Message from the Executive Director

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,

Elliott Ruga, Policy Director

Policy Update

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

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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
Annual Meeting Awards cont’d

Plants (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 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
Fall/Winter 2016 Newsletter

www.njhighlandscoalition.org

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

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

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
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