



# Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning & Policy Commission

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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## OUR MISSION

To manage land use within the Central Pine Barrens to protect vital groundwater and surface water and the region's vast and significant natural, agricultural, historical, cultural and recreational resources for current and future Long Island residents.





## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“ We have taken our first steps toward the creation of an interpretive nature center that will serve as your first and last stop in both visiting and learning about the spectacular Central Pine Barrens.”

As 2024 ends and we head into the new year, it is both an exciting time at the Central Pine Barrens Commission and a time in which we cast a wary eye toward an anticipated development that could potentially negatively impact our beloved Central Pine Barrens region if we do not all remain vigilant.

But first the good news—we have taken our first steps toward the creation of an interpretive nature center that will serve as your first and last stop in both visiting and learning about the spectacular Central Pine Barrens. In recent months, we have begun a feasibility study that will be led by a top company advised by dozens of people who know the region and all its wonders best. It's too early to get into details at this point, but suffice to say, everyone in the Central Pine Barrens community is excited by the possibilities. Check here for an update next year!

At the same time, we need to keep a close eye on the anticipated upcoming closing of the Town of Brookhaven Landfill. Though town officials are taking all the needed steps to ensure that residents are aware of the closing and making the necessary adjustments to their disposal habits, it is entirely possible—perhaps likely—that some will take the shortcut of dumping their refuse into the Central Pine Barrens. Our Compliance and Enforcement Division, in conjunction with its partners in the Law Enforcement Council, will be on high alert, but we'll need the public's vigilance as well to ensure that this region, protected by taxpayer funds, remains as clean and beautiful in the future as it has been in the past.

I know you'll do your part. Though tremendous strides have been made throughout the decades, the job of preserving and protecting the Central Pine Barrens is not over. I encourage your help and ask you to report any potential environmental incidents you see to 1-877-BARRENS.

We welcome your feedback about our work and your questions about the Central Pine Barrens. Please feel free to contact me or any member of the commission staff for us to help you better enjoy this beautiful natural wonder.

**Judith Jakobsen**

Executive Director,

Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning & Policy Commission

# NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS

## Dream of Central Pine Barrens Nature Center Takes First Step Forward with Study



The spectacular Central Pine Barrens

The dream of soon having a single location residents and visitors can visit for everything they want to know about Long Island's beautiful Central Pine Barrens came closer to reality in 2024, with the Central Pine Barrens Commission hiring a consultant to prepare a feasibility study for an interpretive nature center to be located in the heart of the region.

At the commission's direction, Marvel Architects, Landscape Architects, Urban Designers, PLLC will undertake the study with the continual input of dozens of individuals with extensive knowledge of the Central Pine Barrens. It is anticipated that the center will serve as a hub for the commission's educational programs, events and meetings as well as the workplace of the commission's staff.

"We are very excited to begin work on this study," said Central Pine Barrens Commission Executive Director Judy Jakobsen, who said she anticipated the feasibility study to take approximately a year to complete. "For all its beauty, ecological diversity and recreational

opportunities, what the Central Pine Barrens lacks is a sense of place, a single location at which visitors can orient themselves on how to best experience the largest remaining natural area on Long Island. We believe this nature center will address that need."

## New Initiatives Unveiled to Protect Central Pine Barrens



Officials announce the Evergreen Initiative

The good news: the Central Pine Barrens Commission and its partners in the Law Enforcement Council (LEC) have more tools than ever at their disposal to deter and detect environmental incidents within the Central Pine Barrens.

The bad news: the impending closure of the Town of Brookhaven Landfill and other factors threaten to challenge even the most determined officers and technologically advanced protection efforts.

And so the announcement last fall of the new Evergreen Initiative, spearheaded by Suffolk District Attorney Ray Tierney with the strong support of the LEC, was particularly welcomed. The initiative seeks to target polluters via

increased fines, investments in pollution-detecting technologies, greater cooperation between law enforcement partners and the public and the ability of those reporting environmental crimes to receive a higher percentage of fines collected from convicted polluters.

"Now more than ever, we need to use all the technology available to us and encourage the public to take a role in protecting the beautiful Central Pine Barrens region that their tax dollars helped to preserve," said Central Pine Barrens Commission Chief Enforcement Officer Alena Lawston.

## Year of Wildfires, Drought on LI Highlights Need for NYWIMA



Training at the New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy

Unusually dry weather, near-record fall temperatures and strong winds contributed to a nerve-wracking year for Long Islanders concerned about wildfires, both within and outside of the Central Pine Barrens.

As extended drought conditions stretched deep into the fall, a spate of wildfires within the Central Pine Barrens region tested fire departments from around Suffolk County. The National Weather Service issued a "red

flag” warning indicating critical fire weather conditions in late October and multiple more in the following weeks. Brush fires—including several in Riverhead, Baiting Hollow and Calverton—required multiple local fire departments to contain.

The heightened attention on wildfire risk served as a daily reminder of the importance of the New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA), which is run by the Central Pine Barrens Commission and partnering agencies to provide essential training to wildland firefighters, local volunteer firefighters and other first responders.

“Now more than ever, we can see just how vital NYWIMA is to wildland fire preparedness here on Long Island but also beyond,” said Central Pine Barrens Commission Executive Director Judy Jakobsen. “In 2024, a number of NYWIMA instructors and graduates played key roles in containing the numerous wildfires locally and across the tri-state area. We are extremely proud to provide this important service.”

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## Comprehensive Plan Amendments Guiding Land Use Take Effect



New amendments will protect the ecological resources of the Central Pine Barrens

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A comprehensive process to update the Comprehensive Land Use Plan that guides land use in the Central Pine Barrens concluded in 2024 when a series of key amendments to the plan went into effect last July.

The amendments—which improve aspects of the plan pertaining to groundwater protection, the Pine Barrens Credit Program, mixed use developments, vegetation clearing limits and open space standards—are already helping the Central Pine Barrens Commission advance its goal of encouraging appropriate

development in the region while protecting its vast ecological resources.

“The Comprehensive Land Use Plan, with these amendments, has been fine tuned to address present day challenges that will make the plan more effective than ever in ensuring that development and open space are balanced to protect the region’s special environmental and cultural resources,” said Central Pine Barrens Commission Pine Barrens Manager Julie Hargrave.

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## Growth, Better Data and a New Junior Workbook: Big Year for “A Day in the Life” Program



Students conduct tests at the Nissequogue River

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It was a big year for the “A Day in the Life” of a local river or estuary program, created more than a decade ago by the Central Pine Barrens Commission, Brookhaven National Laboratory and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to foster student interest in Long Island’s aquatic life and environment.

In 2024, the program kicked off an improved data collection system which will make it easier for schools to collaborate on projects. Additionally, the program added new schools and locations, bringing school participation levels back to pre-COVID numbers, and created a junior workbook that will allow elementary school-age students to participate in the program as meaningfully as their high school peers.

“The program has been a great success since its beginning, but we are still looking every year for aspects we can improve,” said Central Pine Barrens Commission Educational Outreach and Communications Coordinator Tim Motz. “Doing so, we feel, will better help us to achieve our primary goal—to connect students to their local environment and, hopefully, spur an interest to help protect it.”

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## Wildfire Task Force Works to Keep FDs, Agencies Informed



Ted Kern, Chairman

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The Central Pine Barrens Commission’s Wildfire Task Force under the leadership of Chairman Ted Kern and Co-Vice Chairs Baycon Fideli and Captain Tim Byrnes met during the year to inform local fire departments about planned prescribed fires for the season, upcoming training opportunities through NYWIMA and topical information related to fire operations and water availability, seasonal fire weather outlook, southern pine beetle thinning and hazard tree management in the woods that may impact fire department access.

The Wildfire Task Force was created by the Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission following the 1995 wildfires and consists of representatives from 41 agencies—including 16 fire departments—that have land management, firefighting or emergency services responsibilities within the Central Pine Barrens.

# Educational Outreach and Communications Division

## Teaching an Appreciation of our Local Environment

The Educational Outreach and Communications Division creates, organizes and leads a wide range of programs and events geared toward helping children and the general public gain a lasting appreciation for the Central Pine Barrens region and how to best protect it for current and future residents and visitors to the region.

### In 2024, the division:

- Coordinated “A Day in the Life” of a local river or estuary events with schools from all over Long Island to afford students the opportunity to measure physical data of waterways, conduct biological sampling, conduct chemical analyses and document their findings
- Expanded “A Day in the Life” program to two new school districts
- Developed “A Day in the Life Jr.” workbook to provide elementary-age students the same opportunities to flourish in the program as their high school-aged peers
- Improved “A Day in the Life” data collection process to make it more efficient and information easier to share between school districts to foster project collaborations
- Led, managed budget for, and ran the Barrens to Bay Summer Camp held at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge
- Reorganized counselor responsibilities at Barrens to Bay Summer Camp to ensure accountability and to have counselors responsible for activities that better suit their skills and interests
- Developed numerous new activities at Barrens to Bay Summer Camp to make camp both more educational and more engaging for campers
- Produced and directed video celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Central Pine Barrens Commission’s Law Enforcement Council
- Created and oversaw implementation of comprehensive blueprint for the commission’s social media efforts that developed a more efficient system of password/username access, established division-by-division protocols for social media content creation and created a multi-month schedule of posts to ensure the commission has a constant presence on social media covering all aspects of our work
- Facilitated media requests pertaining to the commission and the New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy
- Coordinated, edited and designed commission’s 2024 Annual Report
- Presented for civic organizations concerning 2024’s “A Day in the Life” program at Carmans River





Students seeking marine life on the Nissequogue River



There were a number of interesting finds at the Massapequa Preserve



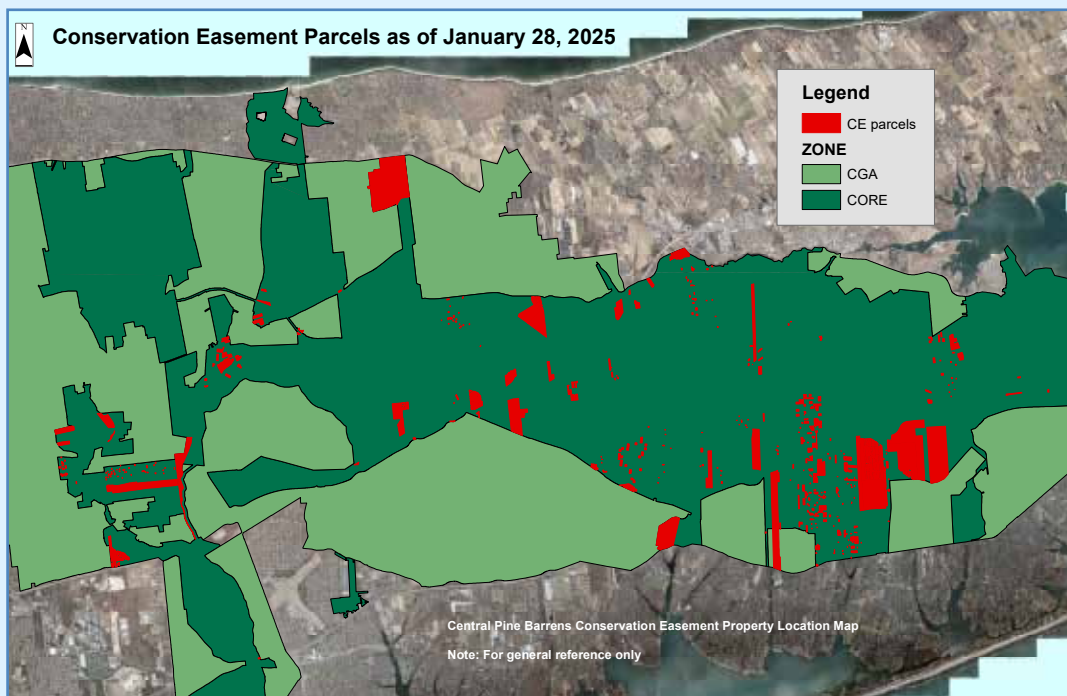
A camper and his clay shark at Barrens to Bay Summer Camp



# Pine Barrens Credit Clearinghouse

## Protecting the Core Preservation Area

The Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act specified the need for land use protection mechanisms to protect the Core Preservation Area, including the transfer of development rights that began when the 1995 Comprehensive Land Use Plan was completed and the Pine Barrens Credit Program was created. This program facilitates the transfer of development rights so the most environmentally sensitive lands in the region are preserved, with the property owner securing development rights for use in other locations.



The Comprehensive Land Use Plan created a five-member Clearinghouse Board of Advisors to oversee the implementation of the credit program.

Owners and purchasers of credits transact business in an open market, with all credits and transactions tracked by the clearinghouse from beginning to end.

Upon receiving a list of the “Best of the Rest” properties in the Central Pine Barrens from the Pine Barrens Society, the Clearinghouse in 2024 sent solicitation letters to landowners in the Core Preservation Area. As a result, 14 new Letters of Interpretation and 11 renewals were generated, and three conservation easements are in progress.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE  
CREDIT PROGRAM IN 2024 INCLUDE:**

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**44**

**LETTERS OF INTERPRETATION WERE ISSUED  
FOR POTENTIAL CREDIT ALLOCATIONS**

**15**

**RECORDED CONSERVATION EASEMENTS  
AND GENERATED 2.82 CREDITS**

**6.39**

**REDEEMED 6.39 CREDITS**

**13.3**

**CONVEYED CREDITS, WITH AN AVERAGE  
PRICE OF \$107,902 PER CREDIT**

**68**

**INSPECTED EASEMENT PROPERTIES**

# Land Use and Planning Division

## Providing Thorough Review of all Development Proposals

The Land Use and Planning Division diligently reviews development proposals and applications under the Central Pine Barrens Commission's regulatory jurisdiction pursuant to New York State Environmental Conservation Law Article 57 and the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

### In 2024, the division:

- Successfully implemented the Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan amendments that went into effect in July and seek to preserve the Compatible Growth Area as a buffer to the Core Preservation Area in character and natural resources
- Participated in the selection of a contractor for the commission's feasibility study to create a Central Pine Barrens interpretive nature center
- Reviewed and analyzed four hardship waiver applications including a 50-acre solar facility in a sand mine, a new MTA Long Island Rail Road train station in Yaphank, a restaurant and a community-scale sewage treatment plant
- Reviewed and prepared comments on approximately 50 project referrals, inquiries, applications and determination requests for the commission's review and consideration pursuant to the definitions in NYS ECL Article 57 and conformance with the land use plan
- Evaluated applications for development projects including more than six acres of rooftop solar power and other commercial, industrial, agricultural and residential activities
- Performed inspections to monitor project sites for conformance with decisions
- Coordinated with other divisions including compliance and enforcement staff on clearing and land use incidents and violations
- Assisted with Freedom of Information Act requests
- Managed the commission/USGS contract to study water resources, including water quality and quantity, in the Peconic River and Carmans River



# Compliance and Enforcement Division

## Utilizing Modern Tools to Protect the Environment

The Compliance and Enforcement Division coordinates enforcement matters pertaining to Article 57 of New York State Conservation Law, the Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act. With numerous federal, state and local jurisdictions having oversight responsibilities within the region, the division's role is essential in protecting the ecological resources of the Central Pine Barrens.

### In 2024, the division:

- Documented 182 new investigations and incidents involving dumping, encroachments and illegal all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, a substantial rise from the 127 incidents documented in 2023
- Investigated 155 solid waste complaints resulting in tens of thousands of dollars in fines levied
- Monitored footage from 18 surveillance cameras at more than a dozen locations throughout the Central Pine Barrens
- Continued to advance in unmanned aircraft system (UAS) training of commission staff
- Attended UAS classroom training at the New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA)
- Piloted UAS drones to monitor conditions and activities within the Central Pine Barrens, helping to make such aircraft an essential tool in protecting the region
- Investigated clearing complaints within the Central Pine Barrens
- Interfaced regularly with members of the Law Enforcement Council, code enforcement officials, town attorneys and other officials to deter encroachment and other illegal activities within the Central Pine Barrens
- Coordinated with Land Use Division, Pine Barrens Credit Program and other agencies on monitoring development projects and conservation easement properties
- Supported details to curb the illegal use of ATVs and other off-road vehicles conducted by the Law Enforcement Council, leading to the impound of 83 ATVs, 59 additional off-road vehicles and the issuance of 442 summonses

Photos to right >  
Enforcement Officer Edwin Ward  
and Chief Enforcement Officer  
Alena Lawston are constantly on  
the lookout for illegal dumping in  
the Central Pine Barrens



# Science and Stewardship Division

## Enhancing Public Awareness of the Region's Ecology

The Science and Stewardship Division conducts a wide variety of activities designed to improve forest health, increase diversity of Central Pine Barrens species and enhance the public's awareness of the region's ecology, especially as it relates to ecological restoration and prescribed fire.

### In 2024, the division:

- Was awarded a USDA Forest Service Grant for \$185,000 under the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program that will enable the commission to create a community wildfire protection plan for 29,370 publicly-owned acres in the Town of Southampton
- Put into operation the commission's Type 6 fire engine which, when combined with two Type 7 fire engines, continue to make prescribed fire operations within the Central Pine Barrens safer and more efficient
- Finalized prescribed fire burn plans for the Otis Pike/Upton Reserve Burn Unit and the Dwarf Pine Barrens Prescribed Fire Enhancement Zone
- Updated all prescribed fire plans to account for and mitigate against any potential for harm to the northern long-eared bat during prescribed fire operations
- Focused prescribed fire operations on reducing fuel loads in mechanically treated areas within the David A. Sarnoff Preserve and the Rocky Point Pine Barrens State Forest, including burning approximately 300 piles of slash, which reduces the potential for a severe wildfire which could damage property and endanger lives
- Managed more than 335 acres of grassland, and woodland burns using prescribed fire techniques to maintain and promote the health of the Central Pine Barrens forests
- Participated in the Long Island Mammal Survey at various locations throughout the Central Pine Barrens to document presence and extent of species such as deer, raccoon, opossum, river otter and fox, as well as many species of birds
- Conducted vegetative monitoring of the David A. Sarnoff Preserve prior to mechanical thinning of more than 200 acres of woodland
- Utilized various remote sensing detection methods to monitor the southern pine beetle, with outbreak suppression tactics halted due to new protection policies for the northern long-eared bat, a state and federally-listed endangered species
- Focused management of for southern pine beetle on forest thinning and prescribed fire methods to increase forest resiliency against beetle activity before an infestation can begin
- Assisted the US Forest Service in an early detection lure study of the southern pine beetle in the Ridge Conservation Area, Manorville Hills County Park and Warbler Woods to assist managers in identifying the presence of southern pine beetle before an infestation can begin
- Actively managed invasive plant species including caper spurge, Japanese stiltgrass, glossy buckthorn and small carpet grass to reduce the amount of invasive vegetation, mitigate the reproductive capabilities of the invasive species and promote recolonization of the impacted areas by native vegetation thereby improving the overall health of the Central Pine Barrens





Managed more than

335

acres using  
prescribed fire  
techniques to  
maintain and  
promote the health  
of Central Pine  
Barrens forests

# New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy

## Providing Essential Training in Wildfire Management

The New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA) has for more than two decades provided essential training in wildfire and incident management to thousands of firefighters and emergency response personnel from all over the country and beyond.

### In 2024, NYWIMA:

- Taught 231 students representing 16 states and 48 different agencies from all levels of government in 15 different classes
- Held academies in October at Brookhaven National Laboratory and in December at Suffolk County Fire Academy
- Trained all students to National Wildfire Coordinating Group and National Incident Management System standards
- Provided a free introductory course on wildland fire training to firefighters from 16 Nassau and Suffolk County departments

### The academy in 2024 featured training in classes including:

- Intermediate Incident Command System
- Advanced Incident Command System
- Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior
- Firefighter Type 1
- Wildfire Chainsaws
- Firing Operations
- Crew Boss
- Engine Boss
- Unmanned Aircraft Systems FAA Prep Course

Photos to right >  
More than 200 students were trained in all aspects of wildfire and incident management at NYWIMA in 2024



“The course was fantastic; the instructors did a phenomenal job of relaying information in a comprehensive manor. I will be highly recommending this course to my staff and anyone else moving forward.”

—2024 NYWIMA student



# Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning & Policy Commission



**Robert T. Calarco**  
Chairman and New York State Governor's Representative



**Timothy C. Hubbard**  
Member and Riverhead Town Supervisor  
*Designated Representative:* Matthew Charters



**Maria Z. Moore**  
Member and Southampton Town Supervisor  
*Designated Representatives:* Janice Scherer, Martin Shea, David Wilcox



**Daniel J. Panico**  
Member and Brookhaven Town Supervisor  
*Designated representative:* Michelle DiBrita



**Edward P. Romaine**  
Member and County Executive  
*Designated Representatives:* Sarah Lansdale, Jennifer Juengst



## COMMISSION STAFF

**Judy Jakobsen**

*Executive Director*

**Julie Hargrave**

*Pine Barrens Manager*

**Angela Brown-Walton**

*Administrative Assistant*

**Catherine Drew**

*Administrative Assistant*

**Alena Lawston**

*Chief Enforcement Officer*

**John Milazzo**

*Legal Counsel*

**Tim Motz**

*Educational Outreach and Communications Coordinator*

**Tara Murphy**

*Environmental Planner*

**Robert Panko**

*Fire Management Specialist*

**Jason Smith**

*Science and Stewardship Manager*

**Jerry Tverdy**

*Senior Environmental Analyst*

**Edwin Ward**

*Enforcement Officer*

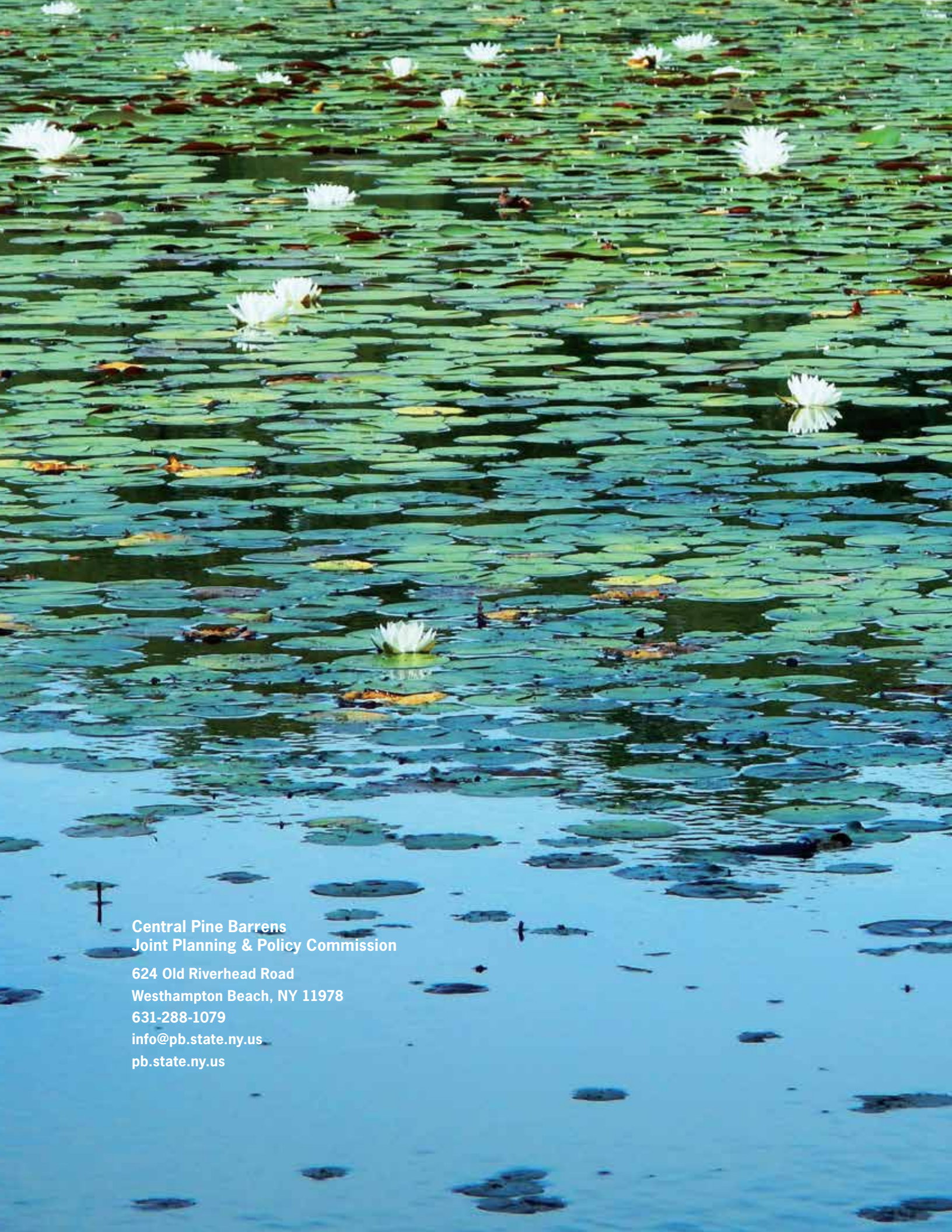


# Commission Staff



**The staff of the Central Pine Barrens Commission:**

From left: Catherine Drew, Alena Lawston, Emmanuel Jaquez (intern), Judy Jakobsen, Jason Smith, Tim Motz, Edwin Ward, Angela Brown-Walton, Jerry Tverdyy, Julie Hargrave and Tara Murphy. (Not pictured are John Milazzo and Robert Panko.)



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