



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

August 31, 2006

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Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail to receive a \$200,000 federal grant

NEW LISBON, N.J. – The New Jersey Pinelands Commission is pleased to announce that the Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail, which was officially designated as a New Jersey State Scenic Byway in 2005, has been awarded a \$200,000 federal grant.

The trail is among 309 projects in 45 states that were selected by Acting U.S. Secretary of Transportation Maria Cino to receive a total of \$25.5 million in discretionary National Scenic Byways Program grants in 2006. A scenic byway is a corridor that possesses historic, cultural, natural, scenic, recreational and archaeological qualities. It reflects a common theme that provides a story of the area to the traveling public.

“We are thrilled by the Secretary’s decision,” Commission Chairperson Betty Wilson said of the grant award. “This grant will be crucial in establishing the framework for managing the trail, including the creation of a marketing plan, signage and strategies for preserving and protecting the tremendous and unique resources found along the trail.”

“It is good news for the Pinelands because learning about the heritage, the features and the attractions in the Pinelands helps give everyone a much better perspective on the treasures that we have here,” added Chuck Chiarello, Mayor of Buena Vista Township and the Chairman of the Pinelands Municipal Council. “It’s very exciting.”

The Pinelands Commission applied for the grant on behalf of the 16 municipalities through which the Trail passes. Funds disbursed under the grant will be used to hire a consultant to prepare a Corridor Management Plan. The Plan will be developed with input from local communities, landowners, governmental agencies, and the traveling public.

The Commission and the New Jersey Department of Transportation will contribute an additional \$25,000 each toward the preparation of the Corridor Management Plan. The Plan will outline the goals, strategies and responsibilities for preserving and promoting the trail while addressing issues

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such as tourism, historic and natural preservation and economic development. Creation of the plan is a necessary first step toward nominating the trail as a National Scenic Byway.

The 122-mile Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail passes through Atlantic, Burlington, Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean counties, including portions of Bass River Township, Corbin City, Dennis Township, Egg Harbor City, Estell Manor City, Galloway Township, Hamilton Township, Little Egg Harbor Township, Maurice River Township, Mullica Township, Port Republic City, Tuckerton Borough, Upper Township, Washington Township, Weymouth Township and Woodbine Borough. Officials in all five counties and 16 municipalities officially endorsed the trail.

The trail travels along existing roadways in the southern region of the 1.1-million-acre Pinelands National Reserve. It has a northern loop that traverses the lower Mullica River basin of the eastern Pinelands, a southern loop that travels the Delaware Bayshore region of the Pinelands and a central segment that wends its way through Atlantic and Burlington counties.

The trail passes through parts of the Bass River, Belleplain and Wharton state forests and can be used as a road map that guides visitors to numerous points of interest, such as historic villages, hamlets, churches and schoolhouses as well as marshes, marinas and wildlife management areas.

The effort to create a Scenic Byway in the Pinelands is a major outgrowth of the Pinelands Commission's Rural Economic Development Program. Legislation passed in 1997 appropriated \$250,000 to the Pinelands Commission to help rural communities identify and plan economic development strategies to stimulate environmentally suitable growth. Expert consultants worked with seven municipalities in limited-growth areas in the Pinelands, and a number of potential planning initiatives and projects were identified, including the suggestion for a New Jersey and National Scenic Byway that would bring widespread awareness and appreciation of the natural and cultural assets of the Pinelands.

An image of the map of the trail is available in jpeg or pdf format and can be obtained by contacting Paul Leakan, the Commission's Communications Officer, at (609) 894-7300.

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