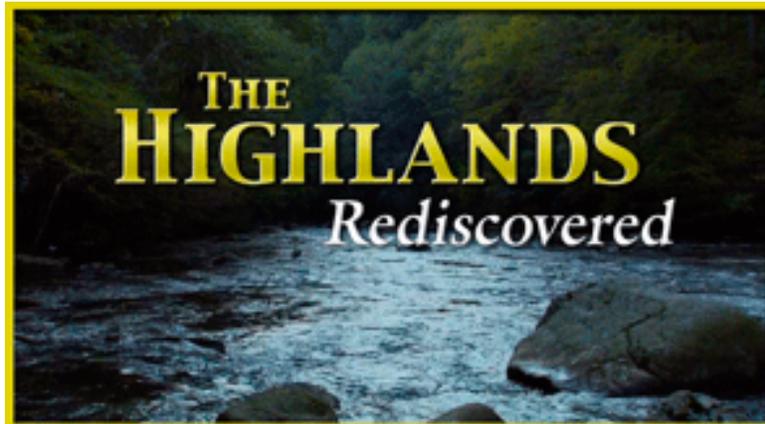


## **The New Jersey Highlands Coalition Presents:**

### **The 2004 NJN Documentary**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih397Q5hrQE>

This beautifully shot (in high definition) and informative 30-minute documentary explains the history of the Highlands region and why it became the source of clean drinking water for more than half of the State's population. The film explains how the ecological functions of the Highlands forests cleanse rain as it percolates into aquifers and ultimately into surface reservoirs. It also presents the challenges the Highlands region is faced with in retaining its important forests under pressures to develop the land.

Now you can show the film and lead the follow-up discussion using the talking points below! We only ask that you not charge a fee to show the film. Please contact Erica Van Auken, NJ Highlands Coalition, ([erica@njhighlandscoalition.org](mailto:erica@njhighlandscoalition.org)) with any questions or requests.

#### **Follow-up Discussion & Talking Points**

**About the Highlands:** The New Jersey Highlands are part of the great sweep of the Appalachians that shadow the East Coast from Maine to Georgia. The NJ Highlands region contains nearly 860,000 acres of forested ridges, rolling farmlands, diverse recreation, abundant wildlife and historic treasures.

In 2004, the New Jersey Legislature passed the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act that encompasses about 60 miles of northwest New Jersey, from Phillipsburg in the southwest to Oakland in the northeast. The Highlands lie within portions of seven northwest New Jersey counties — Bergen, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren — and 88 municipalities within the legislated region. In 2008, the regulatory agency, the Highlands Council, developed a Regional Master Plan to guide the balance of development and preservation in the Highlands.

The NJ Highlands provides 5.4 million New Jerseyans with clean drinking water. A large sector of the State's industrial base also relies on abundant clean water from the Highlands. Click [here](#) for a map of the 292 municipalities in 16 counties that depend upon the Highlands for all or some of its water supply.

**Highlands Resources:** Open space preservation maintains the natural functions of our forests and wetlands. In the Highlands, this means that wetlands provide water filtration and flood prevention, while forests prevent soil erosion and filter both the air and water resources.

The film shows us that open space, particularly forests, in the Highlands is especially important because it allows surface water to be filtered before entering our drinking water system. The forest's natural duff layer slows down the flow of water and filters it as it trickles into our aquifers.

As land is developed and covered with impervious surfaces, the natural flow of water is disrupted. This increases flooding and prevents the natural refilling of aquifers and the filtration of water. This can have serious impacts on the state's drinking water supply.

By allowing our forests and other open spaces to remain intact, we protect the drinking water supply. The Green Acres program helps to protect that drinking water resource by buying land and preventing it from being developed.

**Open Space in NJ:** The Green Acres Program was created in 1961 to meet New Jersey's growing recreation and conservation needs. With the passage of 13 state-wide referendums and public and non-profit partners, the Green Acres Program has directly protected 650,000 acres of open space and provided hundreds of outdoor recreational facilities in communities throughout the state.

Over the years, voters have authorized \$3.3 billion in Green Acres funding, approving every bond referendum put before them. In 2007, a \$12 million bond was approved by voters for the Green Acres, Farmland, Blue Acres, and Historic Preservation programs. An additional \$24 million was approved by the voters in the Green Acres, Water Supply and Floodplain Protection, and Farmland and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2009. But the 2009 Bond funds for these preservation programs have now been fully allocated.

**Preservation in the Highlands:** Between 2000 and 2012, 1 in 8 Highlands acres was permanently preserved through the Garden State Preservation Trust – these figures do not include privately preserved lands, land in the NJ Natural Lands Trust, land acquired through Highlands Development Credit Bank, or land preserved prior to June 1999!

But there are still treasures left to preserve! The Highlands Regional Master Plan estimates that there are still more than 160,000 acres of priority land for preservation. That means the Highlands Council has identified these parcels of undeveloped land and farmland and determined that they are appropriate for preservation.

More than 265 farms totaling 22,762 acres have been preserved through the Farmland Preservation program as well. Throughout the state, Farmland is preserved by the landowners through the sale of development easements, donation of development easements, or the sale of the entire property to the State Agriculture Development Committee. These actions ensure that the properties are preserved in perpetuity for agricultural purposes and preclude any future development. But it's been estimated that an additional 400,000 acres of farmland must be preserved to maintain a viable agriculture industry throughout New Jersey.

The New Jersey Highlands are rich with connections to our past. In total, there are 597 identified historic and cultural sites and districts in the region, many of which are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. There are many more historically important sites that need to be protected!

**Benefits of Preservation:** Open space has other benefits beyond the Highlands, too! Every \$1 invested in state preservation programs returns \$10 in economic value to the state through nature's goods and services, such as water filtration and flood control, and supports key industries such as agriculture and tourism.

Ecological benefits discussed earlier, such as flood prevention and water filtration, keep down public works costs, provide for habitat for eco-tourism, and land for parks. Other benefits come from increased property values and preventing municipal costs associated with development and investment.

Preservation efforts also create jobs and also improve the environment – building and repairing parks, restoring damaged landscapes, keeping our family farms working, and restoring historic landmarks. In fact, it's been estimated that the 2010 \$28.3 million Green Acres Park Development Funds support more than 975 construction jobs as well as many technical professionals.

The Highlands region is critical to New Jersey's drinking water supply. Our state's open space programs work to protect the critical resources of the region, and also benefit the state as a whole. These preservation programs have proved successful time and again, with 100% historical voter support. Continued preservation of land in the Highlands and beyond ensures a robust economy and a healthy future for our children.

**Additional Resources:**

New Jersey Highlands Coalition [www.njhighlandscoalition.org](http://www.njhighlandscoalition.org)

Keep it Green <http://www.njkeepitgreen.org/resources>

Highlands Council <http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/>

Garden State Preservation Trust <http://www.state.nj.us/gsp/>

Green Acres Program <http://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/>

Blue Acres Program [http://www.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres/blue\\_flood\\_ac.html](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres/blue_flood_ac.html)

Farmland Preservation Program <http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/>

Historic Preservation Program <http://www.nj.gov/dep/hpo/>

*Erica Van Auken is the Campaign & Grassroots Coordinator for the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. The New Jersey Highlands Coalition represents a diverse network of organizations — small and large, local, regional, statewide and national — and individuals. Our mission is to represent their common goal to protect, enhance and restore the New Jersey Highlands and to preserve the quality and quantity of drinking water both for the 850,000 people in the Highlands as well as the more than four million people in surrounding areas who depend on Highlands water.*