



Back Roads

Sourland Planning Council

www.sourland.org

Fall 2004

Meeting information

The Sourland Planning Council trustees will meet during the upcoming year on the dates listed below. All meetings will be at the historic Hopewell Train Station on Railroad Avenue, just off North Greenwood Avenue in Hopewell Borough, at 7:30 p.m. They are the first Thursday of every other month. You are cordially invited to attend.

Dec. 2	Feb. 3
April 7	June 2
Aug. 4	Oct. 8
Dec. 1	

Officers and trustees of the Sourland Planning Council

Oct. 1, 2004 – Sept. 30, 2005

The following officers and trustees were elected at the annual meeting on Oct. 7, 2004:

President: Jennifer Bryson,
Hillsborough Twp.
Vice President: Steven Sacks-Wilner,
Montgomery Twp.
Treasurer: Andrea Bonette,
East Amwell Twp.
Secretary: Kathleen Bird,
Hopewell Twp.

Joel Coyne, West Amwell Twp.
Steven Davison, Hopewell Twp.
Tim Dillingham, Hopewell Borough
Jerry Haimowitz, Raritan Twp.
Robert Harris, Hopewell Twp.
Judy Jengo, Hopewell Borough
Tom Kilbourne, Hopewell Twp.
Leonard Lance, Flemington
Patricia Sziber, Hopewell Twp.
Cliff Wilson, Montgomery Twp.

Smart Growth Project Lays Foundation For Sourlands Preservation, Protection

Sourland Mountain Region residents and visitors know it's a special place. Soon, they'll know just how special.

Professionals hired with a smart growth grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, Office of Smart Growth, are completing an important study focused on the natural resources of the Sourland Mountain Region.

The study, which is expected to be completed soon, will include several reports that document the precious natural resources and fragile ecosystem. One of the key pieces details the groundwater, on which all area residents and businesses depend for drinking water.

Another is a natural resources inventory, which is an objective compendium of text and visual information, including maps, about the environmental features of a place and the functions of those items.

The natural resources inventory will provide an authoritative research study that will serve the Sourland Planning Council as a foundation in furthering its work. When the non-profit, volunteer organization was formed in 1986, it established a mission statement that is also true today – “to promote and encourage a com-

prehensive approach to planning, conservation, preservation of open space, protection of natural resources, and protection of places of historical interest for Sourland Mountain and its environs.”

The first step in protecting and preserving significant environmental resources is identifying them.

The final Sourlands smart growth project report will describe and incorporate overall goals and objectives for conservation in the Sourlands and identify locations of critical resources including groundwater and surface water and critical habitats.

The natural resources inventory for the Sourlands will include such basic information such as climate, geology, geography/topography, soils, hydrology, vegetation, wildlife and habitat. It will also include a characterization of local relationships to regional resources such as open space, watersheds, surface and groundwater, and wetlands.

One of the key features of the work is a build-out analysis, which will provide a snapshot of how the region is likely to develop in the future.

continued on page 5

The Sourlands Planning Council is a non-profit volunteer organization formed to promote and encourage a comprehensive approach to planning, conservation, preservation of open space, protection of natural resources, and protection of places of historical interest for Sourland Mountain and its environs.

President's Message

Greetings to our members and supporters!

This year has been an especially busy and challenging one for the Sourland Planning Council. As you can see from the many articles in this newsletter, we have been busy on a number of fronts, from meeting with state officials, to building a coalition of the local governments responsible for planning decisions in the Sourlands and continuing our advocacy for preservation for as much of the Sourlands as possible. Many of you have heard about the Tour of the Sourlands we're now giving on a regular basis. Watch our Web site for more details on the Tour.

At nearly 90 square miles, the Sourland Mountain Region contains the largest unbroken forest in Central New Jersey. The area provides an essential refuge for a wide diversity of plants and animals, such as the red-shouldered hawk, the long-eared owl, and the wood turtle. These species depend on the large tracts of forest to roam, the buffer from rapidly developing adjacent areas, and the unique wetlands that the mountains provide.

But we humans need the Sourlands as well. First and foremost for the water we drink. Although the Sourlands aquifer is notoriously fickle, all the mountain's residents and many of our neighbors depend

on it for water. But development brings more wells and changes to the land. While demand on the aquifer is going up, supply is going down. Discharge from septic systems puts greater stresses on the aquifer. Recent studies predict that the current pace of development in the Sourlands will lead to an eventual water crisis. Doing nothing leaves no choice but to watch it happen. If you rely on well water from the Sourlands (as everyone that lives in the Sourlands and many of our neighbors do), you should know, there are currently no laws or regulations to protect your water supply for the future.

But we humans need the mountains for more than just water. Where else in Central New Jersey can one simply disappear for the day, whether on foot, bicycle or horseback? Indeed, as a refuge, the Sourlands has a long legacy – for Lenape Indians seeking each other; for patriots seeking independence; for slaves seeking freedom; for Dutch homesteaders seeking fortune, for artists seeking solitude, and finally for the many ghosts of legends said to be seeking victims. Whether to count birds, listen to the spring peepers, or travel a new trail, we come here to get away.

But only a small portion of the Sourlands is protected. And each year, hundreds of acres in the Sourlands are lost to development. While the dense rock and large boulders of the mountain held development back for many years, recent changes have opened the mountain to development. What

had been a trickle is now a great tide. But here, even one house has the impact of many elsewhere. What happens in the next few years will determine the fate of this wilderness forever. Will the forest be lost to the sprawl that threatens to link Philadelphia and New York? Or will the Sourlands remain intact for future generations to enjoy and as an essential link between the Highlands and the Pinelands?

If you are like me, you want the Sourlands to remain for future generations to enjoy and as a haven for the wide variety of birds, animals and plants that rely on its deep woods to survive. I, and the other volunteers of the Sourland Planning Council, am doing everything we can to ensure that.

But we need your help.

If you want your water protected and the woods preserved for future generations, let you local officials know. Write a letter to the paper. And get involved. If you live in the Sourlands, you can become a steward of the land. Protect the woodlands and wetlands on your property. Avoid pesticides and herbicides. Plant indigenous species and avoid invasive ones. And get involved. We can always use volunteers to attend meetings, send mailings and many other activities. To find out how you can help, e-mail me at j.bryson@patmedia.net.

Thanks again for your support.

Jennifer Bryson

Sourland Planning Council Wants Region Named A Special Resource Area on State Plan Map

The Sourland Planning Council is leading an initiative to convince the New Jersey State Planning Commission to name the Sourland Mountain Region as a Special Resource Area.

The Highlands is the only Special Resource Area currently identified on the State Plan map that is part of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, the state's blueprint for smart growth.

According to the 2001 State Plan, "A Special Resource Area is an area or region with unique characteristics or resources of statewide importance which are essential to the sustained well being and function of its own region and other regions or systems - environmental, economic, and social -- and to the quality of life for future generations."

The Sourlands region is important for many reasons, including its role in supplying drinking water for many central New Jersey residents. It is internationally important as an essential stopover for geotropically migratory birds that travel along the Atlantic Flyway.

This region includes the largest unbroken forest in central New Jersey and its deep woods provide critical habitat for numerous species of birds, reptiles, amphibians and plants, including threatened and endangered species including the bobolink, bobcat and barred owl.

"The State Plan seeks to foster increased communication and cooperation among state agencies, counties and municipal governments and to establish a receptive environment

for regional planning efforts. ... (and) the Plan acknowledges that there are areas of special resource value that would especially benefit from comprehensive regional planning," the State Plan says.

Among the planning area categories created by state law that are in the Sourlands region are the environmentally sensitive planning area 5 (PA5) and agricultural/environmentally sensitive planning area (PA4).

The Sourland Planning Council is leading a joint planning effort already under way, beginning with the creation of a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from each municipality and county in the Sourlands region, as well as nonprofit organizations.

continued on page 4

Dodge Foundation Supports Sourlands Stewardship Map Project

The Sourland Planning Council has received a \$10,000 grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for education and promotion of stewardship in the Sourland Mountain Region.

"We agree with your assessment that the Sourlands represents central Jersey's version of what the Highlands are to northern New Jersey and the Pinelands are to southern New Jersey," said David Grant, executive director of the

Dodge Foundation, in a letter awarding the grant.

With the funds, the Sourland Planning Council will write, design, produce and distribute a map of the area that will raise awareness of the Sourlands' value and vulnerability and promote public and private stewardship of the land and other natural resources.

The colorful map will highlight the region's key features such as roads,

trails, parks and preserved areas, critical habitats and historic and natural landmarks.

The Sourland Planning Council is partnering with two other nonprofit organizations on the project – the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association and Delaware & Raritan Greenway.

The map is being developed and is expected to be printed and distributed in early 2005.

Sourland Planning Council Wants Region Named

continued from page 3

The first step in this extraordinary, voluntary joint planning initiative is completion of a natural resources inventory and conservation and open space plan. (See related story on page 1.)

The State Planning Commission and its administrative arm, the Office of Smart Growth, currently are engaged in a process known as “cross-acceptance,” through which municipalities, counties and the state compare local land-use plans. At the end of this process, the Commission will adopt a new, updated State Plan and a revised State Plan Policy Map.

The Commission released a draft version of the new State Plan in the spring, which includes a reference to the Sourlands as a Special Resource Area.

Already, nearly all of the municipalities and counties, as well as the state Department of Environmental Protection, support identifying the Sourland Mountain Region as a Special Resource Area.

“It is important to note that naming this much-treasured and important region as a Special Resource Area is not a substitute for local zoning or

local decision making at all. It basically is a name that calls attention to the fact that the area is special,” says Jennifer Bryson, president of the Sourland Planning Council.

“This can serve as a tremendously beneficial tool in our public education and awareness efforts and may assist, as it did in the case of the Highlands to our north, in garnering future financial and other support for preservation and protection of these precious natural resources,” she adds.

3M Donates \$1.5 Million To Preserve Sourlands Land

The 3M Foundation has donated \$1.5 million to The Nature Conservancy to preserve and to protect lands in the Sourland Mountain Region.

“By partnering collaboratively with local residents, government agencies, and fellow conservation organizations hard at work on the ground in the Sourlands, we look forward to helping to preserve the natural legacy of this stunning area for future generations to enjoy,” says Barbara Brummer, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey.

Keith Jacobs, plant manager of 3M Belle Mead, which is located in the Sourlands municipalities of Montgomery and Hillsborough townships, says his company wants to work with community partners to preserve area land.

The Sourland Planning Council supports the effort, as do local officials

and representatives of other nonprofits, including George Hawkins, executive director of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association.

“A gift to help protect the Sourlands has a significance far beyond its

borders,” says Hawkins. “Sourlands streams provide drinking water to the entire region, while birds along the Atlantic Flyway depend on the region’s fields and forests. This gift will ensure that legacy for years to come.”

Sourlands Store

New Jersey's Sourland Mountain
Softcover, 162 pages, by T.J. Luce
\$20.00

Plush scarlet tanager with green Save the Sourlands sash
Squeeze it and it sings!
\$8.00

Save the Sourlands.org bumper sticker
\$1.00

To order, call Andrea Bonette at (609) 466-0641
or e-mail her at abonette@snip.net.



Smart Growth Project

continued from page 1

The professionals are working under the oversight of a highly collaborative steering committee comprised of representatives of the Sourland Planning Council, seven municipalities, three counties and two other nonprofit organizations.

“One of the primary goals of this project is to provide a framework by which the five townships, two neighboring communities, and three counties in the Sourlands can share information and resources and begin to develop a unified approach for protecting this special place,” says Jennifer Bryson of Hillsborough, who is president of the Sourland Planning Council.

“One of the greatest features about this effort is that everyone involved has voluntarily come to the same table to work together on our shared goal to save the Sourlands. The special natural resources cross municipal and county borders and its extraordinary to have so many people abandon any narrow, parochial, local interests and look at the big picture,” Bryson said.

She said it is especially heartening that state government agencies are supporting the work not just with the \$80,000 smart growth project grant, but also through technical assistance. In addition, the Green Acres program has made the Sourlands a high priority for state preservation dollars.

The Sourlands region is nearly 90 square miles, stretching through parts of East Amwell, Hillsborough, Hopewell, Montgomery and West Amwell townships. The region also includes the city of Lambertville

and Hopewell Borough. The Sourlands are in three counties: Hunterdon, Mercer and Somerset.

Each of the local and county governments has representatives on the project steering committee, along with the Sourland Planning Council, the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association and the Delaware & Raritan Greenway Inc. The grant funds are being administered through East Amwell Township.

The Natural Resources Inventory discusses the vital role that the forested areas of the Sourland Mountain region play in many ecosystem functions.

These include:

- Habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- Breeding habitat for neotropical migrant bird species;
- Regulation of stream temperatures to support the stability of healthy rivers and streams;
- Provision of nutrients to streams and rivers;
- Stabilization of steep slopes and reduction of erosion and sedimentation;
- Conversion of carbon dioxide to oxygen;
- Reduction of pollution;
- Enhancement of groundwater recharge capacities; and Stopover between and linkage to other ecosystems and greenways such as the Pinelands, Highlands and the Amwell and Hopewell valleys.

James T. Kyle and Frank Banisch of Banisch Associates, based in Sergeantsville, have been the lead consultants on the smart growth project.

Matthew J. Mulhall and Pete Demicco are the hydrogeologists. Their report provides detailed information about the rock, soils and scarce water resources on the mountain.

Most of the area has been categorized by state officials as a “sole source aquifer,” meaning that the region gets its water from only one place – rain and snow melt in the immediate area – and receives no water flowing in from elsewhere from a water body such as a river, stream or lake.

Because of this, residents and businesses of the Sourland Mountain region are entirely dependent on precipitation that makes its way into the ground and is tapped into through wells.

The headwaters – or beginnings – of area streams are located in the Sourlands. Because of the hard rock on the mountain, very little water is recharged. Rather, the water runs off and flows downhill, where it enters fractures in the ground such as the Hopewell Fault, just north of Hopewell Borough.

Nearly all residents of the region depend on septic systems for treatment of their wastewater. The rock and soil in the area make it very difficult to locate septic systems.

The consultants and the Steering Committee are continuing their work. Once the reports are final, the Sourland Planning Council will launch an education and outreach campaign to inform residents about the fragility and importance – locally, regionally, statewide and internationally – of the precious resources.

Join to support the Sourland Planning Council – or renew now

(Our year runs from Oct. 1 through Sept. 30).

Join a grassroots community of individuals interested in preserving and protecting the precious natural resources of the Sourland Mountain Region. Our goals? Save the Sourlands!

Fill out and mail to: Sourland Planning Council, P.O. Box 538, Neshanic Station, NJ 08853.



- Support Levels: Renewal or New
- Individual: \$15
 - Family: \$25
 - Senior (62 and older): \$10
 - Patron: \$50
 - Other _____

Name: _____

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Want to know more? Visit our Web site at www.sourland.org or contact President Jennifer Bryson at (908) 369-1751 or j.bryson@patmedia.net.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Do we sound busy? You bet we are! And all of our efforts are conducted entirely by volunteers! But to continue our efforts, we need your help. Positions are now available to attend meetings, help with our newsletter, increase membership, research issues, direct events, give tours, etc. Please contact President Jennifer Bryson at j.bryson@patmedia.net for ideas and to find out how you can be a part of our efforts to **SAVE THE SOURLANDS.**

Sourland Mountains: A New Protection Model

*Message from Larry Niles,
Chief Endangered and Nongame
Species Program*

Hannah B. Suthers has the longest privately run bird banding station in New Jersey. For most of the past three decades, the results of her survey and banding project, conducted within the heart of central New Jersey's Sourland Mountains, has stood in stark contrast to the drastic, historically unprecedented ecological changes occurring elsewhere in the state.

Thirty years ago much of the Sourlands, a low ridge nearly 20 miles long that covers more than 60 square miles between the Delaware River and the Raritan River and Delaware & Raritan Canal, was just one of many large patches of forest in the central New Jersey Piedmont. These large patches of unbroken forest supported a healthy population of interior forest-nesting birds such as scarlet tanagers and barred owls. They also provided much-needed resting and feeding areas for all the forest birds migrating through the vast megalopolis between Boston and Washington, D.C.

Much has changed during Suthers' project. During the past three decades, sprawling development has crept northward from Philadelphia and southward from New York, engulfing many of the valuable wildlife habitats in the central part of the state. Most of the large forests that once supported interior or migrant birds has shrunk so small that cats, raccoons, blue jays and



Hannah Suthers

other suburban wildlife have been able to overwhelm the most sensitive forest dwellers. Small patches of woods remain, but they are no longer good habitat.

Except for the Sourlands. By some elegant twist of fate, much of the forest remains intact. Suthers still finds most of the species that were there 30 years ago. But even their numbers are rapidly diminishing. Sprawl has reached the Sourland Mountains. Although there have been protective measures including land acquisition, the vanguard units of sprawl, the McMansions, are creeping up the mountains from the valleys below.

Fortunately a group, the Sourland Planning Council, has taken up the fight to save the Sourlands, along with a coalition that includes the three counties the ridge straddles – Mercer, Hunterdon and Somerset – five townships, citizen volunteers on the planning boards, environmental commissions and members of local

watershed and conservation groups. With a smart plan and good support from New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Community Affairs, which provided an \$80,000 smart growth regional planning grant, the group has made great strides. It is developing a comprehensive management plan designed to preserve natural and cultural resources and encourage consistent land-use strategies in the entire region for state, county and local governments.

What most distinguishes this plan is that it is resident based. This is not a case of outside environmental groups trying to gather support for protection from residents, but rather local residents banding together and seeking help for protection from environmentalists and environmental agencies. In one of the state's most contentious land-use regions, this is a true test of a new model for protection. To facilitate the effort, the Endangered and Nongame Species Program is providing technical assistance, including conducting wildlife surveys and supplying critical habitat mapping, to the Sourland Planning Council. Hopefully, the Council's resident-based actions will be emulated by citizens throughout New Jersey.

Reprinted with permission, State of New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, Endangered and Nongame Species Program. This appeared in the Winter 2003-2004 edition of the program's newsletter, Conserve Wildlife.

Thanks to our supporters who have joined a growing community who support the Sourlands and the work of the Sourland Planning Council. The following people have pledged or renewed their support in 2004 and 2003.

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