



Highlands Lookout

www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Fall/Winter 2016



Message from the Executive Director *Participants in the Fall Tour of the Highlands Road Rally*

We did not have a Highlands Festival this year but the New Riders of the Purple Sage, who were contracted for the Festival, instead performed a benefit concert for us to a full house at Roy's Hall in Blairstown. It wasn't quite the Highlands Festival at Waterloo but it clearly rocked! Our Asbury Park Pub Crawl in July and our Fall Tour of the Highlands Road Rally

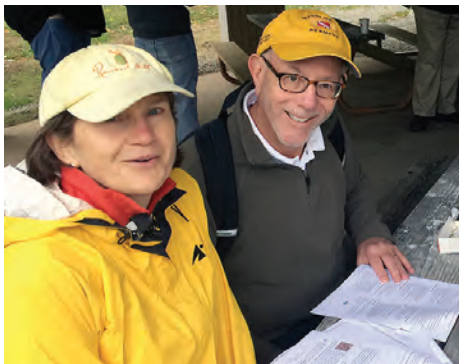
in October both had record breaking attendance. It continues to amaze me how receptive people are to our message of protecting the Highlands while they are having fun!

Did you know that in Pennsylvania the rights to clean air, pure water and the protection of natural and cultural resources are considered basic human rights? And that we have no such rights in New Jersey? It's because these rights are written into the PA Constitution. It is because these rights are constitutionally guaranteed that PA citizens succeeded in rolling back

aspects of the PA Oil and Gas Act that stripped municipalities of the right to control oil and gas drilling in their towns. If we are a free people, we must have protections against private interests polluting our water and air and extinguishing our natural and cultural resources! We are partnering with the Delaware Riverkeeper in advocating for a constitutional amendment here in New Jersey to guarantee these rights. Stay tuned!

Warmly,

Julia Somers 



Ned and Mindy Kirby review route prior to the Fall Tour of the Highlands Road Rally

Policy Update *Elliott Ruga, Policy Director*

We are counting down the months to when New Jersey can stop seeing decades of hard won protections for our water and other valuable natural resources being weakened by an Administration that favors private interests over upholding the public trust. Changes to the NJDEP Flood Hazard Area Rules and Water Quality Management Planning Rules—that we earnestly fought against—have been adopted since our last newsletter. More development in environmentally sensitive areas and increased risks of flooding and the damages that flooding brings are in store. The pressure to

develop land in the most densely populated state cannot be overestimated, and these pressures only increase over time.

The proposed rule to

increase the density of development in the Highlands Preservation Area has not yet been adopted. Despite our strident opposition, joined by prominent, conservation and environmental advocacy groups and echoed by

faith based organizations and elected officials from New Jersey's major cities, NJDEP will likely adopt the rule without any significant changes from what was first proposed, as




There is yet another way for you to express your commitment to the mission of New Jersey Highlands Coalition through a planned gift. Once you have provided for loved ones in your will, you may want to include a gift of money, stock or property to the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. Your gift will be a lasting tribute to your concern for protecting, restoring and enhancing the New Jersey Highlands' resources, while guaranteeing the organization's long-term future. For further information on how to include the New Jersey Highlands Coalition in your charitable giving plans, please contact Julia Somers at 973-588-7190.

Policy Update *cont'd*

they did with the Flood Hazard and Water Quality Management Planning rule adoptions—with little regard for the thousands of public comments in opposition. However, our champions in the Legislature assure us that their colleagues have the will and the necessary majority to repeal the septic density changes through the constitutional mechanism of Concurrent Resolutions—first, to find the rule in violation of legislative intent; and second, by a majority vote in both houses to invalidate the rule. This action, by the way, cannot be vetoed by the Governor. Before the Legislature will act, the rule must first be adopted. NJDEP has advised us they expect to adopt the rule in the late Fall or early Winter (they would have adopted it by now, they told us, but preparing responses to an unanticipated high number of opposition comments had slowed the process).

We owe thanks to Jersey City and Mayor Fulop for their support and solidarity. City residents sent over 1000 comments to NJDEP. Mayor Fulop participated in the September “Save the Highlands” press conference at Liberty State Park, provided logistical support and helped secure Newark and Bayonne’s participation.

As Mayor Fulop pointed out in his comments when accepting our Vision & Leadership Award at our recent Annual Meeting, if it wasn’t for the NJ Highlands Coalition, he and Jersey City residents would not have been alerted to the threat the septic density changes posed to their valuable city-owned water resource assets in the Highlands: Split Rock and Boonton reservoirs.

We plan to work more closely with Jersey City, and to develop relationships with other urban municipalities that depend on Highlands water. Our voices joined with urban voices makes a powerful combination. 

Wanted: Highlands Advocates

Sean Gilson, Outreach & Education Director

Are you actively involved in your community? Do you attend municipal meetings? Would you be more effective if you had the backing of the NJ Highlands Coalition? If so the Highlands Advocates program is a perfect fit for you! We are looking for experienced and inexperienced but motivated volunteers to join our network of Highlands Advocates.

The NJ Highlands Coalition has been working with local activists within Highlands municipalities, partnering with them to be the Coalition’s eyes and ears in their communities, in exchange for training and support from Coalition staff and our network of members and member organizations. Our goal is to have at least one Highlands Advocate in each of the Highlands 88 municipalities, which will enable us to have a stronger and more responsive presence across the Highlands. I have taken on the role of staff coordinator of the Highlands Advocates program and I am redoubling the Coalition’s commitment to make the program as vital, as rewarding and as meaningful as it can be!

Some projects that we have worked on with our advocates include opposition to the PennEast and Pilgrim

pipelines, challenging inappropriate development proposals, and promoting Highlands Plan Conformance. Goals of the program are: Achieving full conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan in all of the 88 Highlands municipalities; making municipal governance more responsive and communities more sustainable, and succeeding in preventing inappropriate development.

The benefits of becoming an advocate are:

- Webinars and workshops on: Environmental law, policy and science; advocacy toolkits; Municipal Land Use Law; Highlands Conformance;
- Be part of a network of prominent environmental leaders and fellow advocates;
- Access to the expertise and resources of the larger, statewide, member organizations of the Coalition.

Would you like to learn more about the program, or are you interested in becoming a Highlands Advocate? Contact Sean Gilson, Outreach & Education Director, at 973-588-7190 or by email at sean@njhighlandscoalition.org. 

Annual Meeting Awards *Elliott Ruga*

Continuing the tradition of convening the Annual Meeting each year at a different venue to highlight the Highlands’ unique history, diverse and becoming landscapes, and abundant natural resources, this year we struck the right note at Villa Milagro Vineyards, in the historic, agricultural hamlet of Finesville, on cliffs overlooking the confluence of the Musconetcong River and the Delaware River.

Along with the business of welcoming the slate of new trustees

(marked by an asterisk on the list of trustees on the outside fold of this issue), thanking those cycling off the Board, and recognizing our most awesome volunteers and elected officials who helped champion our mission, we were treated to a tasting of native Highlands wines and cheeses.

In addition, Margaret Nordstrom continued our annual tradition of inviting the Highlands Council Executive Director to reflect on the Council’s past year and to talk about the challenges and opportunities for the

Continued on page 3

Annual Meeting Awards *cont'd*



Pres. Sandy Batty and Julia Somers present 2016 Capstone Award to Candy Ashmun

upcoming year.

The Delaware Riverkeeper, Maya K. van Rossum gave a presentation on “For the Generations,” an initiative to promote amendments to state constitutions to guarantee citizens’ rights to clean air and water and for the protection of natural and cultural resources (see “Message from the Executive Director,” p.1).

The Vision & Leadership Award, for elected officials who have championed the protection of Highlands resources, was presented to trustee, former member of the Highlands Council and Highlands Task Force, and Mayor of Chester Township, **Bill Cogger**; Clinton Township Mayor **John Higgins**; and **Steve Fulop**, Mayor of Jersey City.

The Wilma Frey Volunteer Award was presented to **Cinny MacGonagle** and to **Stop Somerset Hills Power**



Former Chester Twp Mayor Bill Cogger receives Vision & Leadership Award

Plant (SSHPP). Cinny is a tireless volunteer advocate, clocking many hours of volunteer service as a board member of NJ Highlands Coalition, Musconetcong Watershed Association, and ANJEC. Cinny also serves as the Conservation Chair of the South Highlands Group of NJ Sierra Club.


SSHPP, after three years of advocacy was congratulated for successfully preventing the conversion of a 107-acre farm in Bedminster into a 34,000 solar paneled power plant within a 10-acre rural residential zone.

In recognition of her decades of advocacy and for inspiring several



Elliott Ruga presents Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop with Vision & Leadership Award

generations of environmental leaders throughout the State and still going strong, the Capstone Award was presented to **Candy Ashmun**.

In addition to awards, checks were distributed to this year’s Small Grants Program recipients. Those present at the Annual Meeting to accept checks on behalf of their organizations included: **Alan Hunt**, for **Friends of the Musconetcong River** (\$5,000); and **Eric Fuchs-Stengel** and **Isabel Arrieche** for **Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization, Inc. (MEVO)**. 

All photos on this page courtesy Juniper Leifer

Your Water ... Your Future



Cinny MacGonagle receives 2016 Wilma Frey Volunteer Award



Cinny MacGonagle presents Clinton Township Mayor John Higgins with Vision & Leadership Award



Members of Stop Somerset Hills Power Plant accept 2016 Wilma Frey Volunteer Award



Small Grants Award recipients Friends of the Musconetcong River and Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization (MEVO)



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Your water
Your future

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View trustee bios at www.njhighlandscoalition.org/about_us/trustees



Your water
Your future

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is a nonprofit organization made up of groups and individuals committed to a common goal of helping protect, enhance and restore the New Jersey Highlands.

You can help.

Please return your membership contribution to:

New Jersey Highlands Coalition
508 Main Street
Boonton, NJ 07005
Tel: 973.588.7190
www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Won't You Join Us?

Membership Contribution:

\$1,000 \$500 \$100 \$50 \$30 Other _____

(Your contribution is tax deductible and may be eligible for a matching contribution by the company where you work. Please make checks payable to: New Jersey Highlands Coalition.)

Or make your donation on line at www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

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(Your email will allow us to inform you of upcoming events.)

Yes! I am interested in volunteering for the Coalition.