



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Contact: Francis Rapa

Phone: 609.894.7300

E-mail: info@njpines.state.nj.us

Commission Releases Rancocas Study Report

Commission's second major study of Pinelands watershed resources & health

NEW LISBON, NJ - The Pinelands Commission has released a comprehensive report on the aquatic and wetland resources of Pinelands portions of the Rancocas Creek Basin. The report characterizes the water quality and ecological resources within 69 percent of the watershed, which comprises about 243 square miles in sixteen municipalities in Burlington, Camden and Ocean Counties. It compares environmental data with types and levels of land use development. The report is the second of its kind released by the Commission following the release of the Mullica River Basin Study in 2001.

“The Rancocas report is a significant contribution to the Commission’s growing body of scientific research,” said Pinelands Commission Executive Director John C. Stokes. “Armed with increasingly comprehensive data, we are now even better prepared to protect not only the ecological resources of the Rancocas watershed, but resources throughout the Pinelands.”

Taking about two years to complete, the Rancocas study examines water quality and populations of hundreds of species of plants, fishes, frogs and toads at about 70 sites throughout the basin. The data is then compared with existing land-use patterns to determine how land-use activities impact wildlife, aquatic and wetland habitat and water quality. The study found that areas with the least amount of development, especially protected lands, have ecological communities and water quality that are most characteristic of Pinelands species and water quality.

About 75 percent of the study area is undeveloped forest land and wetlands, about 14 percent is developed and the remainder is predominantly agricultural. With regard to Pinelands management areas: about 42 percent of the study area lies in the Preservation and Forest Areas, where development is largely restricted; 17 percent is Rural Development Area; 14 percent is Agricultural and Special Agricultural Districts; and the remaining 45 percent is divided among the Regional Growth Area, Military Area and Pinelands Towns and Villages.

The Rancocas study concluded that significant portions of the basin do not display water quality or biological characteristics considered typical of the Pinelands, with land use and disturbance having a substantial impact on most of the North Branch and Southwest Branch sub-basins as well as parts of the South Branch. However, the Greenwood Branch basin, which is dominated by state forest land, displays those qualities associated with the essential character of the Pinelands.

Stokes added, “The Commission is grateful to the National Park Service for their funding support of this project, as well as to our science staff, whose Pinelands research work is second-to-none.”

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