



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **NEWS RELEASE**

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Commission to Weigh Agreement on Sanctuary *Public Information Session to be held on November 9 in Evesham*

NEW LISBON, NJ - Pinelands Commission Executive Director John C. Stokes today announced that he will be recommending a tentative settlement agreement regarding the Sanctuary housing development in Evesham Township to the Pinelands Commission at its November 12 meeting. At that time, the Commission may vote to authorize Stokes to execute the settlement agreement. However, Stokes first will hold an informational meeting in Evesham to apprise area residents and other interested parties of the terms and conditions of the draft agreement.

The public information session will be held on Tuesday, November 9, at 7:00 p.m. at the Gibson House Community Center in Marlton. Stokes, along with key Commission staff, will be on hand to explain the proposed settlement, answer questions and receive feedback from Sanctuary residents and others.

The proposed agreement resolves litigation between the Pinelands Commission and Ivelin L.P., an owner of property in the Sanctuary. Ivelin sued the Pinelands Commission in the US District Court of New Jersey in December 2003 after the Commission advised Evesham Township that it would not allow certain subdivision and construction approvals to take effect until measures are implemented to protect endangered pine snakes in the development.

Development at the Sanctuary has been largely delayed for more than two years due to the presence of endangered northern pine snakes, including the discovery of a pine snake nest within the subdivision in June 2002. The Sanctuary was the subject of a previous court settlement in 2000 over endangered eastern timber rattlesnakes which also inhabit areas within and around the subdivision.

“Bringing this longstanding matter to closure accomplishes three things,” said Stokes. “First, more effective measures to protect the pine snake population will be incorporated into the development plans for The Sanctuary. These will also have added benefit to the rattlesnake population. Second, it will allow the Commission to focus its attention on the preparation of a comprehensive conservation plan for the surrounding region in cooperation with the Townships of Evesham and Medford. Third, it will allow The Sanctuary development to be completed as a cohesive community, in keeping with the Township’s and residents’ expectations.”

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The proposed agreement would allow the completion of the unfinished portion of Georgia O'Keefe Way, a road that will connect two main areas of development which are separated by a large deed-restricted conservation area. The agreement directs the road to be built over 12-foot-wide box-type culverts that will allow pine snakes and other animals to pass beneath the road, thereby minimizing snake mortalities from motor vehicles. Permanent barriers will be constructed along both sides of the road to direct animals to the culverts and help prevent them from reaching the road surface.

Under this agreement and a previous agreement reached with another Sanctuary developer in April 2004, two building lots which comprise a pine snake nesting site will be permanently protected through a deed restriction. These lots are contiguous to a 350-acre conservation area which serves as a wildlife corridor to areas of undisturbed forests to the east of the subdivision. In addition, the two building lots on either side of the two protected lots will each have a development easement to serve as a buffer to the protected area.

Ivelin has also agreed to contribute \$75,000 to the Pinelands Commission for natural resource monitoring and planning activities. These funds can be used to support Pinelands sub-regional conservation planning efforts, such as the one that is underway in southern Evesham and Medford Townships. That effort was launched to resolve potential conflicts among Pinelands development and resource protection objectives in the 22-square-mile area surrounding the Sanctuary. Much of this area is zoned for low-density rural development. However, in recent years, the Commission has gained new information on the area's rich natural resources, including threatened and endangered species as well as high-quality water resources and habitat.

Details of the proposed Sanctuary agreement are available on the Pinelands Commission website at www.nj.gov/pinelands.

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