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## **Dedication Ceremony and Ribbon Cutting at the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center**



The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation held a ribbon cutting and dedication ceremony today at the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center. The ceremony unveiled a memorial to Dr. Margaret M. Stewart, one of the original citizen members of the Albany Pine Bush Commission and recognized conservation biologist from the State University at Albany. Dr. Stewart, who passed away in 2006, was a renowned herpetologist, an expert in the field of reptiles and amphibians for over 50 years. She spent many of her class field trips exposing students to the rare flora and fauna that call the Albany Pine Bush home and was a long term supporter of the conservation work at the Pine Bush Preserve. More recently, Dr. Stewart was a significant contributor to the development of the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center, an interactive nature center where people of all ages can go to learn about the natural and cultural history of the Albany Pine Bush and participate in the many recreational and volunteer opportunities at the Preserve. The dedication followed a ribbon cutting announcing the outdoor exhibits and amenities of the Discovery Center, including a one quarter mile all accessible trail system. The trail contains a welcome kiosk, 13 interpretive signs, a “fragmentation” game, native plant landscaping, a “grading grasses” exhibit and five additional interpretive panels between the parking lot and the outdoor restrooms. The Discovery Center is striving to attain a silver LEED rating for green building and the outdoor additions that add to this include a Clivus Multrum biological decomposing style restroom, a solar photovoltaic array, bio-swales and eco-pavers to mitigate rain water run-off.

"The Pine Bush Discovery Center is an environmental education gem that I encourage parents and children from throughout the region to visit over and over again." said Governor David A. Paterson. "The Albany Pine Bush is a fragile ecosystem that is home to a variety of rare plants and animals, including the treasured Karner blue butterfly. It is worthy of protection and the Discovery Center will educate many children who we hope will emerge as the next generation of environmental stewards."

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis added, "This upgraded interpretive center is just one more reason to visit one of New York's most unique natural areas. With new trails, exhibits and amenities, the Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center makes it even more inviting for New Yorkers to get outdoors and connect with nature, to learn why this inland pine barrens ecosystem is so special. And it will be more user friendly and informative to for those who return to the Pine Bush again and again. Congratulations to the Albany Pine Bush Commission."

"The Albany Pine Bush is a fantastic and globally unique natural resource," said Commissioner Carol Ash, with NYS Office of Parks and Recreation. "The Discovery Center fosters an appreciation of this remarkable natural world in our own backyard to thousands of school children and visitors every year. We at New York State Parks are a proud partner in this endeavor to advance an ethic of environmental stewardship through exciting and engaging educational facilities and programming."

"We are delighted to honor and remember our friend and supporter, Meg (Margaret) Stewart. Dr. Stewart provided students with an appreciation for their natural world for decades, using the unique habitat of the Albany Pine Bush as her outdoor teaching laboratory. The expansion of the Discovery Center continues Meg's legacy, providing distinctive opportunities that enhances our ability to educate visitors about the Pine Bush's ecosystem," says Katie Dolan, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy's Eastern New York Chapter. "Visitors can learn about native plant landscaping, how to plan a prescribed fire, how best to minimize the environmental impacts of their visit, and much more. After a visit, many guests are inspired to join our efforts to preserve this special place."

Michael Venuti, Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center Director concluded, "This is indeed another amazing development at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Discovery Center. The many exciting enhancements to the outdoor program of the Discovery Center provide visitors with an example of what is possible within the realm of renewable energy, native landscaping and resource conservation. These important themes are reflected throughout the interpretive trail system in a fun and informative manner by encouraging visitors to participate via games, signage and a variety of activities. It's a terrific feeling to be able to serve as the example of how to reduce our "footprint" within this environment."

Located within the Capital District Region, the Albany Pine Bush represents one of the best remaining examples of an inland pine barrens ecosystem left in the world. This gently rolling sand plain is home to a

variety of rare plants and animals, including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve also creates a special habitat for a number of other rare and unique plants and animals, while providing visitors with an assortment of non-motorized recreational opportunities including hiking, jogging, nature study, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking and hunting.

The **Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center** transforms this globally unique destination into an exciting adventure where learning comes naturally through hands-on activities. As the gateway to the Pine Bush, the Discovery Center introduces visitors to everything that makes the Preserve rare and adventurous. With the help of many volunteers, the Discovery Center offers monthly outings and programs about the ecology, natural and cultural history of the pine bush area. Admission is free. The Center is open Tuesday-Friday 9AM-4PM, Saturday and Sunday 10AM-4PM. Closed on Monday.

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission was created by the NYS Legislature in 1988 to protect and manage the unique and endangered natural communities and species of the Albany Pine Bush for ecological, recreational and educational benefits. For more information, please visit [www.albanypinebush.org](http://www.albanypinebush.org) or call 518-456-0655.

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