



New Jersey Pinelands Commission PRESS RELEASE

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Pinelands Commission approves agreement that authorizes widening the Garden State Parkway

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its regular meeting today, the Pinelands Commission voted to approve a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that authorizes widening the Garden State Parkway in the Pinelands.

The agreement was reached among the Commission and the New Jersey Turnpike Authority. It permits the Turnpike Authority to widen the Garden State Parkway between Interchange 30 in Somers Point, Atlantic County and Interchange 80 in South Toms River, Ocean County to respond to traffic demands and to improve public safety within the corridor.

The 50-mile widening project will occur mostly within the median and primarily within the Parkway's existing right-of-way. All but approximately one mile of the project will occur in the Pinelands. It will add a third traffic lane and wider shoulders in the northbound and southbound directions. The project also will include the construction of new parallel spans and rehabilitation of existing bridges over the Mullica and Bass rivers, as well as widening the existing bridge over Patcong Creek.

Because it will impact habitat for certain threatened and endangered plant and animal species, the project is not fully consistent with Pinelands regulations. However, the Pinelands Commission determined that the MOA, which will allow activities that are not in strict compliance with Pinelands regulations, is accompanied by measures that will, at a minimum, afford an equivalent level of protection of Pinelands resources than would be provided through the strict application of Pinelands standards.

In order to provide an equivalent level of protection of Pinelands resources, the Turnpike Authority has agreed to purchase and deed restrict against future development at least 142.76 acres of land to offset potential threatened and endangered plant and animal species habitat impacts associated with the project. The Authority will provide a portion of this offset at a 259-acre site known as the Turtle Creek site in Washington Township, Burlington County. The site contains expanses of Atlantic White Cedar forest that have substantially recovered from historical logging. The site has been studied over the years and has been documented to contain numerous State threatened and endangered species, including Pine Barrens tree frog, various bird species, timber rattlesnake, New Jersey rush and Pine Barrens boneset.

Although the entire Turtle Creek site will be preserved as part of the Authority's overall

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mitigation package for the proposed project, 44 acres of the site will be specifically set-aside for Pinelands threatened and endangered species habitat offsets. The remaining acreage will be utilized for New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection freshwater wetland mitigation and to address Coastal Area Facility Review Act wildlife habitat mitigation.

The Authority will address the remaining 98.76 acres of threatened and endangered species offset through the future acquisition of land elsewhere. That land will also be deed restricted against future development to ensure that suitable and characteristic habitat for the northern pine snake and red-headed woodpecker is preserved.

A conservative, landscape-based approach combined with field verification of potential habitat was used to identify threatened or endangered species habitat that may be impacted by the project. No direct impacts to plants or animals are expected as a result of the project.

The project is consistent with all other standards of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, including stormwater management, wetlands requirements and standards for public development.

Acting as technical consultants on behalf of the Pinelands Commission, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) undertook a study of the proposed project's potential to generate secondary, growth-related impacts that might induce changes in land use that would be inconsistent with the Pinelands land use program. The DVRPC concluded that only the induced impacts in the vicinity of Interchanges 58 and 69 would have the potential to be inconsistent with the Pinelands program.

Under the MOA, steps will be taken under a separate agreement through which the Authority will address the secondary impacts. That agreement must remain confidential at the present time because it addresses the purchase of specific properties.

The Pinelands Commission's Executive Director will submit a biennial report to the Commission on the progress of the project, beginning in December 2010. The report will confirm, pursuant to the terms and conditions of the MOA, whether there are any material additions, deviations or modifications when the Turnpike Authority provides notice of its intent to begin individual segments of the project, identify whether new information indicates that the project's impacts will materially change from those anticipated in the MOA, provide the status of the action taken during the reporting period pursuant to the agreement on secondary impacts and advise the Commission of any necessary follow-up actions.

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