



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Pinelands Commission endorses natural resource protection plan for southern Medford and Evesham townships

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its regular monthly meeting today, the New Jersey Pinelands Commission formally endorsed a Sub-Regional Natural Resources Protection Plan for an ecologically sensitive area of southern Medford and Evesham townships. The plan was a collaborative effort between the Commission, Evesham Township, Medford Township and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

The Plan's study area encompasses the 22-square-mile southern portion of Medford and Evesham Townships. Although primarily rural in character, almost 75% of this area is designated for modest amounts of residential development under local zoning. However, data compiled in recent years has shown that this area has significant natural resources, including undisturbed sub-watersheds, as well as rare plants and animals.

“The Plan recommends an integrated program of strategies specifically designed to protect significant natural resources, particularly water quality, while avoiding future development conflicts,” said John C. Stokes, the Commission's Executive Director. “This project is a model for collaborative resource protection planning - it involved more than 40 people representing various interests, including township officials, various state agencies, environmental groups, builders, planners, engineers and natural resource experts.”

The Pinelands Commission received a \$73,000 grant from the William Penn Foundation in 2004 to fund efforts to develop the Plan. Shortly after receiving the grant, the Commission organized a Steering Committee composed of officials from the two townships as well as a representative from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the Commission. The Steering Committee appointed an 18-person Project Advisory Committee and a 17-person Technical Support Group to help guide the Steering Committee's decisions.

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The three committees met regularly throughout 2004 to discuss and formulate a series of recommended regulatory and non-regulatory protection strategies that are contained in the Sub-Regional Natural Resources Protection Plan.

The recommended regulatory strategies call for a number of zoning changes devised to reduce development and disturbance levels in high-quality natural resource areas. These strategies would reduce the project area's future zone capacity by 53%. Additional zoning strategies call for creating incentives to transfer all development out of high-value natural resource areas to areas more capable of accommodating it. Development that does occur would be clustered, resulting in the conservation of more than 80% of the properties being developed. Also, a green belt consisting of public lands, preservation areas and low-density zoning districts would be created through the mid-section of the area, which would help to protect the area's water quality and maintain biodiversity.

The recommended non-regulatory strategies include: land acquisition; promoting land stewardship efforts through public education for homeowners, builders, planning and zoning boards; reducing water consumption through programs such as the beneficial re-use of wastewater for golf courses; and conducting surveys to identify the area's rare plants with the intent of helping public landowners, homeowner's associations and the municipalities to protect, manage and recover native plant populations.

The Plan concludes with a specific implementation strategy that identifies the various tasks that need to be undertaken and which parties or organizations are responsible for carrying out those tasks. By endorsing the plan, the Commission agrees to play a prominent role in helping the two municipalities and other involved organizations to accomplish the tasks and meet the objectives of the Plan.

The Sub-Regional Natural Resources Protection Plan is available on the Home Page of the Pinelands Commission's Web site (www.nj.gov/pinelands). A jpeg image (map) of the project area can be obtained by contacting Paul Leakan at (609) 894-7300.

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