



United Efforts to Preserve the Sourlands

Sourland Planning Council received an \$80,000 State Smart Growth Grant, *at the event are (l - r) Assemblyman Reed Gusciora, West Amwell Mayor Nancy Palladino, Montgomery Mayor Louise Wilson, Senator Leonard Lance, Jerry Haimowitz, Commissioner Susan Bass Levin, East Amwell Mayor Andrea M. Bonette, Hopewell Twp Mayor Jon R. Edwards, Barbara Wolfe, and Jennifer Bryson of the Sourland Planning Council.*

Anyone who has ever hiked the trails in the Sourland Mountains knows what an astonishing respite these forests offer.

The Sourlands are recognized as the largest contiguous forested area in central New Jersey, containing three county parks used primarily for hiking and passive recreation. The trails can be steep and rugged, winding through impressive boulder fields of weathered diabase rock, unique to this area.

These boulders serve as staunch protectors for rare and delicate plants and animals that live deep within these important woods, including: trout lilies, wood anemones, ginseng, wood frogs, salamanders, barred owls, ovenbirds, wood thrush, and even the scarlet tanager.

Through time, these boulder fields have also protected the mountain and these habitats from the increasing pressures from development. The early Dutch settlers referred to the region as “*sauer landt*” because the region was clearly not suited for farming. Similarly, the region is clearly not suited for development for the same reasons: *steep slopes, rocky outcrops and shallow depths to rock, severe limitations for well recharge, and septic percolation.*

Preservation efforts are underway!

Several organizations are working together with officials from five towns, three counties and the State to more fully understand the value of these critical areas, and the potential impairments of ground water and local streams from development.

- The *Sourland Planning Council* (www.sourland.org) is developing a comprehensive approach to planning, preservation of open space, and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- The *Delaware & Raritan Greenway* (www.delrargreen.org) works to preserve hundreds of acres of open space in this unique area.

- *Washington Crossing Audubon Society* (www.washingtoncrossingaudubon.org) volunteers hike these woods to document important flora and fauna that depend on these mountains for their survival.
- The *Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association* offers educational hikes, performs build-out analyses of development, provides GIS mapping services, and nominated six streams for Category 1 designation, to protect them from future impairments.

These groups share a common objective, to incorporate accurate information into planning and zoning evaluations, in order to improve local decisions governing our landscape and natural resources. For example, several towns recently adopted large acre mountain zoning to address poor groundwater recharge and septic failures attributed to the diabase geology.

There is still more that can be done!

1. Submit personal letters of appreciation to the Governor and NJDEP for the Green Acres funding and Smart Future Grant. In addition, request NJDEP to consider designating this region as a Special Resource Area, similar to the Highlands; designate the Sourland streams as Category 1 to restrict discharges and increase stream buffers; and reclassify the groundwater as a Class 1 sole source aquifer to ensure the protection of water quality.
2. Stay informed on the progress of ongoing studies, planning and zoning efforts; and attend upcoming public meetings or hearings.
3. Let your local and county officials know that you support these efforts, with a simple phone call, note of thanks, or even submit a brief news editorial.
4. Become a member and support the organizations undertaking these efforts to preserve the Sourland Mountains for our enjoyment and for our children!

“Certain areas are intrinsically suitable for certain uses while others are less so. Begin with this simple proposition and codify the information.” Ian McHarg, “Design With Nature,” 1967

[Note: This article from published in the September 2003 issue of the NLN Watershed Watch newsletter.]