

Disclaimer

These minutes reflect the actions taken by the Commission during its July 10, 2026 meeting. Although these minutes have been approved by the Commission, no action authorized by the Commission during this meeting, as reflected in these minutes, shall have force or effect until ten (10) days, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays excepted, after a copy of these minutes has been delivered to the Governor for review, unless prior to expiration of the review period the governor approves same, in which case the action shall become effective upon such approval. These minutes were delivered to the Governor on July 16, 2026.

PINELANDS COMMISSION MEETING

MINUTES
July 10, 2026

All participants were either in-person or present via Zoom conference and the meeting was livestreamed through YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWlu7e55pnk>

Commissioners Participating in the Meeting

Nicholas Asselta, Alan W. Avery Jr., Deborah Buzby-Cope, Mark Lohbauer, Gaetano Matro, Mark Mauriello, Jonathan Meade, William Pikolycky, Jessica Rittler Sanchez, Douglas Wallner and Chair Laura E. Matos. Also participating were Executive Director Susan R. Grogan, Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Jill Denyes and Governor's Authorities Unit representative Azeem Chaudry.

Commissioners Absent

Jerome H. Irick, Theresa Lettman and Ryck Signor.

Call to Order

Chair Matos called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

DAG Denyes read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement (OPMA).

Executive Director (ED) Grogan called the roll and announced the presence of a quorum. Eleven Commissioners participated in the meeting.

The Commission pledged allegiance to the Flag.

Election of Vice-Chair

Chair Matos requested a motion for the annual election of the Commission's Vice-Chair. Commissioner Pikolycky made a motion to re-elect Commissioner Avery. Commissioner Lohbauer seconded the motion. All were in favor of Commissioner Avery serving as Vice-Chair.

Commissioner Avery thanked his colleagues for their support.

Chair Matos said Committee assignments will be deferred to a later date. She said the Governor has nominated a new member of the Commission and it makes sense to wait to reassign Committees.

Minutes

Chair Matos presented the open session and part 1 closed session minutes from the Commission's June 12, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Lohbauer moved the adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Pikolycky seconded the motion.

The minutes from the June 12, 2026 Commission meeting (open session and part 1 closed session) were adopted by a vote of 10 to 0. Commissioner Rittler Sanchez abstained from the vote.

Chair Matos presented the part 2 closed session minutes from the Commission's June 12, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Pikolycky moved the adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Buzby-Cope seconded the motion.

The minutes from the June 12, 2026 Commission meeting (part 2 closed session) were adopted by a vote of 9 to 0. Commissioner Matro recused from the vote and Commissioner Rittler Sanchez abstained from the vote.

Committee Reports

Chair Matos provided a summary of the June 26, 2026 Policy and Implementation (P&I) Committee meeting:

The Committee approved the minutes of its May 29, 2026 meeting.

The Committee heard a presentation from the Pinelands Alliance on the completion of the Pemberton Lake Trail project. The project involved trail improvements in wetlands and wetlands buffers, with the goal of making an existing trail accessible for people with mobility challenges. As the project included grading and filling in wetlands and wetlands buffers, it required a deviation Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Commission and Pemberton Township. The Pinelands Alliance presentation documented the completed trail improvements and the installed rain gardens and vegetation restoration as offsets required under the MOA.

The Committee also received a presentation on Manchester Township's 2026 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan and Ordinances 26-23, 26-24, and 26-31. Following a discussion, the Committee recommended the plan and ordinances to the full Commission for approval.

Finally, the staff presented recommendations for an amendment to the Pinelands Infrastructure Master Plan. The amendment would revise the types of infrastructure that could be funded through the Pinelands Infrastructure Trust Fund. The suggested amendment would also revise the criteria used to evaluate projects proposed for funding and the interest rate charged for loans awarded from the PITF. The Committee provided input on the amendment and supported moving forward with a public hearing.

Vice-Chair Avery provided a summary of the June 30, 2026 Personnel and Budget (P&B) Committee meeting:

The Committee adopted minutes from its March 17, 2026 meeting.

Staff provided routine financial and personnel updates. The Committee approved the deletion of fixed assets and also voted to support the Executive Director's recommendation to award a contract for accounting services to Holman Frenia Allison. Preliminary Fiscal Year (FY) 27 budget projections were discussed, including the staff's recommended estimate of \$800,000 in application fee revenue.

Executive Director's Report

ED Grogan provided information on the following matters:

- The FY27 State budget included an appropriation of \$4,377,000 to the Commission and the first quarterly installment was received. The increase in the appropriation was to facilitate the salary increases associated with the last year of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) contract. It's expected that negotiations for a new contract will begin later this year.
- Staff will review accomplishments and the status of FY26 projects and suggest new projects for the FY27 workplan at the upcoming July P&I Committee meeting.
- The P&B Committee is scheduled to meet on August 18th and staff will review the details of the FY27 budgets.
- A meeting with the new outside accountants is scheduled for July 23rd. The accounting firm will assist with audit preparation. The state auditor has not contacted the Commission about the FY23 Audit, but staff will be prepared.
- The notice to proceed was issued on June 24th, and it kicked-off the 150-day construction period for the Fenwick Manor Rehabilitation project. The Department of Community Affairs issued the necessary construction permits. The contractor removed the first 20 windows that will be refurbished and reinstalled. Staff will continue to have periodic

meetings with the contractor, the NJ Historic Trust and the Commission's historic architect as required by the contract.

- Chris Sturm has been nominated by the Governor to be a Commissioner and it's expected that the nomination will be confirmed in the fall. She worked as a policy director for New Jersey Future for many years.
- April Field has been chosen as the new Director of Regulatory Programs.

April Field, Director of Regulatory Programs, provided information on the following regulatory matters:

- Hexa Builders is proposing the development of two large warehouses in Monroe Township's Regional Growth Area. An amended application for a warehouse and a data center was submitted. Staff is currently reviewing that application and will be responding to the applicant soon. However, staff will note that the current redevelopment plan in place that covers that parcel prohibits data centers. The letter will also address environmental concerns regarding the project. A copy of the site plan approval for the original application for the two warehouses has been submitted. Staff responded to the applicant, requesting additional information in order to review the township's approval.
- The Doyle clearing matter in Franklin Township is ongoing. Approximately 50 acres of forest clearing has occurred. The property is located in the Agricultural Production Area and is subject of a Pinelands Development Credit (PDC) deed restriction. A site meeting with the property owner has determined that the 50 acres was cleared to establish a permitted agricultural use on the property. The property owner is proposing to plant native trees in both wetland buffers and in uplands. That activity is a permitted use under the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). So, provided the property owner replants the entirety of the area with native Pinelands species, staff's concerns would be satisfied and no application to the Commission would be required. The property owner has submitted a timeframe for the establishment of that use and it's currently under review.
- Sweet Amalia, the restaurant application in Franklin Township, continues to make progress to meet CMP standards. Staff has been working with the applicant to ensure that the wastewater generated from the restaurant will meet the CMP's two parts per million calculation for nitrate dilution for septic systems. In order to meet groundwater quality standards, the applicant has submitted information proposing to reduce the number of days per year that the use will be in operation.
- Spacious Skies Campground in Weymouth Township is a pre-existing campground that predated the Commission and is served by an existing onsite septic system. The campground was recently purchased by a new property owner, and they have inherited some violations on the property. The campground has expanded significantly since 1981, and without application to the Commission. The development includes various buildings and roadways. However, the larger issue that caught the Commission staff's attention was

that both the Township and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) cited the property owner for violations with regard to converting approximately 15 seasonal campsites to year-round single family dwelling units. Residents of the campground signed kids up for school. The property owner has met with staff. Staff sent a letter advising the property owner of the violations. The township solicitor also sent the property owner a letter advising them that they needed to address all of the outstanding issues by April of 2027 or the township would pursue legal action.

Commissioner Avery left the meeting at 9:48 a.m.

Gina Berg, Director of Land Use Programs, provided the following updates:

- The Pinelands Infrastructure Master Plan Amendment was reviewed by the P&I Committee. A public hearing has been scheduled for July 22nd. The notice has been shared with interested parties, counties, utility authorities and municipalities. After the public hearing, staff will return to the P&I Committee with comment summaries. If there are no comments, the amendment would proceed directly to the full Commission for approval at the August meeting. The amendment proposes to revise the criteria used to evaluate infrastructure project proposals and increase the loan rate from 1% to 2% for the loan portion of any Pinelands Infrastructure Trust Fund award.
- At the July P&I Committee meeting, it's anticipated that the Cape May County Municipal Utilities Authority (CMCMUA) will deliver a presentation regarding a proposed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that would allow the extension of sewer to carry leachate from the landfill to a treatment facility outside of the Pinelands Area.

Stacey Roth, Chief, Legal and Legislative Affairs, provided the following update on legal matters:

- The Commission received a notice of appeal that Hexa Builders filed with the Appellate Division. Initially the applicant requested that the Executive Director forward the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) to determine if an amended Certificate of Filing was necessary. There is no right to an appeal in OAL for a determination that one has to file an application. In order to file an appeal at the Appellate Division, an applicant must have a final decision from the agency. The applicant has not exhausted administrative remedies because the Commission has not issued a final determination. In this case, the Appellate Division noticed that there was no final decision and sent a letter to the applicant asking for an explanation as to why the matter was subject to their jurisdiction. The matter has been assigned to a DAG who will also be sending a letter to the appellate division, explaining that this matter is not right for appeal.
- New hearing dates for the Artistic litigation matter have been scheduled. The trial will begin in late September and end at the beginning of October.

Brad Lanute, Chief Planner, provided the following update:

- In late June, staff met with representatives of the New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA), which staffs the State Planning Commission, to discuss interagency coordination and the existing 1999 MOA between the Commission and the State Planning Commission. The discussion focused on Plan Endorsement for Pinelands municipalities that have lands outside the Pinelands Area but within the Pinelands National Reserve. Staff will continue coordinating with OPA as it reviews proposed revisions to the State Policy Map in the Pinelands National Reserve to ensure that any proposed changes align with the Commission's designated management areas in the Pinelands National Reserve. There are five Pinelands municipalities with Plan Endorsement petitions pending before the State Planning Commission.
- In late June, staff met with Waterford Township representatives to discuss potential amendments to the Haines Boulevard Redevelopment Plan. The redevelopment area is the largest tract of undeveloped land in the Township's Regional Growth Area. The Township is proposing to amend the redevelopment plan that the Commission certified in 2017 to facilitate a second 100% affordable housing project and to establish zoning that more closely reflects existing development patterns. Staff is working closely with the Township to ensure that any amendments maintain sufficient residential development potential and opportunities for the use of Pinelands Development Credits, consistent with what the CMP requires for Regional Growth Areas.
- On July 8th, staff met with Monroe Township representatives to discuss the Township's ongoing effort to rewrite its zoning code. The rewrite follows the adoption of a new Master Plan in 2022. The plan recommended several significant zoning changes, including some that would necessitate changes to Pinelands management area boundaries. The discussion focused on additional zoning changes, particularly the creation of a new Agricultural Production Area in the southern portion of the Township to include existing agricultural lands. Since the proposal includes changes to Pinelands management area designations, it will require Commission review and approval.

Commissioner Lohbauer commented on Waterford Township's 100% affordable housing project, noting said he had never heard of a project proposing only affordable units.

Chief Planner Lanute said the Haines Boulevard redevelopment area consists of a large tract of land and has multiple property owners. There is already an existing 100% affordable housing apartment complex that's been developed. Adjacent to that complex, the Township owns a parcel and has been in discussions with a developer for an age-restricted 100% affordable project. It's rare for an all-affordable housing project to occur in the Pinelands Area. He said it has been challenging to shift PDC opportunities to other areas of the redevelopment area. Another aspect of the redevelopment plan includes a large warehouse project that has PDC requirements. Staff will continue to work with the Township to ensure that the revised redevelopment plan meets the CMP's zoning standards.

Paul Leakan, Communications Officer, provided the following updates:

- The 10th Annual Pinelands Summer Short Course is scheduled for Friday, July 17th. There is still time to register, although three classes have closed.
- Since the Commission's last meeting, the Commission has hosted two educational programs as part of the Pinelands Speaker Series. Both programs were well-received.

Commissioner Asselta lost connection to the meeting and did not vote on the resolutions.

Public Development Projects and Other Permit Matters

Chair Matos introduced a resolution approving three Public Development applications.

Commissioner Buzby-Cope made a motion Approving With Conditions Applications for Public Development (Application Numbers 1997-0257.024, 2016-0045.001 & 2026-0076.001) (See Resolution # PC4-26-16). Commissioner Lohbauer seconded the motion.

Ernest Deman, Environmental Specialist, said the first application is for the demolition of a 1,600 square foot sign shop building that's 50 years old or older and the construction of two buildings, a 2,700 square foot sign shop building and an 8,000 square foot storage building at a Garden State Parkway Maintenance yard in Barnegat Township (see attached aerial). The applicant is also proposing to remove an existing 6,000 square foot storage building. That building is less than 50 years old, so it does not require an application to remove it.

He added that the existing sign shop proposed to be demolished was identified as a contributing structure to the Garden State Parkway Historic District (GSPHD). The GSPHD is not listed on the State or National Registers, but due to its cultural contributions, photos of both the exterior and interior have been taken of the sign shop.

The next application is for the replacement of Washington Turnpike Bridge, also known as Godfrey's Bridge, over the Wading River in Washington Township, Burlington County. The current one-lane bridge is deteriorating due to its timber structure and will be replaced with a wider concrete bridge to provide a pedestrian shoulder. He said the current bridge is a 10-span bridge, meaning there are 10 spans going down into the ground supporting the bridge. The concrete bridge will only have three spans. He said the applicant has stated that the concrete deck is more durable than a wooden bridge and will be less susceptible to fire damage.

The last application is for improvements to an existing pump station in Evesham Township and although there are wetlands within 300 feet of the development, the proposed pump station will be no closer to the wetlands.

Commissioner Lohbauer asked if the bridge over the Wading River would be higher than the existing bridge so kayakers could safely navigate under the bridge.

Mr. Deman said the height of the bridge will remain the same. However, he said there will be fewer spans, making it easier to go under the bridge.

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 9 to 0.

Planning Matters

Chair Matos introduced a resolution to certify Manchester Township's Amended Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan and Ordinances 26-23, 26-24, and 26-31.

Commissioner Lohbauer made a motion Issuing an Order to Certify Manchester Township's Amended Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan and Ordinances 26-23, 26-24, and 26-31, amending Chapter 245 (Land Use and Development) of the Code of Manchester Township (See Resolution # PC4-26-17). Commissioner Matro seconded the motion.

Chief Planner Lanute said the township's fourth round housing plans were challenged in court. The revised plan before the Commission includes additional housing sites within the Pinelands Area, specifically in the Regional Growth Area, based on settlements between the Township and challengers. The first site is the Craftway site, which proposes 40 town homes in a two-story, mixed-use building containing commercial space on the ground floor, including seven affordable apartments that will be consistent with the existing certified zoning.

The second site is the Hangar Road site and proposes 52 townhomes and a three-story, mixed-use building with 11 affordable apartments on the upper floors. The Township will need to adopt zoning amendments for this site to facilitate the development. He noted the zoning amendments would have to come to the Commission for review and approval before they could take effect.

The third new site in the amended housing plan consists of two properties along Ridgeway Boulevard. The sites are expected to provide about 530 residential units, including approximately 107 affordable units. These two sites are subject to the rezoning adopted by Ordinance 26-23, which is under review today and will be discussed shortly. He noted that the amended housing plan also includes the Heritage Minerals property as an inclusionary housing site. The Heritage Minerals site is outside of the Pinelands Area but inside of the Pinelands National Reserve. The site has long, complex legal history. The Commission is part of a settlement agreement between NJDEP and Hovson's, the property owner. The agreement allows for approximately 2,450 residential units and the housing plan is consistent with that level of development and the settlement agreement. Staff will be monitoring any zoning changes to that area.

Chief Planner Lanute displayed the map (attached) that was part of the Executive Director's report. He reviewed Ordinance 26-23 which relates to the two areas that are highlighted in red. He explained that the PAF-1 zone is being rezoned to the PR-40 zone. This entire area has been acquired by Ocean County and has been preserved as open space. The zoning change does not have any impact on development potential. The other zoning change associated with this ordinance involves an 83-acre area being rezoned from a POR-LI zone to a new PAF-2 zone. The new zone would allow mixed-use development (commercial and residential) at a maximum gross density of 8.65 dwelling units per acre. He said a minimum of 20% of all units must be set aside as affordable and PDCs are required to be redeemed for 30% of all units, excluding up to 20% of the total project units that are made affordable.

The second ordinance (Ordinance 26-24) relates to where the Township will allow townhouse and garden apartment developments. These residential use types will only be permitted in the Pinelands Business-1 (PB-1) District where they are already permitted. The Ordinance removed these uses as permitted use in all other zoning districts in Manchester Township's Regional Growth Area.

He said detailed in the Executive Director's report is an assessment of the impacts to the overall residential development potential in the Regional Growth Areas and impacts to PDCs. Overall, the net changes are minimal. Lastly, he noted Ordinance 26-31 was mainly administrative to ensure that the new zone was properly cross-referred in all the appropriate sections of the code. He said staff is recommending certification.

Commissioner Rittler Sanchez wanted to make sure she understood correctly that the zoning will shift garden apartments and townhouse development in a portion of Manchester and only permit them in the PAF-2 zone.

Chief Planner Lanute said that is correct with respect to townhouses but in the Regional Growth Area only. He added that there will be a reduction in development potential in the Pinelands Town of Whiting where townhouses are also being removed as a permitted use; however, the CMP does not have specific standards that the township has to meet with regard to density in those areas.

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 9 to 0.

Public Comment on Development Applications and Items Where the Record is Open

Mr. Deman said up for comment are two applications: the replacement of a septic system at Whitesbog Village and the installation of scour countermeasures on a Route 206 bridge in Hammonton that is experiencing erosion issues.

No one from the public provided comment.

Ordinances Not Requiring Commission Action

Chief Planner Lanute said the Land Use Programs Office reviewed nine ordinances that were found to raise no substantial issues with respect to the standards of the CMP. Five were related to affordable housing. He said Winslow Township has chosen to prohibit data centers.

Presentation: U.S. Biosphere Network's National Summit

Mr. Leakan said he spent four days at the 2026 U.S. Biosphere Network Summit at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. He said 15 of the 28 Biosphere Regions were represented at the Summit. He explained that Biospheres are "places where science, culture, and inclusive government come together, showing how biodiversity, conservation, sustainable development can successfully go hand in hand." He said unlike some other biospheres, we have control over development and other things that occur in the Pinelands. Many other biospheres do

not have something like a CMP and are volunteer-based. The Pinelands received its first designation in 1983 but it was shared with another region until 1988, when we received our own distinction and became one of the internationally recognized Biospheres in the United States. At the Summit, ideas were shared about partnerships and collaborations. Mr. Leakan screenshared and described a new Pinelands Biosphere ArcGIS Story Map that was created by University of Michigan students in cooperation with the U.S. Biosphere Network and with the assistance of Commission staff. He said the Story Map is a great example of the collaborations that can occur as a result of our Biosphere designation. He also noted how the story map provides another mechanism for the Commission to raise awareness about the Pinelands and its designation as Biosphere Region. Mr. Leakan then provided details about the U.S. Biosphere Network (USBN), which “guides, funds and supports individual biospheres.” The USBN organized and paid for the summit. Throughout the summit, participants noted that biospheres are when working together than they are on their own. Participants learned about the benefits of biospheres and heard different talks from other attendees. Mr. Leakan said he gave a talk on education and outreach. He noted that presenters were not allowed to have PowerPoint presentations but visual aids were permitted. He said he brought some calendars and his personal deck of Pinelands playing cards.

He said all Biospheres must submit a Periodic Review Report to UNESCO's Man and Biosphere program every 10 years in order to retain their designation as a Biosphere Region (formerly known as a Biosphere Reserve). In 2016, Commission staff produced a 128-page report and successfully retained the Biosphere designation in 2017. The next report would be due on the fall of 2027. However, the United States will withdraw as a member of UNESCO on December 31, 2026, a decision of the federal government. The UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program is temporarily relaxing the upcoming deadlines for biosphere regions such as the New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region to submit their ten-year Periodic Review Reports. The USBN has advised us that all U.S. Biosphere Regions will continue to maintain their UNESCO recognition in good standing during this interim period.

Mr. Leakan said the USBN sent all U.S. Biospheres an online module for a self-assessment. This is not a small undertaking but it's less of an undertaking than the actual periodic review. Mr. Leakan recommended that the Commission complete the assessment. He said this will help the biosphere network communicate to UNESCO that Biospheres in the United States are committed to the program.

Lastly Mr. Leakan reviewed the next steps:

- Complete the on-line assessment
- Look for an opportunity to pair with a similar Biosphere Region
- Create a 10-minute Biosphere film
- Seek to identify a Pinelands representative who will serve on the USBN Youth Group, which includes members who are aged 18-35.

Link to the Presentation slides:

<https://www.nj.gov/pinelands/home/presentations/USBiosphereSummit2026%20-%20final.pdf>

A number of Commissioners expressed their gratitude to Mr. Leakan for the Biosphere update and collaboration.

General Public Comment

Heidi Yeh of the Pinelands Alliance thanked Commission staff for hosting the Alliance's interns with a tour of the rain garden and overview of the Commission's work. She said she would be sharing information with members of the Alliance about the important role of the Pinelands' designation as a Biosphere Region.

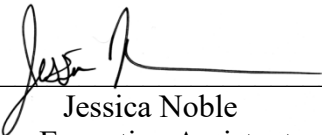
Karen Argenti said how much she enjoyed the presentation on the Biosphere and suggested collaboration with other groups like the estuary program. She asked if development in the Regional Growth Areas has to comply with Pinelands stormwater management rules.

ED Grogan said all development in the Pinelands Area must adhere to stormwater management rules.

Adjournment

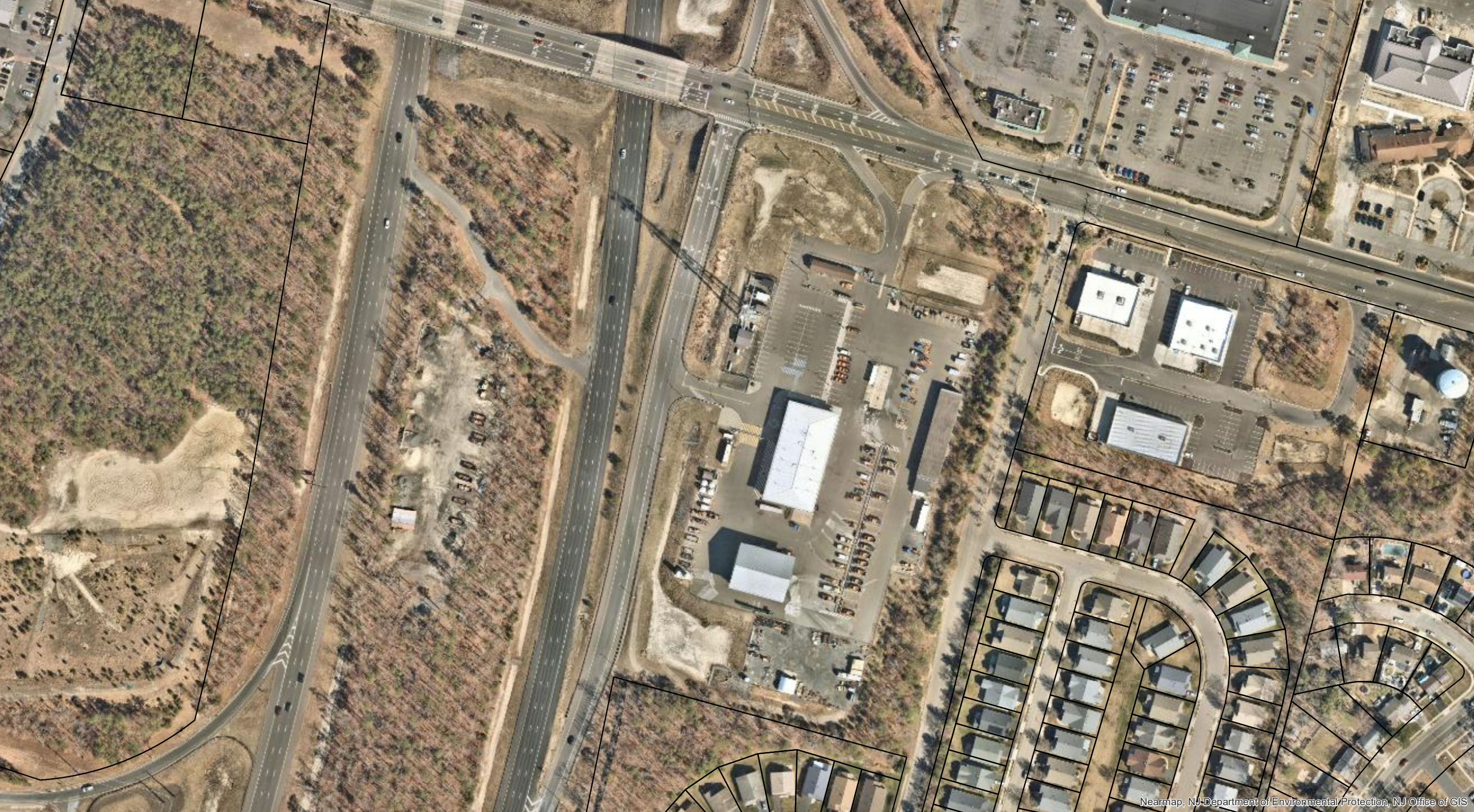
Commissioner Lohbauer moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Pikolycky seconded the motion. The Commission agreed to adjourn at 10:54 a.m.

Certified as true and correct:



Jessica Noble
Executive Assistant

Date: July 16, 2026







Manchester Township Ordinance 26-23

Pinelands Management Areas

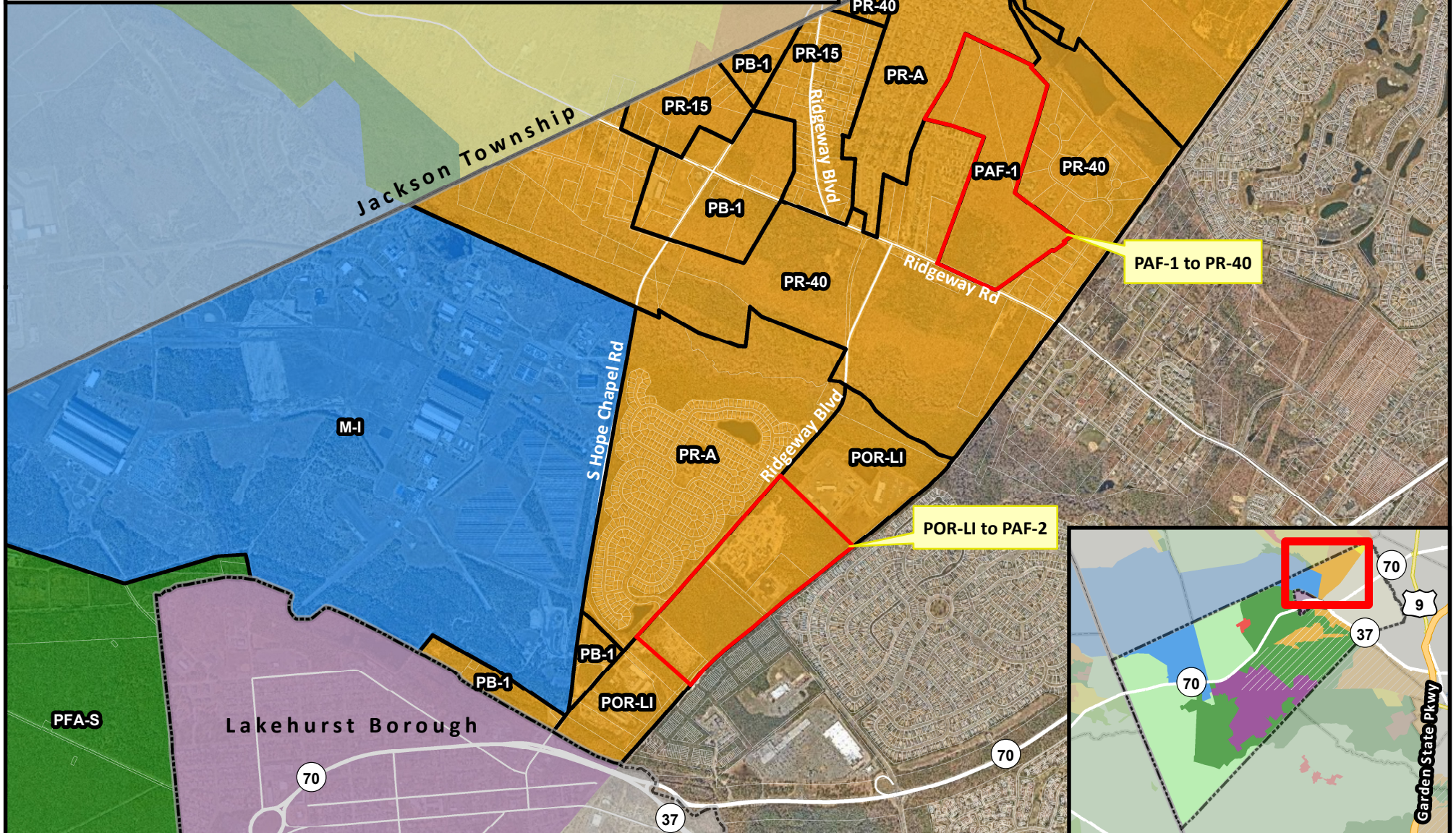
- Forest Area
- Rural Development Area
- Regional Growth Area
- Pinelands Town
- Military/Federal Installation

- Manchester Twp Zoning
- Manchester Twp Parcels
- Zoning Changes

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



Executive Director's Report
Manchester Twp. Ord. 26-23
Exhibit 1
6/26/2026





U.S. Biosphere Network 2026 Summit – Recap and Future Steps



New Jersey Pinelands Commission
July 10, 2026

What is a Biosphere?

- Biospheres are “places where science, culture, and inclusive government come together, showing how biodiversity conservation and sustainable development can successfully go hand in hand,” according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (or UNESCO).

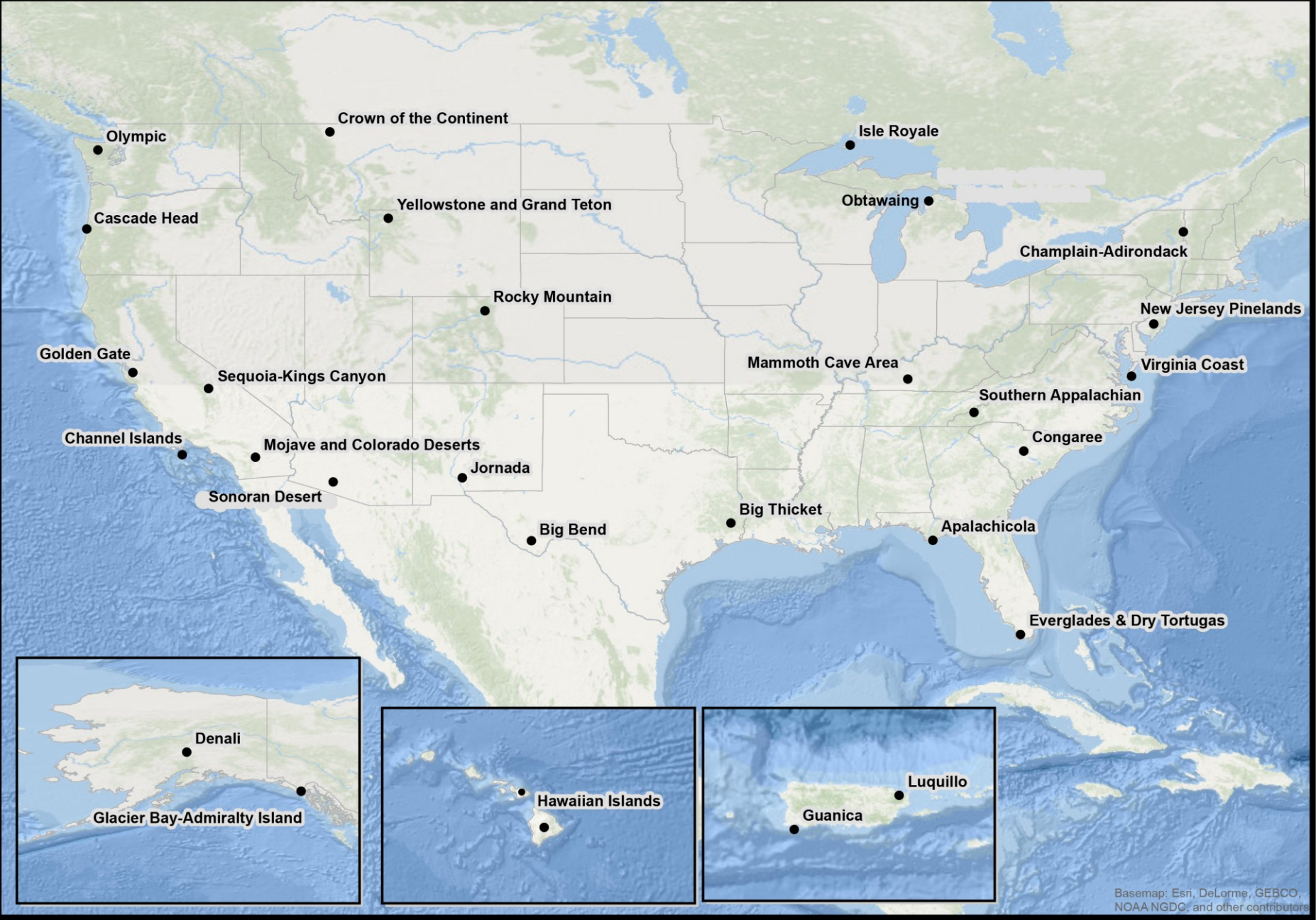




The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region

- The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region was designated by UNESCO as part of the Man and Biosphere Programme in 1983.
- It is one of 28 internationally recognized and designated Biosphere Regions in the U.S. Four hundred and fifty million people live in the 797 UNESCO-designated Biospheres throughout the world.
- The Pinelands Commission, an independent state agency with federal, state, and local representation, manages the Pinelands Biosphere.

Biosphere Regions in the United States



The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region

The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region exemplifies a collaborative approach to environmental preservation, involving partnerships among various governmental and non-governmental entities. Established in 1978 as the country's first National Reserve, the Pinelands encompass over one million acres of diverse ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and aquatic habitats.

In 1983, the area was designated as a U.S. Biosphere Region by UNESCO, reflecting its global ecological significance. The management of this vast region is overseen by the [New Jersey Pinelands Commission](#), which operates in partnership with federal, state, and local governments, as well as private stakeholders. This cooperative framework aims to balance conservation efforts with sustainable development, ensuring the protection of the Pinelands' unique natural and cultural resources. To view the 2024 Pinelands Commission's Annual Report, [click here](#).

Biosphere Benefits

- International recognition
- Shared ideas, project partnerships, and collaboration, including the creation of a new Pinelands Biosphere Story Map.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/713a327011a544dbb9404f2e3149e536>

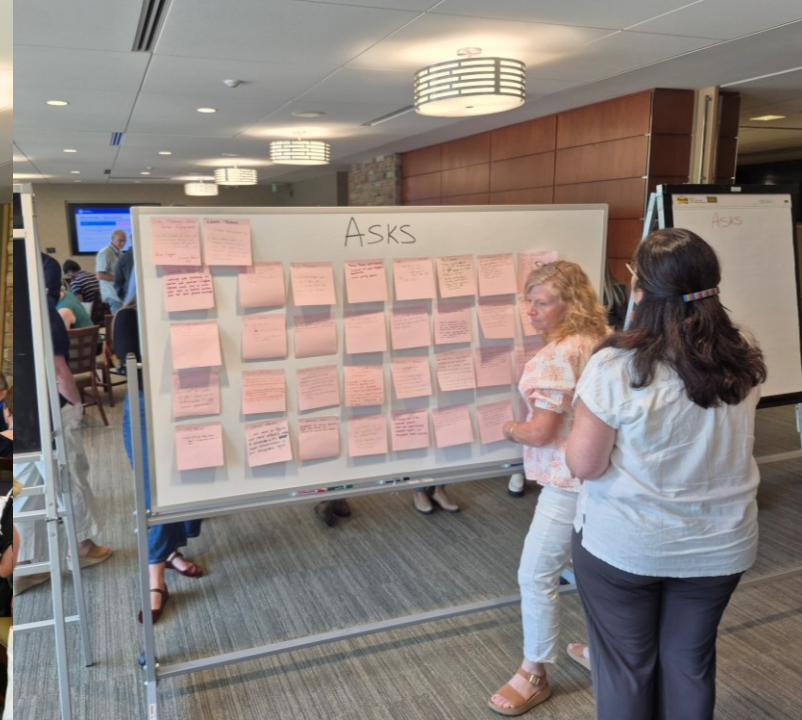
The U.S. Biosphere Network's 2026 Summit

- Held at Colorado State University in Fort Collins on June 22-25, 2026.
- The nonprofit U.S. Biosphere Network (USBN) organized/funded the Summit.
- The USBN is a nationwide network that guides, funds, and supports individual Biosphere Regions within the U.S. It collectively stewards internationally recognized areas of ecological importance, diversity, and cultural significance. Its last Biosphere Summit was 10 years ago.



“We are stronger together”

- Fifteen of the 28 U.S. Biosphere Regions participated in the Summit.
- Participants learned about the benefits of Biospheres, delivered talks about their work, and discussed shared interests and opportunities to build upon successes and address challenges.
- I delivered a talk on education and outreach in the Pinelands.



Phantom Canyon Preserve

Even where you stand, the Great Plains stretch out for more than 1,000 miles. To the west, the foothills of the Rockies rise 8,000 feet to the top of the Medicine Iron Range. In this transition zone between prairie and mountains lies a place as unexpected as its name, Phantom Canyon.

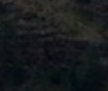
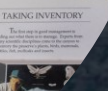
HISTORY

Man's presence in the area is documented by archaeological evidence. Over the years, the area has been used for a variety of purposes, from hunting to farming.

GEOLOGY

The area is characterized by its unique geological features, including the Medicine Iron Range and the surrounding mountains. The area is a mix of prairie and mountain landscapes.

Life in the canyon



**Take a Hike: Exploring the
Phantom Canyon Preserve,
located within the Rocky
Mountain Biosphere Region**

Phantom Canyon Preserve

The Nature Conservancy owns and manages the 1,120-acre preserve, which provides refuge for hundreds of plant species, including the globally rare Larimer aletes (*Aletes humilis*), as well as pronghorn antelopes, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, rattlesnakes, golden eagles and bald eagles.



Short films about Biospheres in the U.S.

We watched several 10-minute films highlighting different U.S. Biosphere regions, then discussed the possibility of creating a film about the Pinelands Biosphere Region.



New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Reserve
Periodic Review 2016



Periodic Review

- All Biospheres are required to submit a Periodic Review report to UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Program (MAB) every 10 years to retain their designation as a Biosphere Region.
- We submitted our 128-page Periodic Review Report in 2016 and successfully retained our designation in 2017. Our next Periodic Review Report would be due in fall 2027.

Takeaways and Possible Next Steps

The United States will withdraw as a member state of UNESCO on December 31, 2026. As a result, the UNESCO MAB Program is temporarily relaxing the upcoming deadlines for biosphere regions such as the New Jersey Pinelands BR to submit their ten-year Periodic Review Reports.

The USBN has advised us that all U.S. Biosphere Regions will continue to maintain their UNESCO recognition in good standing during this interim period.





Takeaways and Possible Next Steps

The USBN has urged all U.S. Biospheres to complete an online self-assessment, which will help in the preparation of a Periodic Review Report, if the U.S. re-enters the Biosphere program in two years. By completing the self-assessment, U.S. Biospheres will demonstrate their commitment to the program and its goals.

Several Biospheres expressed concerns about staffing and the need for more funding, along with a desire to find opportunities to work with other Biospheres with similar challenges.

Takeaways and Possible Next Steps

We should complete the self-assessment provided by the USBN.

We should explore opportunities to work with other Biospheres with similar interests.

We should consider creating a 10-minute Biosphere film, with the assistance of the USBN.

We should seek to identify a Pinelands representative who will serve on the USBN Youth Group, which includes members who are aged 18-35.

USBN Biosphere Youth Group



Questions?

