



Highlands Lookout

www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Fall/Winter 2014

Message from the Executive Director

The 2nd Annual Highlands Festival at Waterloo was bigger and better than the first—and by a margin that signaled to us a green light to begin planning next year’s Festival. Please watch for an official announcement in the coming weeks.

We are thrilled that we finally have a permanent source of funding for open space, farmland and historic preservation. We committed a great deal of our resources, in cooperation with our Keep It Green Coalition partners, towards helping educate the public about the importance of State funded acquisition programs, particularly in the Highlands. We recognize there are concerns that funding for land acquisition will channel funds from critical NJDEP services. In our mission of advocacy for the protection of Highlands resources, we understand the necessary role each of the three fundamental tools play in protecting these resources; acquisition, regulation

and conservation. On November 4 we finally secured a permanent funding mechanism for the State to purchase land and development rights, enabling the State to continue to compete against development interests in order to permanently retire the development potential from lands that provide the most valuable ecological services. With acquisition funding secured, we are now free to focus our resources on regulatory challenges, where the current Administration has been, and will continue to be, most challenging. We never expected for a moment that if the

referendum passed on Nov. 4, on Nov. 5 we could put our feet up and relax. In many respects, our work has just begun.

We recently participated in the Highlands Council’s initial stakeholder meetings on the mandated Master Plan Review. Technical Advisory Committees are being formed to cover key science and policy areas. Qualified individuals from among our staff and our membership have applied to the Council for seats on several key committees. Our intention is to participate in the review process every step of the way.

Warmest regards,

State House News

Elliott Ruga, editor

The bill that extends the expired dual appraisal process for Green Acres and farmland preservation programs in the Highlands until 2019 passed unanimously in the Senate on December 1. We expect it will have passed the full Legislature by the time you are reading this—and will be signed by the Governor before year end. Appraising land at the higher value after considering both current and pre-2004 zoning and regulations has been a good faith measure by the State to address the landowner equity impact of the Highlands Act.

funding mechanism for State open space, farmland and historic preservation programs are promising developments for the Highlands—a region that

receives a much greater share of State preservation funding than the 15% of the State’s land mass the Highlands represents.

The New Jersey Builder’s Association just can’t get enough of a good thing. A bill recently introduced in the Legislature would for the *fourth* time extend the Permit Extension

Act of 2008. Calling it an economic hardship for having to reapply for expired municipal and State permits that were approved before the projects were idled by the 2008 financial collapse, the original bill extended the validity

Projects that were approved as long ago as 2002 could move forward free from most municipal and State regulations that have since been enacted.

inside this issue

Message from the Executive Director	1
State House News	1
Pipelines, Pipelines, Pipelines! . . .	2
Awards at the 2014 Annual Meeting	3
Reflections of a College Intern . . .	3


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

The extension of the dual appraisal method, combined with the passage of the referendum on a long-term

Statehouse News *cont'd*

of permits set to expire for 3½ years beginning in 2007. Environmentally sensitive areas, including the entire Highlands region were excluded. In subsequent extensions of the Act, in 2010 and in 2012, the areas where permits could be extended were expanded, including the Highlands Planning Area and Pinelands Villages and Towns. Most construction, land use and NJDEP permits are typically valid for a period of five years. If the latest proposed Permit Extension extension passes, projects that were approved as far back as 2002 could move forward, free from most municipal and State regulations that had since been enacted.

There is no procedure or reporting requirement for having permits extended. If you have a project that you believe qualifies, you qualify. There is no mechanism to determine where permits have been extended, or a way to evaluate the impacts, good or bad.

We were suspicious in 2008 when economic hardship was used as justification for handing special interests a pass on the regulations necessary to protect public health and safety and for the protection of our public trust resources. Today, with the economy having steadily improved, it is beyond the pale to even ask for a continuation of such an arrangement. The good news is that Legislators are listening and many are joining our call that enough is enough! 



After construction on the Tennessee Gas Pipeline right of way in West Milford.

Pipelines, Pipelines and Pipelines!

Erica Van Auken, Campaign Coordinator


The beauty of the New Jersey Highlands is one of our state's best assets. With its rolling hills, calming waters, and historic landscapes, many look to the Highlands for fresh air and recreation. But not all who know the Highlands see the beauty or recognize the importance of the region. Some merely see it as the distance between Point A and Point B.

The New Jersey Highlands have always been treated as a corridor to transport resources extracted from Pennsylvania and points west to the greater New York markets and beyond. In the 1800's linear development projects arose from the need to ship mined coal first by canal, later by rail, and still later by truck. Today's linear development pressure is no exception; even with environmental protections in place, we are seeing linear development projects across the Highlands for the transport of energy in the form of natural gas, oil, and electricity.

Some rights of way have existed in the Highlands for half a century or more. Evidence of aging pipelines, transmission lines, and even railroads can be seen cutting across the region. Recent linear development projects are upgrades of old infrastructure, as was PSE&G's recently-completed Susquehanna-Roseland Transmission Line Project. Other development projects are expansions of existing cuts or new cuts to for projects bringing additional energy capacity. And that's where we start to see negative impacts to the Highlands and the drinking water resource it provides to more than 5 million New Jersey residents.

As one can imagine, the Highlands were not named for its great plains, or gently rising hills, but rather for its steep slopes along its ancient weathered mountains. The rugged Highlands

terrain has always presented challenges for linear construction, having to build up and over the many elevation changes encountered while progressing along a linear path. As a result, dynamite and other blasting techniques have been used to grade the slopes. Railroads-turned-walking trails bear evidence of blasted rock in clearing a straight path for laying tracks. Laying pipe is no different. Clearing paths to excavate trenches to lay pipelines over steep slopes and through shallow bedrock often requires the use of pyrotechnics. Steep Highlands slopes also exacerbate the erosive effects of digging and trenching for pipelines. When a right of way is prepared for infrastructure, all vegetation is removed, exposing the soil to the elements, especially wind and rain. Without the stability of vegetative root systems, the soil is prone to migrate downhill in even the slightest rain storm. Erosion is detrimental to the ecosystems because it disrupts habitat for important flora and fauna and it clouds waterways and disrupts aquatic life. The negative impacts to river systems and wetlands are especially disruptive considering the number of people and the extensive commerce that depend on the delicate ecological functions that provide for the Highlands clean water supply. If the lakes, streams and wetlands that feed our reservoirs with clean water are harmed by the construction impacts of linear development projects, impairing our water supply, then in turn, our economic stability is also put at risk.

Overlooked in the debate over fossil fuel versus renewable energy is the irreparable harm posed by the increasing demands to transport more and more energy by pipeline through the important core forests of the Highlands and the damaging impacts to our drinking water supplies upon which so many New Jerseyans depend. 

Awards at the 2014 Annual Meeting



Bob Schultz (left), President, R.E.A.C.T., receives an inscribed Highlands photo print by acclaimed nature photographer Dwight Hiscano, as the recipient of the 2014 "Wilma Frey Volunteer of the Year Award" from Elliott Ruga (center) and Wilma Frey (right).



Congressman Rush Holt, in a pre-recorded message that was played at the Annual Meeting, accepting the 2014 "Vision and Leadership Award" for his outstanding support for the Highlands.

Reflections of a College Intern *Jody Perrett*

Jody Perrett, an environmental sciences major at Ramapo College and intern for the fall semester, is completing a college education he began 25 years ago.

If environmentalists appear frustrated and at times belligerent it is surely understandable given the existential threats they battle, such as global warming and species decline, vying for the attention of a distracted public while trying to outmaneuver the special interests that have leveraged their bottomless pockets to influence decision makers and in the drafting of favorable language and loopholes in the reams upon reams of regulations in multiple jurisdictions. Given an informed, concerned and active public, environmental advocacy would not be as difficult as it now is.

Perception is at the heart of the problem. The natural environment is an abstraction to most people. We are so removed from the natural world and its processes that we cannot see the problem. It is essentially invisible. The Clean Air Act of the 70's succeeded in dissipating the layer of brown smog that blanketed our cities. Unfortunately, our memories of that blight have for the most part dissipated too. The problems

today are pollutants you can't see: CO₂, methane or other greenhouse gasses.

Today's contaminants in our water--nitrates, phosphates, pesticides, herbicides, and a wide array of pharmaceuticals--aren't as visible as the slicks, sludges and flammables that the Clean Water Act succeeded in removing. How can we raise an alarm to real, but invisible threats?

Recently I was provided the opportunity to return to school after a long hiatus. Having two young children, the environmental and social consequences of global warming motivated my decision to pursue a degree in environmental studies. Working with the New Jersey Highlands Coalition has highlighted the diversity of threats we face and the difficulty in getting the public's attention.

Adding further to our challenges is the surprising lack of unity among environmental organizations. The New Jersey Highlands Coalition and others were recently disparaged by fellow environmentalists for their support of the just passed open space referendum. Debate and criticism are one thing, both perhaps are necessary

and good. But this was surprisingly hostile and personal. Environmental advocates already face a steep, uphill battle. The well-heeled and financially endowed abilities of our adversaries put us at a tremendous disadvantage. Unity among our ranks might be too much of an ideal to expect. But going at each other with the intensity that should be reserved for the enemy is self defeating. And in our efforts to get the public's attention, our battling each other, like that all too visible brown layer of smog that once hung over us, is all that the public will see, and at the expense of what it is we need them to see. [http://www.njhc.org](#)



Jody Perrett participating in a field project for NJHC's Natural Heritage Subcommittee.



New Jersey Highlands Coalition
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Boonton, NJ 07005

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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.

You can help.

Please return your membership contribution to:

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Yes! I am interested in volunteering for the Coalition.