



# *Annual Report*

## **2023-2024**

To protect and manage the unique and endangered natural communities and species of the Albany Pine Bush, for ecological benefits and controlled and appropriate public recreational and educational use.





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*Photo by Jack Rogers*

## Dear friends,

We are thrilled to share another fantastic year at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve! In this annual report, we proudly highlight the Commission's achievements from April 2023 through March 2024. You'll see how we've been dedicated to protecting and managing the Globally Rare, Nationally Significant, and Locally Distinct Albany Pine Bush Preserve, while also offering engaging family and school programs at the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center.

Nestled in New York's Capital District, the 3,400-acre Albany Pine Bush Preserve stands as one of the best remaining inland pitch-pine scrub oak barrens in the world. This extraordinary fire-dependent ecosystem is a sanctuary for many plants and animals, including over 20 percent of New York State-designated wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need, such as the endangered Karner blue butterfly. As the largest open space in the Capital District, the preserve is a National Natural Landmark, National Recreation Trail Site, Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area Site, a New York State Unique Area and Bird Conservation Area, and a National Audubon Society Important Bird Area. With rolling sand dunes and over 20 miles of trails, it offers visitors an array of recreational opportunities

including hiking, bird watching, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking, hunting, fishing, and paddling.

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, a public-private partnership established by the New York State Legislature in 1988, is dedicated to protecting and managing this incredible preserve, while providing the public with enriching educational and recreational experiences.

As the welcoming gateway to the Pine Bush, the Discovery Center is a gold LEED-certified interpretive hub where visitors can learn about the unique significance of the Pine Bush. A visit to this exceptional destination offers exciting exploration through interactive exhibits, an outdoor Discovery Trail, and a variety of year-round programs covering ecology, natural history, cultural history, and natural resource management.

We have many wonderful opportunities for you to get involved throughout the seasons! Visit our website at [AlbanyPineBush.org](http://AlbanyPineBush.org) to donate to the Friends of the Pine Bush Community. Explore our family programs like an owl prowl, terrific turkeys, or cunning coyotes. Test your photography skills and submit your Pine Bush images to our annual photo exhibit.

Consider volunteering as a Discovery Center docent, community scientist, or preserve naturalist. Also, sign up for our e-newsletter and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and X.

We look forward to welcoming you as we continue to protect, manage, and discover the Albany Pine Bush!

## Warm regards,

**Christopher A. Hawver**  
**Executive Director**  
Albany Pine Bush  
Preserve Commission



## Background and Mission

Photo by Allen Landes

### What is the Commission and what does it do?

Established by the New York State Legislature in 1988, the Commission is a unique public-private partnership that works with willing landowners and a number of municipal, state, federal and private partners to assure the protection, restoration and management of the natural and cultural resources of the Albany Pine Bush.

In advancing its mission to protect and manage the Albany Pine Bush for ecological, recreational and education benefits, the Commission believes in a balanced approach that takes into account the positions and recommendations of its members as well as input from property owners, interest groups and the general public. It has no regulatory authority.

### Where is the Albany Pine Bush, and what does it contain?

The Pine Bush contains remnants of ice age sand plains that were part of a vast river delta at the edge of Glacial Lake Albany. The Pine Bush spans parts of the cities of Albany and Schenectady and the Towns of Colonie and Guilderland and supports

the best worldwide example of an inland pitch pine-scrub oak barrens—a unique ecosystem—and more than 20 percent of New York State's wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve consists of 3,400 acres of lands protected within the Pine Bush and managed by the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission.

### How does the Commission protect and manage a viable Preserve?

**Protects land:** The Commission works with willing landowners to acquire or otherwise protect priority lands within Pine Bush Protection Areas with a goal of building a truly viable preserve of approximately 5,380 acres.

**Manages land:** The Commission uses prescribed fire, as well as mechanical and chemical treatments to reduce wildfire risk and restore ecological communities, wildlife habitat, and control invasive species.

**Reviews proposed development projects:** The Commission does not have the ability to approve or deny development projects, but does advise

Commission member agencies on how a project (in the study area) may affect the creation and management of a viable preserve. The Commission also provides recommendations on how potentially negative impacts may be minimized or avoided altogether.

**Offers educational programming:** The Discovery Center provides visitors with interactive exhibits and activities, and is an invaluable tool for schools, colleges, scouts and other groups. Through hands-on discovery-based learning, staff and volunteers help visitors learn about the unique characteristics of the Pine Bush and nurture a sense of stewardship for the preserve.

# The Board of Directors

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission is established in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) and consists of eleven voting members: the Commissioner of NYSDEC; the Commissioner of the NYS State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; the Mayor of the City of Albany; the Town Supervisors of the Towns of Colonie and Guilderland; the Chief Executive Officer of the County of Albany; the State Director of the New York field office of The Nature Conservancy and four members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The four appointed private citizen members of the Commission are, by training, education, experience or attainment, qualified to analyze, interpret or support matters relevant to the protection, maintenance and management of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve.



**Hon. Kathy M. Sheehan**  
Mayor  
City of Albany



**Bill Ulfelder**  
Executive Director  
The Nature Conservancy  
in New York



**Erik Kulleseid**  
Commissioner  
**Randy Simons**  
Commissioner Pro Tem  
NYS Office of Parks Recreation  
and Historic Preservation



**Hon. Peter Barber**  
Supervisor  
Town of Guilderland



**Hon. Peter Crumme**  
Supervisor  
Town of Colonie



**Basil Seggos**  
Commissioner  
NYS Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation



**Hon. Daniel P. McCoy**  
Executive  
Albany County

Citizen Members:  
**Dr. Harvey Alexander**  
**John Brust**  
**Nancy Pierson**  
**Dr. Steven Rice**



*Photo by Peter Signorelli*



## Project and Programmatic Highlights

### Big News in the Pine Bush...

**Presenting...the 20th Capital Walls mural.** “Pem-po-tu-wuth-ut (Place of the Council Fire) Biocoenosis” by Juliana Haliti is on The Yard, on the corner of Chapel St. and 16 Sheridan Ave. in downtown Albany. The mural features plants and animals that live in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. Our Executive Director joined the artist to help with finishing touches.

**Discovery Center grounds concept design.** Over the winter and spring, our staff worked with Bergmann and Associates to develop a concept design for the Discovery Center grounds. In May, a final concept design was completed. The new design envisions grounds with improved accessibility, added safety features and a design that showcases the unique beauty of our inland pine barrens. We would like to thank the Open Doors Organization for their contribution of input and expertise to this project.

### In Our Community...

**Pine Bush Perspectives.** Pine Bush Perspectives is a juried photo exhibit made up of select photos of the Pine Bush submitted throughout the year by visitors. Attendance at the opening night event was packed with a record breaking 120 people. More than half of the people watching the awards ceremony were “first time visitors.” There were also lots of friends and family supporting their loved ones who submitted photographs. Participation through submissions, opening night festivities and visitation to the show continues to grow each year.



**What in the Pine Bush is That?** Education staff launched a new interpretive venue this year called “What in the Pine Bush is That?” These short monthly social media posts reveal information on familiar and sometimes mysterious parts of the Albany Pine Bush, from earth stars to tent caterpillars to lupine and beyond!

**Reciprocal partners.** Our Fire Management staff assisted partners with 10 prescribed burns totaling 1,128 acres in 2023. These partners included New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and The Nature Conservancy. All these partners also assisted with prescribed fires in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve in 2023.



### *Trailside interpretation.*

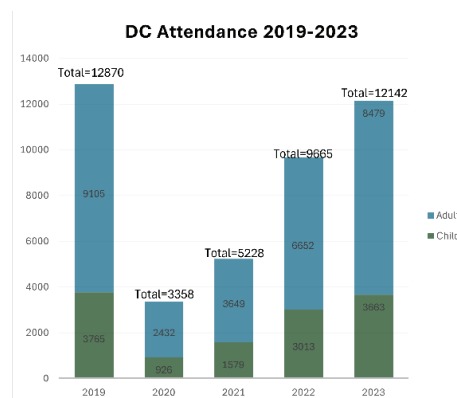
Comparing the data from our new trail counters, Discovery Center attendance and our Naturalist Volunteer reports we can see that we are reaching approximately 10% of our visitors with interpretive services. With an estimated 146,422 people hiking the preserve's trail system in 2023, this suggests a potential for greater engagement with visitors at the trail. One way to achieve this is through setting up staffed interpretive tables at trailheads. We piloted this idea several times over the years. The feedback from these pilots was very positive from both the interpreter's experience and the trail user experience. A low-pressure, informal and interpretive presence at trailheads can provide visitors with context, inspiration and connection with our work.

It can give visitors a chance to ask questions and gain a broader understanding of the Commission's work.

***Kids newsletter – The Towhee Times.*** In September 2023 we launched our first newsletter geared specifically for kids -The Towhee Times! This e-newsletter is another way to educate, and get kids excited to visit the Albany Pine Bush Preserve while inspiring them to become the future stewards of this unique ecosystem. This quarterly newsletter is full of information and fun activities related to the plants, animals and other living things that call the preserve their home. The Towhee Times is intended to be read and enjoyed by kids; but we are also hoping it can be used by teachers who can engage their students about the preserve through the content in the newsletter and encourage them to visit.

## Visit the Pine Bush...

***Discovery Center attendance rebounds.*** Attendance numbers are almost back to pre-pandemic levels (see graph below). In 2023, 12,142 visits were recorded at the Discovery Center! Spring and summer months along with school vacation days continue to bring in our highest attendance throughout the year.



***Pine Bush education and interpretation.*** Participation in our public interpretive programs and guided hikes exceeded 1,350 over the past year. Our programs offer visitors a diversity of learning opportunities including in-person Karner blue butterfly hikes, the historic Trolley Tour and Learn & Paint. School program participation is also impressive at almost 4,000 students, teachers and chaperones.



***Over 400 visitors flocked to the Pine Bush to experience Nature Night Out.*** Nature Night Out is a special event series to engage with visitors in the summer twilight hours, June through August. The Discovery Center was open with extended hours from 4-7:30 p.m., and visitors were able to engage with preserve staff and enjoy the exhibits. Each event boasted live music, food trucks, and a StoryWalk® along the Karner Barrens blue trail.

## On the Ground...



***Habitat mowing completed on 250 acres.*** The open unforested landscape of pine barrens was historically maintained with fire. Now our staff maintains the habitat with a combination of mechanical forestry mowing and prescribed fire, moving these treatments around the landscape in approximately a five year return interval. During October and November 2023, 250 acres of pine barrens were mowed in preparation for prescribed fire in 2024, the largest acreage ever mowed in one season in the preserve.



**BEFORE & AFTER LOCUST REMOVAL**

***Locust sites stumped and planted.***

In the spring of 2023, 69 acres of previously cut invasive locust trees that dominated areas were stumped, graded and seeded with native pine barrens grasses and wildflowers. The viewscape at these sites is significantly changed and already starts to look like a pine barrens. Immediately after stumping the sand dune formations are obvious and rather dramatic, often otherwise hidden in the vegetation and not as noticeable.

***More invasive trees removed over the winter.***

Another 56 acres of forest dominated by non-native black locust trees are being removed along Kings Road and Route 155, making way for pine barrens restoration to begin. For many years pine barrens restoration has been taking place on hundreds of acres formerly dominated by non-native invasive trees. The results have been transforming the landscape and creating a diversity of wildlife habitat types. Keep your eyes open as both sites are highly visible from the roads in these areas.



***Prescribed fire.*** Between March and November 2023 our fire management staff along with our volunteers and partner agency staff treated 333 acres of the preserve with prescribed fire. These burns protect the preserve’s globally-rare biodiversity and the surrounding human community by reducing wildfire risk, improving ecosystem health, and improving the preserve’s resilience to climate change.



***Our Experts...***

***Certified Seed Collector training.***

Our Preserve Steward and Botanist held three intensive training sessions in late May-early June, training volunteers to be able to identify various plants as well as help us with seed collection throughout the growing season. Collected seed, such as from wild blue lupine and horsemint, is used to plant and restore the pine barrens in parts of the preserve that were previously dominated by invasive black locust trees.



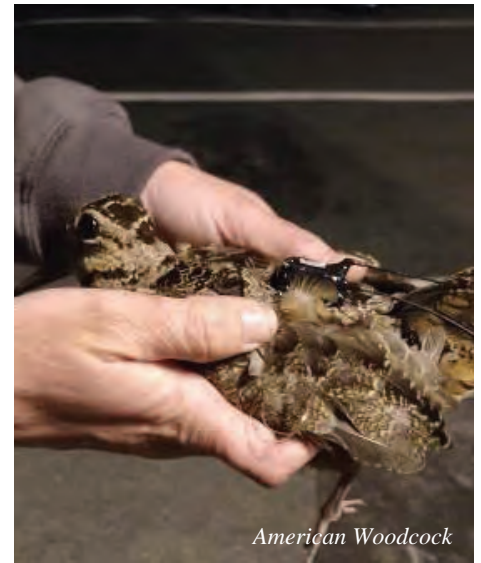
***Indigenous connections to the preserve with Wild Hudson Valley.***

Our Preserve Naturalist and Educator connected us with Wild Hudson Valley to help us learn about Native peoples’ relationship to the Albany Pine Bush. They led a public program, “Place of Pitch Pines” where they talked about Native peoples’ reliance on the unique inland pitch pine – scrub oak barrens known today as the Albany Pine Bush Preserve for food, medicines, and other purposes. They also provided a staff training where they talked more about how pine barrens ecosystems were maintained by Indigenous fire stewardship on both sides of the Hudson River and the rare plant and animal species found here. They later led a Science Lecture entitled “Place of Pitch Pines” and collaborated with us to lead a program for Hudson River Sloop Clearwater Hike and Learn series.



***Knowledge exchange.*** From hosting university field trips in the preserve to presenting at regional and national conferences, our

science staff shared our successful conservation work at many learning opportunities. Visiting universities included Paul Smith's College, Hudson Valley Community College, SUNY Plattsburgh, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, SUNY Cobleskill, SUNY Morrisville, and Skidmore College. With financial support from the North Atlantic Fire Science Exchange our Conservation Director was a featured speaker at three wildland fire conferences in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and California. Staff also shared our science work at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference, the Northeast Natural History Conference and the Eastern Bird Banding Association's annual meeting. Science staff also authored and co-authored articles in professional journals and popular magazines.

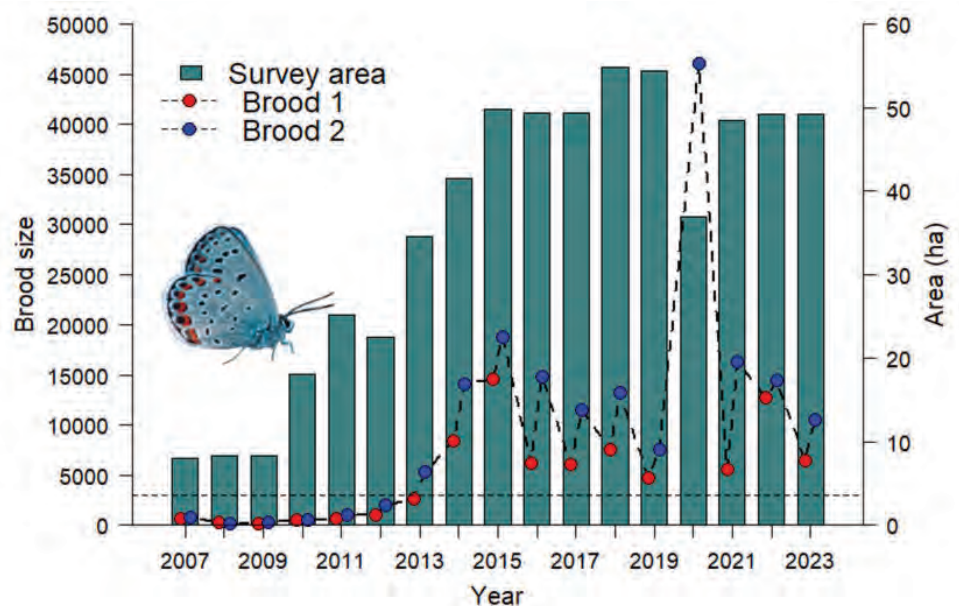


**Bird banding.** Birds continue to provide an important window on how preserve management is improving ecosystem health. In 2023, science staff placed location tracking devices on eastern towhees, eastern whip-poor-will, and American woodcock, in addition to capturing 816 birds at our summer and fall banding stations.

## Latest Research...

### **Karner blue population trends.**

The sizes of the first and second broods in the surveyed areas in the Albany Pine Bush Preserve were estimated to be 6,500 and 10,500 butterflies, respectively (Fig. 1) in 2023. Our Karner population has remained well above the recovery threshold established by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (i.e., 3000 adults in either the first or the second brood) for the last 11 years (See chart to right). It has also exceeded our population target (7640 adults) for nine of the last ten years. These estimates are conservative because they only apply to areas sampled which is just 17 percent of the preserve area known to support Karner blues.



# Financial Highlights

Condensed Statement of Activities  
(For Year Ended March 31, 2024)

## Revenues, Gains & Other Support

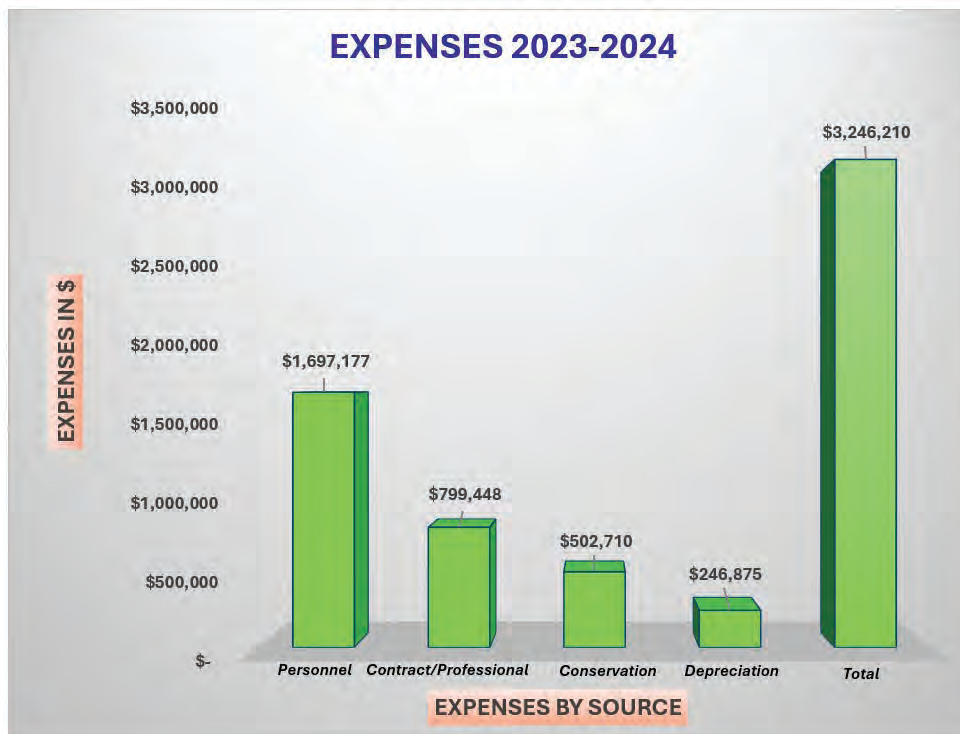
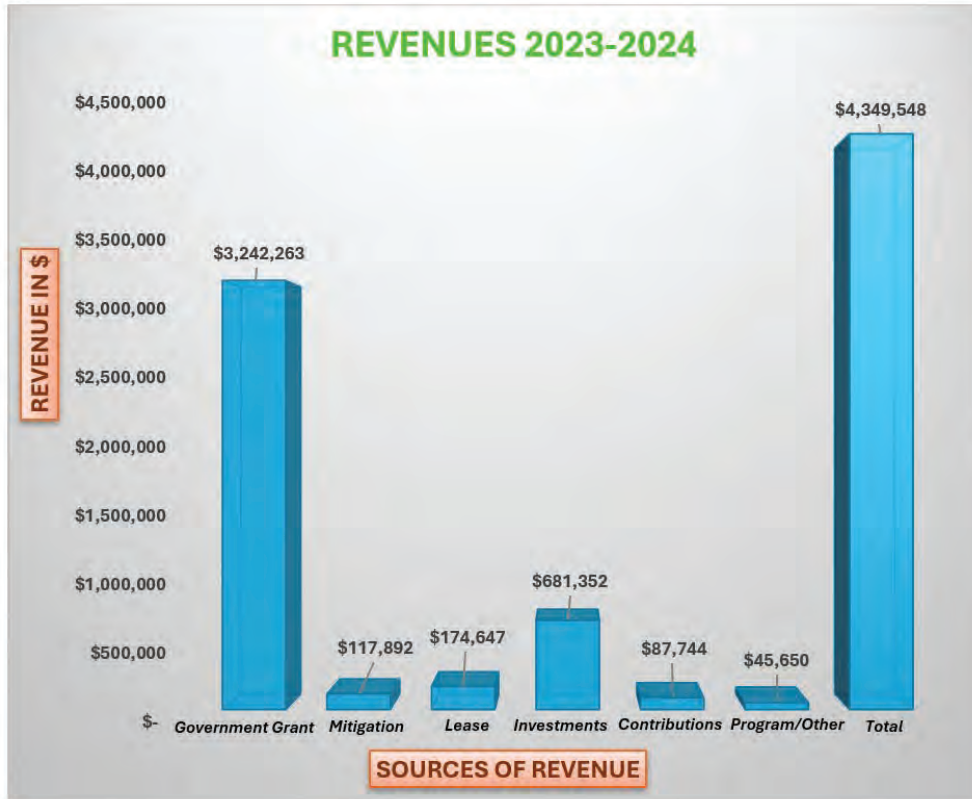
Government Grants	\$ 3,242,263
Mitigation Revenue	\$ 117,892
Lease Revenue	\$ 174,647
Investment Income	\$ 681,352
Contribution Revenue	\$ 87,744
Program/Other Revenue	\$ 45,650
<b>Total Revenues, Gains and Other Support</b>	<b>\$ 4,349,548</b>

## Expenses

Personnel and Administrative	\$ 1,697,177
Contract and Professional Fees	\$ 799,448
Conservation and Programs	\$ 502,710
Depreciation Expense	\$ 246,875
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 3,246,210</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 1,103,338</b>
<b>PLUS: Net Assets at Beginning of Year</b>	<b>\$ 6,518,140</b>
<b>Net Assets at End of Year</b>	<b>\$ 7,621,478</b>

# Financial Highlights

Revenue and Expenses  
(For Year Ended March 31, 2024)





## Become a Member of Our Community

### Get Involved

We have many easy ways that you can connect with us. The Discovery Center offers many opportunities through programs, special events and exhibits. You can participate in our community by submitting your Pine Bush story on our website or to our Pine Bush Perspectives Photo Exhibit or by joining a team for the Birding Barrens Blitz. You can help monitor rare species and study habitat quality. As a Preserve Naturalist you can also work to make the preserve safe and enjoyable for all who visit and live here.

Visit the Commission website, [AlbanyPineBush.org](http://AlbanyPineBush.org) for ways you can join the Pine Bush community.

### Support

The Commission is working to build broad-based, sustained local support for preserve protection and management. Supporters active in preserve research and management through community science and attending presentations reinforce the APBPC brand as *Globally-Rare, Nationally Significant, and Locally Distinct*. They help to further establish its position as the place with which to affiliate for those interested in conservation science, ecology, and natural history.

Pine Bush enthusiasts can show support by signing up for email updates on [AlbanyPineBush.org](http://AlbanyPineBush.org), and liking the preserve on Facebook, Instagram and X.

*Photo above by: Colby Plant*

### Our Friends

Friends of the Pine Bush Community, Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization formed for the charitable and educational purpose of supporting the activities of the Commission. The Friends work cooperatively with Commission staff to add additional land to the preserve, further conservation and education within the preserve, especially through organized activities and programs at the Discovery Center.

Supporters can join or donate by picking up a form at the Discovery Center or through [PineBushFriends.org](http://PineBushFriends.org).





Photo by Mary Greagan

# Albany Pine Bush Preserve Current Staff

Lisa Anthony  
*Director of Finance & Operations*  
Serving since: 2011

Jesse Hoffman  
*Preserve Steward & Botanist*  
Serving since: 2008

Victoria Stoodley  
*Visitor Services Specialist*  
Serving since: 2015

Tyler Briggs  
*Fire Manager*  
Serving since: 2012

Erin Kinal  
*Education Program Director*  
Serving since: 1998

*Visitor Services Associates*  
Carol Seniw Serving since: 2021

Steven Campbell  
*Conservation Biologist*  
Serving since: 2012

John Loz  
*Discovery Center Operations Coordinator*  
Serving since: 2020

## Contact Us

Jacqueline Citriniti  
*Lead Educator*  
Serving since: 2008

Hannah Mather  
*Environmental Educator*  
Serving since: 2024

**Albany Pine Bush  
Preserve Commission**  
195 New Karner Road, Suite 1  
Albany, NY 12205  
(518) 456-0655  
info@albanypinebush.org  
**AlbanyPineBush.org**

Wendy Craney  
*Communications Director*  
Serving since: 1995

Patricia McLaughlin  
*Office Manager*  
Serving since: 2017

Neil Gifford  
*Conservation Director*  
Serving since: 1997

Pammi Price  
*Preserve Naturalist & Educator*  
Serving since: 2022

Go to  
AlbanyPineBush.org/visit-us  
for Discovery Center hours,  
schedule of events and  
directions.

Blake Hastie-Etchison  
*Discovery Center Manager*  
Serving since: 2008

Sarah Reilly  
*Community Connections Coordinator*  
Serving since: 2017

Christopher Hawver  
*Executive Director*  
Serving since: 1993

Alex Soldo  
*Field Ecologist & Entomologist*  
Serving since: 2024

Joel Hecht  
*Stewardship Director*  
Serving since: 1994



*Photo by Dean Bouton*



**Albany Pine Bush  
Preserve Commission**  
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Albany, NY 12205  
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May 2024