



NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COALITION

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Catherine McCabe, Commissioner
NJ Department of Environmental Protection
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YOUR WATER YOUR FUTURE

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August 12, 2019

Dear Commissioner McCabe-

You soon will notice the changed message on the billboard outside your offices at 501 E. State Street. We wanted to give you a heads up because we truly appreciate the relationships we have established with you and many of the Department's divisions and bureaus under your Administration.

However, on the subject of forestry, particularly how our State-owned forests are managed, the Division of Fish & Wildlife implements forest management practices that are harming the ecological values of our most healthy forests. In the Highlands, where the northern half of New Jersey's most intact, least fragmented forests are located, the claimed aim is to diversify the age class of forest stands that are said to be even-aged, and to create habitat for declining young forest species. What we have found in the wake of recent forest management activities, is that these forests are far from even aged; and that the clear-cut operations, to promote habitat for early successional species, comes at the expense of a wide range of interior forest species. In addition, undisturbed soils are overturned by heavy mechanized equipment, making them newly susceptible to invasives; and vernal pool complexes and wetlands are severely disturbed. That these management activities are financed by the timber extracted as part of the management, and in order to ensure cost-effectiveness, the size of the management area often exceeds what is necessary to achieve the stated goal. That these forest stewardship plans have an underlying, timber-product driven perspective, they diminish, rather than enhance the full spectrum of the ecological values provided by our forests.

Crafting an appropriate forest stewardship policy for the intact forests of the Highlands has been a primary focus of our Natural Heritage Committee, which includes respected experts with advanced degrees in various disciplines including wildlife biology and forest ecology to ensure that our recommendations are science based and highly credible. I have attached a copy of our White Paper, *Policy Recommendations for Forest Stewardship & Preservation of New Jersey's Public Lands*.

To be fair, we have had productive discussions with Assistant Commissioner Ray Bukowski and his staff at Natural & Historic Resources. His staff has been responsive to a degree and we continue to have a dialog. We succeeded in reducing the size of planned management

operations at Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area and we were able to save many of the tallest and straightest trees after they were initially marked for extraction. But even with this reduction, the ecological destruction, which we documented in the aftermath, was considerable. It is clear to us that even with the reduced size, the loss of ecological values surpassed by far, what the operation intended to achieve. It is for this reason that we are advocating for the complete cessation of forest management programs such as those carried out at Sparta Mountain W.M.A. And it is the reason for the billboard.

Sincerely,

Elliott Ruga, Policy & Communications Director
New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Cc: Debbie Mans

