



Highlands Lookout

www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Fall/Winter 2011

Message from the Executive Director

On October 11, the newly created Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) issued its proposed final draft State Strategic Plan. The plan supercedes the 2008 State Development and Redevelopment Plan, which was never adopted.

This slim 41 page document reads like a mission statement compared to the 393-page 2008 plan. It points to the failures of all previous attempts at carrying out the mandates of the State Planning Act and contemplates being a blueprint for change that “compliments the Christie-Guadagno Administration’s commitment to sustainable economic growth.” These are admirable goals, though not necessarily unique to the Christie Administration. The devil, however, is in the details. This plan offers very few.

Development of the plan involved the input of many invited stakeholders, including developers, business interests, local government, farm interests and State agencies. It wasn’t until OPA

had finished its round of stakeholder huddles that it was pointed out that no environmental interests were represented. We were then provided with a 2-hour informational meeting.

The Plan rejects the 2008 State Plan Policy Map, recognizing instead the 2001 Map. This is troubling because the 2008 Map has much greater accuracy--reflecting advances in GIS technology--and includes the many changes that came out of thousands of hours of the

Cross Acceptance process with towns and counties.

The Plan also is critical of NJDEP’s Wastewater Management Plan rules and considers its Landscape Project “flawed”. This too is troubling because these are two State programs for which we have high praise. We invite you to contact us if you want to learn more about the State planning process.

Warmest regards,

Coalition News *Elliott Ruga, newsletter editor*

The National Park Service has released its draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), detailing the construction impacts of the proposed Susquehanna - Roseland transmission line project on the Delaware National Scenic River, the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. We

applaud the Park Service for its careful and thorough analysis that led them to

the determination that the “no build” was the most appropriate alternative of those considered. A public comment period and a series of public meetings will follow before the final EIS will be released in the Fall of 2012.

In November, Earth Justice and Eastern Environmental Law Center filed a motion with NJ Superior Court on behalf of the Coalition and its partners, making

a case that the NJ Board of Public Utilities reconsider its approval of the Susquehanna - Roseland project because of the industry’s projections that energy demand trends have leveled in the 2 years since the original approval. However, the Obama Administration has “fast-tracked” the S-R along with several other transmission line projects as part of the latest round of stimulus initiatives. We suspect

The biggest threat to the Highlands watersheds, aside from sprawl development, is the construction of linear utility lines and gas pipelines

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



A PSE&G ROW maintenance crew truck. So much for the local jobs the S-R project will provide.

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Coalition News *cont'd*

that intensive industry lobbying in Washington has succeeded in positioning this project as one that promotes renewable energy, when the project was conceived specifically to enable underutilized coal-fired plants to operate at their full capacity. Along with our partners, Sierra Club, NJCF, Stop the Lines and Delaware Riverkeeper, we have met with Senator Menendez and we conferenced with the President's Council on Environmental Quality in our efforts to correct this misrepresentation.

In the more densely populated northern half of the most densely populated state in the nation, the Highlands improbably supplies 500 billion gallons of clean water each year, at a cost that is the fourth lowest nationwide. It is precisely because of the Highlands unfragmented core forests, which functions as a natural and no-cost water filtration system. The biggest threat to the Highlands watersheds, aside from sprawl development, is the continuing intrusion of linear utility lines and gas pipelines, which shred core forests into ribbons and diminish their ability to provide this valuable ecological service.

Governor Christie's recently released draft NJ Energy Master Plan signals a green light for even more transmission lines and gas pipelines. The opening of the Delaware River basin to natural gas drilling, the Governor's signal could turn the Highlands into a shale gas super highway, from PA to the distribution hubs and LNG terminals.

For good reason, we are focusing our efforts in opposing the Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line, proposed and underway gas pipelines, the NJ Energy Master Plan and the Delaware River Basin Committee's proposed lifting of its fracking moratorium and adoption of its fracking regulations. It's all about our water and our future. 

Highlands Recreation: Pyramid Mountain

Erica Van Auken

If there can be only one quintessential hike of the New Jersey Highlands, I will argue that it is the Pyramid Mountain Loop in Morris County. It does not matter how the hike is started, if the loop is followed, one will witness all attributes of the Highlands. The Pyramid Mountain loop has streams, former farm fields, steep slopes, scenic vistas, historical structures, and even some Jersey lore – everything that comes to mind when thinking of the Highlands!

Located in Montville, Pyramid Mountain Natural Historic Area is not far from the crowded cities of New Jersey and New York. This hike, 2.8 miles and less than 2 hours long, can fit perfectly into anyone's busy schedule. Leaving the Visitor's Center parking lot heading east, the trail starts out easily as it crosses the Stony Brook south of the Taylortown Reservoir. Shortly thereafter, the trail intersects another landmark, unfortunately not unique to the Highlands: a power line! The intrusion of a power line is not a welcomed feature of any hike. In fairness, the proper maintenance of existing power lines may help diversify habitats for some wildflowers and migrating birds.

As the trail moves away from the power lines it passes over Bear Creek, and eventually nears the remains of the Morgan Farmhouse. From this point the trail becomes more rugged as it begins a steep ascent. This climb may be trying but it is entirely worth it. This end of the trail is closest to Tripod Rock: a fantastic glacial erratic and subject of this trail's lore. A glacial erratic is a rock that is picked up by a glacier and carried along with the ice until it

is left behind at a new location as that glacier recedes.

Tripod Rock, a massive boulder weighing 140 tons, was left by a glacier on top of three smaller rocks. One mysterious feature of this glacial erratic is that when the sun sets on the summer solstice it is aligned between the three rocks that support the boulder. The coincidence of a solstice sunset might excite the imagination more than a random geologic feature, but it is the number of these perched rocks in the region that really incite local legends. An article in *Weird N.J.* claims that there are more of these rocks near Bearfort Mountain, Norvin Green State Forest, and Ramapo State Park. Although speculative, many believe that these rock formations are not just misplaced boulders, but are instead the work of native people; there is little evidence to support such claims. Regardless of glacial movement or human intervention, Tripod Rock is surely a sight to behold.

After viewing this wonder, the trail begins to wind back towards the parking area with two noteworthy scenic vistas: Lucy's Overlook and another nameless overlook just shy of the parking lot with views of New York City. The Pyramid Mountain Loop really offers a sneak peak at all things Highlands! 



photo by George Chazin

Highlands History: Morristown and the Revolution *Erica Van Auken*

Because there were no battles of the Revolutionary War fought in Morristown, it is sometimes shadowed by other historic sites; but this Highlands town maintains its claim to fame for hosting General George Washington and the Continental Army through a winter that was the harshest on record during one of the Army's eight years in Morristown.

In 1777, after the famous Delaware River Crossing and battles in Trenton and Princeton, Washington marched into Morristown and took Arnold's Tavern for his winter headquarters. To create the illusion of a larger army he housed a few soldiers in each residence throughout the town. Two years later, when he arrived with the Continental Army in December of 1779, he had closer to 13,000 troops. But because



Jacob Ford Mansion. Morristown

the death toll in Morristown had been so high in 1777 because of Small Pox and other diseases borne by the soldiers, the residents of Morristown had refused to let troops reside in their homes. Washington had to make other arrangements.

George Washington designated his headquarters at the home of Jacob Ford. The Ford Mansion, built in 1774 was said to be one of the most superb homes in America at the time. The mansion proved to be too crowded for the General, his wife, his many servants and house guests so a separate log structure was built to serve as a kitchen and meeting room.

Most soldiers were encamped a few miles from town at Jockey Hollow in log barracks that held 12 soldiers in a roughly 14' by 16' area. The winter of 1779-1780 was the most severe winter of the Revolution. Soldiers in Morristown had to weather 7 separate blizzards in December alone! As the winter wore on, rations decreased so severely that in some accounts soldiers are said to have boiled water to cook their own shoes to eat. During this trying season, roughly

1,000 soldiers deserted, but it is a true testament to General Washington's leadership that more men did not quit.

On June 22, 1780, General George Washington and the Continental Army left Morristown having lost less than 50 soldiers to severe winter conditions. The General's time in Morristown was critical to the overall war effort. It was during this time that Washington laid out his plans for the rest of the war and it is these plans that ultimately secured the Continental Army's victory.

Fortunately, our forbears recognized the national significance of Morristown, and places such as the Ford Mansion were preserved by the Washington Association of New Jersey. In 1933 the mansion and the camp at Jockey Hollow were designated a National Historical Park.

Although battles were fought in other places throughout the state, much acclaim is given to Morristown because of the hardships the Continental Army endured. Few other places honor the mettle of the American spirit, which was what emerged from the winter of 1779 and went on to win a famous war. 

Member Spotlight: Raritan Headwaters Association *Betsy Manning*

On October 1, 2011, the Upper Raritan Watershed Association (URWA) and the South Branch Watershed Association (SBWS), merged to form the Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA).

Headwaters are those areas at the very beginnings of rivers, so small that they are often unnamed but by capturing water from springs, seeps, rain and snow melt, flow downstream and merge to form the larger tributaries that make up a river's watershed. The north and south branches of the Raritan River drain an estimated 470 square miles and include 89 municipalities in Morris, Hunterdon and Somerset counties. They provide

water for 1.5 million people as well as contribute to the Highlands water supply that serves over 5 million residents.

Within the Raritan watershed lie some of New Jersey's favorite recreational areas such as Hacklebarney State Park, Ken Lockwood Gorge, the Leonard Buck Gardens, and Round Valley State Park.

RHA is headquartered at the 170 acre Fairview Farm Wildlife Preserve, URWA's former headquarters. SBWA's Lechner House in Flemington's Echo Hill Environmental Education Area will function as a RHA satellite branch. Cindy Ehrenclou, URWA's former executive director,

serves in the same capacity at RHA. Bill Kibler, SBWA's former executive director, takes the reins as Director of Policy and Science. Together, they will be speaking with one strong voice to protect the whole of the Raritan River Basin headwaters. As Cindy wrote in regard to the merger, RHA will "leverage skills and strengths to achieve greater impact; increase program capacity and effectiveness; be more sustainable; have a stronger voice in Trenton; serve as a model for others". 


Raritan Headwaters
Association

Your water
Your future

Check out our new homepage video!
www.njhighlandscoalition.org

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Your future

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Yes! I am interested in volunteering for the Coalition.