



# Highlands Lookout

www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Summer 2018

## Message from the Executive Director

The Highlands Coalition got off to a terrific start in 2018 following a victory in Trenton, where the Legislature, exercising a rarely used Constitutional provision, invalidated DEP's recently adopted rules that increased the number of new septic systems allowed in the Highlands Preservation Area. In addition, the confirmation of Catherine McCabe as Commissioner for the DEP, the appointment of former NY/NJ Baykeeper Director Debbie Mans as Deputy Commissioner, and the

appointment of Carl Ritchko as Chairman of the Highlands Council, are encouraging signals that we can put forward a proactive agenda to secure a sustainable future for the Highlands, rather than fending off attacks to the existing protections.

Among our new policy objectives are a statewide plan for forest management, which recognizes the critical role of Highlands forests in sequestering carbon and mitigating climate change, and a renewed partnership with the Highlands Council to promote conformance among Highlands towns.

In the first 6 months we have hosted several very successful events for our members and supporters including the



*One of the postcards sent to officials who helped the campaign to invalidate the weakened Highlands Septic Density rule*

2nd Annual Hopped up Highlands Pub Crawl in Hackettstown, the 3rd Annual Highlands Golf Outing, and two very engaging outings on the theme of Open Space in New Jersey.

Warmly, *Julia Somers* njhc



*New Jersey Highlands Coalition's monthly Policy Committee Meeting*

## Policy Update *Elliott Ruga, Policy & Communications Director*

Late in June the Coalition met with DEP management to discuss several Highlands issues. With a new, friendlier administration in place and a now-confirmed Commissioner, we wanted to see, if by making our case, policy changes could result. Here are the topics we discussed:

**Highlands Septic Density.** As Commissioner Bob Martin was exiting the DEP to make way for the incoming Administration, he fired off a letter to the Senate President and Assembly Speaker, rejecting the legislative action that invalidated the recently adopted rule change that would have allowed more development in the Highlands Preservation Area, calling it unconstitutional and that the adopted rule would remain in force. That was the last official word from DEP on the matter.

What we were told was consistent with what McCabe said in her confirmation hearing—that she wanted to review the data before coming to a conclusion.

**Highlands Permitting Standards.** In approving permits for projects in the Planning Area, DEP is required to consult with the Highlands Council to make a determination as to whether or not the project is consistent with the resource protection goals of the Highlands Regional Master Plan, regardless of the town's conformance status. A project found to be inconsistent cannot be approved. Prior to Governor Christie, a project was held to 24 RMP policies. Under Christie, it was reduced to 2. We want DEP to return to the more thorough consistency determination. Unless they do, many Highlands resources will be lost. We


*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*

know of 2 large projects that could not move forward under the former process: Milly's Court in Franklin Borough, Sussex Co.; and Haberman in Hampton Borough, Hunterdon Co. Each propose 300+ units and would be destructive to Highlands resources and community character.

**Forest Stewardship and Recognition of Highlands Forests for Mitigating Climate Impacts.** For this topic we brought a bench of heavy hitters: Dr. Sarah Webb, Drew University; Dr. Jay Kelly and Sue Dorward, Sustainability Director, both at Raritan Valley Community College. We were able to open some minds to an alternative, more ecological approach that does not prioritize timber management. We also discussed the fact that in 2004, when the Highlands Act was passed, we had very little understanding of climate impacts. With our expanding appreciation for the Highlands core forest in mitigating these impacts, are they sufficiently protected?

Having to cover much ground in 90 minutes or so, we could not get into great detail and we did not expect any immediate policy changes. However, we came away with what we wanted: an offer to meet with the appropriate division/bureau heads to discuss each of these topics individually and more thoroughly.

In the eight years of the Christie Administration we never were invited to discuss our concerns. That in itself is a very positive signal. 



*Huddling in the DEP cafeteria before meeting. Clockwise: Dr. Sarah Webb, Sue Dorward, Julia Somers, Bill Kibler, Dr. Jay Kelly*

## #SAVELWCF *Zac Cole, Outreach & Education Director*

The Land & Water Conservation Fund sets aside money specifically for the acquisition of land for conservation. It will expire on September 30, 2018, unless Congress votes to renew it. LWCF operates with no taxpayer funding and it has proven to be among the Nation's most successful conservation programs. The money comes from federal leases of lands used for offshore drilling. The fund is capped at \$900 million, though it has largely been underfunded since it was created in 1965 and despite revenue from the federal leases in the order of \$6.7 billion.


Here in New Jersey the LWCF can be seen all over the State including the Highlands. Targeted funding under the Highlands Conservation Act to various sites in the region has enhanced protections around critical water sources, helping to ensure an abundant supply of clean water for the 6.2 million New Jersey residents who depend on it.

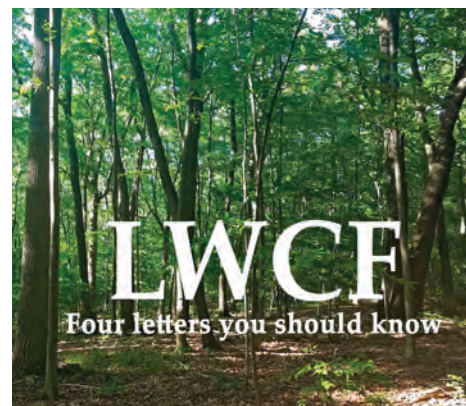
In total the LWCF has invested more than \$346 million in the Garden State, which has preserved historical sites and monuments, state parks, and supports a burgeoning outdoor industry in the State, generating approximately \$18.9 billion annually.

One recent example is the

acquisition of land connecting 3,000 acres of State preserved land to the Rockaway River Wildlife Management Area. The land is underlain by an aquifer, which is a major source of ground water for Jefferson Township, whose quality is protected naturally by the extent of forest surrounding it. By keeping a natural buffer between developed areas and water resources the pollution carried by runoff from roads and other hard surfaces is intercepted

Bills to reauthorize it have strong bipartisan support; however it is imperative that when the LWCF legislation come up for a vote that the authorization is made permanent and for the full \$900 million.

More information about LWCF can be found at [lwcfcoalition.com](http://lwcfcoalition.com) 



## Keeping It Green: NJ Open Space

*Zac Cole, Outreach & Education Director*

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is an active member of the Keep it Green Campaign. Over the last 10 years the statewide initiative has actively promoted and educated people and politicians about the contribution of preserved open space to our economy. Natural open spaces are essential to our health by keeping our air and water clean, and by providing a valuable resource for people to use for exercise and recreation.


This year we launched a new Keep it Green website that includes resources for exploring New Jersey's most popular open spaces. Throughout June (Open Space Month) the campaign successfully hosted the 2nd Annual Open Space Photo Competition on Instagram. This year the competition saw 168 photos submitted using the hashtag #shareyourspaceNJ and raised \$2,000 to split between 4 nominated organizations.

You can still see the pictures by

## Keeping It Green *cont'd*

visiting [njkeepitgreen.org](http://njkeepitgreen.org) or searching NJKeepItGreen in the Instagram app!

Also in June the Highlands Coalition hosted two events celebrating Open Space Month. The first was an evening learning about the mysterious and fascinating world of nocturnal insects with renowned ecologist Blaine Rothaus. New Jersey is home to about 3,200 species of moth, and using a high powered light we did our best to attract as many as we could to Sheep Hill Park in Boonton. For some time now Rothaus has been studying moths as an indicator of the health of an ecosystem by observing the presence and proportion of certain species. Attendees at the event were captivated by the colors and diversity of the specimens attracted to our pop-up observation station.

The second outing was a Wild Plant Hike led by Jared Rosenbaum who identified the native species at Marble Hill Natural Resource Area, in Lopatcong Township adjacent to the Delaware River. Jared is a professional ecologist and a keen ethnobotanist. In addition to pointing out the multitudes of species, he demonstrated how to do an environmental assessment using native plants as indicators and about the use of native plants in traditional medicine. 

## Staff Update

At the beginning of 2018 the Highlands Coalition recruited Zachary Cole to fill the position of Outreach and Education Director. During his first months Zac has represented us at festivals and fairs all over the Highlands region and beyond, including our sponsorship of the first New Jersey Mayors Climate Summit, to which mayors from all over the State came to engage with issues of climate change and sustainability, and the Sustainable Living Conference hosted by Newark Science & Sustainability. 


## Events: Recent & Upcoming

### Hopped Up Highlands!

Earth Day 2018 saw our *Second Annual Hopped up Highlands Pub Crawl & Scavenger Hunt* in Hackettstown, at the heart of the Highlands. This year we turned out a record 286 supporters who visited the eight participating locations to soak up the booming craft beer scene in the area, and enjoy culinary specialties. Water is the first ingredient in beer and our Highlands Pub crawls draw attention to that fact and the importance of the New Jersey Highlands to the State's water



*The thumbs up crew in Bea McNally's, a stop at the Hopped Up in Hackettstown Pub Crawl*

supply. The next *Hopped Up Highlands* event will be in Boonton on August 31. Visit the Highlands Coalition Website for more information. 

### Third Annual Golf Outing

On May 17 Highlands Supporters braved less than perfect conditions at Hawk Pointe Golf Course to support the Highlands Golf Outing fundraiser. At this event we honored William



*Outreach & Education Director Zachary Cole*



*One of NJ's 3200 species of moth at Sheep Hill in Boonton during Blaine Rothaus's demonstration*

(Bill) Cogger, former Mayor of Chester Township, former Highlands Council member and a champion of open space in the Highlands. Teams of foursomes participated in the shotgun golf format, while inside the clubhouse photography and media professionals Dwight Hiscano, Blaine Rothaus and Elliott Ruga shared advice and experience on capturing wildlife on camera. We produced a short video of the day's activities for you to check out: <https://bit.ly/2zBG4if>. 



*Gathering around the 1000 watt sodium vapor lamp that had attracted moths from miles away*

### Upcoming Events

- Hopped Up in Boonton Pub Crawl & Scavenger Hunt:  
August 31
- Hopped Up in Morristown Pub Crawl & Scavenger Hunt:  
October 13
- Highlands Car Rally:  
October 28

For more information visit our Events page:

[njhighlandscoalition.org/events/](http://njhighlandscoalition.org/events/) 



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## Summer 2018 Newsletter

Your water  
Your future

[www.njhighlandscoalition.org](http://www.njhighlandscoalition.org)

### New Jersey Highlands Coalition Board of Trustees 2018

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View trustee bios at <http://njhighlandscoalition.org/njhc-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](http://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/donate/](http://www.njhighlandscoalition.org/donate/)*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Yes!** I am interested in volunteering for the Coalition.