



Save the Pine Bush

October Newsletter

Oct 25 No. 168 • 223 S. Swan St., Albany, NY 12202 • email contact@savethepinebush.org • phone 518-366-7324 • web www.savethepinebush.org • Circ. 600

Vegetarian/Vegan Lasagna Dinner

Wednesday, October 29, at 6:00 p.m.

Michael Diana

Schenectady County Historical Society

Uncover the Pine Bush's Hidden History

Michael Diana, Historian & Director of Education, Schenectady County Historical Society, will discuss how this rare landscape shaped the Capital Region and why its protection matters today.

The Albany Pine Bush is famous for its rare ecosystem, but few know how deeply this landscape shaped the Capital Region's history.

Michael will reveal the Pine Bush's deep past—Indigenous trails, early settlement, and how this sandy expanse influenced the growth of Albany, Schenectady, and beyond. It's a fresh angle on a place usually covered only for its plants and wildlife.

At the St. Andrew's Church, 10 North Main, Albany, NY (please note new location!!!). All-you-can-eat lasagna dinner, with vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options, salad, garlic bread and delicious desserts. Only \$20 for adults, \$6 for students, and \$2 for children. People who make reservations are served first. For reservations, please email contact@savethepinebush.org or go to savethepinebush.org/dinner. Please feel free to wear a mask when not eating because covid is not done with us yet.

Everyone is welcome! Interested people are welcome to attend the program beginning at 7:00 for no charge.

www.savethepinebush.org

Musings of a Wildlife Biologist

by Tom Ellis

ALBANY: Retired DEC endangered species biologist Al Hicks spoke at the April 30, 2025 Save the Pine Bush dinner at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Albany. His topic was Musings of a Wildlife Biologist.

Al said he knew the Pine Bush was a special place the first time he saw it driving from Canandaigua to Albany in 1977 for a DEC job interview. He was hired and worked with insects and birds, and, after a promotion, with mammals. He asked: "What does the future look like for wildlife in New York?" and answered, "It's all about people."

"People have a huge impact on every living thing," he said. People have lived in North America at least 25,000 years, the ice retreated 10,000 years ago, and European expansion began

continued on page 2

Unveiling of the Sign for the John Wolcott Pine Bush Hikers' Underpass

by Lynne Jackson

ALBANY: On October 8, 2025, the sign for the John Wolcott Pine Bush Hikers' Underpass was unveiled at an event organized by NYS Senator Pat Fahy's office.

Chris Hawver, executive director of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, opened the event by welcoming everyone and noting that if it were not for Save the Pine Bush, there would be no Pine Bush left today. Then, Senator Fahy spoke passionately about John and the Pine Bush and the important work that John did. Other officials spoke, including Guelderland Town Supervisor, Peter Barber, Albany County Legislator Danielle Gillespie and representatives from County Supervisor Dan McCoy's office and Assemblymember Gabriella Romero.

Jerry Riverstone and I spoke for Save the Pine Bush. Below is what I said.

I am so happy to be here today on behalf of Save the Pine Bush. Thank you so much, Sena-

continued on page 2

Musings continued from page 1

about 400 years back. As European numbers increased, forest cover decreased and animal populations too. Sixty-six percent of New York is forested today, he said.

“Surviving species manage to survive around us despite us” and live in ecological, behavioral, and economic cracks. He gave examples of each.

New York has three species of rabbits, he said: Snowshoe hare, Easter cottontail, and New England cottontail. Rabbit behavior is well suited for them to survive around us.

New York has nine species of bats. They have survived because they hang out in trees, only fly at night, and avoid people.

Mountain lions became extinct in New York. People saw them as undesirable because they eat farm animals. White-tailed deer are valuable because people eat their meat.

“Collateral damage is the primary remover of wildlife,” he said. One example is “the ceaseless spread of invasive species” around the Earth. Whales, once hunted for their oil, were saved from extinction by the invention of the petroleum industry. Species driven north (in the northern hemisphere) by warming oceans have collisions with ships.

“Once on a landscape, invasive species never stop spreading.” “Any person can introduce a new one into the US or from the US.” It is hard to find a native reptile in Florida anymore. Polar bears, he said, will have to learn to live in forests because there won’t be any ice. “The more cracks a species can live in,” he said, “the more chance of species survival.”

“The long term consequences of invasive species,” he said, “is beyond my imagination.”

Mastodons, he said, were killed by Native peoples who had a massive influence on wildlife. Mastodons, he said, were still here 10,000 years ago.

There is not much evidence bison were ever in New York despite the City of Buffalo being named after them, but they clearly were in SW Pennsylvania. Beavers, he said, were valuable enough for people to risk their lives for. Muskrats, smaller than beavers, survived because it was easier for them to hide. Beavers went extinct in New York around 1800 but have since been reintroduced. The now-extinct Eastern elk was in New York until 1842.

After a moose wandered into Glens Falls in 1981, DEC had an internal debate about whether it was a game animal or an endangered species. Mr. Hicks said moose and deer do not coexist well because deer have diseases fatal to moose. He said moose can live in thirty-six inches of snow and deer about twelve. Moose could live

in the Adirondacks and deer in the river valleys. The last moose killed in New York was in 1861 near Marion River.

A conservation ethic emerged with Theodore Roosevelt who saw moose as cool. People who possess such an ethic will say “I hope my kids can see one.” He said moose came back on their own in the Adirondacks but will be wiped out as climate change allows more deer to move in.

The last authenticated mountain lion sighting in New York was in 1905. Mr. Hicks said many New Yorkers are certain they have seen one and he has heard some memorable stories of their “sightings.” He described a tagged one that may have been seen in Lake George a few years back and soon thereafter killed by a car in Connecticut. It had traveled from South Dakota through the midwest and Canada into New York. “Ontario is not a state yet,” he joked, but “may come in as a county.”

Passenger pigeons were probably the most common bird in world history, he said. The final one died in a zoo in 2014. He said John Audubon saw millions fly overhead in Kentucky for three continuous days in 1813 while he traveled fifty-five miles.

Proof the conservation ethic works is that once DDT was banned, several bird species including Eagles, recovered. “Eagles are doing remarkably well in New York,” he said.

The Allegheny woodrat is susceptible to a parasite and was practically wiped out. He said about fifty live in the Palisades on the New York-New Jersey border.

“Almost all migratory birds are in decline in New York,” he said. Fungi are killing the nineteen salamander species in New York. Peregrine falcons are doing as well as any species.

“Nearly all species of native New York trees are threatened by invasive species that are here or on the way.”

Speaking of insects, he recalled that when he was a kid, windshields had to be cleaned each time gas was purchased due to so many crashing into them. “We have nowhere near the insects we used to have,” he said. “Something really substantial is happening and we are not going to learn it in this [Trump] administration.”

When thousands of bats died from White Nose Syndrome on March 14, 2007 at Haile’s Cave in Thatcher Park, New York employed only one bat specialist. Within a year, their numbers declined from 22,000 to 1100. He saw piles of dead bats a foot deep. Bats flew out of the cave and dive-died into a snowbank.

Bats that survive hibernate at higher temperatures that can kill the fungus. He said some bat species are doing well. Of the nine species

in New York, three migrate south annually and six remain in New York. He said there are two species of flying squirrels in New York.

Moving toward his conclusion, he said the more people there are the more we must accommodate other species. Individual trees thousands of years old are dying now. Water temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit last summer. Coral reefs, he said, are collapsing at a rapid pace.

These problems are solvable, he said, except the most powerful people in the United States do not want to. “The worst we can do is nothing. Far too many people are concerned but do nothing. Develop a conservation ethic.” He concluded his presentation with, “We are not going to get another world.”

During the group discussion, he said “most species die off quickly and we never know why.” “Lobbying is a numbers thing.” People who care about the environment vote at lower levels than the general public.

Lynne Jackson said that even an environmentally conscious elected official must be lobbied. Al agreed saying people doing good things need support and thank yous. “If you don’t say anything, you don’t exist,” he said.

He urged people to check out the Merlin Bird ID app to identify bird calls and said, “If you want to live in a world of ignorance, make no noise.”

Russel Ziemba had the final comment saying the late SPB President, Rezsine Adams, had been a student of Rachel Carson.

Vote Yes on Prop 1: A Win for Adirondacks and New Yorkers

by Alex Brownstein

This November, New Yorkers have the option to vote YES on Proposition 1. Doing so means protecting wildlands while keeping one of the Adirondacks’ historic treasures, Mount Van Hoevenberg, open for world-class sports and community pride.

The deal is straightforward: the Olympic facility near Lake Placid can continue to host global events, and in return, at least 2,500 acres are added to the Adirondack Forest Preserve. That’s more protected wilderness for future generations, more carbon storage, more clean water, and more space for wildlife.

The Adirondacks prove that communities and wildlands succeed together. A yes vote ensures that New York remains a leader in conservation and community strength.

On Election Day, November 4, please flip your ballot and vote YES on Prop 1 - a win-win for people, for nature, and for the future

Acts of Service Save Me in a World on Fire:

Why Volunteer with Save the Pine Bush?

By Madi Kennedy

In my life, as time marches on everything speeds up so fast that there's times that I wonder where the meaning in life is. Working, earning, eating, taking care of my family day-by-day, all while living in a world that feels like it's on fire can lead to it all taking on a surreal quality. As I ponder the meaning of my existence, I ask myself - am I doing enough in my little corner of the world? When I reach the end of my days will I look back and think, well I certainly gave it my best shot to be a good human?

For those of us who pay attention to the actual earth on which we stand, which ultimately gives us all life, we know that we are in the middle of the sixth mass extinction of animals on the planet. Our wild lands are being stripped down, developed for businesses, residential areas, mined or logged. Their trees chopped down and wild life/inhabitants displaced or killed at rates that continue to accelerate. Scientists tell us that we are today using up our grandchildren's resources. Pay any mind to the news and we all can see environmental regulations and funding for our national parks pulled back weekly it seems.

I know I'm not alone when I say that in the face of the enormity of it all I can feel powerless. I hear others express this same idea and feeling over and over again. Like nothing we can do as a single person matters. This sense of powerlessness can dramatically impact the quality of our health; mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. Our communities and even families have been incrementally fractured by industrialization, capitalism, technology/screens, the drugs/substances and behaviors we use to try and cope with a rapidly changing world that places ever more demands on our time. As a result, coming together with others in community to address the

challenges of our day can feel that much more impossible.

Yet again, when I pay close attention, I notice these small and large groups of intentional, kind, caring humans who come together to make the world a little brighter. Brightening both our own inner worlds, elevated by the dopamine, oxytocin and other feel-good chemicals and hormones our body rewards us with when we commit acts of service/kindness, and the world at large. Groups, organizations, collaboratives and associations working tirelessly to stymie the waves of indifference and destruction those of us who are awake see all around us. Save the Pine Bush was just such a group, with a name that resonated since I had spent many calm, soul-nurturing days walking or snow shoeing in the Pine Bush over the years. The Pine Bush was close by one of my first places of employment and I was always curious about its lovely, peaceful and natural existence in an otherwise heavily developed area.

My own journey with Save the Pine Bush, fondly referred to as SPB, started about a year ago when I came across a social media post from a fellow advocate about a proposed solar farm that would essentially destroy acres of Pine Bush habitat. I'd been looking for ways to give back locally to the land, so I asked my friend who posted if he knew more about the issue or who was doing something about it. He pointed me to Lynne Jackson, one of the volunteers of a group of dedicated "volunteers" who have been speaking out, educating on and advocating for the Pine Bush at town meetings for over 40 years. They won (and lost) many lawsuits over developments in the Pine Bush. There would be no Pine Bush left today if it were not for SPB. SPB volunteers are lawyers, geologists, concerned community

members from the areas surrounding the Pine Bush, and/or environmentalists like me. The issue of Pine Bush depletion also struck a chord in me since I grew up in nearby Latham and watched over time as many of the fields, meadows and forests around us slowly were destroyed by strip malls, residential housing and box stores.

I have to wonder if anyone reading this article is like me and would benefit from connecting with a group of people aligned around a goal of...to put it simply, helping out? In my time with SPB I have served lasagna at one of our famous (and delicious) lasagna dinners featuring a presentation by an incredible ecologist and activist, Al Hicks of Citizens Climate Lobby (another group I volunteer with!). I have attended Guilderland Town Hall meetings to show support for SPB's efforts and am working up my nerve to speak at one of the meetings when comments are allowed from the public...next time may be it! I also help promote SPB activities on social media and am now working to recruit some volunteers.

The time required of me is super manageable even with my busy schedule, maybe 2-4 hours a month give or take. SPB is filled with volunteers who are thoughtful, supportive and highly educated about the local ecosystems and ways to advocate to preserve it. I see volunteering as a great educational opportunity for younger folks looking to gain experience in grassroots, environmental advocacy, mapping, ecology. Or a gentle opportunity to give back for adults of any age. Not to mention it being a way to meet new and likeminded people. If you'd like to check us out, please contact Lynne Jackson at lynnejackson@mac.com. I'm also happy to answer any questions you might have about my experience as a volunteer: madelineskennedy@gmail.com

Underpass continued from page 1

tor Fahy, for having the sign made and for this public unveiling.

John Wolcott was one of the founders of Save the Pine Bush, attending that consequential public hearing in the middle of a snow storm on February 6, 1978. John loved the Pine Bush. He first visited at the age of 3 and never stopped advocating for its preservation.

John worked for Pine Bush preservation in many ways. He was a plaintiff on dozens of Save the Pine Bush lawsuits, he researched properties, met landowners and residents, mapped colonial roads and spoke at public hearings. And, throughout all of these important actions, John advocated for visiting the Pine Bush. He led or arranged

hikes, walks, cross-country ski trips and adventures in the Pine Bush for more than 35 years.

John had a deep understanding of the Pine Bush, about its history, about the ecosystem, about its importance to our lives in general. Early on he may have been the foremost expert on these Pine Barrens, an expertise he acquired solely by his own research and observations. And because of that deep and extensive knowledge, he was continuously suggesting ideas and plans to the rest of the members of Save The Pine Bush.

When the bridge on Route 155 over the Thruway was damaged in the late 1990s, John kept telling me that we need an underpass for hikers and walkers, and it should be done during the bridge repair which had already been started. And

he told me over and over again. One day, I got so fed up, I said "John, just call up the Thruway Authority!" And, he did.

John happened to have caught one of the Thruway engineers on a break during a meeting. John and this engineer wound up talking all afternoon, the engineer never going back to his meeting.

John and Save the Pine Bush volunteer, Russell Ziembra, met with the engineers. The engineers were sympathetic to an underpass, but, they said construction had started, the steel has been cut and it was just too late.

Then, one engineer said, well, maybe not!

continued on next page

Underpass continued from page 3

He began to work out some calculations. The meeting eventually ended, but later on, the engineer was able to figure out how to build the underpass and it was built.

We owe a big thank you to the engineers of the NYS Thruway.

There would really be no Pine Bush Preserve or Pine Bush Commission today if it had not been for John's work. Naming the underpass after him is a wonderful way to honor his lifelong advocacy for the Pine Bush.

If John were here, he would tell me I must mention one more thing; the Pine Bush ecosystem has not been saved yet. There are still over 2000 acres of Pine Bush under threat of development.

Public Hearings and Development Proposals in the Pine Bush

by Lynne Jacksons

Recently, Save the Pine Bush volunteers have been attending many public hearings, most for proposed developments in the Pine Bush, and a few for the Guilderland Comprehensive Plan.

In Colonie, there have been several proposals to build warehouses on small parcels of land. Individually, these warehouse proposals seem small and insignificant. But, taken all together, these proposals destroy Pine Bush and fragment the ecosystem.

The most significant development proposal in the Town of Colonie is the proposed Lisha Solar Farm on 2772 and 2792 Curry Road. This 75-acre parcel, owned by the estate of Gerry Phibbs,

is one of the largest remaining privately-owned parcels in the Pine Bush ecosystem.

Save the Pine Bush is a supporter of renewable energy generation such as solar farms. However, we do not believe that solar farms should be built in rare ecosystems such as the Pine Bush.

The recent public hearings specifically deal with the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which part of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) process. The hearing has been held open to Tuesday, October 21. People may submit comments up until that time and/or attend the public hearing that evening at 6:00 at the Town of Colonie Public Operations Center, 347 Old Niskayuna Road, Latham.

Save the Pine Bush volunteers have been attending the last several public hearings held by the Guilderland Town Board on the Guilderland Comprehensive Plan. The Town Board will continue to take comments until October 21. Because of our advocacy, the Town has created an entire section on the Pine Bush in the Comprehensive Plan. We are hoping the Town will still adopt preserving all of the remaining privately owned Pine Bush ecosystem in Guilderland. The Town Board will continue to take comments until October 21.

Use the Save the Pine Bush Mapper!

Want to see where a property is in the Pine Bush?
Want to know what properties are protected?
Want to see public meeting agendas? Use the Pine Bush Mapper!

www.savethepinebush.org/agenda
www.savethepinebush.org/m

We are living dangerously with the Trump Presidency

by Tom Ellis

Many people remember the July 4-5 central Texas floods that killed more than 100 and left ever more missing.

Some are blaming the high death toll on 2025 cutbacks to federal agencies that disabled the ability of professional staff to communicate fast changing weather information to those who could have quickly issued warnings and saved lives.

Trump, who never takes responsibility for his errors, denied any culpability and even blamed the high death toll on the Biden Administration. Rest assured that future natural and unnatural disasters will be handled similarly.

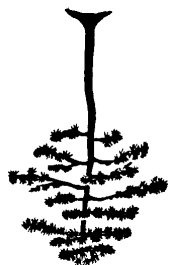
At present, the Trump Administration is greatly deregulating nuclear power oversight while fast tracking new nuclear stations construction. More than half the US operable reactors are over 45 years old, the two oldest are in NY, and the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission has begun extending operating licenses to eighty years.

Trump is increasing the likelihood of a major nuclear radiation release.

Trump, Vance, Johnson and Kennedy are destroying the competence of the federal government in many realms, and especially its ability to prevent and minimize disease and disasters. They are not making America great again; they are weakening the United States by eliminating technical and managerial expertise nurtured over decades.

Return Service Requested

Save the Pine Bush
A Project of the Social Justice Center
33 Central Avenue
Albany, NY 12210



PRESORTED
STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
ALBANY, NY
PERMIT #509