Message from the Executive Director

Conformance in the Highlands is steadily moving along. To date, seventeen towns and two counties have achieved basic conformance. Washington Township (Morris), Franklin Township (Warren), Holland and Kinnelon are scheduled to have their conformance petitions considered at the Council’s meeting in May. The continuing progression of towns that achieve basic conformance create a momentum that a hostile administration will find increasingly difficult to derail.

However, we review every conformance document to ensure that not one of the Regional Master Plan’s environmental standards are negotiated away merely to add to the momentum. We understand the challenges that the Highlands Council faces and its difficulties in moving forward under an unsympathetic administration. However, the Coalition must remain faithful to its mission, which is to preserve the water and other natural and cultural resources of the NJ Highlands region. We support the work of the Council in so many ways. Although we don’t always agree, we recognize each other’s roles in preserving the Highlands, which is why we are so active in ensuring appropriate individuals are appointed to the Council. As I’ve already said, conformance is steadily moving along. That’s a very good thing indeed.

Warmest regards,

Coalition News

We have been working closely with member groups in Tewksbury on two separate matters. DEP has issued a draft NJPDES permit to Bellemead Corporation to allow a wastewater discharge into the Rockaway Creek to serve a proposed office park. Bellemead was first issued a discharge permit in 1998. At its expiration in 2005 Bellemead applied to renew the permit, though Bellemead has yet to submit a development plan. DEP denied the renewal after receiving a substantial number of public comments opposing it. Bellemead quietly contested DEP’s denial and after a series of unpublicized exchanges between DEP and Bellemead, a draft renewal permit was issued in January, despite DEP’s previous indications to the public that the permit had been revoked. The public came out once again to voice its opposition at a public hearing in March.

Since the revocation in 2005, there have been many changes in the regulatory landscape. An office park would now be prohibited by local zoning, including Highlands Land Use elements (now that Tewksbury has conformed). It would also be inconsistent with the State Plan and the draft Hunterdon County Water Quality Management Plan.

In an alarming and unprecedented action in February, DEP overruled the Highlands Council’s rejection of JCP&L’s plan for a substation in Tewksbury. DEP also ignored documented concerns about safety and other impacts from the Township Committee, the Land Use Board, the Fire Chief, the State Historic Preservation Office, and more than a thousand concerned citizens. The Friends of Fairmount Historic District and the Township have filed a legal action against DEP. In support of
the Friends’ efforts, the Coalition will be filing an amicus brief and we have produced a short video to help publicize their concerns. Check it out at www.stopthesubstation.com.

We testified at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) public hearing on April 27 at the Pequest Fish Hatchery. EPA is contemplating action against the Portland, PA Generating Station—a dirty coal-fired power plant whose emissions dangerously impact our health in NJ. We have joined with organizations in to form MAPLE (Multi-state Alliance to Promote Clean Energy) to urge EPA to close the plant. A rally “paddle” by canoe on the Delaware is planned for June 4. For details about follow us on Facebook and watch for our Action Alerts.

We continue to attend DEP’s stakeholder meetings, which are part of its “transformation” into a more business friendly agency. The Coalition and others in the environmental community are attending these meetings to guard against necessary protections being sacrificed in this process.

In Trenton, we are watching for any movement on the Governor’s stalled attempt to seat anti-Highlands activists on the Highlands Council. We are oppose to DEP’s proposed permit waiver rules, which would allow DEP to waive strict compliance to any rule that an applicant can claim is unduly burdensome. Aren’t all regulations, by their nature, burdensome?

On the Highlands Trail you have many choices. You can hike through meadows and woods, through gorges with tumbling waters, past vistas of unspoiled countryside or spectacular views of the New York skyline. You can tramp through unspoiled forests, ford cascading brooks, or wander across rolling hills and along the Morris Canal.

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is marking out new trails from Danbury, CT to Reading, PA, crossing the Hudson at Storm King Mountain and the Delaware River at Riegelsville, NJ. The Highlands Trail will ultimately result in a continuous footpath stretching diagonally across northern New Jersey through parts of Sussex, Passaic, Morris and Hunterdon Counties. There is much to enjoy as the trail links many existing parks and wind through multiple watersheds, Since many parts of the trail are co-aligned with other trails, you need to be alert at each fork. If you see a teal colored diamond blaze, you are on the Highlands Trail.

The Highlands Trail is mostly a rugged footpath that can satisfy a wide variety of fitness levels and special interests from bird watching to photography. For a leisurely amble through history, visit the Long Pond Iron Works State Park, near Ringwood or walk along the Morris Canal towpath near Waterloo Village.

For more strenuous adventures Norvin Green State Forest, an undeveloped park in the Wyanokie Mountains along the Wanaque Reservoir, provides a challenging climb that rewards you with panoramic views of the New York City skyline. Along the Pine Swamp trail in Mahon Dickerson County Reservation, you can hike to the highest point in Morris County at 1,395 feet above sea level. An outing along the old farm and lumber roads of Allamuchy State Park lets you wander through various stages of successional forests. In Stephens State Park the trail follows the Musconetcong River with shaded places for picnicking. The remains of one of the Morris Canal’s twenty-three locks and a section of the old canal’s towpath are at Saxton Falls. The Raritan River rushes over glacial boulders throughout the Ken Lockwood Gorge Wildlife Management Area, one of New Jersey’s most picturesque spots and one of the finest fly fishing spots in the northeast. The Musconetcong Gorge Preserve is a wild ravine carved through the billion year old ridge of Highland’s gneiss. At Sweet Hollow Preserve, the Hackihokake Creek’s headwaters beckon the hiker to rest along its quiet trout pools.

Hikers can enjoy local B&Bs or use the camp sites available at State Parks like Spruce Run, Stephens and Voorhees.

When you plan your trip, the best place to start is the www.highlands-trail.org where you can find maps and descriptions of existing trail sections.
Positioned between New York City and the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania, it was always New Jersey’s destiny to be woven with railroads. Countless towns in northwestern New Jersey owe their history to the induction of the modern rail. New Jersey’s rail history began in 1815 with Colonel John Stevens’ first railroad charter and his experimental circular track in Hoboken that ran at about 12 mph. Undertakings for the last main-line in New Jersey, the Lackawanna Cutoff, began in 1908 and opened in 1911.

Because of the timing of its construction, nearly 100 years after Stevens’ work, the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Company was able to employ cutting-edge technology when constructing the Cutoff. The route began in Port Morris, NJ, moved west through the Highlands and straight into Pennsylvania with one curve at Slateford, PA. The Slateford curve is the only one that exceeded 2 degrees of curvature. Because of the relative straightness of these tracks, this line boasted 70 mph trips! The Lackawanna Cutoff was so named because, unlike other rails that climbed and twisted through the landscape, it significantly reduced the travel time. In addition to its swift speed, this line was also the first to implement the use of reinforced concrete structures – at least six of which can still be seen standing today.

Another unconventional method used on the Lackawanna Cutoff was the allowance of no grade crossings. Any intersecting road, river, or rail was covered with a concrete culvert or archway allowing the Cutoff to pass seamlessly over it. One exception is the Roseville Tunnel in Byram: engineers started carving out a straight path through the mountain, but towards the end had to concede defeat and built a tunnel for the final section through the mountain. Grades were never

**Member Spotlight: Highlands Tourism Partnership**

Giulia Iannitelli, Highlands Tourism Partnership

In the summer of 2009 volunteers came together to start the Highlands Tourism Partnership. The mission of the organization would be to promote agritourism, ecotourism and cultural heritage in the Highlands region. A big part of our business plan was to host a major event and a fundraiser for the organization and proceeds from the event would go to promote the region.

That event became the Last Fling Pumpkin Sling, which was made possible by a grants from the NJ Office of Travel and Tourism and the NJ Highlands Coalition.

We encouraged various groups to build catapults and trebuchets to sling 2-3 lb. pumpkins in a competition. Twenty-one groups participated. The event tied for second place in the Niche category of the Governor’s Tourism Award.

Other Highlands Tourism Partnership projects include getting the word out about events through press releases and a Highlands-wide event calendar (accessed from the Coalition home page, or at www.highlandstourism.org/events.php).

Plans are underway for the 2011 Pumpkin Sling. Organizer Giulia Iannitelli states, “we have gotten many inquiries from groups that attend the annual Punkin’ Chunkin’ in Delaware, which has been catapulting pumpkins for 26 years.”

Just as the construction of rail lines almost 200 years ago brought expansion to secluded areas in northern New Jersey, so too would the reconstruction of the Lackawanna Cutoff today. The main difference between then and now is that development then was still limited to a smaller number of people and fewer structures. This low-density development of the past is a testament to the character of the region still seen today as hamlets and farms. The Lackawanna Cutoff had perhaps one of the most scenic rides with views of mountains, valleys, rivers and farms. The integrity of the rural views of northwestern New Jersey can be preserved by preventing further development likely to accompany the reconstruction of this mighty, historic rail line.
Sandy Batty
Michele Byers
Cindy Ehrenclou
David Budd
Michael Keady
Candy Ashmun
George Cassa
Robin Dougherty
David Epstein
James Gilbert
Marion Harris
Christine Hepburn
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☐ Yes! I am interested in volunteering for the Coalition.

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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