



Photo: Sandy Richard

Preserving
THE PEOPLE'S PARK
Gala 2025



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Dear Friend:

We're writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society to thank you for your support of our 48th Anniversary Environmental Gala, Preserving Today, for Tomorrow. We trust you enjoyed our virtual celebration that featured life in the Pine Barrens – “the People's Park.” We plan to extend our environmental projects into the new year.

We are thankful for the support of our Gala Committee and Committee Co-Chairs, Mr. Ross Ain of Caithness Long Island, Mr. David Calone of Strata Alliance, and Dr. Nancy Douzinas, former President of the Rauch Foundation and Board member of the Greentree Foundation (Manhasset) and Teachers College, Columbia University (New York City). These leaders, along with generous committee members and individual supporters, are helping to ensure Pine Barrens preservation in perpetuity.

This has been an incredibly busy and successful year. We are making great strides with our “The Best of the Rest” campaign. Suffolk County, the Town of Brookhaven and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation are continuing to be bold partners in our quest to permanently preserve an additional 3,800 acres of Pine Barrens. In addition, the Society, as part of an Island-wide coalition, advocated for the Suffolk County Water Quality Restoration Act last year, which over 71% of voters supported! This measure is helping to ensure clean water through grants for improved septic systems, expanded sewer systems where practical, water reuse projects and an extension to the Drinking Water Protection Program fund that is used to acquire and preserve Pine Barrens land.

Alas, our work is never done! We will continue our land and water preservation efforts in the new year. We will also be launching new education, recreation and stewardship initiatives, to encourage Long Islanders to enjoy the beautiful Pine Barrens land that we all continue to fight to protect.

I hope that you'll take a few minutes to learn more about our work. Please accept our thanks for helping to make this year's event so successful and for your contribution to the Society's accomplishments in protecting drinking water and preserving open space. We hope you will join us for Gala 49!

Sincerely,

Nina Leonhardt
Acting Executing Director

Richard Amper
Executive Director Emeritus

**Long Island Pine Barrens Society's Virtual
Environmental Gala Thursday, October 23, 2025**



**THANK YOU FOR CELEBRATING OUR
48TH ANNIVERSARY VIRTUALLY!**

THE LONG ISLAND PINE BARRENS AND WATER PROTECTION

Formed by a unique set of geological conditions over the past 15,000 years, the Pine Barrens is Long Island's premier ecosystem and one of the Northeast's greatest natural treasures. It is home to literally thousands of plant and animal species, many of them endangered or threatened.

Dry upland areas are dominated by the pitch pine that gives the region its name, though in many areas black, scarlet and white oak share the tree canopy. Scrub and dwarf chestnut oaks dominate the shrub thicket, joined by a variety of interesting heath plants. From the forest floor springs a profusion of lichens and wildflowers.

The Long Island Pine Barrens also contains a diverse range of wetland communities, including marshes, heath bogs, red maple swamps and rare Atlantic white cedar swamps. Wetland areas team with unusual plants, including several insectivorous species and over a dozen species of orchids.

Animals in the Long Island Pine Barrens include over 100 bird species, many of which are disappearing in the region; an outstanding population of butterflies and moths, including the threatened buckmoth; and such threatened or endangered vertebrates as the eastern tiger salamander, eastern mud turtle and northern harrier hawk.

In fact, the Long Island Pine Barrens boasts the greatest diversity of plant and animal species anywhere in the state of New York.

Virtually all of Long Island's drinking water is drawn from a single system of underground reservoirs, known as aquifers. This led the federal Environmental Protection Agency to designate our aquifer system as the nation's first Sole Source Aquifer, requiring special protection. The Long Island Pine Barrens overlies the source of the greatest quantity of the purest drinking water on Long Island.

Two hundred years ago, the Pine Barrens blanketed one-fourth of Long Island, assuring a plentiful supply of pure, fresh drinking water. Today, most of that land has been developed, and our water supply has been compromised. What remains beneath our Pine Barrens is pristine and must be protected. For the last ten years, scientists have been reporting a dramatic deterioration of Long Island's water quality

outside of the Pine Barrens. Contaminants resulting from household, business and agricultural activities percolate through the ground and enter the aquifer system that is the source of our drinking water. Precipitation speeds this process and also leads to run-off (rainwater that travels across paved areas), which contributes to poor surface water quality as it picks up contaminants. Common contaminants include nitrogen from household waste flowing through cesspools and septic systems; nitrogen-based agricultural and lawn products; pesticides and other toxic chemicals.

Harmful algae blooms, fueled by excess nitrogen, have devastated Long Island's shellfish industry, resulting in fish and turtle die-offs, killed sea grasses and the closure of beaches across Long Island – undermining our environment and economy. Latest studies indicate that some blooms may cause neurological issues for newborns and new-to-Long-Island varieties of algae appear to be toxic to humans. Also, most of Long Island's coastal waters have been deemed impaired by scientists and the crisis grows with every passing day.

For many years, the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and other environmental groups have advocated for clean water at all government levels. As a result, the state and federal government allocated billions for water quality improvement and Suffolk County established a program that provides grants to homeowners who upgrade their septic systems to innovative/alternative (I/A) systems. These I/A systems remove most of the nitrogen from home wastewater, thereby lessening the nitrogen impact on the aquifer system. In 2023 and 2024, the Society and its environmental partners advocated for passage of the Suffolk County Water Quality Restoration which, for an additional one-eighth of a cent sales tax, provides funding for I/A grants, water reuse projects and sewer infrastructure where practical. It also extends the Drinking Water Protection Program which is used to purchase Pine Barrens land. As they have in the past, Suffolk County voters overwhelmingly chose clean water! The Society remains vigilant to ensure that this new funding stream, which, according to the County, generated \$3.8 million from March 1, 2025 to May 15, 2025, is used solely for I/A grants, sewer systems, water-saving projects and open space, as intended.



Photos: Sandy Richard, Sandy Chuck-Harris



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER
110 STATE STREET
ALBANY, NY 12236

October 23, 2025

Nina Leonhardt, Acting Executive Director
Long Island Pine Barrens Society
2042 North Country Road, Suite 103
Wading River, NY 11792

Dear Friends:

Greetings to all those gathered this evening for the virtual Environmental Gala hosted by the Long Island Pine Barrens Society in celebration of its 48th Anniversary. Since 1977, the Society has been devoted to scientific study, public education and environmental protection of the Long Island Pine Barrens, a unique ecosystem noted for its remarkable biodiversity, diverse wetland communities and precious aquifers.



Founded by three environmental science students with an initial goal of studying and raising awareness of the Long Island Pine Barrens, the Society began to embrace a more active preservationist stance over the years, in the face of encroaching development. While remaining committed to scientific research and education, the Society has become an effective public advocate for environmental protection and the sound management of publicly held Pine Barrens land. In addition, the Society has played a key role in establishing two major preserves, securing public support for drinking water and open space initiatives and championing the Long Island Pine Barrens Protection Act. The dedicated officers, board, staff, members and supporters of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society are defending the natural environment, and helping create a healthier, happier future for Long Island.

Best wishes for a joyful celebration and continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom DiNapoli".

Thomas P. DiNapoli
State Comptroller

PRESERVING THE “PEOPLE’S PARK” – LIFE IN THE PINE BARRENS

The Long Island Pine Barren Society's The Best of the Rest initiative is urging government to buy approximately 3,800 acres that are scattered across the Pine Barrens to ensure the ecological and hydrological integrity of the Pine Barrens. Over the past several decades, various levels of government have done a remarkable job at preserving tens of thousands of acres of Pine Barrens, creating the “People’s Park.”

Thanks to these efforts, not only are our drinking and surface waters protected, but so is the entire ecosystem. Here are a few examples of life in Pine Barrens – species that are dependent on this valuable ecosystem.

Near a vernal pond adjacent to the Dwarf Pine Plains in Westhampton, native plants that love water abound, including the Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*). The beautiful formation of a mature specimen displays an architectural structure of branches on the bottom. Birds look to its berries for sustenance and eat them when they're white. We would wait until they were dark blue or purple before eating. As you're hiking through the Pine Barrens, you can come across a patch of blueberries, both Highbush and Lowbush (*Vaccinium angustifolium*), that have still the purple berries in their ripened state. Also, as the plant blooms white in the spring, it is visited by hosts of pollinators. It's an important plant that helps control soil erosion, and for pollinators, for birds, and for the environment as a whole.

Another native plant that likes the water's edge is the American vervain (*Verbena hastata*). Because it's native, the pollinators love it.

It grows readily, it reseeds readily and it's easy to care for. It's a tall, statuesque plant with strikingly beautiful purple flowers and a sweet fragrance. The ultimate height of these plants ranges from two feet to six feet, depending on the soil quality. This plant attracts hummingbirds in addition to other pollinators.

Wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) grows flat along the ground. It loves to grow under the pines, in the pine needles. This plant colonizes and spreads as ground cover but usually does not form thick patches. Its leaves are fragrant, and in the fall and winter and sometimes in spring it produces red berries. Those red berries provide the flavoring for wintergreen gum and other products. Once again, birds love the berries.

A stand of Atlantic White Cedar (*Chamaeparis thyoides*), which is one of the more uncommon trees, is nestled in the Cranberry Bog Nature Preserve in Riverhead. This particular species underscores how the Pine Barrens provides a stronghold for a number of species that, absent the

protection of Pine Barrens, would be lost to Long Island. By far, the main concentrations of Atlantic White Cedar that remain on Long Island are scattered throughout the Pine Barrens.

These cedars have wonderful leaves that resemble spray ferns, displaying very flattened needles. The tiny cedar cones are not like typical pitch pinecones, which could be 1.5 - 2.0 inches in length and open up to shed their seed. These cones are very tiny, about the size of your pinky fingernail. They produce small seeds, which are easily transported by either water or by the wind.



Photos: Bob McGrath, Travis Cutter, Cornell University, Creative Commons





September 29, 2025

Nina Leonhardt
Executive Director
Long Island Pine Barrens Society
2042 North Country Road, Suite 103
Wading River, NY 11792

Dear Friends,

It is a privilege to send greetings to everyone attending the Long Island Pine Barrens Society's Virtual Environment Gala this October. Congratulations to your community on this meaningful occasion.

I am grateful to organizations like the Long Island Pine Barrens Society for ensuring that our environment is both appreciated and protected. Environmental destruction remains a serious issue in our communities, and as your U.S. Senator from New York, I will continue fighting for our environment, including the beautiful Pine Barrens in Suffolk County. I commend the staff and volunteers of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society for all the important work they do, and it is my sincere hope that your steadfast efforts will inspire others to enact positive changes in their own communities.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful gala and many more years of continued success.

Sincerely,

A blue ink handwritten signature that reads "Kirsten Gillibrand".

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

The Cranberry Bog is one of the largest concentrations of this really interesting tree species. The main trunk of the tree is straight and tall. Two hundred years ago, straight wood was an important construction material for ship masts and fence posts, for example. And so, it was harvested continuously and extensively. Almost all of the white cedar tree populations that existed in western part of Long Island were timbered out.

In addition to an abundance of flora, the Pine Barrens is home to fauna of all types. Birds and pollinators are in abundance throughout the Pine Barrens. Different species inhabit and/or migrate to the various Pine Barrens locales at various times of the year, depending on their life cycles.

The Cranberry Bog Preserve in late September hosts Painted Turtles (*Chrysemys picta*) that can often be found on logs at Sweezy's Pond within the preserve. They bask in the sun to try to increase their body warmth. Later, they leave the surface of the pond and bury themselves in the mud where they will undergo reptilian hibernation, or brumation, where they will spend the winter.

These turtles are a good example of why we need to protect the various wetland communities and habitats that are found in the Pine Barrens. If we were to lose the wetlands, the overall biodiversity of region would be diminished, which would be a great loss for all of us.

Non-poisonous snakes, such as the Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis saurita*), the Eastern Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*), the Ring-necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus*) and the Common Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*), are often found throughout the Pine Barrens. They can climb shrubs and trees adeptly. This allows them to catch prey that you otherwise might think they'd not be able to reach. If the snake's eye is milky or glazed over, it will likely shed its skin fairly soon.

Common Yellowthroat Warblers (*Geothlypis trichas*) are nesting songbirds that are found throughout the Pine Barrens. They have an affinity for wetland areas, typically along pond edges and along streams. Fall migration brings this bird to the Pine Barrens from points further north. The female has a bright yellow throat. The males are quite conspicuous with a black bandit mask with yellow on the other sides. It will continue feeding here and then head south for the winter.

The yellowthroat is one of several dozen species of warblers that breed here or pass through during spring and winter migration. So again, the Pine Barrens provides homes for resident birds, but also as a "migratory motel" for many bird species – a dramatic indication that the Pine Barrens ecosystem is not only important to our ecosystem, but also the global ecosystem.

Photos: Richard Crook, Julie Falk, John Turner, Travis Cutter



GALA CO-CHAIRS



Ross Ain **Caithness Long Island**

Ross Ain has been active in the energy field for more than 40 years. He began his career as a legislative counsel to the U.S. House of Representatives and then counsel to the Energy & Commerce Committee of the House. After the passage of major energy legislation in the 70's, he worked at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

From 1980-1994, he practiced law, advising developers on renewable, co-generation and other power projects. Since 1994, he has been a senior executive with two private independent power companies, which developed, owned and operated wind, solar, geothermal, hydro and natural gas-fired generating plants throughout the United States.

Under his direction, Caithness completed construction of one of the cleanest, most energy efficient and water conserving power plants in New York State. The Caithness Long Island Energy Center was brought online in 2009 and is the most efficient plant on Long Island, producing more than 22% of the electricity generated on Long Island, while representing only 5% of the on-island installed capacity. Mr. Ain is currently working on development projects utilizing highly efficient combined cycle technologies, wind power and battery storage technologies across the United States.



Nancy Douzinas **Rauch Foundation**

After a career of 20 years as a psychologist and family therapist, Nancy Rauch Douzinas decided to devote herself to expanding and guiding the Rauch Foundation. In 1990 she became president, and under her leadership, the Rauch Foundation became a high-profile change agent on Long Island and in Maryland. Two years ago, she stepped back from her daily oversight of the Foundation and empowered her daughters to provide leadership. She continues to serve on the boards of the Greentree Foundation in Manhasset and Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City.

Dr. Douzinas continues to be interested in land and water preservation on Long Island.



David Calone **Strata Advisors**

Through his roles at Strata Advisors, the Long Island Emerging Technologies Fund and Jove Equity Partners, David Calone helps start and grow small businesses on Long Island and around the country. He is an appointed member of New York State's Long Island Regional Economic Development Council and serves as the Vice Chair of Accelerate LI, on the Executive Board of the United Way of Long Island, and on the board of Community Development Long Island.

Mr. Calone previously served as Chair of the Suffolk County Planning Commission where he quarterbacked Suffolk County's first Comprehensive Master Plan and was nationally recognized for his work in streamlining permitting and in renewable energy development. Earlier in his career, he was a federal prosecutor focusing on fighting terrorism and international economic crime and was a Special Assistant New York State Attorney General who helped lead one of the largest recoveries of taxpayer money in New York State history.

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- **Joe Campolo**, CEO & Founder, Strata Alliance

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"The greatest threat to
our planet is the belief
that someone else will
save it."

—Robert Swan

Celebrating
the Pine Barrens
Society for believing
otherwise.

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Positive Image Photography & Graphic Design

THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE
LONG ISLAND PINE BARRENS SOCIETY'S
VIRTUAL 48TH ANNIVERSARY GALA
WE HOPE TO SEE YOU AT 49TH GALA!





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Congratulations from Ørsted

Happy 48th anniversary
to the Long Island
Pine Barrens Society

Ørsted



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**LONG ISLAND
PINE BARRENS
SOCIETY**

Celebrating its 48th Birthday

Preserving The People's Park

**and the ongoing success of
“the Best of the Rest” initiative**

Protecting Land and Water



Nurturing Earth's Treasures for our Children



Caithness celebrates the Long Island Pine Barrens Society and our collective efforts to preserve the People's Park.

The "Best of the Rest" is truly yet to come!

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energy center

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