



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Pinelands Commission moves forward with four proposed changes to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan

Amendments will strengthen protection of Pinelands resources

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its meeting today, the state Pinelands Commission advanced four proposed amendments to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), the rules that govern land use, development and natural resource protection in the million-acre Pinelands.

The changes pertain to the management of septic systems, wetlands restoration, the maintenance of electric transmission rights-of-way and forestry management practices.

“These proposed amendments include specific and carefully-conceived measures that will undergird the special protections afforded to the Pinelands’ unique resources,” said John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Commission. “This includes steps to ensure better maintenance of septic systems to control pollutants and avoid degradation to water quality and help reduce public health risks. These changes also provide specific guidance for those interested in restoring wetlands that are vital to the Pinelands’ ecology. Lastly, the changes authorize a detailed plan of maintenance practices for 233 miles of electric transmission rights-of-way in the Pinelands, and detail forestry practices that can improve forest management while avoiding negative environmental impacts.”

The proposed amendments are as follows:

■ **Septic System Management:** Changes to the CMP would require that all traditional septic systems in active use in the Pinelands be inspected every three years and pumped out when needed. Current regulations require cleaning or pumping of these systems every three years. The proposed rules, however, recognize the fact that some systems – for example, those serving smaller households – may not require pumping as frequently as others and therefore would not require pumping every three years.

Proposed changes to the CMP also would require all Pinelands municipalities to adopt amendments to their land-use ordinances to establish programs for the long-term maintenance of septic systems. This will include the issuance of operating permits to ensure that septic systems are being properly maintained.

This will enable Pinelands municipalities to comply with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s new rules that require septic system management. To help Pinelands municipalities carry out this responsibility, the Commission will prepare and distribute a model ordinance that will implement the newly proposed changes to the CMP and can be used to design these maintenance programs.

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■ **Wetlands restoration:** Wetlands are vital to the Pinelands' ecological character because they provide critical habitat for many rare plant and animal species and they maintain ground and surface water quality and critical stormwater storage capacity that helps control flooding. Development is generally prohibited within all wetlands in the Pinelands, and activities that have an irreversible effect on wetlands' ecological integrity are strictly prohibited. However, these limitations pose a dilemma when the Commission receives proposals to restore natural wetland vegetation communities that have been impacted or altered due to human activities such as agriculture or urban development. These restoration projects might be viewed as inconsistent with Pinelands rules despite the beneficial effects they might provide to these wetlands.

Proposed changes to the CMP seek to solve this dilemma by authorizing certain management activities in wetlands. For example, this will allow the establishment of characteristic wetlands on inactive farmland, the removal of exotic plant species or Phragmites from a wetland and activities that achieve ecological goals such as preventing the loss of a rare wetland community through succession, expanding a rare type of wetland community or creating more favorable conditions for the viability of rare plant or animal populations.

■ **Maintenance of electric transmission rights-of-way:** Changes to the CMP would establish a pilot program that authorizes a plan to maintain electric transmission rights-of-way in the Pinelands. The plan calls for a variety of vegetation management practices for each of the roughly 3,000 spans along approximately 233 miles of right-of-way. The primary objectives of the plan are to create and maintain early successional (low-growth) habitats that are characteristic of the Pinelands, provide habitat for native and rare plant and animal species and ensure the reliability and safety of the electric transmission system in the Pinelands.

The CMP would be amended to allow utility companies to carry out these prescriptions without prior approval by the Commission for 10 years. This period will allow for the Commission's Science office to undertake an extensive monitoring program to evaluate the effectiveness of the prescriptions and to determine whether the goals are being met. The utility companies would be required to remit annual payments to the Commission to help finance these monitoring responsibilities. At the end of the 10-year period, the Commission's Executive Director would recommend whether to permanently incorporate the plan into the CMP, extend the pilot program or propose other measures.

■ **Forestry:** The Pinelands plan acknowledges that proper management of Pinelands forests will increase their economic value to their owners while also preserving and sustaining the overall ecological character of the Pinelands. In 2004, the Commission asked its Forestry Advisory Committee to review, clarify and refine the forestry provision in the CMP. More specifically, the Committee was asked to recommend management practices designed to ensure that forestry activities in the Pinelands are consistent with the Commission's mandate to protect and maintain the region's unique environment while ensuring that forestry remains a viable economic and cultural resource. In 2006, the Committee issued a report that suggests methods to improve forest management planning on private and state-owned properties and recommends a series of silvicultural practices for forestry in the Pinelands. These recommendations guided the proposed amendments to the CMP. The proposed changes provide more direct and specific guidance to potential applicants regarding the practices that can be employed to better manage Pinelands forests.

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The Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan has guided land-use and development activities in the million-acre Pinelands Area since it took effect on January 14, 1981.

Today's vote authorizes Pinelands Commission staff to begin the rule amendment process. The four proposed rule amendments are expected to be published in early June in the New Jersey Register, which will be followed by a 60-day public comment period and public hearings in July.

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