



**New Jersey Pinelands Commission**

# Press Release

October 23, 2018

**Contact:** Paul Leakan, NJ Pinelands Commission

Phone: (609) 894-7300, ext. 124

E-mail: [info@pinelands.nj.gov](mailto:info@pinelands.nj.gov)

## **For Immediate Release:**

### **Plant Protection Program Taking Root in the Pinelands**

*Commission, counties working to safeguard roadside vegetation*

NEW LISBON, N.J. – Motorists traveling through the Pinelands may be noticing a more vibrant display of blooming wildflowers that flank the roadsides of the million-acre reserve.

For the past few years, road crews in five counties in the Pinelands have been implementing a program aimed at protecting native vegetation growing along the region’s roadways.

The program was initiated by the Pinelands Commission in 2009, and it incorporates various practices for mowing and managing the roadsides in a manner that maintains motorists’ safety while encouraging native plant species to survive and thrive.

“While it took some time to adjust to these practices, the counties are doing an excellent job,” said Nancy Wittenberg, the Commission’s Executive Director. “Our staff has made a concerted effort to improve communication with the counties, and that has translated into better implementation of measures that protect roadside plants.”

There are more than 11,000 acres of roadsides in the Pinelands. These sunny, open spaces provide important habitat for native Pinelands plants, including many rare species such as Pine Barren gentians, broom-crowberry and ladies’ tresses orchids.

The Pinelands Commission launched the roadside vegetation protection program in response to the public’s concerns about the destruction of native and rare plant populations. In 2009, the Commission worked with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, state and county transportation officials, and local botanists to develop best management practices for the mowing and maintenance of Pinelands roadsides.

The Commission added the best management practices to a memorandum of agreement (MOA) that was being developed simultaneously with Pinelands Area counties. The MOA clarifies and simplifies the Commission’s application process for certain minor road infrastructure improvements undertaken on county-owned roads. As part of the MOA, the counties agreed to implement the best management practices for roadsides on all county-owned roads.

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The agreements have been executed with Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Ocean counties. Since that time, the Commission's staff has been working closely with road maintenance crews in those five counties to ensure that roadside vegetation is maintained according to the best management practices.

The roadside management practices call for:

- Mowing only the minimum width of roadside needed to maintain safe vehicle pull-off and clear sight at turns and intersections;
- Mowing to a height of six (6) inches to allow common native low-growing groundcovers to thrive;
- Restoring roadside soils to nearly undisturbed conditions following road improvements;
- Avoiding mowing sparsely vegetated areas at all times; and
- Mowing rare plant populations and portions of roadsides beyond the necessary safe vehicle pull-off areas only once a year during the dormant season.

"These practices not only protect important habitat for native plants, they help reduce fuel consumption, manpower, and wear-and-tear on equipment," Wittenberg said. "The practices also reduce the need to restore sites due to erosion, soil compaction and the infiltration of invasive, non-native plant species. Lastly, these measures help to maintain the beauty of the Pinelands."

Staff members and a group of 10 volunteer botanists survey the roadside vegetation on numerous occasions each year to ensure compliance with the best management practices.

Commission staff has observed greater compliance with the measures since discussing the program during meetings with staff in each of the five participating counties in 2016 and 2017. Commission staff provided further support last year by producing and sending an informational brochure about the program to all seven Pinelands counties and all 53 municipalities.

"The Pinelands is unique to South Jersey and its scenic beauty attracts both residents and visitors," said Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson. "Atlantic County is pleased to participate in this program to enhance our roadways with natural vegetation and wildflowers."

"The Pinelands are a natural treasure and a significant asset in Camden County," Freeholder Susan Shin Angulo said. "We have been following the best practices as laid out by the commission and have seen a variety of benefits to our operations on county roadways. There is no question that doing everything we can to preserve the Pinelands is in the best interest for our community and South Jersey."

\*\*\* **ATTENTION EDITORS:** High resolution .jpegs of the images below can be obtained by contacting Paul Leakan at (609) 894-7300 or [info@pinelands.nj.gov](mailto:info@pinelands.nj.gov).



Here is a photo of a Pine Barren gentian blooming along one of the roadsides where county crews are following special practices aimed at protecting native vegetation in the Pinelands. Photo/Robyn A. Jeney



Orange milkwort can also be found blooming along Pinelands roadsides that are being managed to protect native plants. Photo/Robyn A. Jeney



Robyn A. Jeney, a Resource Planner with the Pinelands Commission, spots native orchids growing along Route 563 in Burlington County during one of her surveys of roadside vegetation in the Pinelands. Photo/Paul Leakan



Robyn A. Jeney, a Resource Planner with the Pinelands Commission, surveys roadside vegetation along Route 563 in Burlington County. Photo/Paul Leakan