



Save the Pine Bush

February/March Newsletter

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Save the Pine Bush Zoom Meeting **February 22, 2023, at 6:30 p.m.**

Alýcia Bacon

Moms Out Front and Save the Pine Bush Volunteer, will speak about

How to Get Our Government to Protect the Remaining Pine Bush *Organizing a Lobbying Campaign*

Alýcia Bacon will give a presentation on creating an effecting lobbying campaign. The battle for Pine Bush preservation started 45 years ago this month. Up until now, Save the Pine Bush has mostly used litigation to stop development in the Pine Bush. But, of the 6000 acres of ecosystem remaining, 2500 acres are still privately owed and could be developed at any time. This year, with Governor Hochul signing the 30x30 legislation with a goal to protect 30% of New York's wilderness by 2030, now is the time to ask our state representatives to buy land. Alýcia will outline a lobbying plan and help us to implement it. Let's make 2023 the year we finally win our fight to save the Pine Bush!

How to Join the Zoom Meeting

A link to the Zoom meeting will be posted on the Save the Pine Bush website at savethepinebush.org/zoom.html. Or click <http://savethepinebush.org/z> for a direct link to Zoom. Or call into the meeting at (929) 205 6099, meeting #890 9659 2842. **The Zoom meeting will open at 6:00 PM for anyone who wishes to socialize prior to the presentation.** Also, you may call or text (518)366-7324 for assistance.

See you online at 6:30! • Everyone is welcome!

Save the Pine Bush Turns 45 Years Old!

by Lynne Jackson

Forty-five years ago, Save the Pine Bush came into being. On February 6, 1978, the Albany City Planning Board scheduled a public hearing on four developments in the Pine Bush: the Dunes, Pinehurst, Pine Circle, and a development by Charles Touhey. However, it snowed that day. It snowed so much that the offices of the New York State government were closed by the governor and stayed closed the next day.

Just because the entire city was shut down due to the weather, the City still held its public hearing

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Amanda Dillon

Science in the Albany

Pine Bush Preserve

by Tom Ellis

ALBANY, NY: Amanda Dillon, field ecologist and entomologist for the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission (Commission), was the speaker at the November 16 Save the Pine Bush virtual meeting. She discussed "Science in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve."

Amanda Dillon earned both a BS in Natural History and Interpretation in 2007 and a MS in Environmental Forest Biology with a concentration in entomology from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Ms. Dillon thanked Save the Pine Bush for all the great work SPB has done over the years protecting the pine barrens in Albany County.

The Karner Blue Butterfly (KBB), she said, is on both the state and federal endangered species

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Efforts to Close the Dunn

Dump Continue

All Trucks Enroute to the Dump

Violate Traffic Laws

by Tom Ellis

RENSSELAER, NY: Efforts to close the Waste Connections Dunn construction and demolition debris landfill in Rensselaer continue despite little news coverage of the ongoing public health crisis.

The dump is located on a hilltop at the end of Partition Street, borders the Rensselaer public school campus, a cemetery, and in between Rensselaer and East Greenbush neighborhoods. Interstate 90 passes in front of the school campus; thus the campus, athletic fields, students, staff, and visitors are bombarded from multiple directions by noise, dirt, odors, and fumes. The school should never have been sited near a major highway and the dump never sited next to the school.

During November, the City of Rensselaer submitted a report, Supplemental Comments on S.A. Dunn Construction and Demolition Debris Landfill and Mine, to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (En Con). The

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Amanda Dillon continued from page 1

lists. Pine Bush populations are determined by walking, counting, and estimating. KBB travel less than 200 meters throughout their lives. The growth of Pine Bush KBB populations in recent years is aided by accelerated colonization where gravid female KBB are taken to New Hampshire where their young are reared and later returned to the Pine Bush. Sites inhabited by KBB are frequently restored by Commission staff. KBB have two broods per year, the first in mid-May to early June, the second a month or so later. Increasing the acreage of KBB habitat has occurred via land acquisition, restoration, and management. The first KBB brood is often smaller than the second for many reasons including variations in winter mortality. The Blue Lupine, upon which the KBB feeds, is monitored each year. The density of Lupine stems are counted. The Pine Bush is divided into management units of 2-50 acres. Many factors impact KBB density including rainfall and snowpack.

Pollinators and vegetation are also monitored. About 190 species of bees reside in the Pine Bush. Ms. Dillon has studied bees since 2010 when first employed by the Commission. Some bees are captured and later released. Some nests are below ground allowing bees to survive prescribed burns.

Commission staff use camera traps to monitor how mammals use the managed landscape like deer that may tend to stay in forests during day time and more open areas at night.

Water table depths are monitored in spring, summer, and fall. Most years the Pine Bush dries out during the year.

The Southern Pine Beetle, she said, is a native species that is moving north. It reproduces quickly and can kill pines by girdling them. Pines are more likely to survive in open canopies. No data for 2022 is available yet but the beetle was found in 2020 and 2021.

Ms. Dillon said there are 74 species of concern in the Pine Bush including 46 bird species. The Commission documents bird species and estimates their populations. Birds are captured in mist nets and banded. Hundreds of bird banding stations are operational in North America and others in South America. Thus the Commission and other bird watchers share information and learn from each other. Ms. Dillon said about 950 birds were banded in 2022?, over ninety percent had not been banded before. She said the age of the birds can be determined by examining the feathers.

Project OwlNet is a continent-wide study, 110 Northern saw-whet owls have been caught in the pine bush between October and November over the last 7 years, recaptures from other sta-

tions are common, six were caught in the Pine Bush in 2022, down from dozens in 2016-2017.

She said two Motus (Motus.org) towers that use radio frequencies to track bird movements have been constructed on the roof of the Commission's Discovery Station. The stations are automated and stationary. The Motus collect data on what flies over them and provide information on how birds utilize the landscape and maintain territory.

Ms. Dillon said some species such as snakes are hard to draw conclusions about because they are rarely seen.

During the questions and comment portion of the program, Ms. Dillon said the Pine Bush is fairly important for bird migrations; some fly over the Pine Bush from Alaska enroute to South America. She saw many brown beetles this summer in the Pine Bush, droughts contribute to toad mortality, toads are drawn to lights to catch bugs but then eaten by snakes. She said there are 400 bee species in New York and 4,000 in North America.

Asked about the impact of the covid pandemic on Karner Blue Butterflies, she said the first 2020 brood may have benefitted from reduced human activity in the Pine Bush, but not the second as people returned. Shorter winters, less snowpack, and shorter snowpack durations all impact KBB populations. Insect populations are subject to boom and bust cycles for unknown reasons.

She said a Northern saw-whet owl captured in Michigan's upper peninsula was recaptured in the Pine Bush. Asked about climate change impacts on Pine Bush wildlife, she said Commission staff hope the KBB will be more resilient due to the Pine Bush's variety of microclimates created by the dune topography and complex of habitats. KBB may move from the south to the north sides of dunes.

Efforts to Close Dunn continued from page 1

report, prepared by the city's engineer, contained numerous photos of tractor trailer trucks enroute to the dump violating traffic laws.

The report said that at the fully signalized three way intersection of the northern Dunn bridge off ramp onto Broadway, "Most of the tractor trailers observed exit down the ramp and move directly into the right turn lane, either partially or completely, to make the left turn. On some occasions, it was observed that other traffic coming down the ramp and making left turns continues along beside the truck making the left turn which makes for a dangerous situation when both try to turn left at the same time. If the truck does try to stay in the left lane they need to move dramatically into the right lane when they start the

turn. This endangers traffic legally in the right turn lane. It does not appear that any left turn movement can be made if they stay completely within the left turn lane. If they try they ride up onto the side walk making for pedestrian safety concerns and doing damage to the sidewalk and brick pavers."

Essentially the new report documented that there is no way the 5-, 6-, and 7-axle trucks enroute to the dump can travel through the city without violating traffic laws. I have seen these traffic violations many times. Sometimes at the intersection of the Dunn bridge ramp and Broadway, five or six trucks are lined up behind each other, slowing and endangering other drivers. This is often a busy intersection with lots of pedestrians, traffic to and from the Amtrak station, other city traffic, houses, a Dunkin Donuts and a restaurant, a park with a nearby playground.

A few hundred meters to the north, trucks cross a long bridge over the train tracks and then make a sharp right turn onto Partition Street. Every tractor trailer making the turn takes a wide turn crossing into the other lane in violation of traffic laws.

Rensselaer residents and other dump opponents met with Rensselaer Mayor Mike Stammel on December 21 and asked him to have the city police department ticket every truck that violates the traffic laws and to continue doing so. We said it is unacceptable that every tractor trailer heading to the dump violates traffic laws. The fact that this occurs is proof city streets cannot accommodate the trucks and is an excellent reason to close the dump. Mayor Stammel promised to send a letter to the Rensselaer police chief instructing him to have the department ticket every truck that violates traffic laws.

The Rensselaer Environmental Coalition, composed of Rensselaer, East Greenbush, and other residents, remains confident that the Waste Connections dump will not be relicensed. Despite the dump's operating permit having expired in mid July, the dump remains open, and, as of December 22, the dump permit renewal application remained incomplete.

SPB Turns 45 continued from page 1

on these four proposed developments. Even with six inches of snow filling the main roads, the City still held the hearing.

There was so much snow that the next day. I cross-country skied to work from my apartment to downtown Albany.

Despite the terrible weather, about 20 environmentalists attended the hearing in addition to the developers. Dick Patrick, the City Planner,

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SPB Turns 45 continued from previous page

presided. The developers spoke for one-and-one-half hours. Dick Patrick said, “The weather’s getting kind of bad out, so since the developers had 1 1/2 hours, you can have 1 1/2 hours.” A few people spoke in favor of preservation, and then Dick Patrick adjourned the hearing to meet the next day in a private bank board room (we were not invited).

We were outraged. We started meeting in each others homes and at the library, talking about what we were going to do. The City of Albany was run by one of the oldest political machines in the country, second only to Mayor Daly’s Chicago political machine. Mayor Corning had a strangle-hold on the City; preservation of the Pine Bush seemed impossible.

Looking back on all of this now, I believe it was because of the rigid, immobile Albany Political Machine that caused us to form Save the Pine Bush. If the City had been more reasonable, or even pretended to listen to what we had to say, perhaps we would have accepted some sort of compromise in those early days. But, the City would not even acknowledge that we existed, much less had an important issue that needed to be addressed.

The group that came together because of the meeting on February 6, 1978 decided the only way to stop these developments was to sue the City over the approvals. We formed Friends of the Pine Bush (later, we changed the name to Save the Pine Bush) and found our first lawyer, the late Victor A. Lord.

Victor Lord went to bat for us and we won. What did we win? We won another hearing!

The City held another public hearing in July of that year. No snow, but over 200 people showed up to speak against the developments. So many people attended that the City had to schedule yet another hearing so that everyone had a chance to speak.

It was not a big surprise to us when the City again approved the developments. I mean, why should they listen to the citizens who wanted to save this small ecosystem?

From those early days, Save the Pine Bush, went on to file dozens of lawsuits to stop developments. Our lawsuits set precedents for the State Environmental Quality Review Act. Our lawsuits resulted in the creation of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. Our lawsuits forced the Commission to write a real plan to protect the Pine Bush. Now it has been 45 years of litigation. It is time — way past time — to persuade our government to buy all of the remaining privately-owned land in the Pine Bush ecosystem and protect it as forever wild.

30x30 - Let’s Buy All of the Remaining Pine Bush!

by Lynne Jackson

ALBANY, NY: Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation (A.5390B/S.6191A) that sets the goal to conserve at least 30 percent of U.S. land and water by 2030. This legislation will promote biodiversity and preserve New York’s wild-life, forests, and clean water sources, which are all essential to New York’s health and economy.

Governor Kathy Hochul said, “New Yorkers rely on our clean water for recreation, forests to provide wildlife habitats, and the outdoor spaces for jobs and adventures.” It’s more important than ever to safeguard these resources and setting the goal to conserve 30 percent of public land by 2030 will ensure we’re protecting our State for future generations.”

Save the Pine Bush turns 45 in February, 2023. SPB started in the middle of an epic snowstorm, when, though then Governor Mario Cuomo had shut down all New York State offices, the City of Albany Planning Board still held a hearing on four proposed developments in the Pine Bush.

Using litigation, SPB has fought to save as much of the remaining ecosystem as possible. But, the ultimate solution to preserving this beautiful ecosystem is not litigation, but acquisition.

About 5400 acres of Pine Bush ecosystem remains. Only 3400 of those acres has been purchased and added to the Pine Bush Preserve; 2000 acres remain in private hands, and can be destroyed through development.

It is long past time to protect all of the remaining Pine Bush ecosystem and this new legislation may be able to help.

Called 30x30, one of the goals of this legislation is “protections and restoration projects for

preserving and increasing biodiversity, including habitat restoration, with a focus on habitats of endangered and threatened species including resilient and connected lands and corridors providing means for wildlife migration and habitation. . . “

In comparison with the Adirondacks, or parks out west, the Pine Bush ecosystem is a very small area of land. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission may only acquire land in small amounts, 15 acres here, 50 acres there — nothing like the land purchases New York State has made in the Adirondacks. But, acquiring the remaining privately-owned Pine Bush ecosystem is essential to the survival of the ecosystem. Not only is the Pine Bush ecosystem unique for this area, it is completely surrounded by development. It is an island in the middle of a densely populated suburban and urban area. It is accessible by bus from downtown Albany. The location of the Pine Bush fits neatly with another goal of the 30x30 bill: “conservation measures shall be undertaken in ways that serve all communities, including low-income, disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.” The Pine Bush is just a bus ride away for many people who live in Albany and meets another goal of the 30x30: “expanding access to nature and nature’s benefits and equitable outdoor access in communities in every region.”

With the passage and the governor signing the 30x30 legislation, now is the time for people who want to see the entire Pine Bush ecosystem protected to advocate to purchase all of the remaining Pine Bush ecosystem and dedicate it to the Pine Bush Preserve.



Recent photo of the Pine Bush in the City Preserve

Pine Bush Preserve adds 15 acres

ALBANY COUNTY — The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission announced on Friday that it has acquired 15.1 more acres of land in Colonie to add to the 3,400-acre preserve.

The property was purchased from a willing seller late in 2022, the release said, noting Colonie dedicated 41 acres to the preserve last February, creating an area of nearly 120 connected acres of protected land in western Colonie.

“The goal is to fill in these pieces and connect them for continuity — lands adjacent to one another provide for species movement, public recreation, and buffer from nearby development,” said Commission Executive Director Christopher Hawver in a statement, making the announcement.

The commission was created in 1988 and the preserve spans three municipalities: the city of Albany and the towns of Colonie and Guilderland.

“The Commission still needs to protect an additional 2,000 acres in order to assure the

viability of the ecosystem,” said Hawver in his post, noting the goal is to protect 5,380 acres.

“Protecting the land, however, is just the start of making the barrens healthy again,” Hawver says. “The specialized plants and animals there are fire-dependent, so the Commission uses prescribed fire as well as a variety of other tools to conserve this distinct local treasure

“There are a number of additional properties we’d like to see added and protected from willing landowners. With our state and local partners, we hope to continue the momentum.”

The Commission encourages anyone who has land within the Albany Pine Bush Preserve study area, and is interested in selling, to contact Christopher Hawver at atchawver@albanypinebush.org. To view the map of lands recommended for protection and addition to the preserve, visit <https://albanypinebush.org/our-work-land-protection>, and click on the link to the Vision Map.

Visiting the Legislature

by Lynne Jackson

ALBANY, NY: On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, Save the Pine Bush volunteers attended the Albany County Legislature’s budget hearing.

At the 17 minute hearing, only eight people spoke. Seven of us spoke about the Pine Bush Preservation! I will admit to be surprised that so few people attended and spoke at the hearing about Albany County’s budget of over \$700 million. After the hearing, William Clay came over to speak with us. He is the legislator for the Pine Bush and lives in Pinehurst - one of the

developments that was part of our first lawsuit in 1978. Mr. Clay asked questions about the controlled burns in the Pine Bush and about what land is available to be purchased. We had a good conversation.

This is the year to ask for money to purchase land in the Pine Bush. We need to ask New York State and the Albany County Legislature for funds to buy land. We will need to continue our efforts to bring attention to the issue of acquiring all of the remaining privately-owned land in the Pine Bush. We will be back to lobby our legislature this year.

Proposed Development in Colonie

by Lynne Jackson

COLONIE, NY: The Town of Colonie Planning Board voted to recommend the rezoning of an 11.89 acre site at 4232 Albany Street from industrial to single-family residential after a public hearing on January 10. Five people spoke in opposition, four were from Save the Pine Bush. The rezoning would allow for construction of two houses on the property. The site is adjacent on two sides by land in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission has designated this property as “full protection”, which means the Commission recommends nothing be built on the property.

Of the approximately 2000 acres of privately-owned Pine Bush ecosystem, 1421 acres are located in the Town of Colonie. 1304 of the acres are recommended for full protection and 117 for partial protection. Of the three municipalities, Colonie has the least amount of Pine Bush protected in the Preserve. The Town of Colonie needs protect its Pine Bush.

Save the Pine Bush will be following this proposal as it goes through the approval process and asking that an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared.

The Town should purchase this land and add it to the Preserve. The Pine Bush is being destroyed a few acres at a time and we do not want to see this proposal contribute to that trend.

Agenda Tracker

Check out the Save the Pine Bush Planning Board Agenda Tracker created by Andy Arthur to track development proposals in the Pine Bush:

<https://savethepinebush.org/agenda/>

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