

Where and what are the "Central Pine Barrens" of New York ?

New York's southeasternmost county, Suffolk, occupies the eastern end of Long Island, and comprises over 900 square miles of terrestrial and marine environments. Three of Suffolk County's ten townships are host to the 100,000+ acre, New York State designated region known as the Central Pine Barrens. A rich concoction of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, interconnected surface and ground waters, recreational niches, historic locales, farmlands, and residential communities, this region contains the largest remnant of a forest thought to have once encompassed over a quarter million acres on Long Island. The Central Pine Barrens overlies one portion of Long Island's federally designated sole source aquifer for drinking water.



What is special about New York's "Central" Pine Barrens ?

1992: NY State Court of Appeals decision started a Legislative process to end 30+ years of land use uncertainty and litigation.

1993: NY State Legislature passed the "Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act", protecting the largest, "central" remaining Long Island Pine Barrens region.

Principal goals of the Act:

Protection of groundwater, surface water, and future drinking water supplies for 1.8 million residents

Protection of a threatened landscape containing the greatest diversity of rare, threatened and endangered species in NY State.

What does the Pine Barrens Protection Act do ?



Creates a five member Commission representing the State, Suffolk County, and the Towns of Brookhaven, Riverhead and Southampton.
Gives the Commission a broad spectrum of responsibilities and powers:

- Comprehensive Plan development & implementation
- Plan enforcement
- Transfer of development rights authority
- Public lands stewardship

What is the Commission's Purview ?

Under NY Environmental Conservation Law Article 57, the Commission produced and implements a Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

The Act and the Plan charge the Commission with the combined duties of a state agency, a planning board, and a park commission:

- Land use review, permitting, and enforcement authority in the Central Pine Barrens, along with the local municipalities.
- Establishment and operation of a transferable development rights and conservation easement program.
- Coordination of public lands stewardship and management on a regional basis.

Categories and Principles of Land Use Regulation in the Central Pine Barrens:

- Central Pine Barrens (102,500 acres) = Core Preservation Area (55,000 acres) + Compatible Growth Area (CGA) (47,500 acres).
- Core development is prohibited without a hardship permit from the Commission.

- CGA development must adhere to land use restrictions in 1995 Pine Barrens Plan, otherwise a Commission permit is required.
- Core property is eligible for “Pine Barrens Credits” - transferable development rights - in exchange for a permanent conservation easement. These development rights are sold on the private market and utilized for additional development on designated receiving sites.
- Certain development projects are “grandfathered” or “exempt”.

The Commission’s stewardship work is advanced by a set of “Councils”:

They have responsibility for:

- Protected Lands Management
- Law Enforcement
- Fire Management
- Research.



Stewardship Initiatives – Land Management:

Twelve public and conservation land owners – Federal through local - cooperate through a Protected Lands Council, addressing:

- Development of a single regional management plan
- Performing field inventories and projects
- Pooling resources (staff, mapping, equipment, training budgets, knowledge, and talents)

Stewardship Initiatives – Law Enforcement:

The Law Enforcement Council’s eighteen agencies with law enforcement, investigation, prosecution, emergency response, or enforcement support responsibilities address:

- Interagency protocols for enforcement of all applicable land use and natural resource laws.
- Interagency enforcement of laws regarding dumping, off road vehicles, poaching, arson, weapons, land use violations, and others.
- Court case tracking, information sharing, and joint training exercises.
- Joint fire service – law enforcement concerns, including arson, training, & incident response.
- Interagency equipment purchases, grant applications, civilian – military cooperation, public outreach, and citizen complaint response.

Stewardship Initiatives – Fire Management:



NY State law requires the Central Pine Barrens Plan to address “Provisions for fire management for controlled, prescribed burning, and responses to unanticipated fires.” Towards this end, the Wildfire Task Force brings together 41 public and private agencies to:

- Produce and implement a Pine Barrens Fire Management Plan
- Perform fire protection assessments
- Operate a prescribed fire program
- Run a fire weather and daily fire danger posting program, including broadcasts, web postings, roadside signs, and fax notifications.
- Run the NY Wildfire and Incident Management Academy, a National Wildfire Coordinating Group training venue

- Operate an air ground firefighting training program
- Work cooperatively on arson investigation & prevention
- Operate a public outreach program.

Investing in Stewardship – the Scientific Research Program:

- Annual Pine Barrens Research Forum held each October since 1996 provides a glimpse into the latest field research questions about the “barrens” of the U.S., cosponsored with the Brookhaven National Laboratory and SUNY at Stony Brook’s Long Island Groundwater Research Institute.
- Support for the work of the Upton Ecological and Research Reserve at Brookhaven National Laboratory
- Cooperation with the Foundation for Ecological Research in the Northeast

References & Leads:

Our two basic guiding documents are:

- The Law: “The (NY State) Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act of 1993”, codified in “New York Environmental Conservation Law Article 57”. Passed in July of 1993. Subsequently amended several times, as recently as August of 2003.
- The Regional Plan: “Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan”, June 1995. Produced at the close of a strictly defined two year planning period, starting with the July 1993 passage of the law. (Law contained a “sunset provision” that would have abolished the Commission and Act if this deadline was not met.) Amended twice since then, with a third amendment in progress.



Our basic information repository is:

- The Commission web site at: www.pb.state.ny.us
- The Act and the Plan are both available there, along with a ton – give or take – of other material.

(Updated May 2004.)