive here! Look around, though, and you'll find plenty of plant growth. Pinelands plants have developed over time along with the sandy, low pH, nutrient-poor soils so that they are able to survive – and thrive – in spite of their barren surroundings.

The Plants

In early spring, several low-growing Pinelands native plant species brighten the browned landscape with their flowers, including broom crowberry, pine barren heather, trailing arbutus, sand myrtle, and pixiemoos.

The summer months feature flowers ranging from the ground-covering teaberry, with its creamy bell-shaped flowers, to taller, more conspicuous plants like orchids, milkweeds and cushions of pine barren sandwort.

Pinelands roadsides are especially spectacular in the autumn, when golden-asters lead to blazing stars, asters, goldenrods, and the rare pine barren gentian, slender rattlesnakeroot and little lady's tresses.

Even the golden-brown of tall over-wintering grass stems adds to the beauty of Pinelands roadsides.