

# Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail Corridor Management Plan Vision Statement and Goals

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## Preface

The New Jersey Pinelands has received national and international recognition for its unique and pristine environment and complex ecosystem. As the country's first National Reserve, and as part of the international network of Biosphere Reserves, the Pinelands is distinguished as a site of excellence where approaches to conservation and sustainable development can be explored and demonstrated on a regional scale. Based on its natural intrinsic qualities, the Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail clearly exhibits the national significance required for designation as one of America's Byways.

However, in contrast to many Scenic Byways that have been designated for their natural and scenic resources, the intrinsic qualities and significance of the Pinelands are not readily apparent to the general visitor. While travelers along byways such as Big Sur or the Blue Ridge Parkway are presented with dramatic scenic beauty and natural wonders, the traveler through the Pinelands is engaging with a much more subtle and secretive landscape. The designation and development of the Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail as a National Scenic Byway is thus an opportunity to provide the road map that guides the visitor through the magic and mystery of the Pinelands' tea-stained waters, migratory birds, exotic flora and fauna, and unique historical subculture.

## Vision

The Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail links and interprets important natural, scenic, historic and recreational sites within the New Jersey Pinelands region, telling the story of the Pine Barrens and the Pinelands National Reserve. In so doing, it helps visitors to understand and appreciate this environment, reinforces local and regional efforts to protect these resources, and supports low-impact economic development based on tourism and recreation.

Designation of the Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail as a National Scenic Byway, and the actions and organizational cooperation which will result from that designation, will shape our region for the future. The National Scenic Byway designation will identify the Southern Pinelands as a destination on the level of a National Heritage Area, National Seashore or National Park, and will thereby attract visitors who share our appreciation of the natural environment and will be interested in our history, culture and nature-based recreational opportunities.

The Scenic Byway will present the Pinelands story and resources in a coherent manner, so that people visiting one part of the byway will quickly gain an appreciation for the full range of resources offered by the region. People from around the nation and world will be able to learn about and appreciate what makes this place special.

The design and management of the Scenic Byway will complement the region's natural quality and reinforce the sense of being in a special place. More than simply providing access to natural and recreational resources, the Byway route will become a distinctive feature within the landscape, and traveling along the Byway will be an integral part of the visitor experience.

## Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail Corridor Management Plan

### Vision Statement and Goals

The Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail will thus become central to the region's community development, economic development and natural heritage conservation efforts. In so doing, the Scenic Byway will be a model for how business and environmental groups can work together to create a healthy economy based on a conserved environment.

### Byway Users

The Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail will be used by several different groups of users.

- **The Pinelands Commission and partner organizations** (e.g., National Park Service) will design wayfinding and interpretation around the scenic byway route, in order to promote an increase in awareness of and appreciation for the region's sensitive resource base.
- **Travelers** to South Jersey will use the scenic byway as a way to explore and learn about the Pinelands National Reserve, and to find recreation and accommodation facilities and services.
- **Environmental and heritage organizations** will use the scenic byway to increase awareness of the region's natural and heritage resources, and to increase visitation to their facilities.
- **Recreation and tourist-oriented businesses** along the byway will include the scenic byway in their marketing efforts, in order to establish their image as environmentally-conscious businesses and to attract visitors who are interested in nature and heritage tourism and outdoor recreation.

### Goals

#### Resource Protection and Management

- **Protect and enhance** the natural and scenic qualities of the Southern Pinelands.
- **Maintain** historic and cultural resources, and interpret the relationships between the region's history and traditions and its natural resources.

#### Regional Identity

- **Strengthen** the image of the Pinelands as a nationally significant ecologic region.
- **Foster** awareness of and pride in this unique natural asset among New Jersey's citizenry.

#### Tourism and Economic Development

- **Expand** small-scale tourism based on the region's natural, historic and recreational resources, to assist existing businesses and support local economies.
- **Create** a sustained partnership among the byway communities to address resource protection, tourism and economic development opportunities and challenges along the byway.

## Southern Pinelands Natural Heritage Trail Corridor Management Plan

### Vision Statement and Goals

#### Recreation

- **Increase** opportunities to access and learn about the region's natural systems, including scenic pull-offs and waysides, wildlife viewing platforms, boardwalks, trails, canoe/kayak launches, and interpretive kiosks and panels.
- **Enhance** visual access to scenic resources where appropriate, such as through selective thinning of roadside vegetation to provide filtered views to rivers, lakes and ponds.
- **Promote** visitation to managed historic and cultural sites.
- **Enhance and expand** networks of recreational opportunities along the byway, including bicycling and paddling routes.

#### Roadway Design and Management

- **Develop and implement** design standards that protect and enhance the route's character as well as maintaining safety for vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.
- **Ensure** consistency in roadway design, signs, structures and maintenance throughout the byway, so that travel along the route is a seamless experience.