



MEMORANDUM

To: Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission (CPBJPPC)

From: Hannah Emouna, Senior Environmental Scientist & Project Manager
Nelson, Pope & Voorhis, LLC (NPV)

Date: November 6, 2024

NPV No: 05105

Re: Request for Authorization to Remove SPB-Damaged Trees and Branches to Reduce Fire Risk at the Lewis Road PRD Site

The Lewis Road Planned Residential Development (Lewis Road PRD) site, located to the east of Lewis Road between the LIRR and NYS Route 27, in the hamlet of East Quogue, Town of Southampton, continues to experience an increase in the number of dead and dying pitch pine throughout the site due to an ongoing infestation of the Southern pine beetle (SPB). Refer to **Figure 1** attached for a map of the SPB impacted areas, which have been classified as “Principal Areas of Concern.” It is noted that these areas are within Conservation Management areas that were established as part of the approved development of the site.

On October 27, 2024, a fire was ignited by an unknown source around Hole #3 of the golf course on the Lewis Road PRD site. Despite the best efforts of the East Quogue Fire Department (EQFD), the fire continued to smolder into the following morning. See **Attachment A** for a summary of the incident prepared by property ownership. Following the fire, the EQFD expressed serious concerns regarding the elevated risk of wildfire ignition at the Lewis Road PRD site (see **Attachment B**). This high-risk state is due to the significant volume of dead and downed vegetation, which is a result of the intense SPB infestations coupled with wind damage and extreme drought conditions throughout Long Island this Fall.

SPB outbreaks have devastated sections of the site’s pitch pine forest, leaving large amounts of dry biomass that act as fuel for potential wildfires. Studies¹ indicate that high-density accumulations of SPB-damaged trees increase fire intensity and the likelihood of crown fires, particularly under dry and windy conditions prevalent in this region.

As noted in **Attachment B**, the Lewis Road PRD site lies within a designated high-risk fire zone, where vegetation density and dead biomass increase the spread rate of surface and crown fires. According to the Fire Danger Rating System, landscapes with downed wood, dry needles, and leaf litter have a rapid spread potential that may overwhelm initial fire response efforts. In response, the EQFD has indicated the necessity of urgent measures to minimize the risks posed to the community and to support the resilience of our native ecosystems.

Nelson, Pope & Voorhis, LLC (NPV) has assessed the SPB infestation and associated safety hazards and has consulted with the property ownership. NPV has also briefed the New York State Department of

Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Division of Lands and Forests on the current site/SPB impact conditions, and the proper management methods to minimize risks associated with these conditions. Per his letter dated November 5, 2024, John Wernet, Regional Forester with the NYSDEC, the agency agrees with NPV's proposed approach (outlined below) to reduce biofuel loading on the property.

To mitigate these risks effectively, NPV, on behalf of the Lewis Road PRD ownership, requests CPBJPPC's authorization to conduct carefully targeted removal of dead and downed SPB-damaged trees and branches within the "Principal Areas of Concern" (PAOC) identified in orange in the attached **Figure 1**. This approach will ensure that only high-risk material is removed, while native, live, low-lying vegetation, which is vital for biodiversity and soil stability, remains undisturbed. Maintaining these native plants is key, as they are adapted to the local soil and climate and provide natural fire resistance. Trees targeted for removal will be felled, as necessary, and chipped. Chipped material will be removed from site and disposed of in an approved upland location, although lesser amounts of chipped material may be retained on site to provide coverage for any areas of bare soil.

Following the removal of the high-risk material, we propose to restore any disturbed sections through replanting with native pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) and appropriate oak species (*Quercus spp.*) as well as lower growing native vegetation. The owner has native ecotype plants, previously collected from the site prior to development, which will be utilized for revegetation to support the "self-heal" of the site. By removing the dead and downed trees, we can help reinforce the area's ecological health while reducing future fire susceptibility and risk to life and property.

Previous consultation with the NYSDEC regarding clearing of the site and potential impacts to the Northern long-eared bat (NLEB) was completed and the agency determined that the removal or trimming of trees during the winter clearing window (December 1 through February 28) was not anticipated to result in the incidental take of NLEB. To ensure the continued alignment of tree removal practices with NYSDEC guidance, NPV has reached out to the NYSDEC to confirm that the clearing of trees impacted by SPB during this time frame will not impact the endangered NLEB.

We respectfully and humbly ask that the CPBJPPC acknowledge the seriousness of this situation, and allow this matter to be incorporated into the November 2024 agenda. We look forward to further discussing the details of the situation and the management approach.

ⁱ Hongtao Xie, Jennifer E. Fawcett, G. Geoff Wang. (2020). Fuel dynamics and its implication to fire behavior in loblolly pine-dominated stands after southern pine beetle outbreak, *Forest Ecology and Management*, Volume 466, 2020, 118130, ISSN 0378-1127, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2020.118130>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378112720305089>)

Fawcett, Jennifer. (2012). Fuel Dynamics in Southern Pine Beetle-Killed Stands and Their Implication to Fire Behavior. 10.13140/RG.2.1.1944.3600.

Delwiche, Jake. (2010). After a Southern Pine Beetle Epidemic. *JFSP Briefs*. 72. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jfspbriefs/72>



FIGURE 1
SOUTHERN PINE BEETLE (SPB) IMPACTED AREAS OF CONCERN MAP

Lewis Road PRD
East Quogue, NY



Sources: NYS Orthoimagery, 2023; PWGC, 2024; Discovery Land Company, 2024
Scale: 1 inch equals 10,000 feet

TI

Proposed Clearing of
Areas of Concern

ATTACHMENTS



**THE HILLS
27OCT24-FIRE EVENT**

**MEMORANDUM
27OCT24-FIRE EVENT REPORT**

Date: 01NOV24

From: Ted Musho- VP Construction

To: Saul Scherl, Scotty Stephens, Ed Divita, Lekesha Perez, Trish Carter, Mike Rock, Lars Fitter, Mikol Maitland, Kyle Collins, Jessica Insalaco, Nick Venturino, Megan Mecca, Buddy Wines, Susan Booth, Michael Keirnan

DESCRIPTION OF EVENT

On Sunday Evening at 7-7:15pm, Ernesto (631-294-8385) the Garda security guard saw smoke and fire and called Nick Terlizzo. Nick Terlizzo directed Garda to call 911. Nick then called Ted Musho and Nick Venturino.

The fire was located east of the Hole 3 Tee Box, approximately 20 yards into the Town of Southampton, Pine Barrens property in a hollow.

East Quogue and Hamton Bays Fire Departments arrived at the scene about 7:15-7:30. The Fire was extinguished at about 7:45-8:00pm and under control. Countless Trucks and firemen arrived, parking along Spinney, along the driving range. Two brush trucks arrived each carrying 1000 gallons and put the fire out. Nick Venturino connected 1" hoses to the irrigation line for the FD to use. Site continued to smolder as the firemen continued to spray the charred ground.

At approximately 8-8:15pm, The Fire Marshall arrived and declared location a crime scene, discovering a camp site, a tarp, chopped and cut pine trees, fresh dirt bike trails, white copy paper used to start the fire and a hatchet. The camp site is adjacent to a dirt bike trail.

Other relevant notes:

- Ted Musho, Nick Venturino, Cameron Rice and Buddy Wines were on site. Ted Musho texted photos and descriptions of the event
- Randy Krackie was on site as a member of East Quogue Fire Department and was instrumental in advising the fire departments on how to access the fire, limiting damage to the course.
- Susan Booth also played a part calling friends and relatives in the departments telling them to take care of the course.
- Nick and Cam provided hoses and access to the irrigation lines to help spray the burnt area.
- Roy "Buddy" Wines was on site in his role as a County Coordinator for the Fire Department.
- The fire danger rating for the Pine Barrens is **"VERY HIGH"**. This is due to the lack of rain over the last month and low humidity.



THE HILLS 27OCT24-FIRE EVENT

- There is a significant amount of fuel on the ground from the pine beetles and leaf litter from deciduous trees.
- We were fortunate that the wind stopped, otherwise the fire would have spread further.

When Ted Musho left the site @ 9:10pm, a white helmeted dirt biker on a white and black dirt bike drove past the site. He followed him to the entrance of East Coast mines and lost him in the woods. He did not have a license plate.

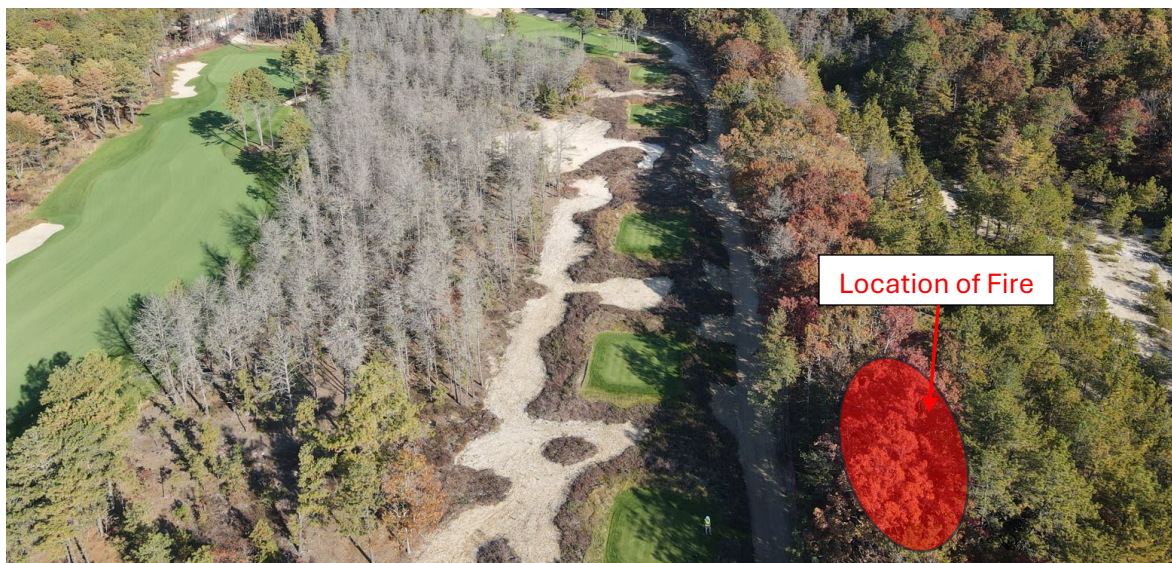
The next morning, Ted Musho, Mikol Maitland, Nick Venturino and Cam Rice returned to the site to find it still smoldering. Nick and cam directed one of their men to continue to water the location.

Mikol Maitland flew his drone and took photos, some attached.

WAY FORWARD

- Team updated the SSSP, revising the communication tree to be more effective.
- Trish Carter Insurance Risk advisor was notified.
- Nick Venturino noted damage was minimal. The Golf Team will repair the course and replace the perimeter orange fence, which seems to deter access onto the site. No costs will be issued to insurance.
- Nick Venturino will install trail cameras in the vicinity of the fire event.
- Golf and Construction will review purchasing additional equipment to protect against fires.
- Team will evaluate additional signage. It is pitch black on the course after sundown.
- Development will be making a request to remove fuel from areas affected by the pine beetle.

PHOTOS



Google Earth Photo, Clubhouse Foundation, bottom left



THE HILLS
27OCT24-FIRE EVENT



Garda photos when fire was discovered



Fire Departments arriving on scene



THE HILLS
27OCT24-FIRE EVENT



Fire Department setting up hoses



Under control, Fire Department Manpower



**THE HILLS
27OCT24-FIRE EVENT**



Brush Truck, one of two on scene



Fire Event
Discovery - The Hills

The Hills
10/28/2024, 9:43:13 AM EDT

Campfire



THE HILLS
27OCT24-FIRE EVENT



Next Morning, View of Fire Area



Fire Event
Discovery - The Hills

The Hills
10/28/2024, 9:43:24 AM EDT

Campsite view

END OF MEMORANDUM

ATTACHMENT B EAST QUOGUE FIRE DEPARTMENT CORRESPONDENCE



East Quogue Fire Department

Chief Paul Sulzinski 1st Asst. Keith Phillips 2nd Asst. Glenn Bullock 3rd Asst. Mark Gregory

November 4, 2024

Judy Jakobsen

Executive Director

Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission

624 Old Riverhead Road, West Hampton Beach, NY 11978

Office Phone: 631-288-1079

info@pb.state.ny.us

Thank you for giving East Quogue Fire Department the opportunity to comment on The Lewis Road PRD's request to cut and remove and perform preventative thinning on their property, which remains part of the Pine Barrens. As we are a fire department concerned about the fire and life safety of our community, it is our position The Lewis Road PRD should be allowed to clear dead wood from their property.

Many of our chiefs and captains were present during the fire of Sunrise Fire of 1995, which burned 3200 acres. From our present experience, with 3 recent calls to Manorville on November 2, to the Pine Barrens property east of The Lewis Road PRD on Sunday October 27, and a brush fire along Sunrise Highway on October 14 we are reminded that the pine barrens forest is at risk. Given the present low humidity, lack of rain and significant fuel from dead trees on the forest floor and knowing the fire danger rating is high in the forest, we are in support of any action that reduces fuel and improves our access.

In researching a strategy that could mutually benefit The Pine Barrens goals of improving the health of the forest and East Quogue Fire Departments responsibilities for life safety, I refer to the "New York State Southern Pine Beetle Management Plan".

Link provided: https://extapps.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/spb18mgtplan.pdf

Spot Suppression, Page 7 reviews two approaches to creating buffers and Cut and Remove and preventative thinning are both mitigating measures I think we can agree on, both of which are consistent with The Lewis Road PRD request. There are also wildfire management programs listed at your website which would also support these efforts. Finally, we see that you recently approved similar activity at the Meadows property in June of this year.

Sincerely,

Paul Sulzinski Jr.

Paul Sulzinski Jr.

ATTACHMENT C NYSDEC CORRESPONDENCE

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Division of Lands and Forests, Bureau of Forestry, Region 1
SUNY @ Stony Brook, 50 Circle Road, Stony Brook, NY 11790
P: (631) 444-0285 | F: (631) 444-0272
www.dec.ny.gov

11/05/2024

Dear Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission,

Please accept this letter in support of the actions recommended by Nelson Pope and Voorhis (NPV). Due to the unprecedented damage caused by Southern Pine Beetle throughout the Pine Barrens, these actions are necessary to protect and enhance the globally rare ecosystem that is the Central Pine Barrens. Because of the devastation and mortality occurred, the Department recommends the revegetation with local native plants and ecotypes.

Sincerely,



John Wernet
Regional Forester