

Adopted November 29, 2023

CMP POLICY & IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING

This meeting was conducted both remotely and in-person
The public could view/comment through Pinelands Commission YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGxCW6CxNdY>

Meeting ID: 859 1049 2608
Richard J. Sullivan Center
15C Springfield Rd
New Lisbon, New Jersey 08064
October 27, 2023 - 9:30 a.m.

MINUTES

Members in Attendance – Alan W. Avery, Jr., Theresa Lettman, Mark S. Lohbauer, Chair
Laure E. Matos, and Douglas Wallner

Members Absent – Jerome H. Irick

Commission Staff in Attendance – Gina Berg, Ernest Deman, April Field, Susan R. Grogan,
Kim Laidig, Brad Lanute, Paul Leakan, Trent Maxwell, Stacey Roth, and Steven Simone. Also
in attendance was Janice Venables from the Governor’s Authorities Unit.

1. Call to Order

Chair Matos called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. She noted that today is Janice Venables’ last meeting and commended her on her service.

2. Adoption of the minutes from the September 29, 2023 CMP Policy & Implementation Committee meeting

Chair Matos asked for a motion to adopt the minutes of the September 29, 2023, meeting of the CMP Policy and Implementation Committee. Commissioner Lohbauer made the motion to adopt the minutes. Commissioner Avery seconded. Commissioner Lettman abstained. The other Commissioners present voted in favor.

3. Presentation on Environmental Protection Agency grant proposal

Kim Laidig, a Principal Research Scientist with the Commission’s Science Office, gave a presentation on the recently submitted Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant proposal (*Presentation A to these minutes and available on the Commission’s website by clicking [here](#).**).

Mr. Laidig’s presentation described the Science Office’s grant proposal to the EPA for a four-part project. The project proposal is titled “Protecting Wetlands, Monitoring Climate Change, Reducing Wildfire, and Educating the Public.” Per EPA criteria, the proposal must address

wetlands protection, wetlands monitoring and assessment, climate change, and environmental justice.

Mr. Laidig said the grant proposal includes new radio tracking research on the wetlands-oriented Eastern box turtle, installing weather stations on certain ponds and wetlands forest plots, evaluating prescribed burn protocols on wetlands-oriented box turtles, and delivering education and outreach programs in designated environmental justice communities. The project would have a three-year work period. He said the grant program is competitive, and that the proposal will compete with other proposals from EPA Region 2. He said 75% of the project would be funded by the EPA and the remaining 25% would come from the Commission.

Chair Matos said the grant proposal was very creative and commended the work put into it.

Commissioner Wallner asked if the prescribed burnings would recognize the habits of the box turtle and avoid times when they are more vulnerable. Mr. Laidig said the Science Office is trying to determine the timing for box turtle emergence and how that coincides with current prescribed burning schedules.

Commissioner Wallner asked about pond monitoring and weather station installation. He asked if the ponds are distributed throughout the Pinelands. Mr. Laidig said the ponds with existing, continuous data loggers are well distributed throughout the geographical range of the Pinelands. He said that local precipitation at each pond may be different from the precipitation reported at the existing weather stations, which are separated by varying distances from the monitored ponds. He said setting up weather stations at the pond sites would allow them to track the relationship between precipitation and water levels more directly.

Commissioner Lohbauer said this study would have very beneficial impacts on a variety of efforts, including monitoring the impact of climate change in the Pinelands. He asked if staff anticipates any difficulty in matching the grant.

Susan Grogan, Executive Director (ED) of the Commission, said the recipient would receive the award in March 2024. Mr. Laidig added the decisions will be announced in January. ED Grogan said the Commission may fund the match through the Pinelands Conservation Fund (PCF) program, as that is typically where the Commission finds its match money for these grants. She said it may require a budget amendment by the Commission or be budgeted in the next fiscal year, but that it is manageable.

4. Discussion of Permanent Land Protection Acquisition Areas and Pinelands Conservation Fund Priorities

Commissioner Avery recused himself as chairman of the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Advisory Committee and left the room.

Gina Berg, Director of Land Use Programs at the Commission, gave a presentation on Permanent Land Protection (PLP) and Pinelands Conservation Fund (PCF) acquisition priorities

(Presentation B to these minutes and available on the Commission's website by clicking [here](#).).* The presentation is intended to initiate a discussion of potential changes to PCF project funding structure, the 20 planning areas and Section 502 target areas, and the PCF project evaluation matrix. The Committee will be asked to review and authorize any changes at its January 2024 meeting.

Ms. Berg first reviewed the status of permanent land protection in the acquisition target areas, known as the 20 planning areas, and the Section 502 areas. She said some of the acquisition target areas are more than 50% preserved. She said the remaining federal funding for the Section 502 areas has been allocated but not appropriated, and that the Commission must rely on PCF funds for permanent land protection projects. She said the Commission has received five of six annual payments of a \$3 million total payment to the PCF through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA). The final payment is due in January 2024. She said with the limited funding, the Committee may want to consider adjusting the acquisition target areas.

Ms. Berg next reviewed the PCF project evaluation matrix. She said the Commission only received one PCF project since the acquisition priorities were last revised in 2021, and the project did not score highly on the evaluation matrix. Ms. Berg described the priorities authorized in 2021. She said grassland habitats, climate change resiliency, and the Section 502 and 20 planning areas were the main priorities. Ms. Berg shared maps of the grassland habitat focus areas, the wild-urban interface forest fire areas, and flood hazard focus areas. Ms. Berg shared a chart of the project evaluation matrix.

Ms. Berg shared a slide on potential PCF evaluation matrix changes. She said staff is seeking input from the Committee on changing acquisition target areas and PCF project priorities. She said the Climate Committee may have some additional input following its December 2023 meeting. Committee input would be incorporated when staff returns to the January 2024 P&I Committee meeting with a more formal structure for any changes.

Ms. Berg discussed possible PCF funding structure changes. She said stewardship was an issue raised at the March 2023 land preservation summit, and staff wanted to discuss changing the funding structure with the Committee. She suggested possibly increasing the typical 33% match for projects that propose specific stewardship and that might become part of a larger grant proposal for stewardship to another program such as America the Beautiful Challenge grants.

Ms. Berg reviewed permanent land protection goals of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). She said better alignment with the DEP program goals may lead to more successful land preservation projects. She said one of the DEP goals is to increase opportunities for environmental justice communities.

Ms. Berg shared maps of designated environmental justice communities over Pinelands management areas and another over acquisition target areas. She noted the environmental justice communities have some overlap with the target acquisition areas, but that she does not know how those communities want to see land preservation occur.

ED Grogan said much of the environmental justice focus of the State Outdoor Recreation Committee was urban-oriented, and translating that to a more rural area, different from their focus in more urban regions of New Jersey, might be challenging. She said some towns in the Pinelands have expressed opposition to additional public acquisition of land.

Chair Matos asked how many environmental justice communities overlap with target acquisition areas. Ms. Berg pointed out some of the overburdened communities on the map. Chair Matos suggested having a conversation with these municipalities. She said the environmental justice perspective is important, but that the Commission should work collaboratively to find the best approach to permanent land protection.

ED Grogan said the Commission is planning to have another land preservation summit in spring 2024 and that could be a potential discussion topic.

Commissioner Wallner asked for the location of the Evesham/Black Run headwaters region on the map. ED Grogan said it is one of the 20 Planning Areas. He said he is happy to hear about possible partnerships and linkages to other funding sources, as some of these projects can be expensive.

ED Grogan said one of the requirements of the PCF is that the Commission can fund up to one third of the project cost, and that the other two thirds requires one or more partners. She said when the acquisition policies were first developed, the Commission wanted to be sure that its money was being used as the final step in the preservation process. She said it is possible to approve higher funding under current policies, but that it may also be appropriate to incorporate more funding for stewardship purposes, for other priorities, or for aligning with DEP priorities.

Ms. Berg shared the planned schedule for implementing changes to the PCF priorities or acquisition target areas and for offering a new round of grants in 2024. ED Grogan said staff is open to thoughts from the Commissioners in the coming months.

Commissioner Lohbauer asked if the Commission is sharing these goals with the affected counties, as they have open space preservation programs.

Ms. Berg said whenever the Commission does outreach for the PCF, it contacts counties as well as nonprofit organizations. She said that county representatives attended the land preservation summit this past March.

Commissioner Lettman asked if counties have presented grassland acquisition projects outside of the focus area around the SJTA site. Ms. Berg said no. ED Grogan said there are some grasslands outside the focus area, although she is unsure if the Commission will be successful in attracting projects for grassland habitat.

Ms. Berg said one of the issues with preserving grassland is that much of it is farmland. She said farmers may not be interested in preserving their farms as open space. She said it may be mapped as grassland because it is managed as hay, but it would not remain as grassland without continued mowing and management.

Commissioner Lettman said it would be disappointing if the grassland areas identified in the presentation were not actually maintained as grassland.

ED Grogan said it is challenging to identify those areas and then find willing sellers. She said someone else would have to be willing to come on as a funding partner. Ms. Berg added that they would also have to maintain the land.

Commissioner Lettman said that is why she wondered if there had been any outreach from property owners who want to preserve grassland habitat. Ms. Berg said no preservation partner specifically identified any outreach or projects.

Commissioner Wallner asked if a grassland project would be weighted heavier within the PCF matrix. Ms. Berg said it is part of the matrix of points and is not the heaviest weighted criterion. Commissioner Wallner said some areas may be predominantly forested but have some grasslands present. He said he is not surprised that the grassland areas are mostly farmland given the ecology of the Pinelands. Ms. Berg noted that this suggests a ranking structure that gives points for any portion of a project being identified as grassland habitat and compared that change to the prior structure that allots progressively higher points for larger acreage in Atlantic white cedar.

ED Grogan said the only money currently available for PCF acquisitions comes from the MOA with SJTA. She said the agreement includes a requirement that the money be used as best as possible to acquire grassland habitat. She said it must be the top priority, although it is unrealistic to spend \$3 million on grassland habitat in the Pinelands.

Commissioner Wallner said there are appropriate forms of agriculture that fit within a stewardship plan. He said it may be appropriate to limit the mowing for a hay field depending on the species composition in the grassland habitat. ED Grogan said that was worthy of consideration although it would be a different type of project than what the PCF has been involved with before.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Commissioner Avery returned to the room.

5. Public Comment

Heidi Yeh of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance (PPA) urged the Commission to release the Black Run watershed CMP amendments as soon as possible. She said there is an information vacuum on the plan and that has allowed nearby residents to fill the gap with other ideas and anxieties about the proposal. She said while PPA is generally supportive of efforts to protect the integrity of the Black Run watershed, it cannot do much public outreach without a solid plan for reference. She said it is not fair to the residents and that the plan has been complete since 2015. She also expressed support for the EPA grant proposal.

Chair Matos closed public comment at 10:28 a.m.

Chair Matos asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Lohbauer made the motion. Commissioner Lettman seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:29 a.m.

Certified as true and correct:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trent Maxwell", written over a horizontal line.

Trent R. Maxwell, Planning Technical Assistant

Date: November 6, 2023

NEW GRANT OPPORTUNITY

EPA Wetland Program Development Grants



Policy and Implementation Committee

October 27, 2023

Proposals Must Address Two Existing and Two New National Priorities

Protecting Wetlands
Monitoring and Assessment
Climate Change
Environmental Justice

Science Office is Proposing a 4 Part Project to EPA

Project Title:

“Protecting Wetlands, Monitoring Climate Change,
Reducing Wildfire, and Educating the Public”

1. Protecting Wetlands

PC and NJDEP ENSP funding radio tracking of box turtles

50% hibernated in uplands and 50% in wetlands
Most turtles maintain heavy wetland use for daily activities

Proposing to EPA:

Determine box turtle activity range size and core activity

Determine upland and wetland habitat types that turtles use
to add value to these habitats in the NJDEP Landscape Project

Evaluate the 300-foot upland buffer to wetlands to support turtles

Timing of activity, hibernation, and spring emergence for use in NJDEP
stewardship plans, prescribed burning, vegetation management, etc.

2. Monitoring Climate Change

PC monitors water levels in 37 ponds and 43 wetland forest plots as part of Long-term Environmental Monitoring Program

Proposing to EPA:

Install weather stations at 5 ponds that currently have continuous water-level recorders to be long-term climate change monitoring stations

Install a well adjacent to each pond and install continuous water-level recorders for when ponds dry

Install continuous water-level recorders in 4 wetland forest plots, including pine lowland, pine-hardwood lowland, maple swamp, and cedar swamp

3. Reducing Wildfire

Part of box turtle study: working with NJFFS through ENSP to direct prescribed burning to where we have clusters of turtles

Proposing to EPA:

Direct prescribed burns to areas with clusters of turtles that are also in tracts listed as high wildfire risk and/or disadvantaged in EPA Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)

Reduce wildfire risk to protect forests and people in CEJST tracts

Better understanding of the relationship between turtles and fire

4. Educating the Public

Communication Office currently offers spring Pinelands Short Course, Summer Short Course, fall World Water Monitoring Challenge, interpretive center and bog/rain garden tours, and education programs at schools and community centers

Proposing to EPA:

Integrate more Science Office wetland research and climate change information into all education programs

Contact elementary, middle, and high schools and community centers in disadvantaged CEJST tracts to schedule free interpretive center and bog/rain garden tours and education programs at the schools

Timeline and Cost

4 year project: 2025 - 2028

Funding 75% EPA and 25% PC

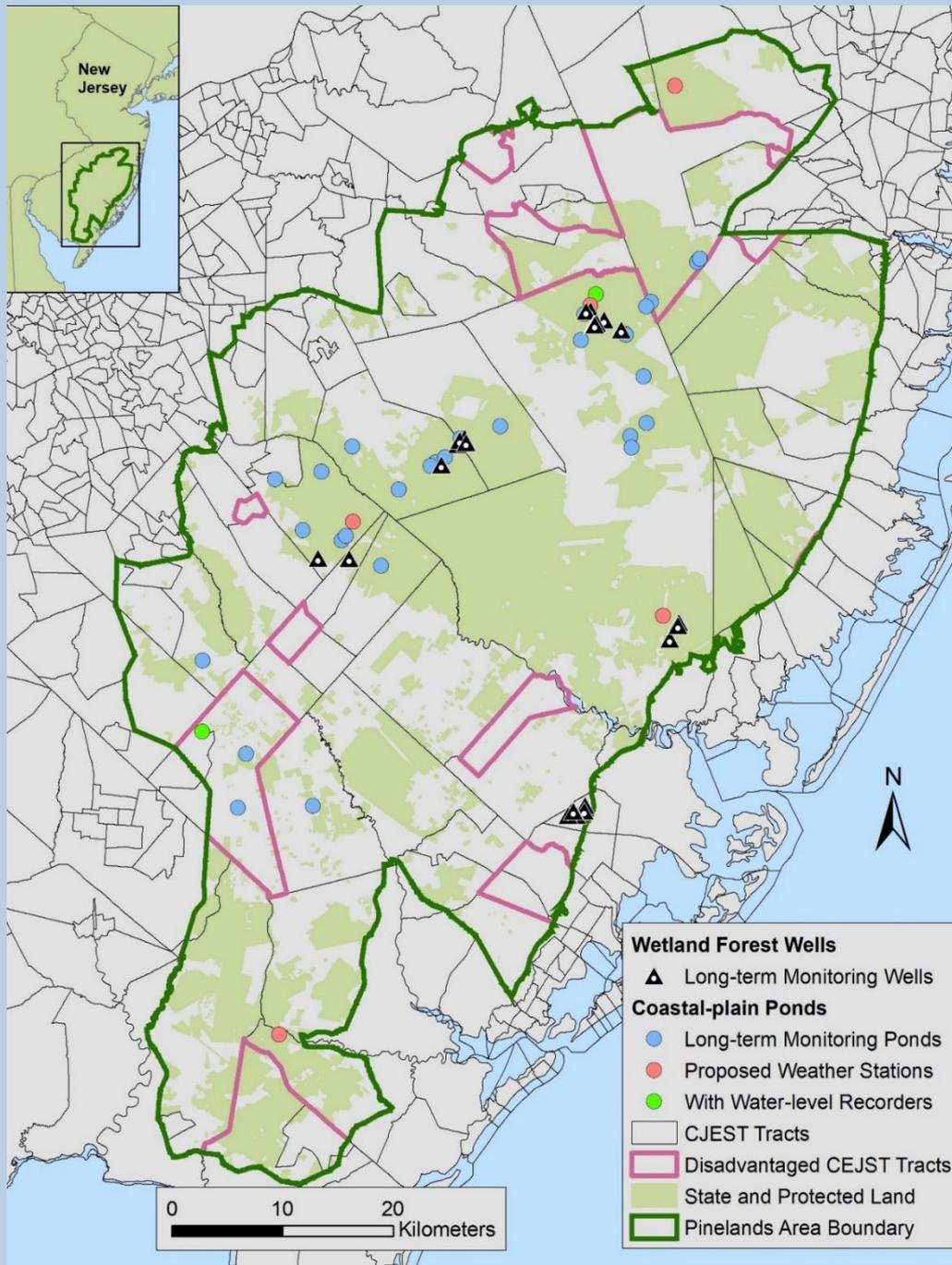
Total Project Cost: \$202,480

EPA Funds Requested: \$151,860

Cost Share Match: \$50,620

Letters of Support:

NJDEP Endangered and Nongame Species Program
American Turtle Observatory
New Jersey State Climatologist
New Jersey Conservation Foundation
Pinelands Preservation Alliance



Permanent Land Protection & Pinelands Conservation Fund Priorities Update

Policy & Implementation Committee
October 27, 2023

Concept Development

Initiate discussion of

- PCF project funding structure changes
- 20 Acquisition Target Area changes
- Evaluation criteria changes

P & I Committee

- Consider changes now
- Review & authorize in January

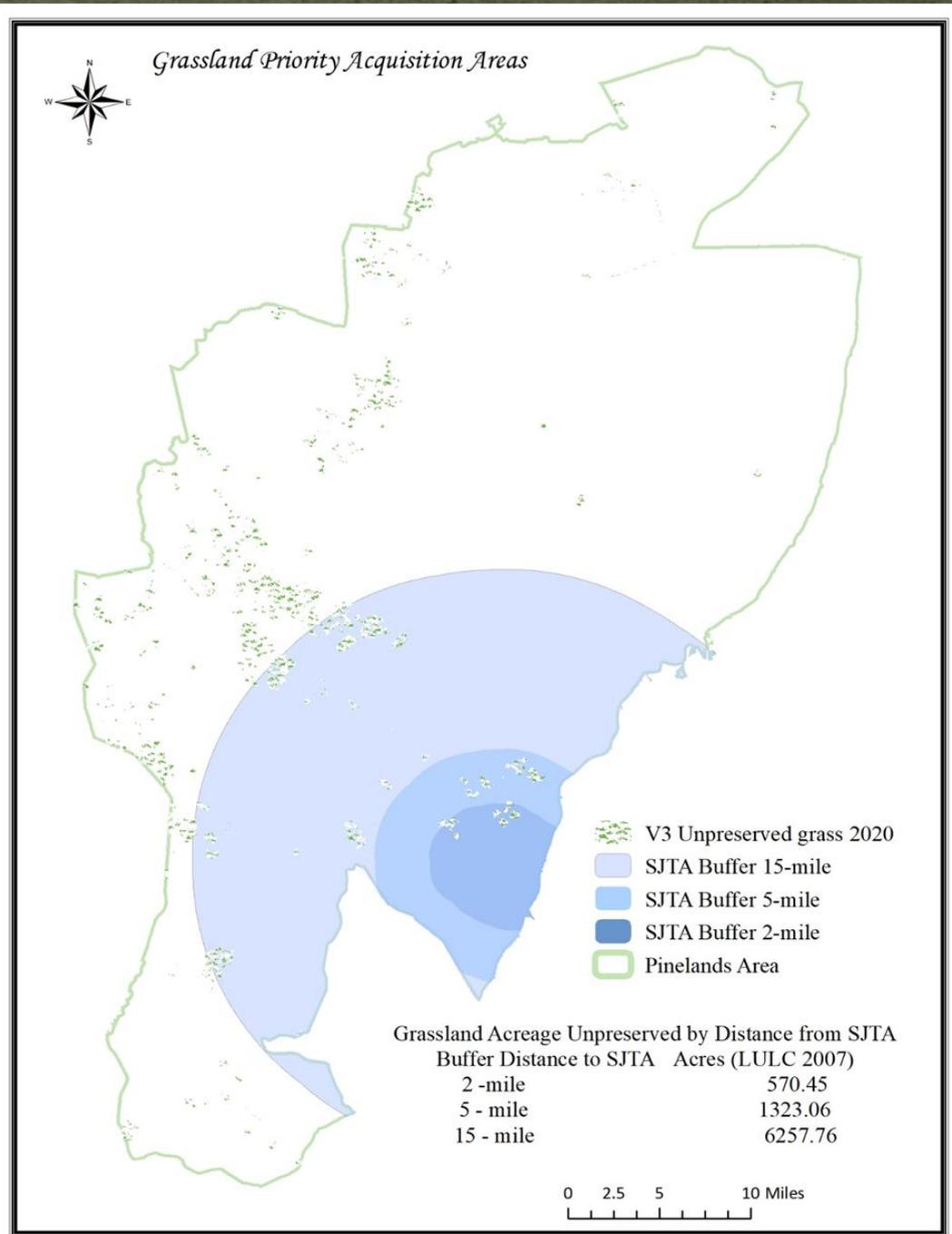
Background

- Permanent land protection:
 - 51% of Pinelands Area
- 20 Planning & Section 502 Acquisition Target Areas
 - All appropriated Federal funding for Section 502 areas expended
 - Rely on PCF to achieve Permanent Land Protection goals (\$9.5 M/8,971 acres preserved to date)
- Additional \$3 M funding added to PCF through SJTA MOA 2019-2024
- PCF acquisition priorities revised in 2021, but few projects

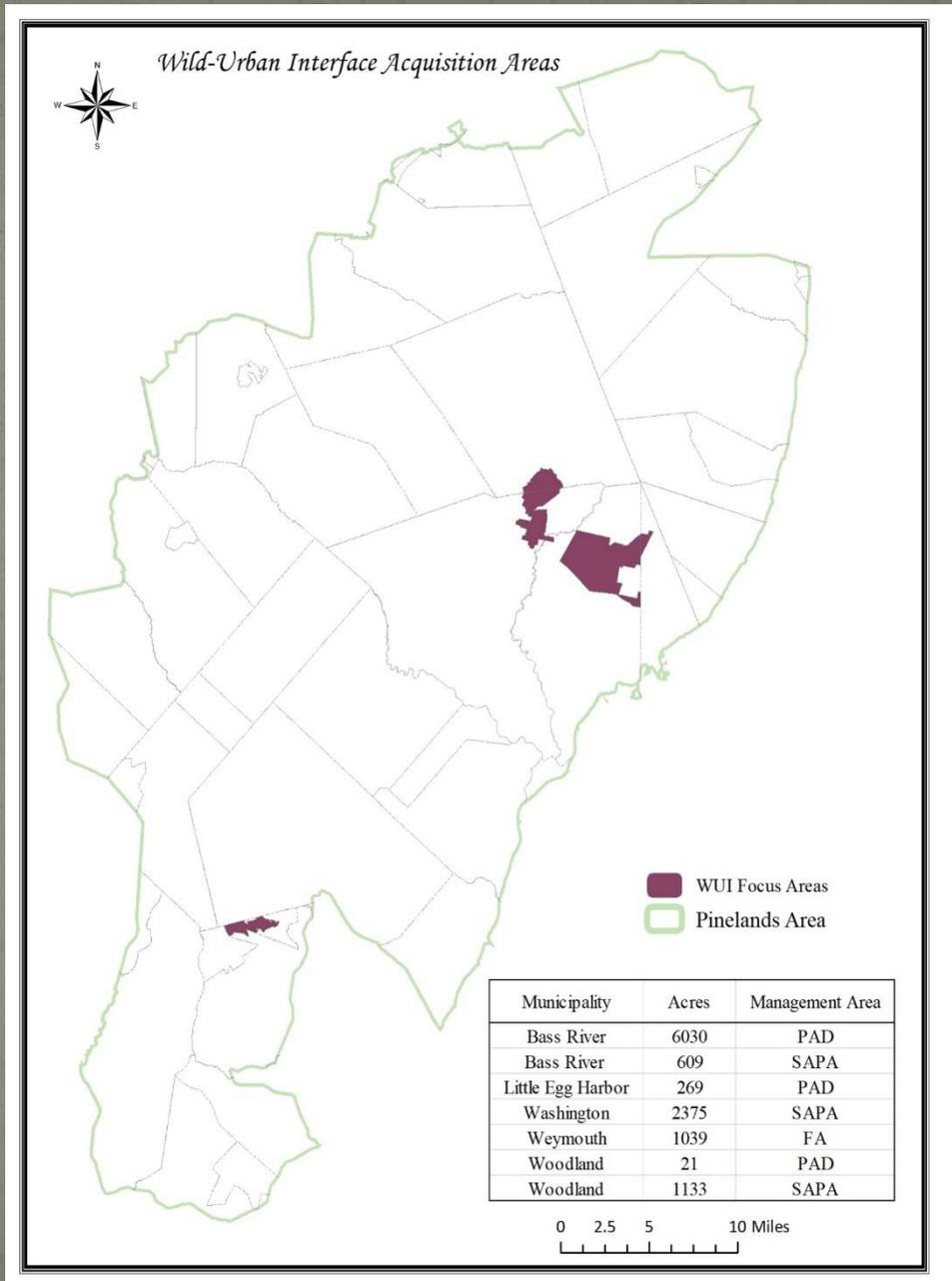
Land Acquisition Priorities -2021

- Grassland habitats
- Impacts of climate change
 - Fire hazard
 - Flood hazard
 - Carbon sequestration
- “Traditional” acquisitions
 - 502 Fund Areas
 - Target Areas

Grassland Focus Area



Wild-Urban Interface Focus Area



Project Evaluation Matrix

Factor	Low (1)	Medium (3)	High (5)
Location: Is the project in PCF focus area	In RGA, Town, Village or Rural Development Area AND none of the designated focus areas	In designated focus areas and PAD, SAPA, APA or Forest Area	Within a five-mile radius of SJTA and inside the State Pinelands Area
T&E Habitats:	No state/federal T&E habitat per NJDEP Landscape Model AND no NJPC and ENSP sightings	T&E habitat exists based upon NJDEP Landscape model and/or NJPC and ENSP sightings	Grassland habitat exists based upon NJDEP Landscape model and/or NJPC and ENSP sightings
Size:	Less than 50 acres	Between 50 and 100 acres	100 acres or more; add 3 additional points if greater than 500 acres
Contiguity:	Greater than one mile from preserved habitat or open space	Less than one mile from known grassland T&E habitats but not contiguous	Contiguous with preserved habitat or open space
Partner Contribution:	67.7% of acquisition costs	At least 75% acquisition costs	Greater than 75% acquisition costs
Long-Term Maintenance Capability:	No monitoring or maintenance plan/ no identified land steward	Proposed Monitoring and maintenance plan; Not previously implemented	Established Monitoring and maintenance program / Gov't. agency or NGO is prepared to manage land
Climate Change Mitigation:	Flood hazard mitigation	Wildfire Management	Carbon Sequestration/ Storage
Purpose:	Historic Preservation	Open Space	T & E or Climate Change

Extra points for carbon sequestration involving Atlantic cedar swamps.

PCF Changes

P & I Committee input

- Acquisition target areas?
- PCF project priorities?

Staff recommendations

- Add PCF criteria for location in or adjacent to overburdened communities
- Add points for projects in areas highlighted by management area boundary analysis (from Climate Committee)

Return to P & I in January 2024

- Climate Committee targets from December meeting
- Maps
- Priority matrix

Funding Structure Changes

- Enhance stewardship success
 - Increase traditional 33% PCF match for projects with specific stewardship plans
 - Allow partner to set aside funds for stewardship
 - No change in funding for other projects
- Build a better grant proposal (future ATB?)
 - Identify sites
 - Partners
 - Projects
 - Costs
 - Benefits

Reasons for Changes to Target Planning Areas

- Some Planning Areas are more than 50% preserved, contain significant areas of development and/or were not drawn to follow property lines ([map](#))
- Better alignment with NJDEP acquisition goals for climate & environmental justice ([map](#))
- Climate Committee recommendations from management area boundary analysis (December)

Acquisition Target Planning Areas

Goals to be
achieved

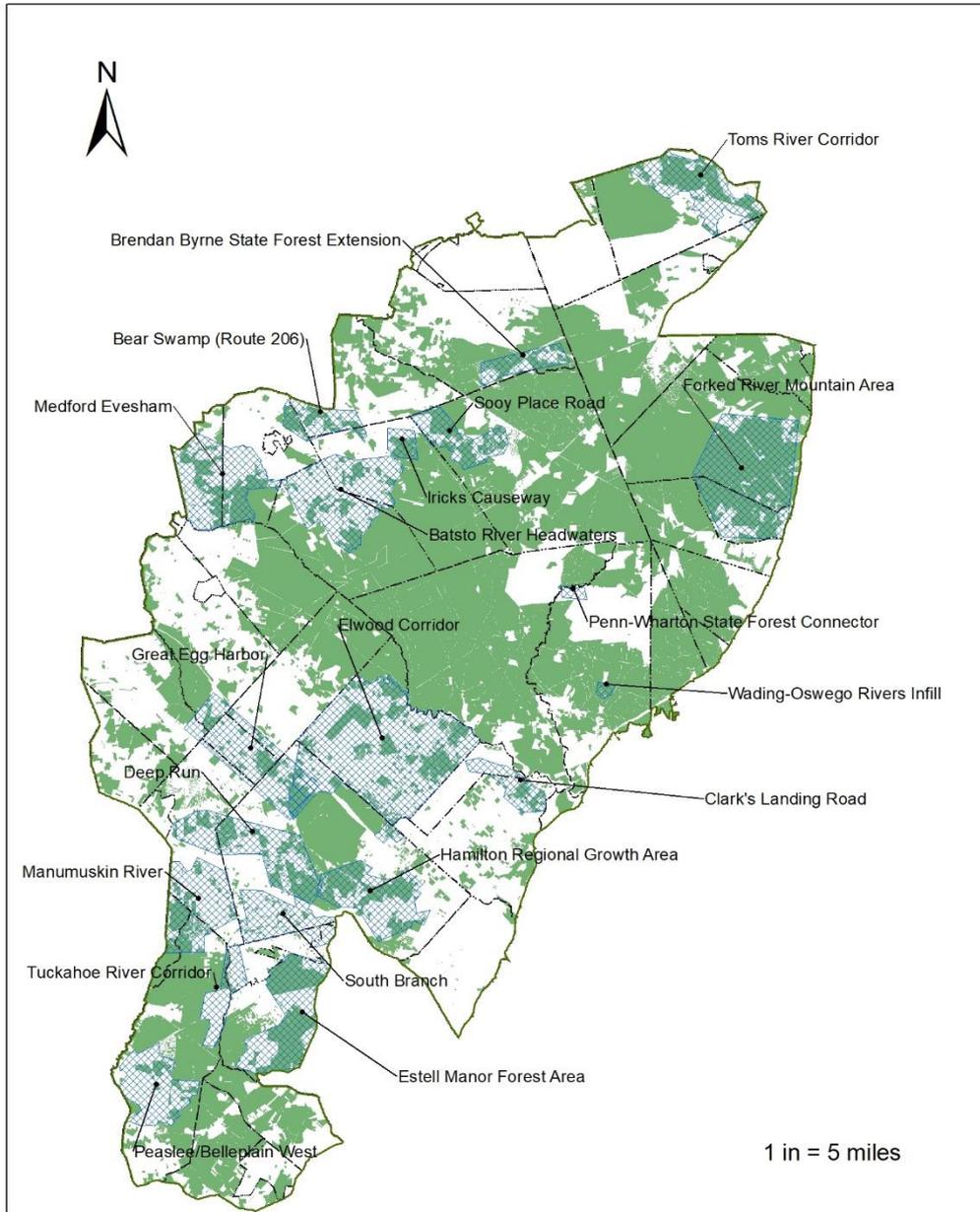
- Increase project participation over recent years' PCF rounds
- Support stronger wetlands buffer protections in corridors identified through Management Area Boundary (Climate Committee) analysis
- Further address environmental justice communities & climate change initiatives

Other Considerations for PCF Project Evaluation

- Grasslands outside the Focus Area set in 2021
 - Mostly in Agricultural Production Areas
 - May be more appropriately preserved as farmland, not open space
- Continue to assign extra points for carbon sequestration in Atlantic white cedar swamps
 - Based on acreage of cedar

Permanent Land Protection Schedule (2024)

- Draft amended PLP or PCF Updates -January 2024
P & I meeting
- P & I Approval of PCF Priorities - February
- Preservation Summit – March
- Open application round ~ late March
- Deadline for submitting proposals ~June 30
- Project Recommendations to P & I ~ September



Permanently Protected Land in 20 Target Acquisition Areas

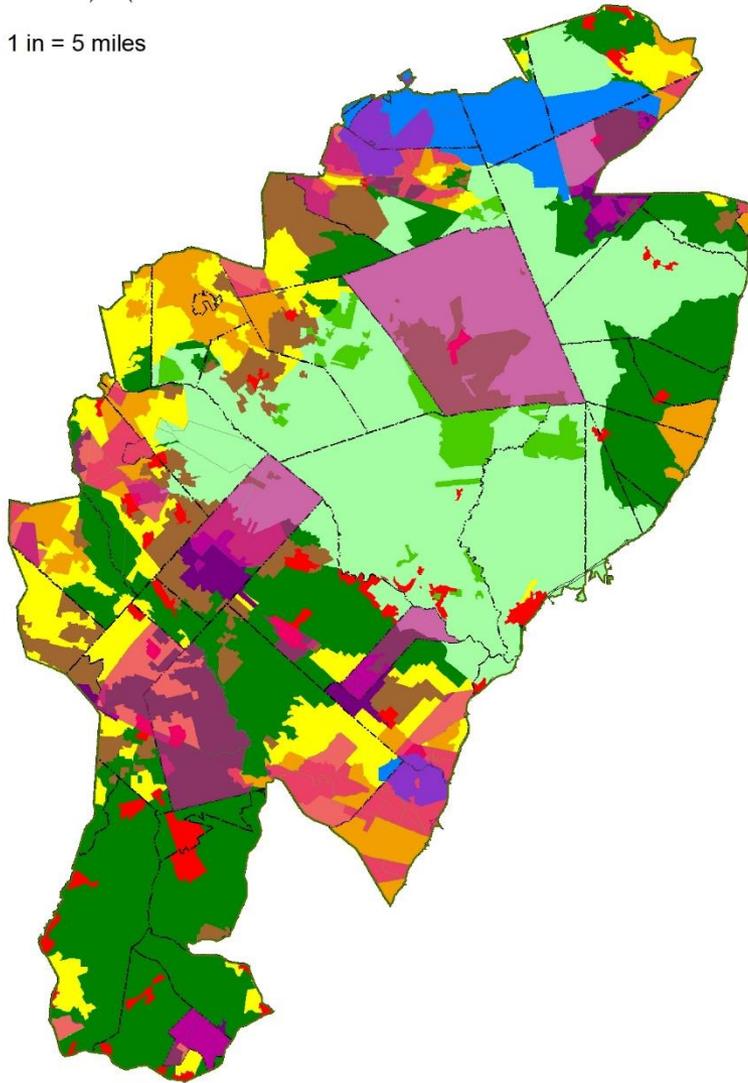
Planning Area Name	2023 Preserved Acres	Planning Area Total Acres	% Preserved
Batsto River Headwaters	3893	15858	25%
Bear Swamp (Route 206)	2262	4900	46%
Brendan Byrne State Forest Extension	2284	3796	60%
Clark's Landing Road	1041	3988	26%
Deep Run	5877	13151	45%
Elwood Corridor	11622	38288	30%
Estell Manor Forest Area	7903	13197	60%
Forked River Mountain Area	18977	23201	82%
Great Egg Harbor	4290	14715	29%
Hamilton Regional Growth Area	5588	11038	51%
Iricks Causeway	1038	1731	60%
Manumuskin River	3783	11120	34%
Medford Evesham	5448	14521	38%
Peaslee/Belleplain West	1523	8818	17%
Penn-Wharton State Forest Connector	42	655	6%
Sooy Place Road	3755	6016	62%
South Branch	548	7729	7%
Toms River Corridor	5615	10916	51%
Tuckahoe River Corridor	732	4502	16%
Wading-Oswego Rivers Infill	445	459	97%
Grand Total	86668	208598	42%



Environmental Justice Communities with Pinelands Management Areas



1 in = 5 miles



Environmental Justice Communities with Acquisition Target Areas

