



NEW JERSEY PINELANDS COMMISSION

MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT



A rainy December morning in downtown Hammonton in the New Jersey Pinelands

DECEMBER 2023

1 EXECUTIVE OFFICE

1.1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

1.1A COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- **Personnel & Budget (P&B) Committee:** The Committee did not meet in December.
- **Pinelands Climate Committee:** The Committee's December 13th meeting was canceled due to lack of a quorum.
- **Policy & Implementation (P&I) Committee:** The Committee did not meet in December.

1.1B RULEMAKING

- **Stormwater Management:** Staff continues to do outreach with the few remaining Pinelands municipalities that have not adopted the Pinelands model stormwater ordinance.
- **Water Management (Kirkwood – Cohansey):** The adopted amendments to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) were published in the New Jersey Register on December 4, 2023. The amendments became effective on that date.

1.1C OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

- A total of 10 Open Public Records Act (OPRA) requests were received in December. Five were provided responsive material, two were advised there were no responsive documents, one was advised a file review could be held and two will be responded to in January.

1.1D PINELANDS MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

- The Pinelands Municipal Council did not meet in December.

1.1E OTHER

- The New Jersey Senate approved the Governor's nomination of Dr. Jessica Rittler Sanchez to the Commission on December 11, 2023. Jessica's appointment fills the vacancy created in June 2019 upon Bob Barr's resignation. She will be sworn in at the Commission's January 2024 meeting.
- At their meeting of December 13, 2023, the Burlington County Board of County Commissioners reappointed Commissioner Doug Wallner for a three-year term ending December 12, 2026.

1.2 LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

1.2A LEGISLATION

The 221st New Jersey Legislature will be sworn in on January 9, 2024.

Pinelands Specific Legislation

<u>Bill No.(s)</u>	<u>Prime Sponsor(s)</u>	<u>Synopsis</u>	<u>Current Status</u>
A4/S4251	Lopez, Coughlin, Wimberly, Reynolds-Jackson/	Reforms municipal responsibilities concerning provision of affordable housing; abolishes COAH; appropriates \$16 million.	Assembly Bill – Reported out of the Assembly Housing Committee, Second Reading. Senate Bill – Introduced, Referred to Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee.
A5806/S4165	Moriarty/Greenstein, Oroho/Singleton, Scutari	Appropriates \$48 million from constitutionally dedicated Corporate Business Tax (CBT) revenues to NJDEP for State acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, including Blue Acres projects, and Green Acres Program administrative costs.	Assembly Bill was passed by the Assembly and referred to the Senate without reference; Second Reading; Senate Bill reported from committee, Second Reading.
A5809/S4097	Swain/Zwicker, Gopal	Amends list of projects eligible to receive loans for environmental infrastructure projects from NJ Infrastructure Bank for FY 2024.	Passed by Assembly; Referred to Senate without reference, Second Reading; Senate Bill – reported from committee, Second Reading.
A5810/S4098	Sampson/Greenstein, Stanfield	Amends lists of environmental infrastructure projects approved for long-term funding by NJDEP under FY 2024 environmental infrastructure funding.	Passed by Assembly; Referred to Senate without reference, Second Reading; Senate Bill – reported from committee, Second Reading.
A5808/S4135	Park, Freiman, Lopez/Beach, Turner	Appropriates \$15,564,293 from CBT revenues to the NJ Historic Trust for grants for historic preservation projects and associated administrative expenses.	Assembly Bill - Passed by Assembly; Referred to Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee, Reported from Committee, Second Reading; Senate Bill – reported

			from committee, Second Reading.
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Pinelands Related Legislation

<u>Bill No.(s)</u>	<u>Prime Sponsor(s)</u>	<u>Synopsis</u>	<u>Current Status</u>
A5477/S3863	Kean, Thomson/ Singer	Establishes program in NJDEP for acquisition of development easements on privately-owned woodlands.	Assembly Bill Introduced and Referred to Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee. Senate Bill reported from Senate Committee with Amendments, Second Reading.
A5551/S3928	McKeon/Smith, Stanfield	Authorizes State Treasurer to appoint Garden State Preservation Trust acting executive director under certain conditions.	Assembly Bill introduced and referred to Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee. Senate Bill reported from Senate Committee, Second Reading
A5764	Sauickie	Prohibits planting of non-native species in landscaping at State parks and forests; establishes grant program to support use of native plants at local parks and forests; appropriates \$250,000.	Introduced and referred to Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Committee
A5767	Sauickie	Provides CBT credit for construction or retrofitting of warehouses to meet certain green building standards.	Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce and Economic Development Committee
A5768	Sauickie	Requires State Planning Commission to adopt model buffer ordinances detailing different regulatory options for siting warehouses on or near zoning district boundaries; amends Municipal Land Use Law to allow updates to municipal zoning ordinances consistent with such model ordinances.	Introduced and referred to Assembly Community Development and Affairs Committee

A5769	Sauickie	Requires certain warehouses to obtain air pollution control permits from NJDEP.	Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee
A5770/S4186	Sauickie/ Greenstein	Requires NJDEP to evaluate cumulative impact of stormwater when reviewing applications associated with warehouses and other high-density development projects.	Assembly Bill introduced and referred to Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee. Senate Bill introduced and referred to Environment and Energy Committee.
A5802	Danielson, Reynolds-Jackson, Sauickie	Establishes pilot program in the Office of Planning Advocacy to reimburse municipalities for certain expenditures concerning warehouse development, including costs incurred related to master plan reexamination and zoning ordinance revisions; appropriates \$1 million.	Introduced and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee
A5807/S4138	Freiman/Johnson, Schepsie	Appropriates \$58 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues for recreation and conservation purposes to NJDEP for State capital and park development projects	Assembly Bill introduced and referred to Assembly Appropriations Committee. Senate Bill introduced and Referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee
S3992	Smith	Requires public utilities to develop and implement grid modernization plans; appropriates \$300 million	Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee

1.2B INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS

- Pemberton Township and the NJDEP:** This proposed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) would authorize a deviation from CMP wetlands and wetlands buffer standards to accommodate surfacing of an existing trail at Pemberton Lake for accessibility purposes. A public hearing was conducted on December 13, 2023. The MOA, Recommendation Report and draft resolution will be considered by the Commission at its January 12, 2024 meeting.
- Stafford Township:** This proposed MOA would authorize a deviation from CMP wetlands buffer standards to accommodate paving of an existing trail around Forecastle Lake for accessibility purposes. The Township delivered a presentation at the Commission’s July 14, 2023 meeting

regarding the project and the need for a deviation MOA. Following the presentation, the Commission authorized the staff to begin working with Stafford Township to develop the draft MOA. Staff completed its review of the information submitted by the Township and provided detailed comments on additional information that it required, especially to address stormwater associated with the proposed project.

1.3 HUMAN RESOURCES

- **Contract Negotiations:** A negotiation session was held on November 22, 2023. The next session is tentatively scheduled for late January 2024.
- **Recruitment:** Jared Schmidt was selected for the Management Information Systems Specialist 3 position. His start date was December 4, 2023. Interviews continue for the Environmental Technology Coordinator and Applicant Services Representative vacancies.
- **NJ Employees Charitable Campaign (NJECC):** The 2023/2024 NJECC virtual kickoff was held in September. This year's campaign will run from September 2023 – December 2024.
- **State Health Benefits Program:** All records were updated to reflect the changes in health and dental rates for 2024.
- **Employee Recognition:** Congratulations to Joel Mott, Principal Public Programs Specialist, on achieving 20 years of service with New Jersey Pinelands Commission. Among other accomplishments, Joel has educated tens of thousands of people about the Pinelands by delivering presentations and guiding field trips and by organizing the highly popular, annual spring and summer editions of the Pinelands Short Course, the Pinelands-themed World Water Monitoring Challenge events, Pinelands Speaker Series and by fielding questions from the public. He has also assisted the Science Office for years, including collecting water-level data in the Pinelands each month.

2 INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

- **New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBP):** NJBP staff issued its straw proposal for the dual-use solar program on November 15, 2023 and conducted a virtual stakeholder meeting on that proposal on November 29th. Staff reviewed the straw proposal and will continue to work with NJBP staff concerning how the Dual-Use Solar Program may be implemented in the Pinelands. Additionally, staff will provide a brief overview of the straw proposal at the Commission's January 12, 2024 meeting.
- **Interagency Council on Climate Resilience (IAC):** Commission staff attended the December 12, 2023 meeting of the Council, at which updates on the Council's Extreme Heat Resilience Action Plan and the NJDEP's upcoming Coastal PACT (Protecting Against Climate Threats) rules were provided. On December 19, 2023, staff met with representatives of the IAC to discuss the Council's accomplishments to date, meeting schedules, procedures and future agendas.

- **New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy (NJOPA) Interagency Workgroup:** Commission staff attended the December 1, 2023 meeting of the NJOPA Interagency Workgroup, at which NJ Future staff presented an update on the demographic projections being developed for the forthcoming State Plan updates. NJOPA has also circulated draft goal statements to state agencies for comment.
- **US Biosphere Network (USBN):** Staff attended the December 6, 2023 quarterly meeting of the USBN Biosphere Working Group. The selection process for a new USBN Coordinator was discussed, as was the United States’ re-entry to UNESCO. Cliff McCreedy’s recent visit to the Pinelands and presentation to the Commission was noted, and other working group members indicated an interest in future visits.

3 LAND USE PROGRAMS

3.1 CONFORMANCE ACTIVITY

	Monthly Total	Calendar Year to Date
Master Plans/Ordinances Received		
Adopted	11	137
Drafted or Introduced	3	71
Total ¹	11	142
Substantial Issue Finding ²	0	6
No Substantial Issue Finding	9	111
No Issue Finding	1	21
Total	10	138
Finding Letters Issued³	9	106

¹The total accounts for unique master plans and ordinances received (i.e., it does not double count drafted, introduced, or adopted submissions for the same ordinance).

² Ordinances and Master Plans that are found to raise substantial issues with respect to the standards of the CMP require formal review and approval by the full Commission.

³ A single finding letter can pertain to multiple master plans/ordinances from the same municipality.

3.2 CULTURAL RESOURCE ACTIVITY

Activity	Monthly Total	Calendar Year to Date
Applications Reviewed	9	130
Surveys Required	1	21
Surveys Reviewed	2	17
Certificates of Appropriateness Required	0	1

- Fenwick Manor:** On December 6, 2023, staff met with the Division of Property Management and Construction (DPMC) in the Department of Treasury to discuss the procurement process, including development of a scope of services and RFPs for design and construction services related to the rehabilitation and stabilization of Fenwick Manor. The process will begin upon the Governor’s approval and the Commission’s receipt of the \$575,000 capital grant awarded by the New Jersey Historic Trust.

3.3 PINELANDS DEVELOPMENT CREDIT (PDC) PROGRAM

Activity	Monthly Total	Calendar Year to Date
PDCs Allocated	0	41.25
PDCs Severed	0.25	25.00
Acres Protected	1.80	557.43
PDCs Extinguished	3.75	11.10
Acres Protected	83.71	271.49
PDCs Sold	19.50	31.00
Average Sales Price per PDC	\$75,000	\$73,242
Average Sales Price per right	\$18,750	\$18,310
PDCs Redeemed	0	13.75

Notable Activity:

- PDC Severances:** 0.25 PDCs were severed, permanently preserving 1.8 acres in the Preservation Area District in Woodland Township.

- **PDCs Extinguished:** A total of 3.75 PDCs were extinguished across three parcels. A 30.19-acre farm in Tabernacle Township with an allocation of 1.0 PDC and a 43.44-acre farm in Shamong Township with an allocation of 2.50 PDCs were preserved through the Burlington County Farmland Preservation Program. A 10.08-acre parcel in Woodland Township with an allocation of 0.25 PDCs was preserved through NJDEP Green Acres acquisition.

3.4 SPECIAL PROJECTS

- **Long Term Economic & Environmental Monitoring Projects (National Park Service Task Agreement):** The annual report was submitted to the National Park Service (NPS) in satisfaction of the Task Agreement requirements for funding. The report detailed progress on data collection and analysis for the five-year update of the Long-Term Economic Monitoring report, on tasks associated with the Economy of Open Space study, and on cultural resource activities such as the ground-penetrating radar study at an historic cemetery in Tabernacle and coordinating plans for a future archaeological field school with Monmouth University, federally recognized Native American tribes, and the landowner. The annual report also details work completed for 10 Long-Term Environmental Monitoring projects, including water quality and water level monitoring, snake studies and turtle studies. Recent activities in those long-term environment monitoring projects are described the Long-Term Studies section below.
- **NJDEP – Establishing a New Pollution Budget for Barnegat Bay: The Proposed Nitrogen Water Quality Standard:** Staff viewed a recorded stakeholder meeting held by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the Barnegat Bay Partnership. The stakeholder meeting presented a planned Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for nitrogen coming from land uses in watersheds that discharge to the Barnegat Bay. A recording of the stakeholder meeting is available on the NJDEP website: <https://dep.nj.gov/event/barnegat-bay-stakeholder-meeting-nitrogen-tmdl/>. Additional sessions are planned to discuss the science behind the planned nitrogen limitation and implementation of the standard. Portions of the Pinelands Area in Ocean County would be affected by the proposal. Those areas of the Pinelands are primarily located in the Forest Area and Preservation Area District, which are unlikely to trigger the planned nitrogen loading limitations. However, staff will continue to monitor the effort to establish a new TMDL.

4 REGULATORY PROGRAMS

4.1 APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Activity	Monthly Total	Calendar Year to Date
Pre-Application Conferences	8	55
Certificates of Filing	12	188
Public Development Reports	0	29
Forestry Certificates of Filing	0	4

PDC Letters of Interpretation	0	15
Non-PDC Letters of Interpretation	0	4
MOA Consistency Determinations	0	40
Review of Agency Determinations	62	635

4.2 NOTABLE APPLICATIONS

- Demolition of A Building, Tabernacle Township (James Songhurst, App. No. 2017-0223.001):** On November 22, 2023, the Commission received an application proposing the demolition of a portion of a log cabin style building, 50 years or older. The building is located on a one-acre lot in a Pinelands Agricultural Production Area. The submitted information indicates that the building is a single family dwelling. The portion of the building proposed to be demolished is believed to have been built in the 1920's. An approximately 264-square-foot portion of the building is proposed to remain. Preliminary information indicates that the 264-square-foot portion of the building proposed to remain was constructed in the late 1700's or early 1800's. A cultural resource survey is being prepared for the application.
- Two Lot Subdivision, Southampton Township (Applicant: Craig Mehler, Rancocas Cranberry Co. App. No. 2004-0048.005):** This application proposes a two lot subdivision and no further development of a 229-acre parcel. The subdivision proposes a 182.9-acre vacant lot and a 32.9-acre lot to contain two existing dwellings and an active cranberry agricultural operation. The parcel is located primarily in a Pinelands Agricultural Production Area (221 acres). The purpose of the subdivision is to allow the continued farming of the proposed 32.9-acre lot and the possible acquisition of the 182.9-acre vacant lot by the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. Based upon the presence of wetlands, it is unlikely that it can be demonstrated that the proposed 182.9-acre vacant lot meets the applicable environmental standards of the Township land use ordinance and the CMP and is a "developable lot." The applicant requested that the Commission staff not require a Commission conservation deed restriction be imposed on the 182.9-acre parcel because the parcel already contains an existing Burlington County conservation restriction, will contain a proposed NJDEP conservation deed restriction and will contain a proposed United States Fish and Wildlife (USF&W) conservation deed restriction. Each of the three noted conservation deed restrictions either contain a provision that authorizes development on the 182.9-acre lot that is inconsistent with the provisions of the Township land use ordinance and the CMP or may authorize development that is inconsistent with the provisions of the Township land use ordinance and the CMP. For example, the Burlington County deed restriction permits the development of a dwelling on the parcel. The applicant has indicated that NJDEP and the USF&W cannot amend the required conservation deed restriction language to address the Commission's concerns. In an effort to resolve the issue, the Commission staff provided a draft "deed notice," not a deed restriction, to the applicant intended to reconcile the deed restriction issues. The draft deed notice will provide notice within the proposed deed to the 182.9-acre lot that notwithstanding the provision of any existing or future conservation deed restrictions that may be imposed on the parcel, it has not been demonstrated that the proposed 182.9-acre lot meets the environmental or land use standards of the Township land use ordinance and the CMP. The deed notice would further

indicate that an application for any such future development of the 182.9-acre lot must be approved in accordance with the provisions of the Township land use ordinance and the CMP. On November 11, 2023, the staff issued a Certificate of Filing for the proposed subdivision. The Certificate of Filing noted the need to submit a recorded copy of the “deed notice.” On December 5, 2023, the Commission staff sent a letter scheduling a Commission staff public hearing regarding the application because the recorded deed notice had not been received. On December 21, 2023, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation notified the Commission that their acquisition of the parcel had been completed and that the recorded deeds would be provided upon receipt from Burlington County.

- **Residential/Commercial Development, Manchester Township (Applicant: AASTMA Stavola, App. No. 1981-1470.008 & App. No. 1981-1470.009):** In 2021, the Commission staff met with an applicant to discuss both the proposed development of 1.6 million square feet of office warehouse space and, alternatively, the development of 367 dwelling units on a 225-acre parcel in Manchester Township’s Regional Growth Area. A portion of the 225-acre parcel was previously disturbed as part of a resource extraction operation. The primary issue raised by the proposed development on the parcel is consistency with CMP (threatened and endangered) T&E plant and animal species protection standards. By letter dated August 23, 2021, the applicant submitted a summary of multiple T&E species surveys that had previously been completed on the parcel and on adjacent parcels. A threatened animal species was previously identified on the parcel. The concerned animal species was primarily utilizing adjacent parcels. A threatened plant species was also identified on the parcel. After review of the multiple prior T&E surveys, a site inspection and review of the applicant’s August 23, 2021 letter summarizing the multiple prior T&E surveys, the Commission staff advised by letter dated November 19, 2021 that a follow up one-season, drift fence survey and visual investigation must be completed on the parcel. The results of the one season drift fence survey were submitted to the Commission on December 14, 2021. Based upon the results of the drift fence survey identifying the possible presence of a threatened animal species, the Commission staff required a spring/summer shelter board and visual survey on the parcel for the concerned animal species. On November 16, 2022, the Commission received the results of the spring/summer shelter board and visual survey for the threatened animal species. The survey indicated that the threatened animal species was observed on the parcel. On December 16, 2022, the Commission staff met with the applicant and the applicant’s representatives to discuss the results of the survey and the applicant’s proposed residential development plan. The proposed development plan reserves an area of the parcel as critical habitat for the concerned threatened animal species. At that meeting, the staff advised the applicant that based upon the location of the observed threatened animal species and the known critical habitat for the species on adjacent parcels, additional survey work was required to determine whether the areas reserved for development by the proposed development plan would protect critical habitat for the concerned animal species on the parcel. Subsequently, the applicant and the Commission staff discussed the possible relocation of an existing road (Freemont Avenue) that separates known critical habitat areas on the 225-acre parcel from a larger population of the concerned animal species north of Fremont Avenue. On December 12, 2023, a conceptual plan depicting the relocation of Fremont Avenue and the development of warehousing on the parcel was submitted, along with a request for guidance regarding the location of grading and filling in the vicinity of the relocated road. The information is currently under review.

- Change in Use of Former Elementary School, Bass River Township (Maple River LLC, App. No. 1989-0464.004):** The Commission staff received an email inquiry on November 8, 2023 proposing the use of the former Township Elementary School as a year-round private boarding school. The school is located in the Pinelands Village of New Gretna. The Commission staff issued a letter on November 20, 2023 indicating that, based upon the apparent determination of the Township that the proposal constituted a change in use, a development application must be completed with the Commission. The letter also addressed the process the applicant could follow if they wished to pursue a Township use variance prior to initiating an application with the Commission. On November 20, 2023, an application for the change in use was filed with the Pinelands Commission. On December 18, 2023, the Commission staff issued a letter requesting the information necessary to complete the application. On December 21, 2023, the applicant submitted additional information. By email dated December 22, 2023, the Commission staff requested clarification of the information submitted on December 21, 2023. On December 22, 2023, the applicant submitted additional information, which is currently under review.
- County Rt. 563 Bridge Replacement, Egg Harbor City (Atlantic County, App. No. 2019-0060.001):** An application is pending with the Commission for the proposed replacement of the County Rt. 563 bridge over Egg Harbor City Lake. The application includes proposed improvements to the existing dam over which County Rt. 563 passes across the Lake. The bridge is located in a Pinelands Forest Area. On November 2, 2023, the Commission staff met with representatives of the County to discuss an issue raised by the proposed stormwater management design for the bridge. The current stormwater management design results in an increase in the volume of stormwater being directly discharged to the Lake (wetlands). On November 28, 2023, the Commission staff provided a follow-up email to the County identifying possible approaches to address the stormwater management issue. On November 28, 2023, a meeting was also held with representatives of the County to discuss the application process for a Commission Waiver of Strict Compliance based upon a compelling public need. Such a Waiver would be required if the stormwater management issue could not be resolved. At the same meeting, the Commission staff also offered guidance to possibly resolve the stormwater management issue. On November 30, 2023, a Commission staff member conducted a site inspection to assess soil suitability conditions for the possible siting of stormwater management infiltration areas. Such infiltration areas may eliminate the increase in stormwater volume being discharged to the Lake. By email dated December 7, 2023, Commission staff provided the County with the results of the site inspection. The site inspection identified favorable soil conditions in the vicinity of the proposed bridge for the potential siting of stormwater management infiltration swales. Additional information regarding the site inspection was provided to the County via email on December 13, 2023.
- Marina, Washington Township (Applicant: MK3 Holdings, App. No. 2022-0004.001):** On April 6, 2022, the Commission staff received a request for a pre-application conference for the proposed expansion of an existing marina located on the Mullica River. The proposed expansion consisted of approximately 60 boat slips and 15 jet ski slips. The proposed marina expansion also included the dredging of approximately two acres of the Mullica River to a depth of approximately four feet below the existing riverbed. At that time, the Commission received public comment on the proposed marina expansion. A pre-application conference was conducted on May 5, 2022 for the proposed marina. The proposed marina expansion is located in the Pinelands Preservation Area District. By letter dated May 23, 2022, the Commission staff advised that the proposed development in the Mullica River is subject to the permitted land use standards of the

Township's certified land use ordinance and the CMP and that the proposed development appeared to require a use variance from Washington Township. On September 13, 2023, an application was submitted to the Commission for the proposed marina. On October 4, 2023, the Commission received the required application fee to allow for review of the application. By letter dated December 1, 2023, the Commission staff identified the necessary information to complete the application.

- **Township Public Safety Building, Mullica Township (Mullica Township, App. No. 1991-0320.005):** On November 6, 2023, the Township Administrator requested a pre-application conference with the Commission staff to discuss the development of a new Township Public Safety Building. The Public Safety Building is proposed to be located at the existing municipal complex on the White Horse Pike. The existing municipal complex is located in the Pinelands Village of Elmwood. Based upon an apparent mold issue, the Township police department vacated their offices in the existing municipal building. By email dated November 8, 2023, the Commission staff requested information regarding the square footage of the existing municipal building, the square footage of the proposed Public Safety Building and information regarding other uses, such as the public works building, on the 1.6-acre lot. On November 21, 2023, the Township provided information, including a plan depicting the size of the proposed Public Safety Building. The existing municipal building is approximately 8,500 square feet (two floors). The proposed Public Safety Building is approximately 4,200 square feet. The Township's proposal is to serve both the existing and proposed buildings with a standard onsite septic system. On November 29, 2023, the Commission staff advised the Township that the proposed Public Safety Building appeared to be feasible, but that based upon the extent of existing and proposed development on the 1.6-acre lot, it appeared necessary to convert the existing standard septic system to an onsite wastewater treatment system in order to meet CMP water quality standards. By email dated December 5, 2023, the Commission staff summarized the results of its preliminary review of the proposed public safety building and reiterated the probable need to replace the existing onsite septic system with an onsite wastewater treatment system. It is anticipated that the Township will shortly be filing an application with the Commission for the proposed Public Safety Building.
- **Singer House, Medford Township (Applicant: Affordable Homes Group, App. No. 1987-0055.005):** On November 21, 1991, the Commission approved a Certificate of Appropriateness with specific conditions that required the preservation in place of a significant historic resource known as the Singer House. The Singer House is located in a Pinelands Regional Growth Area. On January 3, 1992, the Pinelands Commission approved a Report on an Application for Public Development for the development of the Medford Township Public Safety Building located on the same lot as the Singer House. That Commission approval reiterated the conditions of the Certificate of Appropriateness requiring the stabilization and preservation in place of the Singer House. The conditions for the stabilization and preservation in place of the Singer House have not been met. The Singer House is currently privately owned. On June 8, 2023, the Commission staff received a request from the current owner of the Singer House to meet and discuss the proposed demolition of the house. On June 28, 2023, the Commission staff met with the current owner. The current owner represented that the Singer House has deteriorated to the point where preservation in place is no longer feasible. The owner was advised at that meeting of the need to apply to the Commission for the proposed demolition of the Singer House. As part of that application, it must be demonstrated why the requirements of the November 21, 1991 Certificate of Appropriateness were not met and why the Singer House cannot be rehabilitated

and preserved in place. On July 7, 2023, the Commission received an application proposing the demolition of the Singer House. By letter dated August 18, 2023, the Commission staff advised the current owner of the Singer House of the information necessary to complete an application for its demolition. The requested information included construction cost estimates that address the feasibility of renovation/rehabilitation of the Singer House for possible different proposed uses (e.g. office, residential). On October 25, 2023, a prospective buyer of the Singer House requested that the Commission staff provide guidance regarding how to proceed with an application for renovation/rehabilitation and the establishment of three affordable dwelling units in the Singer House. By email dated October 30, 2023, the Commission staff provided information to the prospective buyer regarding the extensive regulatory history of the Singer House and the regulatory requirements that the buyer must address in renovating/rehabilitating the Singer House to address its historic significance. The potential buyer submitted additional questions by email dated November 14, 2023 and November 28, 2023. By letter dated December 11, 2023, the Commission staff summarized the extensive application history of the Singer House and provide guidance to the potential buyer. By email dated December 27, 2023, the potential buyer submitted additional questions and requested the opportunity to make a presentation to the Commission. That information is currently under review.

- **Lake Herbiciding, Hammonton (Applicant: Town of Hammonton, App. No. 1989-0573.006):** This application proposes the herbiciding of Hammonton Lake. The lake is located in the Pinelands Town of Hammonton. By letter dated May 22, 2023, the Commission staff advised the applicant of the potential presence of certain T&E plants species in Hammonton Lake. The Commission staff letter required the applicant to complete a T&E plant species survey to determine whether the concerned T&E plant species were present in Hammonton Lake. Alternatively, the applicant could provide information demonstrating that even if the T&E plants species were present in the Lake, the proposed herbiciding would not have an irreversible, adverse impact on any local populations of the concerned T&E plants. On September 19, 2023, the applicant submitted a T&E plant species survey. The survey confirmed the presence of two T&E plant species in Hammonton Lake. On October 9, 2023, the applicant submitted supplemental information. By letter dated October 31, 2023, the Commission staff provided guidance to the applicant and indicated that information must be submitted to the Commission demonstrating that the proposed herbiciding would not have an irreversible, adverse impact on the local populations of the two identified T&E plants. On November 22, 2023, Hammonton submitted information responding to the Commission staff's October 31, 2023 letter. By letter dated December 22, 2023, the Commission staff identified the information necessary to complete the application. That letter also identified the need for either the applicant to provide additional herbiciding expertise or the Commission could require the applicant to post an escrow enabling the Commission staff to retain such expertise.

5 SCIENCE

5.1 ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

- **Water Level Monitoring:** In December, Communications staff measured water levels at 43 forest plots and 30 ponds in the Commission network of long-term monitoring sites. All 30 ponds have begun to fill with water from the recent rains. This work is completed each month

with assistance from the Communications Office. Science staff also downloaded water level data collected from continuous water level recorders installed in four ponds. Sometime between the November and December monitoring rounds, large trucks drove through two of the ponds in Brendan Byrne State Forest, damaging the pond sediments and vegetation community and running over the metal posts used for measuring water levels. The damage was reported to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) southern regional superintendent of the New Jersey Park Service.

- **Annual Frog and Toad Monitoring:** Each spring staff conduct monthly nighttime vocalization surveys for calling frogs and toads at a series of ponds located along the transition between developed and farmed land and protected state land in the Mullica River watershed. In December, data collected in 2019 and 2020 were finalized and data collected in 2021 and 2022 began to be digitized.



Above: Since 2005, Commission scientists have monitored the pond water level in this large natural coastal-plain pond as part of the National Park Service funded Environmental Monitoring Program. Over the years, vehicles have repeatedly breached the tall shrub border and driven through the pond, churning up the soft, organic sediments and damaging the plant community. This image shows vehicle damage that occurred between November and December 2023.

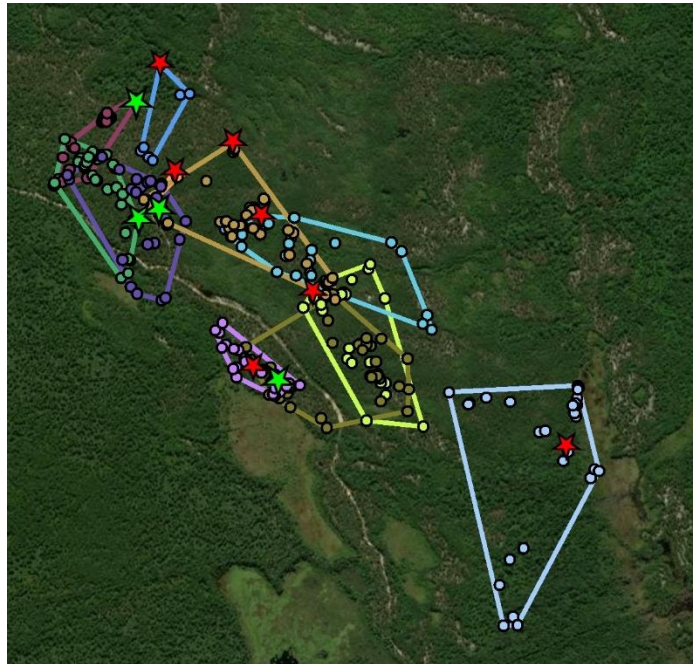
- **Rare Snake Monitoring:** In December, Science staff prepared a list of den locations found on state land that were discovered from radio tracking snakes in 2023. The list was sent to the NJDEP Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP) staff in a request to build corrals around the new dens to monitor the snakes. ENSP staff submitted the request to go through the Land Management Review process in which various NJDEP departments review the list of dens for any issues. Science staff expect a decision in mid- to late-January so that corrals can be built around the dens during the coldest part of the winter.

Science staff normally capture hundreds of snakes each year. Some of these individuals are new snakes that have never been captured and some are individuals that have been found previously. When initially captured, each snake receives a passive integrated transponder tag or PIT tag, which is a microchip inserted under the skin for permanent identification. In December, staff sent the 2022 snake capture data to the NJDEP ENSP to satisfy permit requirements and began to enter the series of data that was collected for each snake captured in 2023.

Staff also began to finalize the data collected during the radio tracking of snakes in 2022. Data for snakes that were killed by predators and those that had their radio transmitters removed in 2022 and were also released were sent to ENSP to satisfy research permit requirements.

5.2 LONG TERM STUDIES

- **Drift Fence Study:** In 2019, as part of a corn snake study, Science staff and researchers from Herpetological Associates and The College of New Jersey installed a drift fence and box trap array through a large snake nesting area to evaluate the array as a survey method and to recapture tagged snakes. The fence was monitored for four years and was removed in 2022. In December of 2023, the data collected during the study was finalized and a draft work plan for analyzing the data has been initiated. Staff intend to begin analyzing those data in 2024.



Above: Activity ranges for several eastern box turtles that were radio tracked in 2023. Dots indicate the locations of turtles, lines show the activity ranges, and stars denote turtle hibernation locations. Turtles overwintering at green stars have iButtons glued to their shells and turtles at red stars do not have iButtons. The iButtons log the temperature of the turtle during hibernation.

- **Box Turtle Study:** Staff continued to check on radio tracked box turtles in December. None of the turtles moved since November, indicating they are all in their overwintering locations. Like the snake capture data, staff began to enter the data collected during the initial capture of each turtle. Staff created a map of turtle activity ranges and overwintering locations to assess the overlap with polygons approved for prescribed burning by the New Jersey Forest Fire Service in preparation for a video call with ENSP staff in January.
- **Snake Fungal Disease Monitoring:** Science staff are collaborating with researchers at Virginia Tech to swab Pinelands snakes for snake fungal disease. A second batch of swab samples were shipped to Virginia Tech for PCR analysis. Staff scheduled a video call with Virginia Tech

researchers for early January to discuss future sampling for snake fungal disease in the Pinelands.

- **Adenovirus Study:** Science staff are also collaborating with Rutgers University researchers to swab Pinelands snakes for adenovirus. Staff have not yet received any results for this sampling.

5.3 OTHER

- The New Jersey State Wildlife Action Plan identifies priority actions that can be implemented over the next five to ten years to address the threats facing wildlife populations and their habitats in the state. Science staff continued to participate in the 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan revision by voting individually for human activities that are thought to be the greatest threats to New Jersey wildlife.

6 COMMUNICATIONS

6.1 COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

- **Inquiries/Correspondence:** The Communications Office received and responded to approximately 45 inquiries from the public in December, including phone calls, e-mails, and media inquiries.
- **Website:** Commission staff made routine edits to the website in December, while also helping to update several fillable .pdf forms.

- **Pinelands-themed Merchandise:** Throughout December, staff promoted and processed sales of Pinelands-themed merchandise via the Commission’s online store and at the agency’s office. The Commission generated additional sales by offering 10% off Pinelands-themed mugs and tote bags as part of a holiday sale that ended on January 1, 2024 (as promoted in a photo shown on the right). The Commission sold nearly \$600 in merchandise in December – the best month to date – and has netted a total of \$1,657.75 in sales since launching its online store in late August 2023. All of the proceeds from sales and donations benefit the Kathleen M. Lynch-Van de Sande Fund for the Reforestation of the New Jersey



Pinelands. The fund was established in memory of Ms. Lynch-van de Sande, a Pinelands Commission Environmental Specialist who died in a car accident in June 1989. It funds projects that support or promote the use of native plants in the Pinelands.

- **Social Media Enhancements:** In December, staff shared 80 photos and three videos on the Commission’s Instagram site and 27 tweets on X (formerly known as Twitter). The Commission shared a total of 1,360 photos and 103 videos on Instagram and 678 tweets on X in 2023. Meanwhile, the Commission uploaded 44 videos on its YouTube Channel in 2023, garnering 153 new subscribers, 353 shares and 22,300 views for the year.

- **Pinelands National Reserve Wall Calendar:** Commission staff promoted the 2024 Pinelands National Reserve wall calendar throughout December. The calendar was funded by the National Park Service, and more than 800 copies were printed in late November and distributed free of charge throughout December.



Above: Commission staff shared a total of 80 photos on the agency’s Instagram site in December, including this photo of a female northern harrier foraging in the Pinelands.



Above: Commission staff shared 27 tweets on X (formerly Twitter) in December, including this photo of sunrise in Bass River State Forest in the Pinelands.

6.2 EVENTS, OUTREACH & INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

- **Pinelands Short Course:** In December, Commission staff edited and finalized the course descriptions for the 35th annual Pinelands Short Course. The event will be held at Stockton’s main campus on March 9, 2024. The event will feature 30 presentations, including 14 new programs.

Barnegat Bay Coordination: A member of the Communications Office chaired the Barnegat Bay Partnership's Communication and Education Committee meeting in December.

7 INFORMATION SYSTEMS

- **Pinelands Commission Information System Upgrades:** The Pinelands Commission Information System (PCIS) is the internal system of record for all applications to the Pinelands and associated transactions. Staff continued to improve the logging features of the PCIS software. Staff began working on draft reports in response to meeting minutes taken during the annual report review last month. Staff took the necessary steps to prepare systems for the startup of a new calendar year and completed testing. Staff completed revisions to the Application Fee Online Calculator, including validating all calculations, improving the useability of the site, and making the summary and calculation information more intuitive.
- **Geographic Information Systems:** Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allow the Pinelands Commission to manage, analyze, and map relevant data. Staff reviewed feedback on the draft map layer linking applications to parcel data to evaluate the feasibility of requested changes. Staff continued to evaluate the new data released by the New Jersey Office of GIS to best integrate the information with internal systems.
- **Cybersecurity:** Vigilance to protect the internal networks, hardware, and data of the Pinelands Commission is critical in today's networked world. The Information Systems office participated in the monthly call hosted by the New Jersey Cybersecurity & Communications Integration Cell (NJCCIC).
- **Conformance Tracking/Zoning system:** Staff worked with the Planning Office to improve the new SQL Server database that will act as a foundation for the new system through iterative steps of data evaluation and data cleansing.
- **Pinelands Development Credit Bank:** The Pinelands Development Credit (PDC) Bank is the processing agency for the Pinelands Development Credit Program, one of the oldest and most successful transfer of development rights (TDR) programs in the world. The Information System staff provides ongoing operational support to the PDC Bank.
- **Permanent Land Protection (PLP) Data System:** The PLP system manages the data related to all the preserved land in the Pinelands National Reserve. Staff supported the Planning Office in maintaining PLP records.
- **Technology Enhancements:** Staff members continually evaluate emerging technologies for how they can impact or enhance the office environment. Staff continued the required migration of legacy data and Oracle database to new servers. Data staging was completed for the final migration of the Network Attached Storage (NAS) drive. Staff continued to work with Verizon on their project to relocate network services from Fenwick Manor to the Richard J. Sullivan building, including installing new fiber lines between the buildings and mounting new network hardware.

8 BUSINESS OFFICE

8.1 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Application Fees: December 2023, Net Total: \$82,511.13, Fiscal Year to Date Total: \$446,510.28. This is 63% of the Fiscal Year 2024 anticipated fee revenue of \$700,000. The net total includes 15 online application payments totaling \$6,272.92.