

**Minutes of the Parks & Environment Advisory Board
Meeting April 3rd, 2024 at the Canale Training Center**

In attendance:

Officers Present - Stephen Fiedler, Co-Chairperson Alex Perri, Co-Chairperson

Members Present - Dick Colby, Dan Crum, Belinda Chester, Emma Witt,

Members Absent - Mike Hogan, Ken Sooy, Lisa March

Commissioner Representative - Andrew Parker -present

County Staff - Greg Brookins, D.H.P.W. - present

Secretary - Eric Husta, D.D.P.R. – present

Guests: Jason Howell, Pinelands Preservation Alliance

Old Business: None

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 PM and a flag salute was conducted.

Presentations:

Jason Howell, Public Lands Advocate for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, gave a presentation on the history and current state of Wharton Forest. He noted all State Forests in New Jersey are considered state parks with Wharton Forest being the largest.

Jason showed slides of the extensive off road vehicle damage in the forest and talked at length about the NJDEP's Visiting Vehicle Use Map. Discussion was had on what roads would remain open, which would close, and what is defined as an actual "road". Many slides illustrated the history of mapping in the forest. At some point in the 1970s the Pinelands Commission created a comprehensive road map from older USGS topographic maps. Many of the "roads" shown on current maps were never intended for public use and have since grown shut or disappeared altogether. Updated road mapping needs to be done to show which roads are still accessible and recognized as legitimate access points.

Mr. Howell pointed out that the NDEP's new VVUM still provides more access than many other comparably sized parks and users would rarely have to walk further than a mile in any one direction to get to any part of the forest. Emergency and law enforcement vehicles would still need maintained access which would be provided by the newly recognized user map.

The map is still in draft form with the public comment period ending on April 8th.

Lengthy discussion was had on the role of this board and a desire to draft a resolution of support in favor of the Visiting Vehicle Use Map. Steve and Alex will present the group with a resolution for discussion at our May 1st meeting.

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General Discussion topics:

Dan Crum voiced a desire to have board members attend a County Commissioner meeting if a resolution is brought back to their table opposing NJDEP's proposed map.

Emma Witt discussed her attendance at a recent NJ Forestry conference at Rutgers University. It was geared toward both public and private landowners with considerable discussion on invasive species, deer damage, the role of fire in the landscape, and climate change.

Steve Fiedler updated the group on the upcoming Sustainable Jersey Natural Resource Actions event. The free event will take place at the Atlantic Cape Community College Cape May Courthouse campus on April 11th, from 6-8 PM.

The meeting adjourned at 8:37 PM.

Our next meeting is currently scheduled for May 1st, 2024 at 7PM at the Canale Training Center in EHT.

cc: Dennis Levinson, County Executive
Jerry DelRosso, County Administrator
Diana Rutala, Deputy County Administrator
Maureen Kern, Chairperson - Board of County Commissioners
Andrew Parker, Board of County Commissioners – PEAB Representative
Greg Brookins, Department Head Public Works
All Advisory Board Members