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NJ Pinelands Commission Approves First Forest Stewardship Plan in the State on Public Land

Stockton College Develops Comprehensive Plan to Manage Campus Forests, Build Biodiversity, Provide Recreation

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Galloway Township, NJ- The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey's forestlands, located in the Pinelands National Reserve, will now be protected and managed under the state's first comprehensive forest management plan on public land.

"This marks the first full approval of a forest plan in the state on public land," said Rummy Pandit, interim associate vice president of Operations and executive director of Stockton Seaview, whose group helped develop the plan. "The forest plan proposes to sustain and increase the existing biodiversity of the forests by improving growing conditions for existing trees and improving conditions which will allow oak and pine to regenerate and protect forest health."

"Stockton's Environmental Studies program is one of the oldest in the nation," said college President Herman J. Saatkamp. "Stockton has been nationally recognized for its Sustainability initiatives. This forest management plan expands our protection of the environment on campus and in surrounding communities, while offering educational opportunities in forest management."

Stockton's Office of Facilities Planning and Construction worked closely with Marathon Engineering & Environmental Services, Inc., Bob Williams, certified forester and vice president of forest operations for Land Dimensions Engineering, and Dr. George Zimmermann, professor of Environmental Studies at Stockton, on the Forest Stewardship Plan approved April 12 by the New Jersey Pinelands Commission.

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Under the new plan, Stockton will actively manage more than 1,500 acres of forest, benefiting the local wildlife populations, protecting the college campus against fire and pathogens and providing recreation such as hiking and wildlife viewing.

Nancy Wittenberg, executive director of the Pinelands Commission, said, "Comprehensive forest management is crucial to the survival of the unique ecology of the Pinelands. We are pleased to have the opportunity to work closely with Stockton College on this important planning effort."

The plan's goals and objectives state that "this is a forest with a college in it—not a college with a forest attached to it. The emotional experience that humans have while at this learning institution can be directly linked to the setting of being in a forest."

Stockton's efforts will "demonstrate what good ecological forest management can do for the health, resiliency and biodiversity of our forests," Dr. Zimmerman said.

"Many New Jersey forests are in poor shape because they haven't been managed. They are in danger from catastrophic fire and aren't as diverse and resilient as they could be," he explained.

A major threat to forests is a small bug found from central America and north to New Jersey — the southern pine beetle.

"Our forests are highly vulnerable, and one of our high priorities is defending our campus against this pest," said Zimmermann.

The new plan provides opportunities for faculty members to collaborate on interdisciplinary research and enhance overall environmental education programs with hands-on forest management.

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