New Jersey Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan

The New Jersey Pinelands is one of the most important ecosystems in the United States. With its unbroken forests of pine, oak and cedar (including a unique "pygmy forest") the Pinelands are the largest open space on the mid-Atlantic seaboard. The Cohansey Kirkwood Aquifer in the Pinelands contains over 17 trillion gallons of pure water, and 580 mature plant species, 54 of which are threatened or endangered.

Recognizing its importance and the threat that overdevelopment posed, the U.S. Congress in 1978 designated the New Jersey Pinelands as the country's first National Reserve. New Jersey followed this action of Congress with the Pineland Protection Act in 1979, conferring further protection.

The boundaries of the Pinelands National Reserve and the Pinelands Area, as defined by New Jersey state legislation, differ somewhat. The Reserve, totaling 1.1 million acres, includes land east of the Garden State Parkway and to the south bordering Delaware Bay, which is omitted from the 927,000-acre state Pinelands Area. The two jurisdictions are spread across seven counties: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Ocean.

The Pinelands region is governed by the 15-member Pinelands Commission and is divided into eight areas of different land use capability. (However, local governments have primary responsibility for implementing the Plan.) The delineation of these areas, and their permitted land uses are a central feature of the Pinelands Plan. The districts are as follows:

- Preservation Area District
- Forest Area
- Agricultural Production Area
- Rural Development Area
- Regional Growth Area
- Pinelands Town
- Military and Federal Institution Area
- Pinelands Village
- Special Agricultural Production Area

Maurice River Township and the City of Vineland are the only Cumberland County municipalities that are affected by Pinelands regulations. The large majority of Maurice River Township falls within the Forest Area. In general, only new land uses compatible with the ecology of the central Pines are allowed in the Forest Area. Examples of acceptable activities are forestry, cultivation of berries and native plants, and operation of recreational facilities, such as canoe rental services and campgrounds designed for minimal impact on the landscape. However, municipalities are given the option of including certain other new uses, such as limited commercial establishments. Each municipality is also assigned a number of new housing units which may be built in its Forest Area. The Plan allows one new house for each 15.8 acres of privately owned,
undeveloped upland. To minimize environmental damage, municipalities are permitted to cluster development on 3.2 acre lots.

A smaller portion of Maurice River Township is located in the Rural Development Area, which is concentrated along Route 47 between Port Elizabeth and Delmont. Modest development is permitted in this area; new housing is allowed at an overall density of 200 units per square mile of privately owned, undeveloped upland. The Rural Development Areas serve as a transition area between more and less developed areas, alleviating development pressures which Regional Growth Areas cannot absorb.

Higher density development is permitted in Pinelands Villages; within Maurice River Township, these include Cumberland, Delmont, Dorchester, Hesstown, Leesburg, Milmay and Port Elizabeth.

Only a small portion of this northeastern corner of Vineland lies within the Pinelands, in the Rural Development and Forest Area districts.

Anyone who wishes to develop land within the Pinelands must file an application with both the Pinelands Commission and municipality. Applications are first reviewed by Commission staff to determine whether they are complete, and then forwarded to a municipality for its normal municipal review process. Municipal authorities are required to notify the Commission when they are scheduled to consider an application and when it receives preliminary or final local approval. These local approvals are then subject to Commission review to ensure that they are consistent with the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan.