

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT for 2023

Submitted by the Environmental Commission of Franklin Township, January 2024

2023 Commissioners:

Jason Brandt
Frank Kohute, Planning Board Liaison
Margaret Duerr
Evan Duerr
Suzanne McCarthy, Vice-Chairman
Jeffery Link
Jon Stippick, Chairman

2023 Liaisons

Jonathan Keen, Township Committee
Micheal Marsh, Township Committee

Emergency Management Operation Officer:

Matthew Decesari

Secretary: None (Suzanne McCarthy- Acting Secretary)

2023 Alternates:

#1 Giovanni Cavone
#2 None

Environmental Commission usually meets on the 4th Monday of the month, except when those are holidays. The EC meetings were convened in-person and virtually via Zoom, on the following dates in 2023:

January 23	July 24
February 27	August 28
March 27	September 25
April 24	October (cancelled)
May 22	November 27
June 26	December 27

Applications Reviewed in 2023:

In the course of its meetings during the year, the Environmental Commission (EC) reviewed a total of **21** Planning and Zoning Board applications:

There were **11 Planning Board applications** and **10**

Zoning Board applications reviewed. Each application was discussed and comments were made when environmental issues were identified. These comments, or “No Comments” sheets (when there were no environmental issues), were subsequently submitted to the Planning or Zoning Board and became part of the packets of information for Board member review.

Emergency Management

The Environmental Commission keeps track of environmental problems within Franklin Township, especially cleanups of hazardous or potentially hazardous sites. The Commission members also sometimes receive reports from its Township Committee liaisons, Jonathan Keen and Micheal Marsh, during the year. There were no reports of major environmental problems during 2023.

The Environmental Commission received **5** incident notifications from the NJDEP all relating to the discharge of hazardous material.

- One notice was pertaining to Benzene detected in groundwater at Iona Gas on RT.40 – 4/25/23
- One notice was pertaining to a citizen complaint of excessive pesticide spraying and strong odor of chemicals at 2050 Bluebell Rd – 6/30/23
- One notice was pertaining to a diesel fuel spill (75 gallons) on Route 55 South at MM41 – 9/23/23
- One notice was pertaining to a diesel fuel spill (50 gallons) and hydraulic oil (5 gallons) because of a motor vehicle accident at the intersection of Monroeville Rd and Willow Grove Rd. - 10/6/23
- The final incident notice was a diesel fuel spill (75 gallons) because of a motor vehicle accident at Coles Mill Rd and Malaga Rd. - 11/14/23

All incidents were resolved by NJDEP.

Correspondence:

Over the course of 2023 there was some correspondence that was reviewed at meetings (9 letters along with various newsletters). Correspondence consisted of notifications from the Pinelands Commission (4) about applications that were reviewed by them. Other notifications were from NJDEP (5) documenting possible hazardous materials spills.

Special Projects/Reports:

1. Malaga Lake Park:

- a. There was a trash cleanup event sponsored by the Environment Commission that took place on April 22nd, 2023 at Malaga Lake Park. 8 Volunteers collected trash and recyclables from the park, trail and roadside. Several bags of trash were collected, especially along Malaga Park Drive. Participants also cut back invasive plants that have been encroaching into the woodland. Time was also spent clearing downed and leaning pine trees along the trail.



Environmental Commission members Jon Stippick (left) and Evan Duerr (right) collecting trash during the annual Malaga Lake Park cleanup event. *Photo: S. Stippick & J. Stippick*

- b. There was also an event on August 5th, 2023 to celebrate National Moth Week. 12 participants gathered to observe moths and other nocturnal insects that were attracted to multiple viewing areas by shining UV lights onto white sheets that were hung between trees. Over 100 different species were observed, photographed, and submitted to the international database via iNaturalist. This was the 2nd year the EC held this event.



Polyphemus Silkmoth (*Antheraea polyphemus*) observed at Malaga Lake Park @ Moth Night.
Photo: J. Stippick

2. Piney Hollow Preservation Area:

- a. The Environmental Commission, along with members of the community, continued to advocate for the NJDEP Green Acres Stewardship grant that was awarded to Franklin Township in February 2017. This grant will be used for Piney Hollow, to repair trails, build boardwalks in low-lying areas that are often impassable, establish interpretive and directional signage, and erect gates and barriers at entrances to eliminate vehicle traffic. Township Committee and township officials continued to pursue the necessary plans and permits to proceed with grant. The Township received final approval from The Pinelands Commission in December 2023 to begin improvements to the park.
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- 3. The annual **Bird Quest** morning survey of birds in the township, organized by the Gloucester County Nature Club each year, was conducted on May 6th, 2023. The EC continued its tradition of participating in the event by leading a group of 8 birdwatchers through Piney Hollow Preserve, Malaga Lake Park and the grasslands near Downtown Airport. A record high of 71 bird species were observed. A comprehensive list of local bird species is included in the Franklin Township Environmental Resource Inventory, available on the township website.



Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)- First ever recorded in Franklin Township. Nov. 2023 Photo: J. Stippick

4. **Meeting Recordings:** The FTEC began recording its meetings in 2023. The video recordings are forwarded to the Franklin Township Communications Commission and subsequently broadcasted on Channel 9 and Franklin Township Youtube channel for public viewing. Youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/@townshipoffranklinnjglouce6644>
5. **Pitman BioBlitz:** The Franklin Township Environmental Commission worked closely with the Pitman Environmental Commission to host a BioBlitz event at Alcyon Park in Pitman, NJ. A BioBlitz is a community event that teaches and encourages members of the community to document all the species of organisms in a given area by using a smartphone and the iNaturalist app. Multiple seminars were conducted throughout the day focusing on different organisms such as trees, birds, aquatic invertebrates and insects. The Franklin EC provided technical assistance as well as hosting an evening lecture on nocturnal insects. Following the lecture, several “moth stations” were constructed to attract moths and nocturnal insects. Over 60 participants enjoyed the event and documented 422 different species.



Rare white colored Pink Lady Slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*) at Malaga Lake Park. *Photo: J. Stippick*