

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

CENTRAL PINE BARRENS JOINT PLANNING & POLICY COMMISSION

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.**



Cover photo: A black tupelo tree in Quogue

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White water-lily



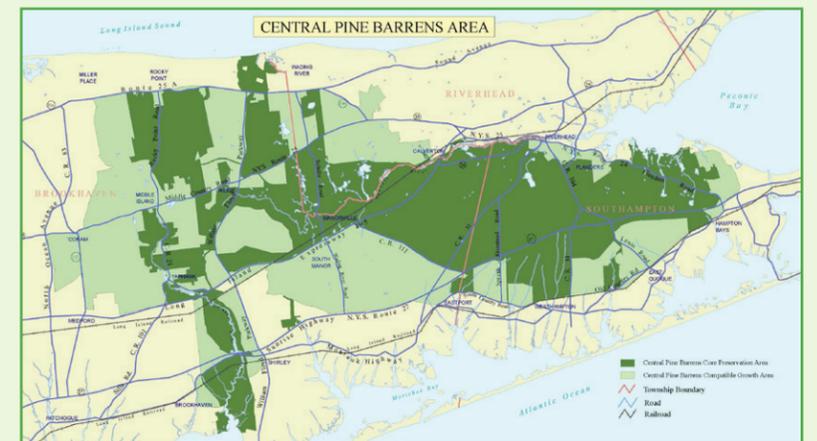
A hungry chipmunk

ABOUT THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS

NEW YORK STATE'S CENTRAL PINE BARRENS REGION, A GLOBALLY RARE ECOSYSTEM, WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1993 WHEN THEN-GOVERNOR MARIO CUOMO SIGNED INTO LAW THE LONG ISLAND PINE BARRENS PROTECTION ACT, WHICH SET NUMEROUS AMBITIOUS GOALS SEEKING TO PROTECT THE VAST GROUNDWATER RESOURCES DIRECTLY BENEATH THE REGION'S LAND SURFACE AND PRESERVE ITS SIGNIFICANT AND DIVERSE ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES.

In order to facilitate these goals, the act created a five-member Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning & Policy Commission with members representing the state as well as Suffolk County and the towns of Brookhaven, Riverhead and Southampton, all of which contain portions of the Central Pine Barrens. The act also created and mandated the implementation by the commission of the Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which for 32 years has guided the management of land use in the region.

The day-to-day operations of the commission are carried out by a staff of dedicated professionals, who have guided land management in the 106,000-acre region and ensure that its amenities are enjoyed by residents and visitors to the area alike.



MESSAGE

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



BY ANY MEASURE, 2025 WAS A FASCINATING YEAR FOR THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS COMMISSION AND LONG ISLAND'S CENTRAL PINE BARRENS REGION.

The first major development kicked off early in the year, as a dedicated group of individuals who know and love the Central Pine Barrens rolled up their sleeves to work earnestly on the development of a feasibility study covering every aspect of a potential Central Pine Barrens Nature Center. All year long, with input from the public via community meetings, the group outlined a series of guidelines for the center pertaining to its location, amenities, exhibits and programs. I hope you'll read the full story on the group's incredible work in the "News from the Central Pine Barrens" section of this report. If you do, I think you'll be as excited as we are about the possibilities of the creation of such a center to serve as a central location where visitors can learn how to best experience all the treasures of Long Island's largest remaining natural area.

The other major news of the year in the region occurred not long after work on the feasibility study kicked off, and that was the spate of brush fires that burned hundreds of acres of Central Pine Barrens trees in early March in the Westhampton area, right near the commission's office. The fires, which spread quickly due to strong air currents and a prolonged period of dry conditions in the area, led to a widespread burn ban issued by Governor Kathy Hochul. It was precisely the kind of situation that three decades ago spurred the commission's involvement in various measures

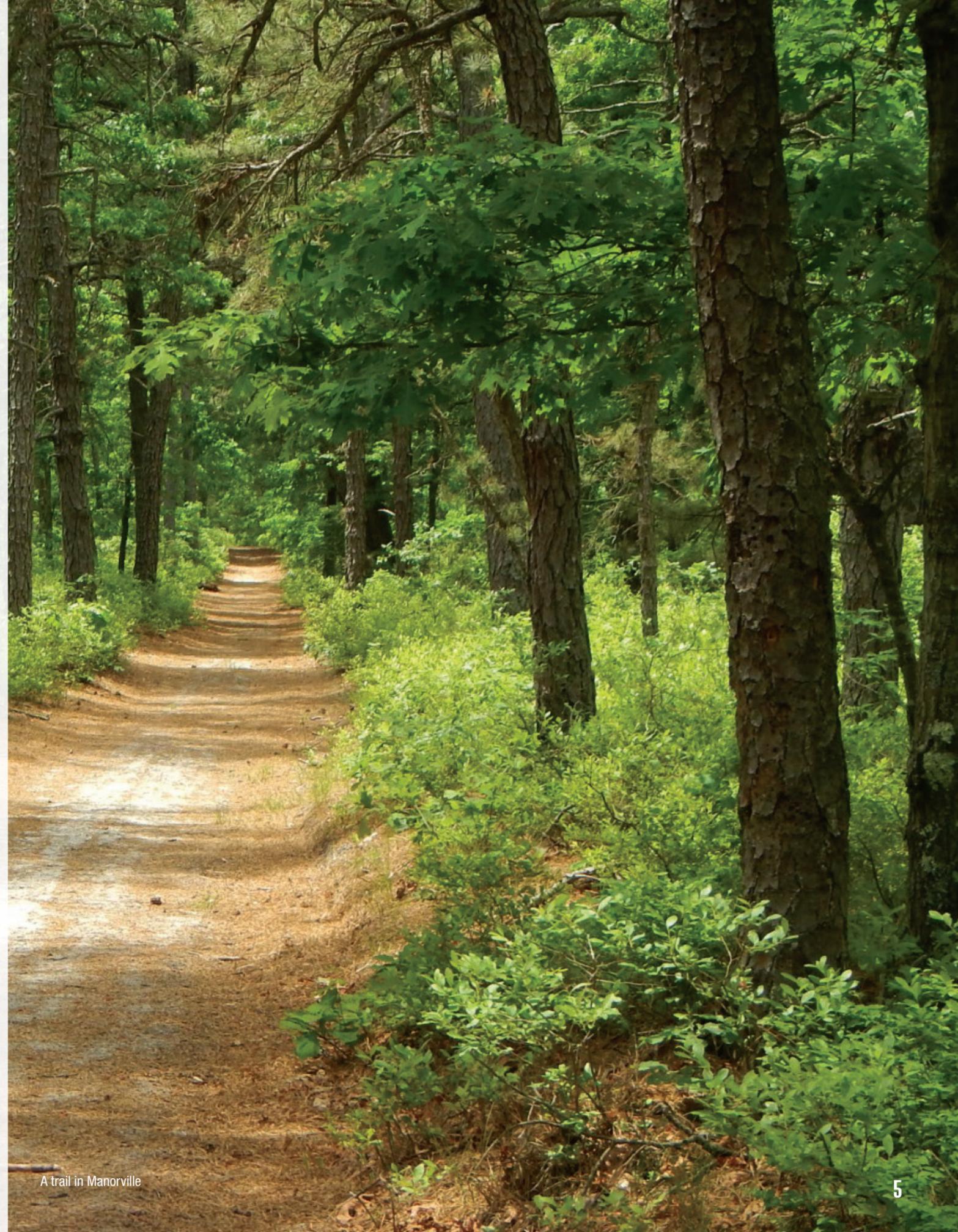
to mitigate potential damage caused by wildfire in the Central Pine Barrens region, including most recently our effort to establish a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for western Southampton Town.

There were of course many more important and exciting developments in the region in 2025, and I hope you'll read all about them in the following pages.

We welcome your feedback about our work and your questions about the Central Pine Barrens and the Central Pine Barrens Commission. By the time you read this, I will have retired from my 33-year career at the commission. It was an honor to work with everyone at the commission. Please feel free to contact our office if we can help you find ways to better enjoy this one-of-a-kind ecosystem.

JUDITH JAKOBSEN

Executive Director,
Central Pine Barrens
Joint Planning & Policy Commission



A trail in Manorville

NEWS FROM THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS

VISION OF CENTRAL PINE BARRENS NATURE CENTER TAKES FIRST STEP TOWARD BECOMING A REALITY

Feasibility Study of Potential Facility Is Now Complete

The Central Pine Barrens Commission in late 2025 completed a feasibility study conducted by a consultant and team of Central Pine Barrens experts outlining the potential location and amenities of a Central Pine Barrens Nature Center that would be open to the public.

Though early in the process, the study, authorized by the commission a year ago, provides a roadmap for the creation of such a center, which would be located within the Central Pine Barrens and give the public a single, dynamic location to learn about the globally rare region and its vast and diverse ecological resources. It is anticipated the center would also host the commission's educational programs, events and meetings, as well as serve as the workplace of the commission's staff.

"For all its beauty, tremendous diversity of animal and plant species and recreational opportunities, the Central Pine Barrens has always lacked a single location where visitors can best orient themselves on how to best experience Long Island's largest remaining natural area," said the commission's Executive Director Judith Jakobsen. "It is my sincerest hope that all who care about this spectacular region will join together to build on this great first step and create this nature center."

The study was developed by Marvel and DBI Projects in conjunction with a center planning team of local leaders with knowledge of the Central



A rendering of a proposed Central Pine Barrens Nature Center

Pine Barrens and provides a detailed framework of what such a center may offer and where it may be located, though many details are still to be determined. The study also charts the potential way forward to fund the creation and maintenance of the center.

The center planning team, led by Marvel and DBI, conducted public meetings to solicit input on what amenities and exhibitions an ideal nature center would feature, and this public input was incorporated into the final study. The planning team also studied more than a dozen potential locations for the center within the Central Pine Barrens before recommending a site in Ridge. The site, located in the region's Compatible Growth Area, received a 92% site score and, according to the study, is located near the region's Core Preservation Area and "is easily accessible and highly visible from a well-traveled road." It is also near schools, libraries and Brookhaven National Laboratory, far from other nature centers, and "undisturbed, uncontaminated and ideal for re-wilding efforts."

Using information gathered from site studies of other regional nature centers, as well as input from center planning team members and the general public about what they'd like to see at such a center, the study outlines a series of design principles for the center including minimizing site

impact; preserving existing ecologies; connecting directly to nature trails; developing a compact and flexible center design with views of the surrounding Central Pine Barrens landscape; and creating a memorable and immersive arrival to the center.

The consultants and center planning team envisioned an approximately 22,000-square-foot center featuring community spaces, exhibition spaces and commission offices, all designed to minimize physical and visual impact, preserve the natural character of the Central Pine Barrens and ensure the building fits well in its surrounding environment. Under the tentative plan outlined in the study, a first level of 7,000 square feet would contain commission staff offices, a mezzanine level of 6,000 square feet would feature exhibition space and an 8,000 square-foot area above the mezzanine would feature community space, with features such as a roof terrace/garden, a multi-purpose room, a lab/craft room and a room for rotating exhibits.

The center, as imagined, would prioritize sustainability and energy efficiency, and would be designed with fire safety in mind—to serve as a model of how Central Pine Barrens residents in a fire-dependent ecosystem can protect their own homes.

Attention in 2026 turns to taking the first steps toward funding the project. The first steps toward that goal are underway.



Burned pitch pines in Westhampton have sprung new life

BRUSH FIRES LAST WINTER IN CENTRAL PINE BARRENS SHOW NEED FOR STRONG PREPARATORY MEASURES

It Was a Busy Late Winter for Fire in the Westhampton Area

Multiple brush fires in early March fed by an unusually dry winter and strong air currents burned hundreds of acres of land in the Central Pine Barrens in the Westhampton area, quite close to the Central Pine Barrens Commission's offices on Old Riverhead Road.

Brush fires are common in the Central Pine Barrens, and the region's ecosystem depends on fire to flourish. But the presence of such fires in proximity to inhabited communities presents challenges for local public safety agencies, and that is why the Central Pine Barrens Commission has for decades participated in and led a wide variety of programs designed to understand wildfire, educate the public about ways to protect their homes and train personnel in every aspect of wildfire management.

"One such effort, the Southampton Community Wildfire Protection Plan, is currently underway," said Jason Smith, the commission's Science and Stewardship Manager. "Once complete, the protection plan will provide residents, business owners, emergency responders and elected officials with a wealth of information about how to mitigate wildfire impacts to local neighborhoods and infrastructure. When combined with wildland firefighting awareness and training through organizations like NYWIMA and the Wildfire Task Force, as well as fuel reduction and mitigation efforts done through prescribed fire management, our communities will be better protected against the next wildfire."

NEED AN ADITL TUTORIAL? JUST CLICK HERE!

New Instructional Videos Provide Teachers an Easy Way to Hone their Skills

The "A Day in the Life" of a local river program over the past 15 years has taught tens of thousands of local students about the importance and properties of waterways right in their backyards, and now teachers have a much easier way to learn to teach the program—a series of videos covering every aspect of the "A Day in the Life" workbook.

The "A Day in the Life," or ADITL, program is managed collaboratively by the Central Pine Barrens Commission, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Brookhaven National Laboratory. Over the course of seven consecutive Fridays every fall, students set up at 13 different locations from Western Nassau to the East End of Suffolk to conduct biological surveys and chemical analyses, chart the physical data of their site and document their findings. Their data is saved and often used as part of their school curriculum.

"There's no substitute for in-person training, and we will continue to hold those regularly and encourage teachers to attend," said Tim Motz, the commission's Educational Outreach and Communications Manager. "But we're very pleased to be able to give our dedicated teachers an additional tool at their disposal to learn or refresh their skills. And one huge advantage of the videos over in-person trainings is that teachers can view the videos over and over until they master every aspect of the program."



Ryleigh Scales of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation demonstrates proper soil corer technique

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION



Westhampton Beach High School students seine the Peconic River at Indian Island County Park

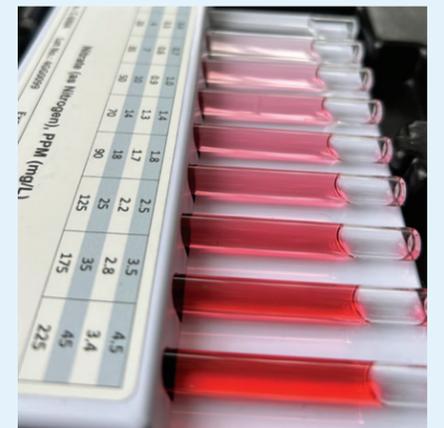
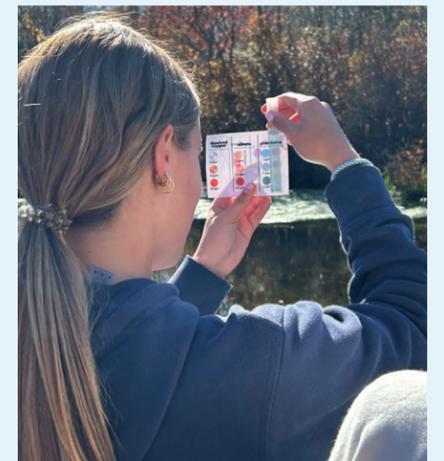


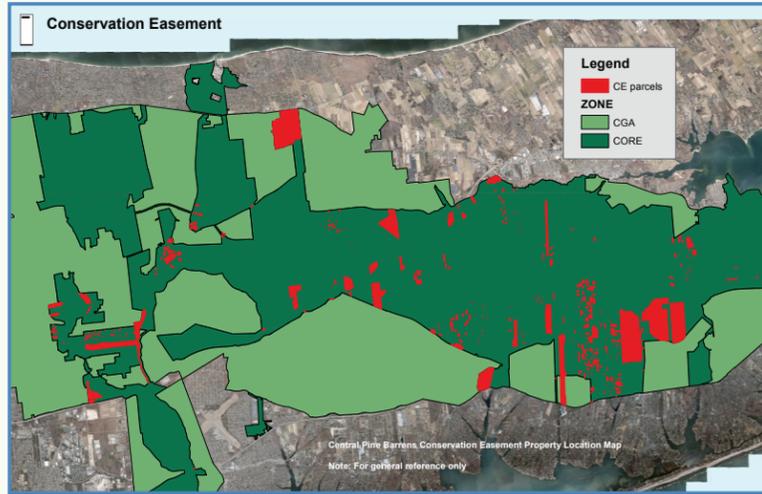
ENCOURAGING OUR YOUTH TO APPRECIATE THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS

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 2025, THE DIVISION:

- Wrote, directed and produced a general introduction to the “A Day in the Life” of a local river program and a brochure to be used to promote the program
- Wrote, directed and produced five instructional videos designed to teach every aspect of the “A Day in the Life” workbook
- Coordinated “A Day in the Life” 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 one new school district
- 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
- Reached agreement with state, county and federal agencies to waive fees and eliminate need for permits for schools participating in the “A Day in the Life” program
- Led, managed budget for, developed program for and ran the Barrens to Bay Summer Camp held at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge
- Overhauled the pay system for the Barrens to Bay Summer Camp to make the system more equitable for counselors
- 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 that has been widely viewed chronicling the fascinating phenomenon of vernal pools
- Assisted in various ways with the creation of a feasibility study concerning the creation of a potential Central Pine Barrens Nature Center
- Facilitated media requests pertaining to the commission and the New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy
- Managed the commission’s social media output
- Prepared a draft report aimed at reimagining Pine Barrens Discovery Day with an eye toward relaunching the popular event in the fall of 2026
- Coordinated, edited and designed commission’s 2025 Annual Report
- Presented for civic organizations concerning 2025’s “A Day in the Life” program at Carmans River





BALANCING DEVELOPMENT AND PRESERVATION

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 ENHANCED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS AT 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.

To date, approximately 2,240 acres in the Core Preservation Area have been protected in conservation easements through the credit program.

PINE BARRENS CREDIT CLEARINGHOUSE

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CREDIT PROGRAM IN 2025 INCLUDE:

380

LETTERS SENT TO CORE LAND OWNERS SOLICITING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM

27

LETTERS OF INTERPRETATION ISSUED

2.81

CREDITS REDEEMED

3.32

CREDITS CONVEYED, WITH AN AVERAGE PRICE OF \$111,895 PER CREDIT

LAND USE AND PLANNING DIVISION



Swamp candles

CONDUCTING DILIGENT REVIEW OF ALL APPLICATIONS

THE LAND USE AND PLANNING DIVISION WORKS TO MAINTAIN THE PRESERVATION AND CHARACTER OF CENTRAL PINE BARRENS WATER AND ECOSYSTEM RESOURCES WHILE ACCOMMODATING COMPACT, EFFICIENT AND ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT.

IN 2025, THE DIVISION:

- Reviewed and analyzed eight hardship waiver applications, including a 150-foot tall cell tower, a community scale wastewater treatment facility and development of an agricultural use
- Reviewed and prepared comments on approximately 65 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 Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- Evaluated applications for development projects including multi-family housing, residential uses and commercial activities
- Performed inspections to monitor project sites for conformance with decisions
- Coordinated with other divisions, including Compliance and Enforcement division 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, both located in the Central Pine Barrens



PROTECTING THE ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES OF THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS

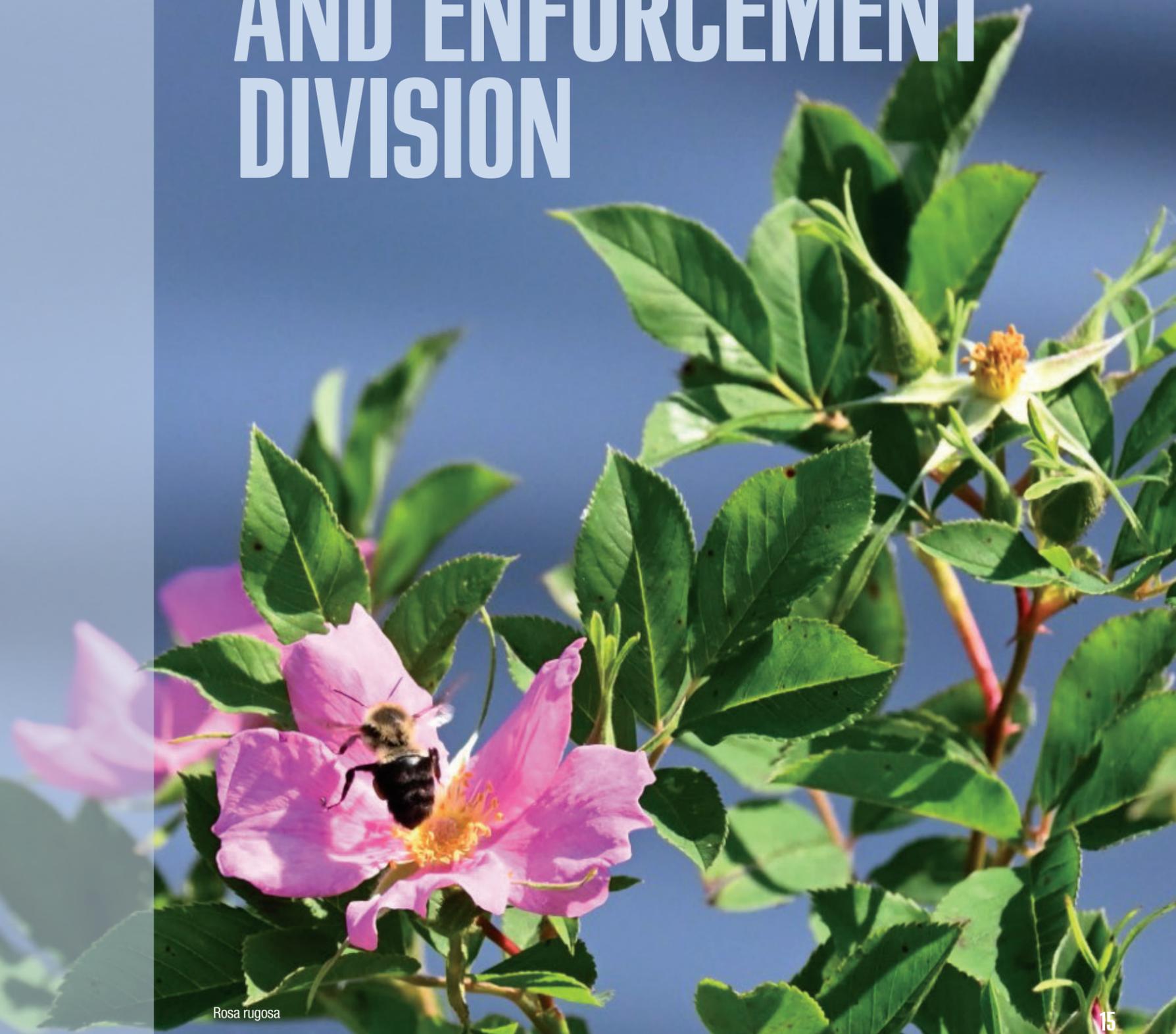
THE COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT DIVISION COORDINATES ENFORCEMENT MATTERS PERTAINING TO ARTICLE 57 OF NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATION LAW, THE LONG ISLAND PINE BARRENS PROTECTION ACT. WITH NUMEROUS FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL JURISDICTIONS HAVING OVERSIGHT RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE REGION, THE DIVISION'S ROLE IS ESSENTIAL IN PROTECTING THE ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES OF THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS.



IN 2025, THE DIVISION:

- Documented 290 new investigations and incidents involving dumping, clearing and encroachments, a substantial increase from the 182 investigations and incidents in 2024
- Investigated 249 solid waste complaints resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines levied
- Maintained and monitored 22 surveillance cameras at more than a dozen locations throughout the Central Pine Barrens
- Investigated clearing and encroachment complaints within the Central Pine Barrens
- Interfaced regularly with members of the Law Enforcement Council (LEC), code enforcement officials, town attorneys and other officials to deter encroachment and other illegal activities within the Central Pine Barrens
- Coordinated with the Land Use and Planning Division, Pine Barrens Credit Clearinghouse 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 LEC, leading to the impound of 72 ATVs and 25 additional off-road vehicles as well as the issuance of 240 ATV-related summonses and 13 summonses concerning other off-road vehicles
- Identified, in conjunction with LEC partners, the party responsible for discarding 24 tons of concrete in the Central Pine Barrens, leading to charges against the party and fines totaling \$150,000

COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT DIVISION



Rosa rugosa



SCIENCE AND STEWARDSHIP DIVISION



Yellow-rumped warbler

IMPROVING FOREST HEALTH

THE SCIENCE AND STEWARDSHIP DIVISION CONDUCTS A WIDE VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH, INCREASE DIVERSITY OF CENTRAL PINE BARRENS-DEPENDENT SPECIES AND ENHANCE THE PUBLIC'S AWARENESS OF THE REGION'S ECOLOGY, ESPECIALLY AS IT RELATES TO ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION AND PRESCRIBED FIRE.

IN 2025, THE DIVISION:

- Participated in seventeen prescribed fires during the 2025 spring fire season, successfully managing more than 300 acres of Central Pine Barrens grassland and 13 acres of woodland
- Performed mop-up duties with local partners during the Westhampton Pines wildfire of March to ensure the fire had been completely extinguished and no longer posed a threat to local communities
- Initiated draft of a conservation management plan for the Central Pine Barrens that will ultimately serve as a holistic approach to conservation of the Central Pine Barrens focusing on forest health, habitat fragmentation, and biodiversity
- Provided significant input into the commission's Nature Center Feasibility Study to help guide and inform planning efforts including assisting in public meetings, describing ecological impacts and mitigation strategies, brainstorming layout and design features and generating ideas for permanent and temporary exhibitions for the future Pine Barrens Nature Center
- Partnered with SUNY ESF to begin early research into Air Curtain Burner (ACB) technology, a tool that can assist in fuel reduction operations in the Central Pine Barrens and potentially serve as a safer option to traditional pile burning by containing the fire more securely and producing less greenhouse gases and particulate emissions during operation
- Held or participated in several public information sessions on the southern pine beetle and its impact on the Central Pine Barrens, including a symposium organized by Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine and an expert panel discussion hosted by LTV
- Began planning for the use of advanced remote sensing technologies to survey for forest health variables, aid in wildlife crossing placement and design and document floral and faunal biodiversity in the Central Pine Barrens
- Commenced the two-year study of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Southampton Town to provide essential safety and incident response strategies for residents in the event of a wildfire



IN 2025, NYWIMA:

- Operated three academies over the course of the year, additionally providing specific group or agency training outside the academy timeframe
- Trained all students to National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and National Incident Management System standards
- Featured certified instructors from local, state and federal agencies and various organizations

The academy features 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
- Portable Pumps and Water Use
- Prescribed Fire Burn Boss
- Wildfire Fire Origin & Cause Behavior
- Heavy Equipment Boss
- Anticipating Wildland Fire Behavior
- Planning for Disaster Debris Management

Courses emphasized both classroom learning and field-based exercises, ensuring participants gain practical, hands-on experience aligned with NWCG standards.

278

STUDENTS REPRESENTING 22 STATES AND 100 DIFFERENT AGENCIES FROM ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT



TRAINING THE HEROES OF TOMORROW

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.

NEW YORK WILDFIRE AND INCIDENT MANAGEMENT ACADEMY



RYAN P. MCGARRY
Chairman and New York State
Governor's Representative and
NYSDEC Region 1 Assistant
Regional Director



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:
Jennifer Juengst
Sarah Lansdale



CENTRAL PINE BARRENS JOINT PLANNING & POLICY COMMISSION



THE STAFF OF THE CENTRAL PINE BARRENS COMMISSION

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

COMMISSION STAFF

JUDY JAKOBSEN
Executive Director

JULIE HARGRAVE
Pine Barrens Manager

ANGELA BROWN-WALTON
Administrative Assistant

JOHN CALLAGY III
Enforcement Officer

CATHERINE DREW
Administrative Assistant

EMMANUEL JAQUEZ
*Educational Outreach and
Communications Assistant*

ALENA LAWSTON
Chief Enforcement Officer

JOHN MILAZZO
Legal Counsel

TIM MOTZ
*Educational Outreach and
Communications Manager*

TARA MURPHY
Environmental Planner

JASON SMITH
Science and Stewardship Manager

JERRY TVERDY
Senior Environmental Analyst

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Enforcement Officer



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Joint Planning & Policy Commission**

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