



Highlands Lookout

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Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition

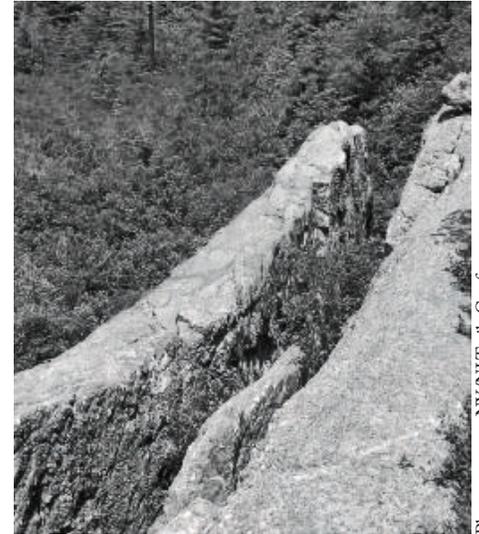
Fall 2009

Message from the Executive Director

The rubber has hit the road! 75 of the 88 Highlands municipalities are working with the Highlands Council on the Conformance Modules that may result in their commitments to full Plan Conformance. As the opportunity of committing to full Conformance nears, questions and concerns continue to be raised by municipal officials and their consultants, concerned citizens, and environmentalists. That's a good thing. If a regional plan, of this scale and incorporating under its umbrella such a diversity of landscapes, community character and interests had ever before been proposed, we would have a blueprint to follow. It is being drawn now. We can and do look to the Pinelands regional plan for guidance. But the Pines are more homogenous than the Highlands and the Pinelands Commission has vastly different regulatory authority than the Highlands

Council. However, if we can learn anything from the 27 year history of the Pinelands, it is that regional planning works. Taxes are lower and property values are higher within the Pinelands than the communities immediately outside. Encroaching sprawl from both Atlantic City and Philadelphia was stopped and a 17 trillion gallon source of clean drinking water, the Cohansey and Kirkwood aquifers, is protected to the benefit of all.

The ground rules may be different between the Pines and the Highlands, but the concept is the same. Let's be bold, move forward, and continue to ask questions. I cannot overemphasize the importance of your following and supporting your town's conformance process. Municipal officials need to know you want your community to conform. If you have questions or need



Bearfort Ridge

Photo courtesy NY/NJ Trails Conference

assistance, please ask us. That's what we're here for!

Warmest regards,

Julia Gomez 

Coalition News *Elliott Ruga, newsletter editor*

Where to begin? On opposing PSE&G's proposed 500Kv power line, we have become actively engaged in the NJ Board of Public Utilities legal proceedings as "Environmental Intervenors, and coordinating with the "Citizens" and "Municipal" intervenors. We will soon be meeting with NJDEP to discuss PSE&G's Highlands Applicability determination

and we will be commenting on PSE&G's wetlands permits. We are commenting to the Morris County Parks Commission to persuade them

that the current maintenance access trails for PSE&G's rights of way in Mahlon Dickenson would become major "diversions" of public lands if allowed to become construction access roads for the new power line.

We are working closely with groups in Tewksbury, Holland and other towns, helping in their efforts to encourage municipal officials to conform to the Regional Master Plan. We have recently commented on the Fair Share Housing Center's motion to overturn COAH's waivers that would allow Highlands Build Out numbers to guide growth *continued on page 2*

There is good news to report in Morris Township, Boonton and Sparta

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NJ Highlands Coalition
508 Main Street
Boonton, NJ 07005
www.njhighlandscoalition.org
973.588.7190

Coalition News *cont'd*

in conforming municipalities. We have commented on DEP's rule proposals on "Determinations of Substantial Reliance on Previously Issued Letters of (wetlands) Interpretation."

We are monitoring developments regarding a proposed truckstop on prime farmland in Franklin Township.

The Columbia Law Clinic has filed a motion on the Coalition's behalf, to overturn NJDEP's finding that the Huntington Knolls development proposal, in Holland Township, is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan—despite the Highlands Council's overwhelming finding of inconsistency.

We are continuing to monitor the following: the proposed wood chip incinerator at Mount Hope in Rockaway

pristine forest lands in Vernon, West Milford and Ringwood.

I would be remiss if I were not to report on several successes. 180 acres of the Delbarton School's land in Morris Township that was slated for a retirement community was finally preserved as county and municipal open space, after a 12-year battle by mostly local area residents. The proposal for a high-rise apartment in Boonton, on the banks

of the Rockaway River and adjacent to the Morris Canal and remnants of a historic iron forge, was withdrawn. Also, watch for the publication of a Highlands Eco-Tourism brochure that was funded in part by the Coalition. And last but not least, the Riverbank peak-demand hydro-electric plant proposed in Sparta has been withdrawn. Much kudos go to Coalition member "Stop Riverbank" for a job well done. 

Highlands Recreation & History: The Cannonball Trail

by Kate Millsaps, Campaign and Grassroots Coordinator

On the Cannonball Trail in Oakland, Highlands' history and ecology come together. The hiking and biking trail once served as a road for ammunition, troops, and provisions during the Revolutionary War. Between Pompton Lakes and Suffern, New York, supplies were secretly moved through the mountain passes by the Continental Army. Oakland served as an important supply center during the war because the Dutch settlers there did not have an allegiance to the British. Links from the great iron chain that kept the British fleet from West Point are said to have traveled the road.

The Cannonball Trail is now traversed by nature lovers rather than artillery carts. The 7.7 mile route leads through Ringwood State Forest and Ramapo State Forest passing by Bear Swamp Lake. Before reaching the lake you can turn off onto Bear Swamp Road/ Cannonball Road to reach the historic Revolutionary route. The trail offers spectacular vistas of the mountain valleys. If you are not up to such a long trek there are a number of smaller trails that connect to Cannonball Trail so you can easily select a route that suits you.

The trail can be reached by taking I-287 to Exit 57 (Skyline Drive) and proceeding north for about one mile to the upper parking area for Ramapo Mountain State Forest on the left, opposite the entrance to Camp Tamarack. The yellow trail blazes will mark the Hoeflerlin Memorial Trail. Less than half a mile farther, the Hoeflerlin trail joins with the Cannonball Trail, which

is blazed in white on red. The trail follows the ridgeline and splits from Hoeflerlin upon descending. About a mile from this point Cannonball Trail joins with the Old Guard Trail. After these two split you will be on the secret Cannonball Road of the past. The NY/NJ Trail Conference recommends taking the triple-yellow blazed Yellow Trail back to the parking area. This trail offers vistas of not only the Ramapo Mountains but also the New York City skyline. 



Ramapo Mountain State Forest



Castle Point, Ramapo Mountain State Forest

Township, EAI Investment's proposed 350-unit residential development on the Pohatcong grasslands, the Galloway Farms proposed development in Holland Township, the extension of a water main through an environmentally sensitive area of Morris Township, currently served only by private wells and septic, to benefit the new athletic fields at the private Delbarton School, and Tennessee Gas Pipeline's proposed expansion project through 17 miles of mostly

Birding with Dennis Miranda & Cinny MacGonagle

By Betsy Manning

When I arrived at the Newark Watershed Echo Lake Office, Dennis and Cinny were already birding the parking lot. We piled into Dennis' car and began our wonderful trip to bird the Highlands.

Our first stop was a soaring cathedral of Norway spruces on redundantly named La Rue Road. The trees were planted in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps to hold back erosion in Newark's watershed lands. Here I discovered the true Dennis; he is actually part bird. He can mimic anything avian that lives in or visits New Jersey. So throughout our trip we were astonished as he became, among other things, a prairie warbler, a yellow billed cuckoo and a red tailed hawk.

Hiking the Clinton Ironworks site on Clinton Road, we came upon something quite unexpected-- Clinton falls, hidden under the road's stone bridge. We pressed on to the Clinton reservoir. Here, as elsewhere in this part of the Highlands, the understory was robust and healthy, a reminder of what we need to restore in the deer ravaged areas to the south. Our ramble through the dappled woods and past a quiet and still pond made me wonder why such a magical place was so abandoned.

We returned to Clinton Road and to pull-off area 2, a thinning hemlock forest that will soon be entirely gone due to Woolly Adelgid. Dennis spoke about when these evergreens were densely packed and the woods dark and deep and he had enjoyed a lunch with hooded warblers fluttering about and inquisitive but immobile barred owls watching every bite. At Mossman's Brook, I marveled at the clarity of the tannin stained water as it swirled its way through the woods. On Newt Pond, long ripples of golden pollen were pushed gently towards the shore by a cool breeze. In the Johansen Piece, we wandered along a trail bordered by an amazingly rich variety of woodland flowers.

Driving north through Wawayanda State Park we followed Upper Greenwood Lake into New York State. As the road crested up and out of the woods we were treated to a staggering 20 mile view of Orange County, past a beautifully maintained farm with Black Angus cattle lowing in a stone walled pasture. From there we dipped back into New Jersey to walk along the Camp Ground Road beside a sunny wet meadow back in Wawayanda State Park.

Returning to New York, we stopped in Warwick for bowls of hot soup to ward off the day's nippiness. Suitably warmed, we proceeded down the Vernon Valley to the open fields around the Appalachian Trail crossing on RT 94. Cinny immediately recognized the bobolink since it is her telephone ring tone. While wandering along Wawayanda Creek at Canal Road we ran into Wade and Sharon Wander who helped us identify the gaywings that Dennis had photographed earlier when we entered the hemlock forest.

At Green Swamp atop Hamburg Mountain we saw a beaver swimming as Dennis tried for one last time to raise an owl. He hooted earnestly for almost 5 minutes with no luck. Finally, two barred owls called back, disturbing a red tail hawk that joined in the commotion. We left before the agitation had finished. Our last stop was a rocky overlook above a shrubby wet meadow. The day had finally warmed up and we sat on lichen covered boulders listening to birdsong and remembering all of the day's highlights. We had seen or heard 85 different bird species. It was a wonderful day of vivid Highlands memories. [PH](#)

Member Spotlight: Stop the Lines!

by Elliott Ruga

Stop the Lines first organized just about one year ago, by two Fredon residents, Dave Slaperud and Tom Hill, in an effort to pull together grassroots opposition to PSE&G's proposed Susquehanna - Roseland 500Kv power line. Since then, their membership has grown to 415. They have successfully petitioned the NJ Board of Public Utilities to be recognized as "Intervenors" in the BPU hearings to determine need for the project—along with the group of Municipal and Environmental Intervenors— which, if the Intervenors succeed, could effectively kill the project. The proposed project

would have lasting impacts on the environment of the NJ Highlands and its 195' towers—doubling the height of the existing towers—would scar Highlands viewsheds.

To help Stop The Lines "grow" their organization and continue their advocacy work, they were awarded a

grant under the Coalition's Small Grants Program.

"Stop the Lines is grateful for all of the generous support of the NJ Highlands Coalition," says Dave Slaperud, "they have been instrumental to us with financial support in the form of Grants, and have also helped us in organizing and building our coalition to look out for our mutual interests - assuring that PSE&G's proposed Susquehanna-Roseland expansion project does not go through the Highlands Region as proposed."

I encourage visiting Stop the Lines' information-rich website. [PH](#)



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New Jersey's parks, natural areas,
clean water, farmland and historic
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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.



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