

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission was established by the New York State Legislature in 1988. The law that created the Commission recognizes the Albany Pine Bush as "... a landscape of rare and endangered natural communities and species," and gives the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission the responsibility to "manage the preserve for the purposes of its protection and controlled and appropriate recreation and education purposes." The Albany Pine Bush Preserve protects one of the last-remaining inland pitch pine-scrub oak barrens in the world and it's the Commission's job to make sure it survives into the future.

These photos give us an idea of what the Albany Pine Bush looked like in the 1930s and 1950s. The images remind us that not long ago the Albany Pine Bush was an open sandy landscape home to a diversity of pine barrens and prairie species much as it had been for centuries.

Fire suppression and urban-suburban development have caused dramatic changes to the Albany Pine Bush including a loss of over 75% of its land mass and the gradual transformation to a more forested landscape of the remaining 25%. Today, there are fewer than 20 inland pitch pine-scrub oak barrens in the world. Many other pine barrens, once like the Albany Pine Bush, have disappeared across the northeast. Without the protection efforts of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission and the many people who have fought for the survival of this landscape, Albany's pine barrens surely would have been lost as well.



East Lydius Street, circa 1930s (Photo credit: Schenectady County Archives)

Yes, as one person commented on Facebook, the Albany Pine Bush now looks like sandy hills with burnt trees. The photos of Old State Road from 1953 and of Kings Road below remind us that it once looked that way before. Among the sandy hills and burnt trees are a diversity of species including Karner blues, prairie grass, eastern towhees, blueberries, sunflowers and more. A return to open pine barrens is not just the result of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission's ecological restoration efforts, but the amazing accomplishment of a task set for the Commission against all odds at its very start 36 years ago.

The Commission is just one of many organizations working across landscapes and time to protect the unique biodiversity of endangered habitats around our planet and in our own backyards. We hope that people visiting the Albany Pine Bush from both near and far come to appreciate both its unique beauty and ecological significance. Not every natural habitat needs to be a forest to be of value. And if it's forests you need, you are in luck! The Capital Region is home to many beautiful, forested preserves and parks just minutes from downtown Albany. The diversity of landscapes in and around Albany, including the Albany Pine Bush, is one of the best parts of living in this area!



Old State Rd, 1953 (Photo credit: Schenectady County Archives, Martin Viscusi)



Kings Road (Photo credit: Schenectady County Archives)