



Highlands Lookout

www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Fall/Winter 2019

Message from the Executive Director

We were delighted with the hiring of Lisa Plevin, as the new Executive Director of the Highlands Council in August. Lisa has an impressive background: Deputy State Director for Senator Frank Lautenberg; Chief of Staff, USEPA Region 2; and Deputy Director for Environment and Energy, Governor-Elect Phil Murphy's Transition Committee. In addition, Lisa led the drafting of the NJ League of Conservation Voters' highly collaborative Environmental Policy Guide, a collection of briefing

documents addressing the top environmental challenges in NJ. Lisa has a strong commitment to protect NJ's environment—and with her depth of experience, we are confident Lisa will steer the Highlands Council in a very good direction.

We have already seen signs of positive changes at the Highlands Council. Under Governor Christie, the momentum achieved under the previous Administration towards Planning Area conformance was halted. Lisa has already reached out to all Highlands municipalities, offering to meet and to discuss how the Highlands Council can help them reach their goals. Lisa recently met with several towns and the feedback



View from Norvin Green State Forest at recent Highlands Hikers hike

has been very positive. We very much look forward to forming a partnership with the Council, one based on a mutual goal of protecting Highlands resources.

Warmly,

 nj hlc



Highlands Council Executive Director Lisa Plevin at our Annual Meeting

Policy Update Elliott Ruga, Policy & Communications Director

We have been focusing our advocacy on Highlands matters in direct, welcomed discussions with the Highlands Council, NJDEP and the Governor's office. I must admit, the willingness to have serious conversations with us, after eight years of shut doors and minds, takes some getting used to! And although we fully understand that these offices of state have many interests to balance, and that our voice is now heard as an important one in achieving that balance is a very welcomed, new perception. The several issues we are discussing include:

Consistency with the Regional Master Plan for WQMP amendments: Prior to the Christie Administration, major projects proposed in the Planning Area that require an amendment to the areawide Water Quality Management Plan, were held to a 25-point policy

review for consistency with the Regional Master Plan, regardless of the municipality's conformance status. Under Governor Christie, for non-conforming municipalities, the 25-point review was reduced to one policy: Net Water Availability. We are asking DEP and the Highlands Council to return to the 25 point RMP review, which is consistent with the State Appellate Court when ruling on our successful appeal of the Bellemead wastewater discharge permit in Tewksbury, in Hunterdon County, that stated, "DEP may not issue a permit in the Planning Area that is inconsistent with the resource protection goals of the RMP."

We are very appreciative of Governor Murphy having appointed Carl Richko as Highlands Council Chairman, which set the stage for the hiring of Lisa Plevin as Executive Director. And

Video Spotlight


We are collaborating with 11 organizations to improve water quality in the Highlands and Ridge & Valley regions of New Jersey, part of the 4-state Delaware River Watershed Initiative. One of our projects is to produce a series of short videos featuring ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Check out the first one, by Policy & Communications Director Elliott Ruga: <https://youtu.be/2z46RZu-vLw>

Photo credits: Rick Tracy, Zachary Cole, Elliott Ruga

Policy Update *cont'd*

now it is essential that the Governor *make appropriate appointments to the Highlands Council*. Every Highlands Council member today is occupying an expired seat. Some of those seats are still occupied by Christie appointees who fundamentally oppose the Highlands Act.

We have had several productive meetings with officials at the Deputy Commissioner level at DEP about forest management of State owned lands in the Highlands. In conjunction with Coalition members, NJ Forest Watch, NJ Conservation Foundation, Drew University, Raritan Valley Community College, and others, we want to see *the abandonment of practices that manage forests from the perspective of timber production*.

There has been an increasing number of forest stewardship plans issued that have prescribed the unnecessary clear cutting of mature forest stands to promote early successional habitat at the expense of interior forest species and other vital components of forest biodiversity. These are misguided plans that favor narrow interests and are harmful to the ecological health of our precious Highlands core forests. As a result of our advocacy, DEP has been reducing the scope of such plans and protecting more of the forest's sensitive ecology. It's a good step in the right direction. 



View of Edison Bog in Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area

New Program: Highlands Hikers


Zachary Cole, Outreach & Education Director

The NJ Highlands Coalition launched a new program this Fall, *Highlands Hikers*, with the aim to connect people with the resources we are working to protect. Coalition staff have already led three successful outings.

The myriad of Fall colors swaying in the wind serve as a reminder of the Highlands natural beauty and the incredible opportunity for outdoor recreation available to us. Our state parks offer a wide variety of hikes with breathtaking views. Hikers will find examples of the Highlands' great biodiversity, such as the recent spotting of a cast of hawks gliding the thermals above Split Rock Reservoir, before continuing their migration south for the winter.

Along the trails there is also a wealth of history to be discerned among the hills and valleys. Evidence of the Highlands' industrial past is clearly visible in the remains of iron mines, forges, furnaces and canal works. Look a little more closely and one might see traces of a Native American rock shelter or find oneself on the site of a

Revolutionary War encampment. These cultural events shaped the Highlands in a very different way than the glaciers that carved out the ridges and lakes, but as a whole, they define the Highlands' distinct character.

Highlands Hikers will be exploring different corners of northern New Jersey, celebrating both the natural and cultural resources that make up the unique character of the New Jersey Highlands. These outings are open to everyone, and they include expert guides and speakers who will enhance the experience. For more information visit njhighlandscoalition.org/highlands-hikes 



Highlands Hikers taking a break on Bearfort Mountain in Abram S. Hewitt State Forest

Remembering a Highlands Hero: Connie Stroh


Elliott Ruga, Editor



Connie Stroh, former president of the Upper Rockaway River Watershed Association (URRWA) passed away in May. Connie

was a vital presence on our Policy Committee and remained an active voice on it until this year. Connie was a passionate, uncompromising and early advocate for the Highlands portion of the Rockaway River watershed, from its headwaters on Sparta Mountain, to the Jersey City Reservoir in Boonton. It was by her efforts that DEP reclassified the Upper Rockaway River as a Category 1

water body. In addition, her petitioning and testimony convinced the USEPA to classify the underlying groundwater as a Sole Source Aquifer. These efforts, with the contributions of her colleague Diane Nelson, provided the watershed with higher levels of regulatory protection and made it a priority for conservation funding.

Under Connie's leadership of URRWA, the ground-breaking, highly collaborative, regional study, *Farny Highlands - a Plan to Protect Water Supplies and to Preserve Forests* was published. A force of nature, yet gentle, we owe a great many thanks to Connie. She is already greatly missed. 

NJ Highlands Coalition Events *Zachary Cole, Outreach & Education Director*

This year we had record breaking participation at our *Hopped Up Highlands Pub Crawl and Scavenger Hunts* in Hackettstown, Boonton, and Morristown. Over 600 pub crawlers enjoyed delicious food and great Highlands craft beers, in vibrant Highlands downtowns, while staff was on hand to promote the Coalition's work and to make the connection between natural clean water and great tasting, hand-crafted beer.

We seek a uniquely splendid and historic venue for our *Annual Meetings* in September. After 12 years we have yet to repeat a location. This year we were lakeside in the great hall of the Lake Hopatcong Yacht Club, built in 1910 from local logs in the Adirondack style of architecture. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places. Guest speakers included NJDEP Senior Advisor Daniel Ryan, the Commissioner's chief point person for the Highlands. In keeping with tradition, the Executive Director of the Highlands Council discussed the Council's challenges for the upcoming year. This was Lisa Plevin's first of what we hope will be many appearances at our annual event.

In a ceremony at each year's Annual Meeting, the Coalition awards grants up to \$5000 to Highlands grassroots organizations for projects that align with our mission to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Highlands. This year's award recipients include:

Boonton Trails Committee, to assist in the nomination of the Arch Bridge to the State & National Registers of Historic Places;

Stop the Mahwah BOE Tower, for legal assistance in opposing a cell tower on environmentally sensitive land;

Washington Township Land Trust, towards the restoration of the circa 1750 Obadiah LaTourette Grist and Saw

Mill.

The Annual Meeting is also where we recognize and thank the volunteers, officials and professionals who have made a significant difference in protecting the Highlands and improving its quality of life. Award recipients this year are:

2018 Candace McKee Ashmun Award to *Tracy Carluccio* for her uncompromising commitment to protecting the Highlands, as a founding member of the Highlands Council and as Deputy Director of the Delaware



Honoring Tracy Carluccio with 2018 Candace McKee Ashmun Award

Riverkeeper Network;

2018 Vision & Leadership Award to Holland Township Mayor *Dan Bush* for his leadership in promoting full municipal conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan;

2018 Wilma Frey Volunteer Award to *Dwight Hiscano* for producing five Annual Highlands Art Shows, his chairmanship of the Natural Heritage



Outgoing Trustee Dwight Hiscano honored with 2018 Wilma Frey Volunteer Award



Julia Somers and Wilma Frey present checks to 2018 Small Grants awardees

Committee and for donating his photography to enhance the Coalition's advocacy;

2018 Above & Beyond Award to *Chris Manzella*, Executive Director, Boonton Main Street, Inc. for enhancing the economic viability of downtown Boonton; and, to *Donna Macalle-Holly*, Grants and Program Director, Lake Hopatcong Foundation, for her work to improve the Lake's water quality, for expanding education programs and for promoting awareness of the Lake's ecological importance.



Julia Somers and Trustee Mark Lobbauer present Donna Macalle Holly with 2018 Above & Beyond Award

Twenty-three cars participated in the *4th Annual Tour of the Highlands Road Rally*, in October, produced in partnership with the Sports Car Club of America. The 75 mile course from Hackettstown to the Delaware River featured Merrill Creek Reservoir, Jenny Jump State Forest, Foul Rift and Great Meadows. The tour instructions included interpretation of Highlands cultural and natural features. We design the routes to bring people to as many places in the Highlands where people say, "I can't believe we're in New Jersey!" 



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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

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.)

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Contact Julia Somers for more information: 973-588-7190, or julia@njhighlandscoalition.org.*