



INSIDE...

PAGES 2 - 3

◆ PPOW: A HISTORY III

PAGE 4

◆ ENVIRONMENTAL BOND
ACT FUND

INSERT

◆ PPOW CALENDAR:
WALKS, WORKSHOPS,
IMPORTANT EVENTS
AND MEETINGS

PAGES 5 - 6

◆ FOREST RESTORATION
WORKSHOP PROJECT

PAGE 7

◆ MEMBERSHIP MESSAGE
◆ MEMBERSHIP
INFORMATION

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

One of the gifts of winter is visibility. You can read tracks in soft mud at the edge of a pond, find deer paths braided through the understory, or watch a hawk work the open edge of a field without a curtain of leaves limiting your view. It's also when Staten Island's forests feel most like a crossroads: resident wildlife hunkering down and winter visitors arriving from farther north. If you're out early, you might hear the clear notes of a Winter Wren tucked into a brush pile, catch a sudden flash of blue as an overwintering Belted Kingfisher patrols a creek, or see the telltale sweep of a Great Horned Owl's wings at dusk.

Throughout 2025, many of you have followed our work opposing the Northeast Supply Enhancement (NESE) pipeline, a proposed natural gas pipeline that threatens our harbor, our wetlands, and the health of our communities. In November, New York State issued approvals for the project that, in our view, contradict both the spirit and the history of how water-quality protections have been applied throughout the region. The details can get technical fast, but the principle is simple enough: if our laws are going to fulfill their purpose, they must protect water, habitat, and communities regardless of political pressure.

We are doing what Protectors has done for the last five decades: showing up, building coalitions, and using every legal tool available to defend the natural resources our communities rely on. To that end, we have joined a coalition of other nonprofits in a lawsuit against New York State to put an end to the construction of the pipeline. We are proud to be represented by EarthJustice in this litigation, the leading nonprofit public interest environmental law organization.

The second half of 2025 also included a highly successful, but solemn, Fall semiannual meeting at the Staten Island Museum. We heard beautiful tributes from friends, colleagues, and loved ones of the late Hillel Lofaso, former president of this organization, reflecting on his passion and dedication for preservation of Staten Island's natural spaces and the powerful influence he had on so many lives. The meeting also allowed us to hear from Lilla Maselli, a student at Staten Island Technical High School, who spoke about the meaningful and lasting impact of her Protectors-sponsored DEC Camp experience. We thank Lilla, our guests, and the staff of the Staten Island Museum for making our event successful.

As we move into the New Year, we face a new political playing field in City Hall—one that we must recognize and work with at a time when “resilience” has become an empty buzzword. However, on Staten Island, resilience is not abstract. Being resilient is what our west shore saltmarshes do when storm surge hits, and it's what the soils of the Greenbelt do when heavy rains pour. If New York City is serious about climate readiness and resilience, it has to be serious about Staten Island. Protectors will keep advocating on that principle in every forum we enter, and we are eager to continue working with elected officials across the political spectrum to keep Staten Island green.

Protectors of Pine Oak Woods is powered by people who care deeply and act consistently: donors who give what they can, volunteers who show up in the cold, members who write letters and attend hearings, and neighbors who tell their friends, “this place matters.” Protectors of Pine Oak Woods is entering 2026 with clarity and urgent purpose, and we thank you for standing with us.

With gratitude and resolve,

José R. Ramírez-Garofalo
President, Protectors of Pine Oak Woods

P.S. Winter is when we build momentum for spring. If you're able, please renew your membership or make an early-year gift. Your support keeps our advocacy strong and our stewardship visible.

PROTECTOR'S MISSION

Protectors of Pine Oak Woods is committed to increasing the stewardship of Staten Island's existing parkland, Bluebelt corridors and nature preserves, and to continuing the effort to preserve Staten Island's natural areas. Protectors advocates for protection and preservation by educating our members, the general public and elected officials at all levels of government through meetings, workshops, walks, articles, newsletters, and sponsorship of environmental education.

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

José Ramirez-Garofalo

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Jack Bolembach

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Elaine B. Croteau

RECORDING SECRETARY

Lisa Abbot Pillarella

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Madeline Paladino

TREASURER

Andrew Blanco

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

Nicole Sammon, J.D.

..

DIRECTORS

Alan I. Benimoff, Ph.D.

Heather Butts, J.D.

Linda Cohen

Dominick Durso

Kwynn Hogan

Eileen Monreale

Jacqueline Perine

Ellen O'Flaherty Pratt

Don Recklies

Herb Smith

..

HONORARY DIRECTORS

Albert F. Appleton, Esq.

Hon. Gordon J. Davis

Joseph Fernicola (Co-founder)

Richard Lynch

Lenore Miller

Robert Miraldi, Ph.D.

Arthur M. Shapiro, Ph. D.

•

Protectors Co-founder and

President Emeritus

Richard Buegler (1928-2016)

..

BULLETIN COMMITTEE

Elaine Croteau (Chair)

Dominic A. Durso

Jacqueline Perine

Madeline Paladino

Ellen O'Flaherty Pratt

Skye Suter (Editor & Design)

..

BULLETIN

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper by Modern Press, Inc., Jersey City, NJ

..

WEBSITE

Heather Butts
Quinn Hogan



How did it all begin? Ellen Pratt chronicled the fifty-year history of Protectors of Pine Oak Woods encompassing many parks and natural areas whose names are so familiar to us today. The first installment appeared in the spring 2025 issue of the bulletin, followed by a second installment in the Autumn issue. In this third installment, Ellen discusses The Greenbelt, Bloodroot Valley and Paulo's Peak (formerly Moses Mountain.) Look for more history in future bulletins and on the blog at siprotectors.org.

PROTECTOR OF PINE OAK WOODS: 50 YEARS OF GREEN A HISTORY - PART III

THE GREENBELT

Frederick Law Olmsted, the brilliant landscape architect of Central Park and Prospect Park, farmed on Staten Island in Eltingville for seven years on one hundred and thirty acres of land overlooking Raritan Bay. He envisioned and advocated for a greenbelt on Staten Island, a contiguous interlocking strip of green lands. Olmsted's house and 2.7 acres of grounds are now Staten Island's newest park: The Olmsted-Beil House Park.

The first area of Olmsted's proposal to be threatened was High Rock Park, a Girl Scout headquarters and camping area, high in the hills of the central Greenbelt. When the Girl Scouts learned that Robert Moses planned a parkway at the edges of their campground they decided to sell. This alarming decision upset many Scouts and Staten Islanders, but they decided to sell anyway.

A developer planned a high-rise apartment complex at High Rock. He went ahead to build the foundations. The Court intervened and the public became concerned that the Scout's refuge would be lost. This was round one of the fifteen-year battle to keep the wooded lands of the central Greenbelt intact. The developer lost out and the foundations were never completed. But Robert Moses still intended to build a parkway near the Girl Scout camp and the adjoining Boy Scout camp. That battle, which went on for years, pitted Protectors and Staten Island Greenbelt Natural Areas League (SIGNAL) against the City and parkway advocates. Years went by and Robert Moses, the master developer of parks and parkways in the metropolitan region, still insisted that the Richmond Parkway would be built. It remains on the map as a reminder of the one project Robert Moses did not complete. Local roads replaced the dreamed-of Richmond Parkway and Pouch Camp is now a conservation easement property in coordination with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), New York City and the Trust for Public Land (TPL).

Protectors' goal of protecting the central Greenbelt was gradually coming to completion. The next round of the battle began on December 26, 1979 when the Staten Island Advance headline read "Mayor Koch, to Sell Seaview", the semi-abandoned hospital between Staten Island's Brielle Avenue and Manor Road. Protectors intervened immediately and on January 9, 1980 obtained an injunction to halt the sale of Seaview and the adjoining Farm Colony complex. The announcement of the sale came as a shock because the hospital sat squarely in the middle of the Greenbelt. The news galvanized the public. Hundreds of letters were written. Actually, it was a virtual tidal wave of letters that kept arriving every day for years, all in support of saving the Greenbelt. The Protector's flyer, entitled "Save Seaview and the Greenbelt," recruited members for Protectors and sought funds for the battle.

Hundreds of supporters attended the hearings, and Protectors was leading the way in organizing the speakers to cover every point. It was clear the public cared about Seaview and the Greenbelt. Mayor Koch called for a City Planning Department study which was done between

...continued on next page.

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH PPOW...

ORGANIZATION

MAIL:

P.O. Box 140747
Staten Island, NY 10314

E-MAIL:

ppow@siprotectors.org

WEBSITE:

www.siprotectors.org

FACEBOOK:

Protectors of Pine Oak Woods

INSTAGRAM:

siprotectors

January 1980 and March 1983. The hearing at the end of the study produced an enthusiastic crowd of 550 supporters who applauded the Staten Island Parks Commissioner, Thomas Paulo's study which proposed the creation of the Greenbelt Park. During this time the Borough President's Committee on the Greenbelt, led by Protectors, recommended that the Greenbelt be expanded. Jack Deitch, an ardent Greenbelt supporter, led the group. The accompanying Staten Island Greenbelt Stewardship Council which met for seven years with community supporters such as Joan Martin, Dr. David Soifer, Hillel Lofaso and Kevin Sheehy, recommended adding the William T. Davis Wildlife Refuge, the St. Francis Woodlands, Willowbrook Park, and the Richmond County Country Club Golf course to the Greenbelt core. Throughout, many dozens of walks were led by Dick Buegler, President of Protectors, and his companions, Herman Zaage, Dominick Durso, and Don Recklies along the Richmond Parkway route. He pointed to the wonders of the urban natural area. Finally in 1985 the Greenbelt was dedicated and Mayor Koch funded the Greenbelt office with Thomas Paulo as Administrator for the Greenbelt.

BLOODROOT VALLEY

Bloodroot Valley is the least disturbed place on Staten Island. It is within the Seaview property and runs parallel to Manor Road. It is quite inaccessible because of fencing on the Manor Road side and a steep slope on the eastern Seaview side. It is actually a stream ravine which drains Camp Kaufman and Pouch Camp, the land surrounding Susan Wagner High School and the Jewish Community Center property and eastern Seaview. It was rediscovered in 1997 during a botanical survey conducted by Dick Buegler for the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Science.

It is named for Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), the gentle white flower which grows only on the slope of the stream-ravine, the only place on Staten Island. The orange tubular root of the Bloodroot plant was used by the Lenape Indians as a dye.

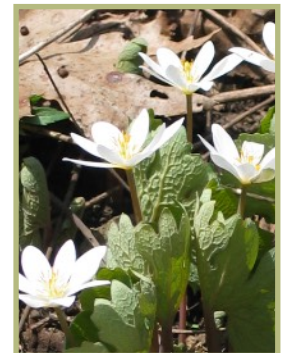
The soils of Bloodroot Valley are less acidic than most Staten Island soils. Sugar Maple, Canadian Hemlock, Mountain Laurel, and Dolls-Eye (also known as white baneberry plant) are found in Bloodroot Valley.

When Parks Department staff took NYC Parks Commissioner Henry Stern to visit the stream he instantly recognized the unique character of Bloodroot Valley and decided to preserve the area as a unique park. A picture recognizing the creation of the Greenbelt was taken with Commissioner Stern, Staten Island Parks Commissioner Joseph Curran, Terence Benbow and George Pratt at the edge of Bloodroot Valley. Today the park created of Bloodroot Valley and southern Seaview is called Bloodroot Valley Park. It includes Moses Mountain and Egbertville Ravine.

Dick Buegler's lawsuit challenging Mayor Koch's sale of Seaview paved the way for the division of Seaview into several portions: northern Seaview, Bloodroot Valley, southern Seaview, and in the west, the Farm Colony and the Seaview Hospital core.



Blooming
bloodroot.
Photos by
Don Recklies.



PAULO'S PEAK - MOSES MOUNTAIN

Moses Mountain has been renamed Paulo's Peak in recognition of Thomas A. Paulo, author of the City Planning Department's Greenbelt Study and longtime administrator of the City Parks Department's Greenbelt Park.

Paulo's Peak is approximately a 300 foot high deposit of rock and soil at the intersection of Manor Road and Rockland Avenue in the Greenbelt. It is named after Robert Moses, the planner of parks and highways in Metropolitan New York and Long Island. In preparing to build the Richmond Parkway through Staten Island's Greenbelt, this soil and rock was excavated from what was to be the intersection of the Staten Island Expressway and the Richmond Parkway.

This hard-to-climb hill, now dotted with trees, is an excellent place to view the green spaces of the Greenbelt: St. Francis Friary Woodlands, The Richmond County Country Club Golf Course, the non-existent Willowbrook Highway, Lighthouse Hill, southern Latourette Park (now Bloodroot Valley Park), Seaview, Kaufman and Pouch Camps. A sea of green in the midst of an urban area, it is most easily accessed from Manor Road, 800 yards above Rockland Avenue. It is worth the climb. It also is the best viewing spot for the sunset and moonrise phenomena.

Protectors' Greenbelt hikes, held each Spring, Autumn and Winter, sometimes visit Paulo's Peak. Sunset-Moonrise visits are held each year.

— Ellen O' Flaherty Pratt

CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS

RE: EBA FUND DISTRIBUTIONS

In November 2022, citizens statewide voted to approve the \$4.2 billion Environmental Bond Act (EBA). \$650 million of this is to be used to acquire ecologically valuable open space across the State.

There have been a number of time-consuming logistical hurdles that have slowed down distribution of these funds, but those hurdles have now been surmounted, and the funds will be available in 2026.

Staten Island taxpayers are paying into this fund and we have let administrators of this fund (the State Department of Environmental Conservation -- DEC) know that Staten Island is insistent upon receiving our fair share. DEC is now familiar with each of Staten Island's high priority conservation properties.

We are in regular communication with the DEC and with our elected officials on Staten Island. In fact, several DEC officials hiked the Serpentine Ridge in early November 2025 to look at potential conservation parcels there.

It is important that Staten Island elected officials support these projects, and they have all given us indications that they will. But it would be most helpful if you would reach out to them to remind them that you are quite passionate about the need to preserve addition parcels on Staten Island for conservation, in perpetuity. We should all understand there is a good chance that all parcels not formally preserved on Staten Island will ultimately be developed.

You've seen in recent years the unfortunate loss of ancient trees and critical wetlands at sites such as Mount Manresa and Graniteville Wetlands, and near the Matrix Logistics Park. So, we need to preserve as many of our remaining natural resources on Staten Island as possible. Please reach out to your elected officials to let them know that you would like to see any and all of these properties protected.

- Land Preservation Committee

	City Council Member	State Assemblyman	State Senator	Borough President
Serpentine Ridge (3 parcels; over 7 ½ acres; adjacent to 11 acres already saved by the Serpentine Commons land conservancy)	Kamillah Hanks	Charles Fall	Jessica Scarcella-Spanton	Vito Fossella
Arden Woods Park expansion (3 parcels adjacent to City lands; 32 acres; the largest wetland in the NYC metro area)	Frank Morano	Sam Pirozzolo	Andrew Lanza	Vito Fossella
Sharrott's Shorelands and Tappen's Creek (several parcels; 20+ acres along Arthur Kill and straddling Tappen's Creek; adjacent to State-owned DEC parcels)	Frank Morano	Michael Reilly	Andrew Lanza	Vito Fossella
North Bloomingdale Wetlands Corridor (7 parcels; 11+ acres; flows into, and is adjacent to, the City's Bloomingdale Park)	Frank Morano	Michael Reilly	Andrew Lanza	Vito Fossella
Hybrid Oak Woods expansion (several parcels; 20+ acres; adjacent to the City's Hybrid Oak Woods.)	Frank Morano	Michael Reilly	Andrew Lanza	Vito Fossella
Outerbridge Ponds (3 wetland & woodland parcels; 22 acres; near Mill Creek Bluebelt; surrounded by very dense development)	Frank Morano	Michael Reilly	Andrew Lanza	Vito Fossella
Seaside Wildlife Nature Park expansion (1 parcel; 4 acres; adjacent to the City's SWNP; developer has already received building permits to build in this wetland buffer zone that is also a flood zone)	Frank Morano	Michael Tannousis	Andrew Lanza	Vito Fossella
Glossy Ibis Waterfront Park (1 parcel; 1.9 acres; could become an exclave of the City's Richmond Terrace Park)	Kamillah Hanks	Charles Fall	Jessica Scarcella-Spanton	Vito Fossella

As taxpayers, you are paying for the Environmental Bond Act.
This \$650 million will not come around again.

Let's not let our hard-earned tax dollars go only to support open space conservation in Plattsburg, Poughkeepsie, and Patchogue. So, please reach out to your elected officials; advocate for one or more of the properties shown above; and speak up for Staten Island.

PROTECTOR OF PINE OAK WOODS CALENDAR

FREE NATURE WALKS TO POND AND PARK FOR ALL

Saturday, January 10 1:00 - 3:00 pm

NORTH MT. LORETTO STATE FOREST WITH DON RECKLIES

We'll meet in NYSDEC parking lot at Amboy and Cunningham Roads - not at Hylan! We will loop the eastern side of the State Forest by the Red and Blue trails, visit the power house and church in the developed area to the south, cross Hylan to the boardwalk and uphill to the "lighthouse", then return to the parking lot by way of Cunningham Road, on the way examining the topography and history of the area. If there has been recent rain, some of the trails may be muddy. Inclement weather, but not a drizzle, will cancel this walk.

For information call Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036.



Sunday, January 11 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

RAMBLE ALONG SERPENTINE RIDGE WITH KIERAN NASEEM

See the scenic vistas of Stapleton along this elevated ridge for a hike that is under two miles.

Meet Kieran at 599 Van Duzer Street for this hike.



Saturday, January 17 10:00 am - 12 noon

FOREST RESTORATION WORKSHOP BELOW THE LATOURETTE BIKE PATH

We'll meet in the "Field of Dreams" parking lot on Forest Hill Road (opposite the Costco) and continue cutting twining, woody vines from trails below the Greenway. This is our 353rd monthly workshop. We have worked on these trails several years now, and have made considerable headway, but there are isolated sections we've skipped by, so we'll look for those particularly! Protectors will supply gloves, tools and refreshments.

REGISTRATION: Please register through **Eventbrite** on our website siprotectors.org, so we know how many volunteers to prepare for. For more information call Brian Smith 917-842-6585 or Don Recklies 718-768-9036.
(Service Credit is available.)



Friday, January 23 5:00 - 6:30 pm

AN OWL PROWL AT HIGH ROCK PARK WITH CLIFF HAGEN

Join Cliff Hagen as he wanders the dark woods of the Greenbelt in search of wintering owls. Participants will listen for owls responding to Cliff Hagen's calls, hoots and whistles. Though flashlight are permitted, lights are discouraged. Similarly, flash photography is not permitted.

Participants will meet at the park entrance at the top of Nevada Avenue. For more information contact Cliff Hagen at 718-313-8591.

Sunday, February 8 9:00 - 11:00 am

RAMBLE IN THE HISTORIC CLAY PIT PONDS WITH KIERAN NASEEM

Take in the local history and feel the wintery chill as well as stops into the Nature Center on this Clay Pit perimeter hike which is just over two miles.

Meet Kieran at 2351 Veterans Way West Entrance at the Interpretive Center.



Sunday, February 15 12 noon - 2:00 pm

WALK IN THE WOODS AT BLUE HERON PARK WITH DON RECKLIES

We'll brave the chill (if there is any) to see winter activity in the park and try to identify a few trees by their bark. Perhaps we'll run across a shed (deer antlers that have been discarded) or hear the pileated woodpeckers. We'll meet in the Blue Heron Nature Center parking lot, 222 Pollion Avenue, then cross the street using the Blue Trail to visit Butterfly Pond, then loop back to the Nature Center using the Yellow and Red Trails. Time permitting, we'll walk around Spring Pond and the Arbutus Woods Trail loop to the north. (Inclement weather, but not a light rain, will cancel.)

For more information call Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036.



*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world; indeed,
it is the only thing that ever has.*

- Margaret Mead



Saturday, February 21 10:00 am - 12 noon

FOREST RESTORATION WORKSHOP ON THE BUCK'S HOLLOW RED TRAIL

We'll meet in the Moses Mountain (now Paulo's Peak) parking lot at the intersection of Rockland and Manor Road (or park on Meisner Road opposite the Bluebelt dam close to that intersection), then cross Rockland to take the White Trail north to the large restoration area at the junction of the Red and Blue Trails where we will range the restored area cutting and pulling out Wisteria and Oriental Bittersweet vines that threaten the new trees, and extracting alien Japanese Angelica saplings. We began this project just last November, but there's more to do, and it's likely to be a yearly project for us for some time. Protectors will supply gloves, pruners and refreshments.

REGISTRATION: Please register through the **Eventbrite** link on our website siprotectors.org. For more information call Brian Smith 917-842-6585 or Don Recklies 718-768-9036.
(Service Credit is available.)

PROTECTOR'S OF PINE OAK WOODS CALENDAR

FREE NATURE WALKS TO POND AND PARK FOR ALL

Friday, February 27 5:30 - 7:00 pm

CHAPIN WOODS WITH CLIFF HAGEN

Join with Cliff Hagen as he climbs the hills and slopes along the eastern slopes of Todt Hill in search of our nocturnal neighbors. Participants will listen for owls responding to Cliff Hagen's calls, hoots and whistles. Though flashlights are permitted, lights are discouraged. Similarly, flash photography is not permitted.

Participants will meet at the top of Chapin Avenue. For more information contact Cliff Hagen at 718-313-8591.



Sunday, March 8 9:00 - 11:00 am

A GUIDED WALK THROUGH ARDEN HEIGHTS WOODS WITH KIERAN NASEEM

Watch as the Early Spring thaws this beautiful patch of the south shore during this under two mile trail ramble.

Meet Kieran at the intersection entrance of Arden Avenue and Forest Green.



Friday, March 20 6:30 - 8:00 pm

TIMBERDOODLES CANOODLE AT SOUTH BEACH WITH CLIFF HAGEN

Join Cliff Hagen for an evening walk through the fields of South Beach to hear American Woodcock (aka timberdoodles) celebrate the arrival of Spring with their unique courtship rituals. Participants will gather in front of the Ocean Breeze Athletic Complex located at 625 Fathers Capadanno Boulevard.

For more information contact Cliff Hagen at 718-313-8591.

Saturday, March 21 10:00 am - 12 noon

FOREST RESTORATION WORKSHOP AT THE "PINE PLANTATION" ON THE LATOURETTE BIKE PATH

For our 355th workshop we'll meet at the entrance to the bike path on the Old Mill Road (west of Richmond Hill Road) next to the old St. Andrews Church. We'll follow the Greenway to the stand of Pitch Pines that was planted in the mid 90s and where last year we planted more pines adjacent to the current stand. Our job will be to continue digging up Japanese Knotweed from around the new pines. Protector's will supply gloves, necessary tools and refreshment.

REGISTRATION: So that we know how many volunteers to expect, please register through the Eventbrite link on our website siprotectors.org.

For more information call Brian Smith 917-842-6585 or Don Recklies 718-768-9036. (Service Credit is available.)



Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets. To plant a pine, one need only own a shovel.

- Aldo Leopold



Saturday, March 28 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

GREENBELT NATURE CENTER TO SEAVIEW WITH DON RECKLIES

Meet in the Greenbelt Nature Center parking lot at Rockland Avenue and Brielle (additional parking at the Recreation Center nearby). We'll see how Spring is breaking by making a loop using the Blue, White, and Red trails to pass the Dept. of Parks serpentine barrens restoration project, Paulo's Peak (Moses' Mountain), and the Bluebelt Dam at Rockland and Meisner. Rain, but not a drizzle, will cancel this walk.

For more information call Don Recklies at (718) 768-9036.

◆ MEET OUR WALK LEADERS ◆

Cliff Hagen is a past president of PPOW and has been involved with the group since 2000. He is deeply committed to the ecology and preservation of our natural areas on Staten Island.

Kieran Naseem is the founder of the SI History Hub and has been a regular guide for Staten Island Hiking Meetup Group. An avid naturalist, Kieran is particularly passionate about local history and how it pertains to our landscape.

Don Recklies is has been part of PPOW since the early 2000's and leads many walks and workshops; his primary interest is the ecology of NYC urban forests.

Brian Smith is has been "second in command" for Protector's Forest Restoration Workshops for several years and is passionately interested in slowing the intrusion of alien invasive plants in our precious woodlands.

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: While we strive for safety, the activities of Protector's of Pine Oak Woods (Protectors) have certain uncontrollable hazards which each participant undertakes and for which each participant is responsible. Neither the leader nor the substitute leader is responsible in any way whatsoever for any of these hazards. All participants assume the responsibility and risks of hiking and participating in Protector's events, and release Protector's, its leaders or substitute leaders, from any liability whatsoever for any loss, damage to personal property, or injury, however caused, of any kind, nature, and description.

PINE PLANTING AT SOUTHWEST LATOURETTE

A FOREST RESTORATION WORKSHOP PROJECT

Former PPOW president Dick Buegler began the Forest Restoration Workshops in the latter half of the 1990s when the Department of Parks received a grant from the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest Foundation for a large restoration effort in SW LaTourette that involved invasive removal and replanting of trees. After the project, a state forester floated the opinion that the work would be wasted and the area would again become a vineland unless a recurring effort was made to suppress invasive plants. At that time there was no budget to do this work, and Dick decided that Protectors could step in and lend a hand. He thus instituted our Forest Restoration Workshops that have occurred monthly since that time.

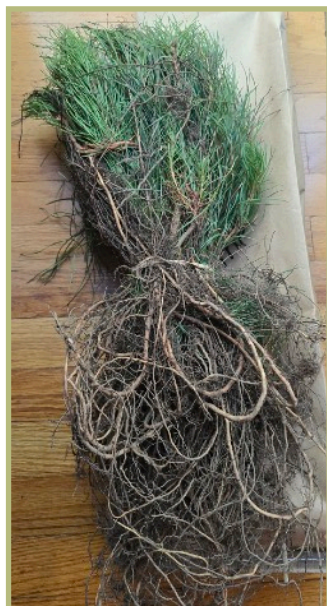
Forest Restoration Workshop co-leader Brian Smith acquired some pine seedlings from the Native Plant Center in late 2024 for the Forest Restoration project. These damaged trees were discards that couldn't be distributed elsewhere, so they were offered to us to do with what we could. When he picked them up, most of the needles were brown, but Brian kept them watered, and moved them into larger pots when necessary while we planned where and when to plant them.

The site we chose wasn't very encouraging; it was a forest of Japanese Knotweed stems. I cut the dead stems down so we could begin clearing the site for planting. Brian and I came back just before we planted to continue cutting and raking the area so that we wouldn't have to start from scratch in March. We left a line of uncut Knotweed to screen the site from the bike path, and didn't attempt to clear any from the steep slope between the site and the marsh below.

Finally, planting day! We chose the site behind a thin screen of knotweed stems because Protectors had been involved in introducing Pitch Pines at that place when the Department of Parks was doing a Forest Restoration project there in the late 1990s.

We put in the pines, using tree mats to help suppress the knotweed, and circled them with staked chicken-wire to protect them from deer. Unfortunately, we didn't know how dense the knotweed rhizomes were beneath the ground or how difficult it was going to be to control. We soon learned. Less than two months after planting, Knotweed surrounded the young pines and even grew up inside the chicken-wire.

Then things got more complicated when Brian received a package of twenty-five bare root Pitch Pine seedlings from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). He had responded to an announcement of availability several months before, but had not heard further and had forgotten about it. Now they arrived and he was planning to leave for a holiday in a week. We wanted to get them into the ground while they were still healthy, so we put out a call for help. Those of you who answered the call to volunteer, know that a few of us cleared knotweed from spots in between the staked pines, then planted and watered the new pines.



Left top: Planting in March.
Left bottom: Overwhelmed in May.
Center: Bare root pines.
Above: A call out to volunteers to remedy the situation.

We had no more wire to put around them, but so far they haven't been browsed. The biggest problem is that they are so small that they almost disappear under the competing knotweed. For the next three months Brian and I dug out knotweed around the plants about every three weeks, but gaining ground - that's sort of a pun - was slow. Some bare ground showed by the end of August, but it was very patchy.

We kept at it, and by the end of August the center of the site was very clear. But even in areas recently cleared, after a month knotweed sprouts were already 6 inches high. We realized we needed more help to dig out the underground stems they were growing from, so we scheduled a restoration workshop almost solely dedicated to uprooting those plants. We had a good turn-out, eighteen volunteers in all, and split our efforts between uprooting knotweed and planting some other shrubs in the newly cleared areas.

From a distance the area looks pretty good, but there are hundreds of small knotweed stems coming up in what looks like clear soil as well as dense knotweed along the edges. We extracted a large pile of rhizomes and dumped them at the edge of the site.

At the end of the day, the site was pretty clear, and we couldn't have done it without everybody chipping in. A good looking group, aren't they! There is no doubt in my mind that we aren't done here. Every little chunk of underground rhizome that bears a bud will be pushing up a new plant next spring, but the work we did this day will make going after the new stuff so much easier. I do think we have those plants on the run.

Earlier, at the end of August, you couldn't see the pines from the greenway; the knotweed border was already 6-8 feet tall. In fact it was this tall all around the planting site and made a deeply shaded zone at its eastern end. Then Parks sent a mowing crew to clear the edges of the greenway, and our planting could be seen from the path. Maybe because of that we got some unexpected help - a few days later a group of Urban Park Rangers came over and cut down the knotweed that was shading the eastern edge of the pines. That made such an improvement that we decided that next spring we will dig out the rhizomes there too.

In July we were asked to put up a sign about what was going on. Well, we put two signs up, and since our name is on them I guess we're obliged to go back and keep weeding next year. I understand that Brian has persuaded volunteer John McTiernan to watch over the site and co-ordinate our activity next year, so expect to see another name on our e-mails. We'll be going back in March, or perhaps even earlier if we see that the whitetail deer have discovered the un-protected seedlings. I'm keeping my fingers crossed about that.

- Don Recklies



A map showing the location of the current restoration project mentioned in this article and the group of diligent workers who volunteered their time for this Forest Restoration Workshop.



Don Recklies became associated with Protectors around 2001 when he was encouraged by a fellow nature walker to look up an organization on Staten Island with an odd name - "Protectors of Pine Oak Woods." After a search, he found that PPOW would soon be holding a "Forest Restoration Workshop", which he joined. It was here that he became acquainted with then president, Dick Buegler and other like-minded members of PPOW. Attending these workshops appealed to Don as a way of giving back for all the enjoyable opportunities to hike the local woodlands. Don took over the running of the workshops in late 2009 and was joined by Brian Smith in 2014 to co-lead the Forest Restoration Workshops.

MEMBERSHIP

MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Greetings Protectors,

Nature celebrated the Holidays by giving us a blanket of snow, and in this New Year we will give to Nature our commitment to protect its land and resources. Through your membership in Staten Island's oldest environmental organization, Protectors continues to be the strong voice that influences our local and state governments, supports open spaces, and protests thoughtless developments.

Thank you for attending our member events during our 50th Anniversary year, whether by a nature walk, a restoration workshop, a social gathering, or a meeting. Together we look forward to another *Fifty Years of Keeping Staten Island Green*.

Be a Protector. Stay a Protector.

Please use the membership form to select your new or renewal category and any additional donation you want to make. Send a check by mail, or simply use your credit card or PayPal on the Protectors website www.siprotectors.org.

Not sure of your membership status? Email membership@siprotectors.org.

Madeline Paladino

ADD YOUR VOICE AS A PROTECTOR OF PINE OAK WOODS

(see page 4)

Contact your local elected officials:

Hon. Vito Fosella (Dear Borough President Fosella...)
Staten Island Borough Hall 10 Richmond Terrace SI NY 10301

Hon. Jessica Scarcella-Spanton (Dear Senator Scarcella-Spanton...)
NYS District 23 36 Richmond Terrace Ste. 112 SI NY 10301

Hon. Andrew Lanza (Dear Senator Lanza...)
NYS District 24 3845 Richmond Ave. Ste. 2A SI NY 10312

Hon. Charles Fall (Dear Assemblyman Fall...)
NYS Assembly District 61 853 Forest Ave. SI NY 10310

Hon. Michael Reilly (Dear Assemblyman Reilly...)
NYS Assembly District 62 7001 Amboy Rd. Ste. 202E SI NY 10307

Hon. Sam Pirozzolo (Dear Assemblyman Pirozzolo...)
NYS Assembly District 63 2090 Victory Blvd. SI NY 10314

Hon. Michael Tannousis (Dear Assemblyman Tannousis...)
NYS Assembly District 64 11 Maplewood Place SI NY 10306

Hon. Kamillah Hanks (Dear Councilwoman Hanks...)
District 49 Office 130 Stuyvesant Place - 6th Fl. SI NY 10301

Hon. Frank Morano (Dear Councilman Morano...)
District 51 Office 2955 Veterans Rd. W. - Ste. 2 SI NY 10309

PROTECTORS OF PINE OAK WOODS MEMBERSHIP COUPON

Please enroll me as a member in the following category:

_____ NEW _____ RENEWAL _____ DATE

- _____ \$15.00.....Student
- _____ \$25.00.....Senior (62 and older)
- _____ \$30.00.....Individual
- _____ \$40.00.....Family/Household
- _____ \$75.00.....Contributor
- _____ \$150.00.....Supporter
- _____ \$250.....Benefactor
- _____ \$500.....Patron
- _____ \$3000.....Life
- _____ \$5000.....Corporate/Organization

Can your employer offer Matching Grants?

Enclosed is a tax deductible check for \$_____ made out to Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, Inc. To join/renew/donate by credit card or PayPal visit siprotectors.org/donate.

Here is my additional donation of \$_____ for:

- \$_____ General donation
- \$_____ SI Natural Areas Defense Fund
- \$_____ DEC Teen Camp Scholarship Fund
- \$_____ In honor of _____

**ALREADY A MEMBER? PLEASE USE THIS FORM TO
GIVE GENEROUSLY TO FURTHER OUR MISSION.**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE _____

EMAIL: _____

Contact me, I want to volunteer my help: _____

Mail to: Protectors of Pine Oak Woods, Inc.,
P.O. Box 140747, Staten Island, NY 10314.

Questions? Email membership@siprotectors.org.

PROTECTORS OF PINE OAK WOODS, INC.

P.O. Box 140747

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK 10314

Address Service Requested

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 405
S.I., N.Y. 10314



SAVE THE DATE
ANNUAL
MEMBERS MEETING

April 19th, 2026
1:00-3:00 pm

Staten Island Museum
on the grounds of
Snug Harbor Cultural Center.

Is your teenager interested in
attending the summer 2026 DEC teen
camp on a scholarship? Registration
starts in March.

Contact Madeline Paladino at
mpaladino@siprotectors.org for more

HELP SUPPORT PPOW

The 2026 calendar is available for purchase.
Contact Elaine Croteau at 646-713-4797.



Cover photo from the 2026 PPOW calendar.
Red-breasted Merganser, Silver lake Park. Photo: Anthony Esposito, Sr.