



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **NEWS RELEASE**

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Commission Approves Plan for \$13 Million Conservation Fund *Money to be used for planning, research, and open space preservation*

SOUTHAMPTON, NJ - The Pinelands Commission has approved a plan to direct the use and management of the Pinelands Conservation Fund. The Fund was recently created as part of an agreement with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to permit the construction and upgrade of an electric transmission line through eastern portions of the Pinelands.

Under the agreement, the special fund was set up to “further the Pinelands protection program and ensure a greater level of protection of the unique resources of the Pinelands Area.” The utility constructing the transmission lines, Atlantic City Electric (formerly Conectiv), is providing \$13 million to establish the fund.

The plan, approved by the Commission at its April meeting, dedicates the funding to three types of projects: \$6 million dollars will be allocated for permanent land protection; \$3 ½ million will go toward conservation planning and research projects; and \$3 ½ million will support community planning and design initiatives.

“The Pinelands Conservation Fund Plan was developed with extensive public input,” said John Stokes, Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission. “We invited public input on the proposal and held a public forum in January. As a result, the Commission received written and verbal comments from 18 public and non-profit organizations.”

The objectives of the permanent land protection component will be to protect important natural, cultural, historic and agricultural resources through the purchase of land and conservation easements. Funding will be appropriated for acquisition of lands that are recommended as part of regional or sub-regional plans adopted by the Commission or other acquisition recommendations approved by the Commission. Priority will be given to projects which supplement Pinelands Conservation Fund proceeds with other state, federal, local or private funding.

Funds disbursed under the conservation planning and research component must also directly benefit the conservation of Pinelands resources, including the funding of sub-regional conservation planning projects and applied scientific research projects. This portion of the fund will support the ecologically based electric transmission right-of-way maintenance plan project, also set forth in the BPU agreement. This project is developing a management approach to maintain early successional habitats along electric rights-of-way within the Pinelands while maintaining transmission safety and reliability.

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The third component will support ongoing community planning and design efforts in Pinelands municipalities. This will build upon the work of the Dodge Foundation-supported Pinelands Excellence Program which develops community action plans for creating livable and sustainable communities.

The Pinelands Conservation Fund plan also sets forth policies for the investment, management and administration of Fund monies. To date, the Commission has received \$9.75 million, and the remaining \$3.2 million is scheduled to be received on or before March 13, 2006.

A copy of the Pinelands Conservation Fund policy is available on the Pinelands Commission website at www.state.nj.us/pinelands/reports.htm.

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