

# THE PINE BARRENS

A person wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a jacket is seen from behind, standing in a field of tall grasses. The scene is set during sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light illuminating the sky and the person's clothing. The background is a soft-focus landscape of tall grasses and trees.

A FILM BY DAVID SCOTT KESSLER  
MUSIC BY THE RUINS OF FRIENDSHIP ORCHESTRA



# THE PINE BARRENS

[FEATURE DOCUMENTARY]

*Running Time:*

**1 hour 44 minutes**

*Produced and Directed By:*

**David Scott Kessler**

*Production Company:*

**Studioscopic**

*Cinematographer and Editor:*

**David Scott Kessler**

*Composers:*

**Ben Warfield**

**Jesse Sparhark**



## LOGLINE

In a million acres of wilderness within the most densely populated state in America, storytelling is the most powerful tool for the forest's survival.

## SYNOPSIS

Within the heart of New Jersey, a scorched wilderness stands in defiance of the encroaching megalopolis that surrounds it. Once deemed inhospitable; north and south, rural and suburban, harmony and disruption, truth and folklore, all merge and contradict around the stories that unite individuals living among the land.

Spanning six years, the film paints a portrait of nature and identity that aims to capture the surreal wonder of the Pinelands during a time when corruption threatens to undermine its few protections.

The Pine Barrens is scored live by The Ruins of Friendship Orchestra, a fusion of folk and electronic sounds, creating a layered experience transporting the viewer through this surreal landscape.



# OUR STORY

David Scott Kessler began filming *The Pine Barrens* in late 2011. The project began as a series of cinematic tone poems and a portrait of place as seen from an outsider's point of view, weaving the naturally surreal and supernatural wonder of the Pine Barrens with depictions of daily life.

Early on in the production, David assembled a group of musicians called *The Ruins of Friendship Orchestra*. Through a collaboration with these musicians, they developed a series of evolving and experimental live performances shown to people both familiar and unfamiliar to the forest, including the subjects of the film.

These performances took place in art spaces, museums, theaters, and the forest itself, featuring a different iteration of project with semi-improvisational music, thus making each experience singular and ephemeral. This unfixed documentary created a continuum of experiences that mirrors the changes that take place in one's perception of place over time.





## Allen Crawford

Through tea colored cedar water and snow covered blow-downs deep within the Pinelands swamps, Award winning illustrator, Allen Crawford is your guide through the natural and poetic universe of the Pine Barrens.



## Steven Carty

Basket Weaver, Steven Carty discovered his Lenape ancestry as a teenager, thus shaping his personal identity and deep connection to the land his family lived in for many generations. His sense of identity will be challenged in his adult years.



## Mary Ann Thompson

Mary Ann's family owned and operated the Birches cranberry farm since before the civil war. Having had a hand in the development of the Pinelands protections and being the last of her family who will ever run the farm, she contemplates whether the nature and culture will live on for future generations.



## Paul E. Pedersen Jr.

Song writer, story teller, jewelry maker, and self-proclaimed Piney, Paul considers himself the keeper of the soul of the Pine Barrens and the American freedoms that it represents to him.



## Gary Giberson

The land where Gary Giberson, Mayor of Port Republic, resides on was deeded to the Giberson Family by England. Having grown up on his grandfather's farm, he keeps traditional crafts alive while espousing his belief that small towns should be free to govern themselves as they see fit.



## Bonfire Storytellers

Filed over four years, around a dozen bonfires, nearly 100 locals participate in the continuous storytelling and music making that has formed the Piney identity for hundreds of years. Weird tales, personal anecdotes, and dark histories all come to light around the fire.





## The Forest

While only being a short drive from New York and Philadelphia, the character of The Pine Barrens stands out as being both beloved and unknowable. Home to plants and animals found nowhere else and to stories of pirates, runaway slaves, fearsome Pineys, and the Jersey Devil, it was also a place where people sought refuge and a simpler life.

The stories told around campfires recall times when the forest was deemed expendable -- along with its people. A prejudice against rural people was common in America and gave birth to a eugenics movement that first tried to erase a class of Americans, and later many millions in Europe.

In the 1960's The Pinelands was nearly wiped off the map. A work of creative nonfiction by John McPhee helped to change perception of the land and people, inspiring the Pinelands Protection Act and the nation's first National Preserve.

Now, a corrupt commission, stacked by a governor with deep ties to energy industry, threatens to undo those protections and open the Pandora's box that would make this, the last generation for the Pine Barrens.

# DIRECTOR, David Scott Kessler

David Scott Kessler is a visual artist living in Philadelphia. He studied painting and illustration at Parsons School of Design and University of the Arts before turning to documentary film and video installation. His work, often set in small villages around the globe, explores an elusive sense of place and our contemporary relationship to landscape.

David has presented films and installations internationally at the Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia, Summerhall Edinburgh, The James A. Michener Museum, International House Philadelphia, Rooftop Film Festival, and Delaware Contemporary, among others.

In 2015 he was awarded the prestigious Pew Center for Arts and Heritage Fellowship. That same year, he was also named as a Flaherty Film Seminar Fellow with a Philadelphia Grant.

In 2016, David founded and produced the landscape based arts and music festival called Middle of Nowhere, which will be held once again in a remote location of New Jersey again this fall.





## LIVE SCORE, The Ruins of Friendship Orchestra

Named for the historic Pine Barrens town of Friendship where the band first practiced together as a group, The Ruins of Friendship Orchestra is a collective of electronic and traditional instrumentalists. The band has been composing the score to The Pine Barrens since 2012 concurrently to the film's evolving editions. Ruins perform this score live at screenings of The Pine Barrens

The Ruins of Friendship Orchestra are:

Ben Warfield - synthesizer

Laura Baird - vocals, flute, banjo

Gretchen Lohse - viola

Jesse Sparhawk - harp, bass

John Pettit - guitar, trumpet, harmonium

Michael Dur - sequencer





# PRAISE

*"The Pine Barrens is a sprawling, elegiac film. I watched, rapt, as the Ruins of Friendship Orchestra performed a lilting, wandering, live score replete with harp, strings, banjo, and ethereal vocals. I became so engrossed in the film that at times I forgot the orchestra was even there." Meredith Sellers, Hyperallergic*

*"With lush cinematography and a symphony of sounds, Kessler takes us on a journey" Ilene Dube, WHYY*

*"absolutely breathtaking!!!" Mackenzie Vaughan Pikaart*

*"entrancing & hypnotic. It is such a deeply personal movie. It resonates with so many" Don Randall*

# CREDITS

*Produced and Directed by:*  
*Co-Producer*  
*Director of Photography*  
*& Editor*  
*Music by*  
*Audio Post Production*

*Associate Producers*

*Contributing Producers*

**David Scott Kessler**  
**Allen Crawford**

**David Scott Kessler**  
**The Ruins of Friendship**  
**Nada Sound Studio**

**Daniel Wheeler**  
**Steven Gardner**

**Les Baird**  
**Marianne Bernstein**  
**Mary Carty**  
**Cindi R Ettinger**  
**Darlene Emers**  
**Lee Jennings**  
**Erin Lockard**  
**Linda & Jim Stanton**  
**Leo Voloshin**





*Featuring*

**Allen Crawford  
Paul E. Pedersen Jr.  
Steven R. Carty  
Tommy Bozarth  
Gary Giberson  
Mary-Ann Thompson  
Bill Bolger**

*Second Camera:*

**Dave Barbaree  
Adam Diller  
Jared Flesher**

*Sound Recording:*

**David Scott Kessler  
Laura Baird  
Eric Carbonara  
Sean Hamilton  
Thomas Hughes  
Joe Patitucci  
John Pettit  
Althea Rose  
Palesa Shongwe**

*VFX and Color:*

*Music Recording:*

**STUDIOSCOPIC  
Uniform Recording**

*With support from many backers on Indiegogo*

