



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Pinelands Commission details new practices aimed at better protecting native vegetation, including rare species, along roadsides in the Pinelands

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its regular meeting today, the New Jersey Pinelands Commission detailed a series of new management practices aimed at better protecting and promoting native vegetation, including rare plant species, along roadsides in the Pinelands.

"Roadsides throughout the Pinelands provide important habitat for a host of characteristic, native plants, including some rare species that thrive in these open-canopied, sun-exposed environments," said John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Commission. "These practices provide county and municipal governments with specific guidance for managing road shoulders in a manner that protects and perpetuates native vegetation, while also ensuring traffic safety along Pinelands roads. Moreover, these practices will reduce maintenance costs, hinder the spread of invasive, non-native vegetation, and help to curb the use of costly soil amendments and herbicides."

The practices specify techniques for managing vegetation along Pinelands roads, including when, where, how and if vegetation should be mowed. They also call for using clean fill dirt along roads, ensuring that the fill is obtained from a local source. The use of nutrient-rich or high pH soil and soil amendments is also discouraged. These practices will help to minimize the establishment of non-native plant species. In addition, vegetation will be maintained in a manner that does not obstruct sight lines or pose potential hazards to drivers. Special measures will be taken to ensure that rare plant communities growing along roadsides are protected. **(For a full description of the best management practices, please see pages 3 and 4.)**

The Commission is currently working with officials from the seven counties in the Pinelands (Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Ocean), as well as state transportation agencies, to implement this ecological approach for maintaining road shoulder vegetation.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (DOT) will be following these practices this year when it conducts a pilot project along the entire length of state Route 72 in the Pinelands. The practices are consistent with the DOT's Grassland Eco Mow Zone Program, which the transportation agency has implemented on other roadways in the state.

***** ATTENTION EDITORS:** High resolution, digital photos of native Pinelands plant species that grow along roadsides in the Pinelands, such as those on page 2, can be obtained via e-mail by contacting Paul Leakan at (609) 894-7300, ext. 124.

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Above: Pine Barrens Gentian (*Gentiana autumnalis*) is among the rare, native plant species that can be found growing along Pinelands roadsides.

Photo by Donna McBride/NJ Pinelands Commission



Above: Goat's Rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*) is a characteristic, native plant species that grows along Pinelands roadsides.

Photo by Paul Leakan/NJ Pinelands Commission

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MOWING AND MAINTENANCE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR PINE BARRENS ROADSIDE PLANT COMMUNITIES¹



MOWING AND MAINTENANCE REGIMES

The following mowing and maintenance practices are intended to protect and promote native Pinelands vegetation while addressing traffic safety concerns relative to roadside shoulders. Please refer to the typical section on the following page, which illustrates the 3 vegetated Zones described below.

I. REGULAR-MOW ZONE

The regular-mow zone includes any vegetated portion of the road shoulder within 8 feet from the outside edge of the travel lane. The purpose of this zone is to provide safe emergency vehicle pull-off areas and to allow road maintenance activities including maintenance of drainage swales and access to utilities. This zone may be wider than 8 feet where drainage swales or utilities are set farther back from the roadway.

a. Regular-Mow Zone Mowing and Maintenance Regime

The regular-mow zone should be mowed as frequently as needed to maintain its practical functions. Because typical roadside mowers have a 5- to 6-foot cutting width and paved/gravel portions of road shoulders ordinarily vary from 2- to 3-feet in width, it is expected that no more than one pass will be required during each mowing event. Vegetation height in these areas should be kept below 10 inches at all times to prevent contact with the bottom of vehicles, which may cause the vegetation to catch fire under certain conditions. However, to benefit some native Pine Barrens species, mowing height should be no lower than 6 inches above the ground.

To encourage native Pinelands species and minimize the establishment of non-native species, only use clean fill along roadsides that is obtained from a local source. Do not use nutrient-rich or high pH soil or soil amendments. Areas of any zone that are currently sparsely vegetated should not be mowed. This will reduce soil erosion and soil compaction caused by mower wheels and help promote re-vegetation.

b. Rare Plant Hotspots Mowing Regime

To prevent impacts to known rare plant populations, the dormant-season mow zone mowing regime, described in Section 2, should be followed at sites where rare plants are found (“rare plant hotspots”). The boundaries of rare plant hotspots should be marked with signs to alert roadside managers to their location and avoid untimely mowing that would be detrimental to these rare plant populations.

2. DORMANT-SEASON MOW ZONE

The widths of dormant-season mow zones vary and these zones are kept free of all woody plants that present potential hazards to drivers. Where intersection sight lines extend into the dormant-season mow zone, vegetation that is likely to obstruct such sight lines must be maintained below 30 inches at all times.

Dormant-Season Mow Zone Mowing and Maintenance Regime

The dormant-season mow zone is mowed no more frequently than one time each year. The dormant season extends from December 1st to March 31st. However, mowing activity should be confined to the month of March to allow the full, uninterrupted life cycle of plants - including growth, flowering, seed production, seed dispersal and seedling establishment.

Set mowing height no lower than 6 inches above the ground to avoid damage to short-statured, woody native species (e.g., Bearberry, Wintergreen, and Pine Barrens Heather), which are excellent groundcover for roadsides.

Areas of any zone that are currently sparsely vegetated should not be mowed. This will reduce soil erosion and soil compaction caused by mower wheels and help promote re-vegetation.

Annual mowing will remove the tops of any woody plants. However, exclusive use of dormant-season mowing may not be adequate to prevent some vigorous woody species from growing to a height that obstructs sight lines, especially where establishment is already underway (e.g., Pitch Pine sprouts). In these cases, it may be necessary to selectively cut such plants to ensure unobstructed sight lines.

3. UNDISTURBED ZONE

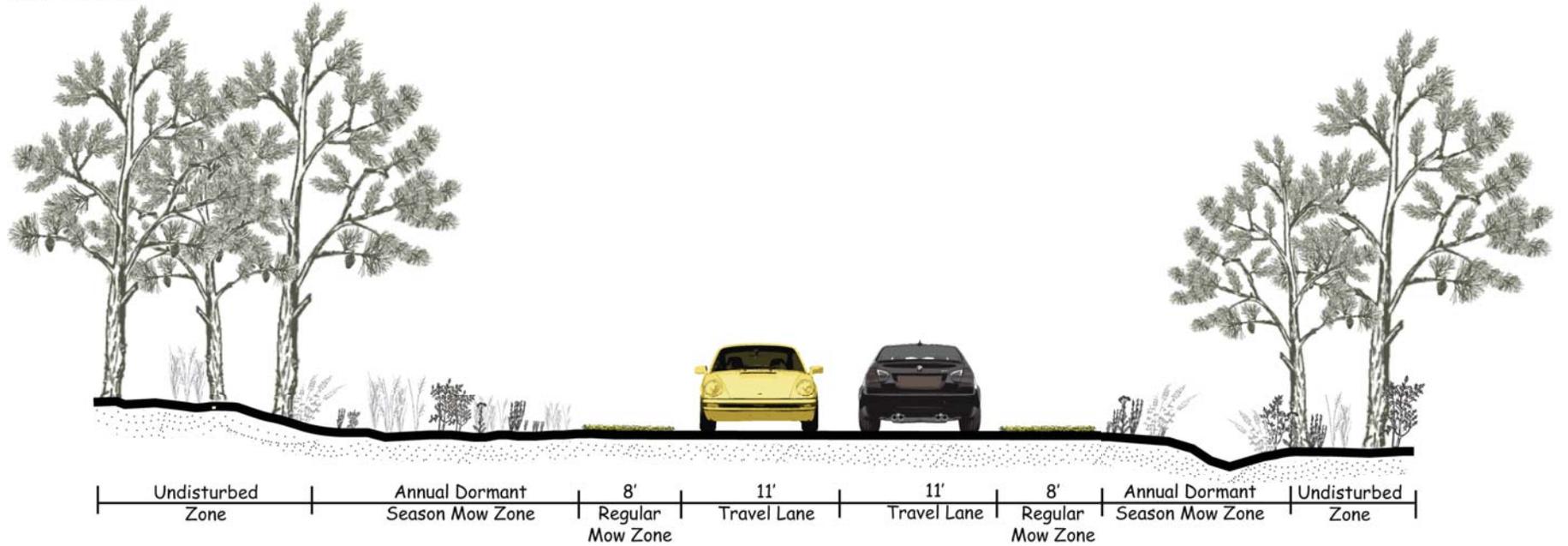
This zone begins at the tree line of adjacent forest cover and defines the limit of the dormant-season mow zone.

Undisturbed Zone Mowing and Maintenance Regime

Mowing is not recommended in this zone except to remove tree limbs that may hang over and shade the dormant-season mow zone.

¹ **Note:** Adapted from Van Clef, Michael, Ph.D.; Ecological Solutions, LLC; May 2009; “BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR PINE BARRENS ROADSIDE PLANT COMMUNITIES”

Pine Barrens Roadside Plant Communities
Best Management Practices
Mow Zones



Note: Illustrations Not to Scale
Pinelands Commission, April 2010