Message from the Executive Director

The Coalition’s focus until the adoption of the Regional Master Plan in September was spearheading the campaign for a strong plan protective of the resources of the NJ Highlands. We have now directed our efforts towards encouraging Plan Conformance among Highlands Municipalities. We have begun an education campaign for municipal officials, grassroots organizations and individuals, to explain the benefits of Plan Conformance. Our staff has already given many presentations followed by lively Q&A’s at town halls, community centers and public libraries. The good news is that more and more towns are seriously considering Conformance. As of this writing, 70 out of the 88 Highlands towns have passed a Resolution of Intent to conform to the RMP. We will continue to encourage them throughout the conformance process.

I also encourage all members to visit and make use of our website. It is updated regularly to keep you informed about Highlands issues and positions taken and efforts being made by the Coalition. The website is also deep with information about the history, culture, and ecology of the Highlands. We provide links to numerous recreational sites for members looking for outdoor activities. We also have links to member and partner organizations. If you haven’t visited us on the web lately, I am sure you will find it well worth your while.

A final note to our members, in these difficult economic times, I cannot emphasize enough how much your continuing membership is appreciated.

Warmest regards,

Monksville Reservoir

As of this writing, 70 of the 88 Highlands towns have passed Resolutions of Intent to Conform with the Regional Master Plan.

Coalition News  Elliott Ruga, newsletter editor

There have been many milestones in the effort to preserve the water resources of the New Jersey Highlands region, beginning with the 1907 NJ Potable Water Commission Report, which recognized the importance of preserving the Highlands watersheds.

Much later, in 1988, the regional Highlands Coalition was formed. Much of their efforts led to the 1992 and 2002 United States Forest Service Study that outlined goals for Highlands’ preservation. In 2003, Governor McGreevey established the Highlands Task Force. Their findings, along with considerable input from the NJ Highlands Coalition, led to the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act in 2004.

The Highlands Act mandated the formation of the Highlands Council, an agency of the state charged with drafting a Regional Master Plan in order to regionalize resource protection measures and channel growth away from environmentally sensitive areas. In September, 2008, the Highlands Regional Master Plan was adopted.

As of this writing, 102 years after the findings of the Potable Water Commission Report, 70 of the 88 municipalities that comprise the Highlands region have passed Resolutions of Intent to Conform with the Highlands Regional Master Plan. That is indeed the most significant milestone to date towards the preservation of...
On an often chilly spring morning, thousands of anglers flock to New Jersey’s creeks and rivers to enjoy the opening day of trout season. While a few remaining New Jersey creeks contain self-sustaining populations of native brook trout, the most popular waterways for fishermen are stocked by the State with farm raised trout in the spring, fall and winter to provide opportunities for anglers throughout the year.

To celebrate the coming of spring and the start of trout season, the NJDEP’s Pequest Hatchery holds an annual open house and flea market. Always the weekend before the start of trout season, the event this year will be held on April 4th & 5th from 10AM-4PM. The open house is a great event for the whole family complete with fishing lessons, educational programs, tours, vendors, local artists and display booths by local civic organizations.

The Pequest Trout Hatchery and Education Center is located just nine miles west of Hackettstown on Route 46 in Warren County. Starting in mid-March, the Hatchery begins loading mature trout onto trucks for stocking throughout the state. Over 600,000 fish are raised and stocked every year in New Jersey’s waterways!

Located within the Pequest Wildlife Management Area, consisting of over 4,800 total acres, the Hatchery also has a handful of short interpretive trails that are perfect for children and the whole family, some of which are wheelchair and stroller friendly. The trails are well marked and the signage is very informative. For the intrepid, the Wildlife Management Area has miles and miles of abandoned railroad beds and off-trail hiking opportunities, some along the beautiful Pequest River, a treasure of the Highlands Region.

After the open house, this author recommends a stop at one of New Jersey’s classic road-side eateries, Hot Dog Johnny’s, just a mile past the Hatchery on Route 46 in Buttzville. Celebrate the coming of spring and the opening of trout season at this year’s Pequest Hatchery Open House. See you there!
Highlands History: Growth & Development Began with Iron
by Marion Harris and Michael Henderson

Highlands history is all about iron, with geography calling the shots. Northwest New Jersey was a wilderness until after the Revolution, but the first visitors saw that iron ore lay underground in a wide diagonal swath through the area. And the forests provided all the charcoal they would need. Mining began early in the 1700s, or even before. While the English were in charge, colonists were forbidden to manufacture metal products for local use: those made the profits, and profits belonged to the mother country.

Washington knew the importance of northwest New Jersey iron. Local ammunition providers were concealed and protected. Wintering in Morristown was not an accident. After the Revolution, knowledge, investments, and a work force were ready to grow. Iron was the growth engine of Highlands settlement. At Ringwood and Mt. Hope, Mine Hill, Andover, and Oxford, the Ogdens, Fords, and Hewitts flourished. Markets opened in New York and beyond, reached via that engineering marvel, the Morris canal, which carried loads of ore and local produce. By mid 19th-century, railroads and the historic road network – turnpikes: the prototype Morris, the Hamburg-Paterson, the Newark-Pompton; parts of modern Routes 46, 23, 24, 206 – put the area on the move. Waterways like the Musconetcong and the Whippany, which defined the original Highlands travel patterns, changed from transportation corridors to power sources as agricultural land use spread into the lower, more fertile Highlands areas, and small towns grew up to provide commercial services.

Of course the story of Highlands development doesn't stop there. The geography also gave us lakes, where city dwellers fled in summer for health and fun. Many lake communities, planted in late Victorian days, are still with us. We can still see their typical architecture and clustered growth patterns, under the changes that now make these little houses livable year-round.

The remnants of this 19th-century built environment are today's cultural resources. To understand and honor their story, we must protect them, as the Highlands Act requires. Less than 10% of these resources have even been identified; we must find the rest. It is a huge job, and the Highlands Council will need lots of help from the community.

We have to label and celebrate the rusty “industrial archaeology,” the almost invisible farmhouse and barn foundations, the patterns of early cultivation in the fields. Historic resources are not just big pretty houses. Telling the whole story of our past means seeing what our ancestors saw, in its open scenic setting, with all its limits and subtleties. The natural and built environments support each other, and together they keep us alive. Protect the water, protect the land, protect the past, to make sure the Highlands has a future.

The New Jersey Highlands are rich with connections to our past. In total, there are 597 identified historic and cultural sites and districts in the region, many of which are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Highlands Region also has four National Historic Landmarks and 56 archaeological sites.

Member Spotlight: Friends of Holland Highlands
by Mike Keady

Friends of Holland Highlands organized in 2001 as a grassroots citizens group based in Holland Township, the southern-most part of the Highlands Region in New Jersey.

“Eight years ago, we barely knew there was a Highlands Region,” confesses founder Mike Keady. “Fortunately, people told us to contact the Highlands Coalition, and experienced environmentalists in their membership taught us about this treasure and helped us fight to protect it.”

Through legal actions, the group stopped developments on two tracts totaling 192 acres and got the properties preserved. “We played ‘bad cop,’ stopped the subdivisions, and made developers see the attraction of working with ‘good cop’, land conservation groups to preserve the properties,” says Keady.

The group began to lobby to get more protective ordinances in their local land use code rather than oppose single developments. They supported passage of the Highlands Act in 2004, and their members attended public hearings and wrote letters to newspapers advocating strengthening the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

“The environmental movement is a marvelous two-way street,” says Keady. “Members of the NJ Highlands Coalition helped our neophyte group, and now we feel we should give back to the movement. Happily, region-wide solutions wind up helping our local community through the enlightened rules in the RMP.”

In 2009, Friends of Holland Highlands’ main goal is to support Holland Township officials who appear to be leaning toward conforming to the Highlands RMP. Their website is www.hollandhighlands.org. Mike Keady is secretary of the NJ Highlands Coalition Board of Trustees.
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