



## **New Jersey Pinelands Commission PRESS RELEASE**

**August 13, 2010**

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### **John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission, to retire after more than 30 years of service with the Pinelands panel**

NEW LISBON, N.J. – John C. Stokes, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Pinelands Commission, announced today that he will be retiring from the Commission, effective January 1, 2011.

The Commission voted to accept Stokes' resignation with regrets, and they expressed their appreciation and admiration for his many achievements as the Commission's director.

"John Stokes has been a critical part of a truly unique state and federal effort to preserve the Pinelands' ecology from the very beginning," said Candace Ashmun, who is the Commission's Acting Chairperson and has served on the panel since its inception in 1979. "His knowledge and expertise in strengthening the Pinelands Protection Program will be sorely missed."

Ashmun said she will appoint a committee that will begin its search for a new executive director next week.

John A. Haas, the Commission's Acting Vice Chairman, praised Stokes for his "exceptional leadership" in guiding the Commission. "His resignation is occurring at a critical time, and finding a replacement with his depth of knowledge of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan will be a critically important task," Haas said.

In announcing his retirement, Stokes noted that he had "the extraordinary privilege of working to conserve one of New Jersey's and the nation's treasures." As for his retirement plans, Stokes indicated that he hopes to pursue civic and business challenges outside of government. During the next four months, Stokes will be working to complete several major projects and will help the Pinelands Commission in its search for a new executive director.

The Pinelands Commission is an independent state agency that is governed by a 15 member board of directors. It is charged with protecting the million-acre Pinelands Area, which includes parts of Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Ocean counties.

Stokes was appointed as the Commission's Executive Director in April 2003, after serving 23 years as the panel's Assistant Director. The Haddonfield, Camden County resident was one of the chief authors of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, the rules that govern land-use, development and natural resource protection in the Pinelands.

**(MORE)**

## **Pinelands Press Release**

Page 2...

Under Stokes' leadership, the Pinelands Commission:

- Established the \$18.5 million Pinelands Conservation Fund, which is helping to permanently protect more than 5,000 acres of environmentally-sensitive land in the Pinelands and is financing more than 15 critical Pinelands research and planning projects;
- Instituted innovative conservation measures in the Toms River and Oyster Creek Basins (Ocean County) that serve to better protect more than 7,000 acres of ecologically-important lands in those areas;
- Adopted 15 amendments to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, including state-of-the-art stormwater management and on-site development clustering standards;
- Launched a \$6 million, multi-year study of the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer system that lies beneath the Pinelands and contains an estimated 17 trillion gallons of water. The study will be used to ensure that future water supply needs of the Pinelands can be met without adversely impacting the region's unique natural resources. The study is scheduled to be completed within the year;
- Won a federal lawsuit that prevented an unregulated waste facility from being constructed in Mullica Township, Atlantic County under the guise of a federal railroad transportation law. That federal law was later amended to provide greater protection against these unregulated facilities throughout the country;
- Completed the first comprehensive reassessment of Pinelands natural resources since the Pinelands Plan was originally adopted in 1980. Based upon a wealth of environmental data collected through the Commission's environmental monitoring program, the assessment found that 83% of the Pinelands ecosystem still retains its natural qualities. This assessment is helping the Commission continue to improve its land use and environmental policies;
- Secured the environmentally safe closure of two landfills at the Stafford Township (Ocean County) Business Park by authorizing a redevelopment project in which a private developer paid for the landfills' closure in return for the approval to redevelop the business park; and
- Reactivated the Pinelands Short Course, a day-long educational program on the Pinelands that is held in cooperation with Burlington County College and now serves more than 800 teachers and other participants each spring.

Robert W. McIntosh, who has served as the federal representative on the Commission since 1995, lauded Stokes as a leader and innovator in smart growth and conservation.

"Due to his leadership, the Pinelands is now regarded as an international model for landscape-scale conservation and has become the longest, consistently monitored ecologic and economic research site in the nation," McIntosh said. "The lessons learned in the Pinelands experience can be exported around the world."

**(MORE)**

## Pinelands Press Release

Page 2...

As Executive Director, Stokes is responsible for the daily operations of the Commission and its staff of approximately 50 planners, scientists, environmental reviewers, educators and others. Among other activities, Stokes has served as the Chairman of the Haddonfield Planning Board, as a member of the Haddonfield Environmental Commission, as treasurer of the Camden County Council of Girl Scouts, as assistant district administrator of the National Little League, and as a member of the Haddon Avenue Transit Corridor Study Committee. He holds a bachelors of science degree from North Carolina State University and is a New Jersey Professional Planner and member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

**\*\*\* ATTENTION EDITORS/REPORTERS:** A high resolution, digital photo of John C. Stokes, taken during today's meeting, can be obtained via e-mail by contacting Paul Leakan at (609) 894-7300, ext. 124.



**John C. Stokes, the Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission (shown in center), announced his retirement during the Commission's regular meeting today.**

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