Highlands Lookout

www.njhighlandscoalition.org Newsletter of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition Fall 2010

Message from the Executive Director

When commuting to our office I pass the Boonton Reservoir, Jersey City's water supply, and that of several other New Jersey northeastern cities. Widening shore lines and emerging islands clearly indicate its diminished water supply. NJDEP has issued 2 drought watches in 5 weeks. Coalition trustee and NJ Sierra Club director Jeff Tittel was quoted recently, "We're seeing our streams lower and dirtier than any time in the last 12 years. When we get these kinds of conditions, parts of New Jersey can run out of water. This is not being alarmist. We are heading into a la Nina winter and some of the worst droughts on record occurred in a La Niña year. The dry summer of 1964 preceded the worst drought in history in 1965."

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center website confirms that we are indeed in a La Niña year and predicts that through 2011, "La Niña will begin to exert an increasing influence on the weather and climate of the United States". Add the variable of global warming—this summer has been the warmest and driest on record—it is far from alarmist to consider we might be entering a period of drought as profound as the one in 1965. Add 45 years of sprawl, huge increases in imperious cover, and vast acres of forest and farmland transformed into irrigated lawns—perhaps we should be concerned.

We cannot predict the duration or the severity of this drought. However, if our Governor bows to the special interests that would undo the protections of the Highlands Act, undermine the regional planning initiatives of the Highlands Council and weaken the environmental regulations of DEP—the consequences would be severe—drought or no drought. Much of the Coalition's work over the coming months will focus on educating folks in Trenton about the importance of Highlands protection for the health of the state's economy and our well being.

Warmest regards,

Photo by Elliott Ruga

Boonton Reservoir, late September

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NJ Highlands Coalition
508 Main Street
Boonton, NJ 07005
www.njhighlandscoalition.org
973.588.7190

Coalition News

Elliott Ruga, newsletter editor

The NJ Highlands Coalition commented at all three well attended Preliminary Alternatives Public Meetings held by the National Park Service in August concerning the Susquehanna-Roseland transmission line upgrade project. These hearings were part of the Park Service's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review in consideration of the PSE&G proposal to widen rights of way and nearly double the tower heights. The Park Service has proposed alternative routes that avoid impacts to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area, the Middle Delaware National Scenic River and the Appalachian Trail. We have been strident in our support of the "No Action" alternative proposed by the Park Service. We have been working with our affiliates Stop the Lines! and Save The Park, in addition to partnering with NJ Sierra, Environment New Jersey, NJEF and the Eastern Environmental Law Center in pressing the Park Service to consider non-transmission alternatives such as demand side management, conservation and locally generated power. Thanks

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Kayaking, Monksville Reservoir

Coalition News *cont'd*

are due to all Coalition members who submitted individual comments. All of our comments are now archived on our website—just hit the "Comments to Agencies" button.

The Coalition recently underwent a comprehensive Strategic Planning review. A clear message received from a survey of our members is the need to increase our presence in Trenton. To that end, we recently met with Senator Bob Smith, co-sponsor of the 2004 Highlands Act. The Coalition was joined at the meeting by ANJEC, the South Branch Watershed Association and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. We discussed common concerns about threats to the Highlands Act, recent attempts to undermine the Highlands Council and any weakening of NJDEP's Highlands Preservation Area rules.

We are sponsoring a Legislators' tour of the Highlands. Senate and Assembly leadership and Highlands-region legislators have been invited for an afternoon of sightseeing—touring Ken Lockwood Gorge and Spruce Run Reservoir, tasting crafted cheeses at Valley Shepherd Creamery, lunching at the Musconetcong Watershed Association's Platinum LEED River Resource Center—all while getting educated about the need for continued protection of Highlands resources. njhc

Highlands Recreation: The Columbia Trail

Kate Millsaps

Previously a rail line, the Columbia Trail in western Hunterdon and Morris counties is now a scenic destination for hiking, fishing, mountain biking, snow shoeing, cross-country skiing and horseback riding that offers spectacular views of the South Branch of the Raritan River. The trail is the former roadbed of the High Bridge Branch of the Central Railroad of New Jersey, which was established in 1876 to carry iron ore from Morris County mines such as Hibernia, Chester, and Mt. Hope, to the Taylor-Wharton Iron and Steel Company in High Bridge. At the turn of the last century the rail line offered passenger service and ferried vacationers to resorts at Schooley's Mountain and Lake Hopatcong. Passenger service ended in 1935, followed by the end of freight service in 1976. The rail line right-of-way was purchased by the Columbia Gas Company in the mid-1990's and after the construction of an underground gas pipeline along the length of the rail bed, the surface was conserved as a trail by the Hunterdon and Morris County Park Commissions.

Ownership by the Columbia Gas Company is not the trail's namesake, however. In August 1885, a locomotive named the Columbia was pulling 45 cars over a wooden trestle in the Ken Lockwood Gorge when it derailed and plummeted 60 feet into the South Branch. A steel trestle was reconstructed in the 1930's and can be found at the site today as the Ken Lockwood Gorge Bridge. This spot along the trail offers spectacular views of the Raritan River and Gorge, one of the most picturesque spots in the Highlands, if not New Jersey.

The Columbia trail stretches 15.8 miles from High Bridge to Mount Olive and offers a fairly flat, rarely crowded, easy walk or ride. Beyond the Ken Lockwood Gorge and the Raritan River, the trail offers up beautiful scenery of farms, wetlands, Lake Solitude and forests with spectacular fall foliage. Along the trail is the old Califon Train Station, which is preserved today as a museum and is open every first and third Sunday of the month from 1-3 PM. In Long Valley, the Long Bridge offers views of a charming pond and stone bridge and is a popular rest spot. The Columbia Trail connects with Morris County's Patriots Path trail network and the Highlands Trail. In High Bridge the trail head is located in the center of High Bridge in Common's Park, around the corner from High Bridge Borough Hall. Public parking is available in the municipal parking lot on Van Syckles Street. Another trail head parking area is located in Long Valley off of Schooley's Mountain Road. The northern end of the trail in the Bartley section of Mount Olive is located off Valley Brook Road but there are no parking facilities at this terminus. njhc

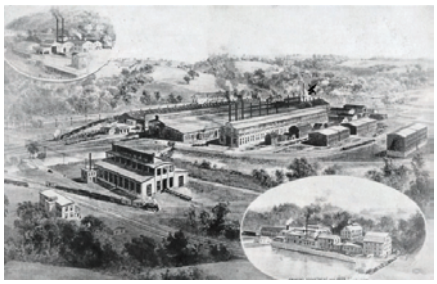
Columbia Trail, Ken Lockwood Gorge

Highlands History: High Bridge

Zachary Lucash, 4th grade, High Bridge Elementary School

The most historic place in my town is the Taylor-Wharton Iron & Steel Company. In 1742 William Allen and Joseph Turner leased 3000 acres in what is now High Bridge. The company was named Union Iron Works. It manufactured farming tools, shoes for horses, oxen and mules, wagon iron & nails. During the Revolutionary War they manufactured cannonballs. During World Wars I & II they manufactured bombs and armor.

In the 1800's they manufactured railroad rails, links, wheels, axles, couplings and pins. High Bridge was named for the railroad trestle that spanned the South Branch of the Raritan River. In 1803 Robert Taylor purchased Union Iron Works and 366 acres from Allen and Turner and changed its name to Taylor Iron & Steel.



In 1912, Taylor Iron & Steel company merged with the Wharton Company and began manufacturing "manganese steel" castings. They changed the name to Taylor-Wharton Iron & Steel Works. Manganese steel was used for mine equipment, steel safes, steel shovels and all-steel castings for track work. Manganese steel was used for the steam shovel "teeth" which was used to dig the Panama Canal. They manufactured the bucket teeth, lock gates, and other things by what is called "I/Sand Molding."

The current River House is where they stored their patterns. The patterns were filled with sand and then metal was poured into them and compressed. Once it was ready the sand was scraped into grates on the floor. Under the grates, tunnels with conveyor belts moved the sand. Discarded sand is now the fields we call Union Forge Park" and our "Husky Football Field".

Dennis Trimmer, an employee of Custom Alloy took me on a tour of the tunnel and the River House. Mr. Trimmer lifted a manhole and we had to climb through into the dark, smelly, cold tunnel. There were long thick pipes along the walls with oil and water on the floor. You had to walk slow because it was very slippery.

In the River House, I saw patterns that looked like big circles, and a rock crusher. There were two fire doors that men who had worked there had signed and put the date. One said Steve Mazar Aug. 26, 1918. There was another name I couldn't read that had a date of Feb. 19, 1917. This factory is one of the oldest iron & steel companies in the United States. Taylor Wharton built houses for their employees. They were a great help during the depression when people could not get jobs and enough money for homes. Women worked in the shops when their husbands had to go to war.

In 1970 after five generations, Taylor Wharton Iron and Steel Works closed its doors in High Bridge. Starting in 1968 Custom Alloy began to use a part of Taylor Wharton to manufacture butt-weld fittings. Just like Taylor Wharton, Custom Alloy supports the town of High Bridge by donating to The Fire Department, Rescue Squad, and High Bridge Recreation, to name a few. nj hc

Member Spotlight: Alliance for Historic Hamlets

George Cassa, co-chair, AHH

The Alliance for Historic Hamlets (AAH) is a grassroots advocacy group that has been active in bridge preservation efforts in Hunterdon County for several years. AAH was founded in 2002 by Tewksbury residents Libby Devlin and Bob Flowers, who understood the considerable influence historic and architecturally significant bridges had in sustaining the sense of community in the villages and hamlets where these bridges were found.

Most bridges on local roads are owned and maintained by the county government. Without community participation in the design process, county engineers might focus more on safety and liability considerations than on local community character.

In Tewksbury Township, most bridges traverse NJDEP Category I waterways—several of which are also designated by the Fish & Wildlife Service as wild trout streams. Many of these bridges are recognized as uniquely historical by both state and federal authorities. To ensure that design decisions are made with appropriate respect for historical context, sensitive wildlife habitat and water quality, AHH encourages the participation of residents as partners with local and county authorities in the decision-making process.

As a result, replacement or restored bridges that are thoughtfully designed with regard to history and place, can be found on Main Street, Rockaway Road, Vernoy Road, Fox Hill Road, Water Street, and Guinea Hollow Road in Tewksbury. nj hc

Photo by George Cassa

Vernoy Rd Bridge over S. Branch Raritan River, Lebanon, Tewksbury and Washington Twps

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www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Join us at the Last Fling Pumpkin Sling!
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go to www.Pumpkinsling.com for details

Fall 2010 Newsletter

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New Jersey Highlands Coalition
New Member Affiliates 2009 - 2010

- Alliance for Historic Hamlets
- Foodshed Alliance
- Friends of Fairmount Historic District
- Highlands Tourism Council
- Kinnelon Conserves
- New Jersey Outdoor Alliance
- NOFA-NJ
- Preserve Greystone
- Raritan Highlands Compact
- Residents Against Power Plants
- RANPI
- Save The Park
- Stop the Lines!
- Skylands Preservation Alliance
- Trout Unlimited-NJ Council
- Washington Valley Community Association

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
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www.njhighlandscoalition.org

Won't You Join Us?

Membership Contribution:

☐ $1,000 ☐ $500 ☐ $100 ☐ $50 ☐ $30 ☐ Other _____

You can now make your donation on line at www.njhighlandscoalition.org

*(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**.)*

Name:_____

Address:_____

Phone(s):_____

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

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