



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Pinelands Commission weighing local conservation plan *Special task force develops innovative plan for Toms River Basin*

NEW LISBON, NJ - A special task force created last year to develop a plan for protecting critical natural resources in the Toms River watershed of Jackson and Manchester Townships has submitted its findings and recommendations to the Pinelands Commission, Ocean County and both townships to consider for implementation. The Pinelands Commission's Permanent Land Protection Committee endorsed the document at its February 27 meeting and has forwarded it to the full Commission for consideration at its March 12 meeting.

The Toms River Corridor Task Force is comprised of 19 representatives from government planning and environmental agencies, non-profit conservation groups, municipal officials and others. In addition, a group of technical advisors on botany, herpetology, geology, hydrology and other key fields provided ongoing expert guidance to the Task Force.

"On behalf of the Commission, I want to thank the Task Force and its technical contributors for the hard work and long hours that they put into this project," said Pinelands Commission Chairman James Florio. "For nearly 25 years, the Pinelands Management Plan has served as a blueprint for smart growth and natural resource protection. This effort signifies a new and innovative approach whereby we can custom fit the Plan to meet sub-regional challenges in a comprehensive and cooperative manner."

The Toms River Corridor project area covers nearly 17,000 acres in the northern Pinelands of Ocean County. Of that land area, approximately 15,000 acres lie in Jackson, with the remaining acreage in Manchester. The area includes six Pinelands Management Area districts ranging from the ecologically critical Preservation District to the Pinelands Regional Growth Area. The project area also includes the three designated Pinelands Villages of Cassville, Legler and Vanhiseville.

Under the impetus of the Pinelands Commission's Permanent Land Protection Committee, the Task Force was established in April 2003 to address growing concerns over the potential for development conflicts in the region. The area is home to a wealth of important land and water resources, including more than a dozen plant and animal species that are classified as threatened or endangered. At the same time, the area features significant swaths of developed land with a population of several thousand people.

"If fully implemented, this plan will enhance the predictability of growth opportunities and reflect the community development objectives of Jackson and Manchester Townships," explained Pinelands Commissioner Candace McKee Ashmun, Chair of the Permanent Land Protection Committee. "The plan makes the use of Pinelands Development Credits more realistic and enhances development potential in the Villages and Regional Growth Areas."

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In its report, the Task Force set forth three key findings:

- Development pressures exist and are growing, with approximately 1,500 residential units currently proposed for construction within the corridor and more are expected;
- Water resources are threatened, with both water quality and quantity in jeopardy from the inter-basin transfer of wastewater and proposed development near high-quality waterways and groundwater recharge areas; and
- Clusters of threatened and endangered species exist within and around the Corridor in large, relatively undisturbed landscapes.

The Toms River Corridor Plan proposes to utilize a combination of planning, zoning and resource protection tools in the area. A series of Pinelands and municipal re-zonings are proposed to: provide greater protection of water quality and critical wildlife habitat; enhance habitat buffers; and establish connectors between large areas of undeveloped and protected habitat. These will be supported by reductions in permitted housing densities and implementation of stronger clustering provisions in a number of areas. On-site clustering standards will help to minimize impacts on environmentally sensitive land while allowing for appropriate residential development.

The Plan also calls for enhanced use of conservation easements as well as stepping up efforts to acquire land for permanent protection. The State of New Jersey, County of Ocean and Townships of Jackson and Manchester are all actively pursuing land acquisitions of up to 2,000 acres that would be consistent with the recommendations of the Task Force. As long-term strategies, the Task Force is also encouraging the expansion of the Pinelands Density Transfer and Pinelands Development Credit Programs to allow greater use within the Toms River Corridor.

Seventy-three percent of the Corridor will be protected through conservation-oriented zoning measures and 2,600 fewer homes will be built in the future. Future non-point source pollution of the Toms River and Barnegat Bay will be reduced and clustering will ensure that future development is directed away from the most environmentally sensitive lands.

The Task Force also developed a systematic approach for establishing, up-front, the type and scope of endangered and threatened species surveys that would be required of potential developers. This includes a set of criteria that tailors survey procedures based on zoning districts and the type of development being proposed. This approach recognizes the habitat conservation measures already set forth in the overall plan and simplifies the survey process to provide greater predictability of regulatory requirements.

In early 2003, the Pinelands Commission concluded an intensive review of the Pinelands Protection Program. As part of a five-year strategy plan, the Commission decided to pursue sub-regional conservation plans as a means to better protect Pinelands resources in cooperation with its municipal partners. It specifically called for the Toms River project as well as other projects.

The Toms River Corridor Plan can be read or downloaded for free from the Pinelands Commission website at www.nj.gov/pinelands. It can also be purchased on CD ROM for \$2.00, which includes postage and handling. To purchase, make checks or money orders payable to “the Pinelands Commission” at PO Box 7, New Lisbon, NJ 08064.

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