

Sierra Club Highlands Committee Off to a Great Start

About 20 members attended the initial meeting of the Sierra Club Highlands Committee, chaired by Bill O'Hearn. Ross Kushner. (Pequannock River Coalition) and Jill H. (AMC) represented their organizations. Betsy Kohn and Ellen Pepin represented North & Northwest Groups. Dave Mattek drove up from Central Jersey. There was a good mix of seasoned veterans of past Highlands campaigns and new faces.

After a round of introductions, Bill asked the audience to identify threats to the Highlands and items promoting Highlands conservation. Two large flip-chart pages were filled. Time (1.5 hrs)

went by quickly, and a number of folks retired to a local pizza place with Bill to continue the conversation.

Bill ran a great meeting, supported by Tina Schvejda. A fine beginning!

There is now a "Sierra Highlands" unmoderated discussion list-serve for this Committee. The list is open to anyone with an interest in conservation of the Highlands. Anyone may subscribe by sending a blank email to NJ-Sierra-Highlands-subscribe@topica.com.

Next meeting is April 2, 7:30pm, Oakland Library. Bill O'Hearn's e-mail address is: William_OHearn@juno.com

WILD UTAH: America's Redrock Wilderness

NJWild!, Sierra Club Singles, and the Loantaka Group are co-hosting Wild Utah: America's Redrock Wilderness on Monday, May 13 at Chatham Boro Library, located on Rte. 124 in Chatham. The program begins at 7pm and is free and open to the public.

Wild Utah: America's Redrock Wilderness is a unique multi-media slideshow documenting citizen efforts to designate some public lands as Wilderness in southern Utah's spectacular canyon country and deserts. This 20 minute journey through redrock splendor invigorates and motivates viewers to participate in the movement to protect these unique lands. Wild Utah: America's Redrock Wilderness was made possible through the generous donation of photos, music and words from concerned Utahns who wish to pass this heritage onto future generations, including a special reading by Pulitzer Prize winning author Wallace Stegner from his famous Wilderness Letter.

Commissioner Campbell hires our Bill Wolfe

In March, Bill Wolfe, our Policy Director, moved office and changed boss. He is now Policy Advisor to the new DEP Commissioner. Bill has a professional land-use planning background, and worked for the DEP and the NJ Environmental Federation before joining the Sierra Club's Chapter staff in 1997, under our first Director, Tim Dillingham. He served as our Acting Director for the four months after Tim left us in 1998. His main job has been to critically examine proposed State legislation and regulations, and to work with legislators and State employees to improve environmental protection. He is admired for his ability to delve into the fine print. He also joined many land-use battles, including that over the Merrill Lynch site in Hopewell Twp, and that over the Meadowlands Mall. Also, he will be remembered with respect (if not admiration), for his forceful participation in debates setting Chapter policy on several contentious issues. We wish him every success.

POPULATION ISSUES UPDATE

by Bonnie Tillery, Population Issues Coordinator

National/International: Editorials around the country, such as the one that appeared on February 6, 2002, in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, have criticized the President for appeasing anti-choice representatives such as Chris Smith (R-NJ, CD-4) who lobbied for nonpayment of the \$34 million in UNFPA funds authorized by Congress for family planning around the world. When 97% of the world's population increase will take place in developing nations, who already suffer unspeakable hardships, this funding is crucial. You can voice your concern by calling the White House at 202-456-1414. Let the President know you want this \$34 million released and that his 2003 budget needs to provide increased funding for

family planning rather than the \$0 he has currently proposed.

Local/State: The contraceptive coverage bills we worked for in the last session of the NJ legislature died at the end of the year. These bills would have required health plans to cover contraceptives if they also covered other medication/medical devices. Fortunately, Senator Diane Allen (R-7) and Assemblymen Reed Gusciora (D-15) and Neil Cohen (D-20) immediately reintroduced new legislation. Work is progressing on the bills and we will notify you later in the year about contacting your legislators to sign on as cosponsors.

If you would like to be more involved in population issues, please contact me at (phone) 609-259-6438, or e-mail me at btl44blt@aol.com.

UNCLE SAM PAYS FOR MOTORIZED WRECKREATION IN NEW JERSEY

by Fred Akers, Conservation Chair of the South Jersey Group

Last year, the federal government provided New Jersey with \$814,000 for Recreational Trails Program projects with gas tax revenues distributed under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, or TEA-21. The Recreational Trails Program provides funds to the states to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational uses: hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, off-road motorcycling, all-terrain vehicle riding, four-wheel driving, etc.

This Program requires that 40 percent of a state's funds in each fiscal year be apportioned for "diverse" recreational trail use (mixed motorized and/or non-motorized uses), 30 percent for motorized recreation, and 30 percent for non-motorized recreation. Unfortunately, the rules specify that if there are insufficient eligible motorized projects in a fiscal year, the state must obligate unused funds for motorized projects as they are developed. And if a state fails to obligate all its funds, then it will lose money in the following years.

Difficult to understand? Well, here in New Jersey we've had insufficient eligible motorized projects since the Program was reauthorized in 1998. There are currently only two legal motorized trail facilities, and these two areas just can't spend enough money, hard as they try. Motorized vehicles do so much damage to landscape that last year the New Jersey Off Road Vehicle Park (NJORV) in Chatsworth (with 3000 members) received \$39,000 from TEA-21 for "trail remediation and closure," and the Egg Harbor Township Police Athletic League (PAL) Ridge Avenue facility (with 200 members) needed and received \$25,000.

That still left \$180,000 unspent of the 30 percent motorized use allocation for 2001, plus some additional money from past years, so the Egg Harbor PAL was

granted an additional \$194,243 to purchase and develop a new motorized trail facility in the Betsy Scull area, a privately owned, undisturbed woods with exceptional habitat resource values, including several streams and significant wetlands, in the Elwood Wildlife Corridor and in the federally designated river corridor of the Scenic and Recreational Great Egg Harbor River.

In order to protect its lands from severe damage by renegade motorized trespassers, the NJ Department of Parks and Forestry has had the very good sense to prohibit all ATV use in our State parks and forests. But now, with pressure to capture New Jersey's fair share of Uncle Sam's tax dollars, Parks and Forestry is about to open State land to motorized recreation. And instead of relegating motorized users to already severely damaged sites like old quarries and sand pits (as is the case with the NJORV and PAL locations), the State is proposing the use of undisturbed, sensitive Green Acres lands in West Milford, and the Betsy Scull site in Egg Harbor Township.

So here we have a small minority of all public recreationists wanting to tear up nice virgin lands, and promoting the myth that, if they are given more scenic, legal places to ride, then there will be fewer law enforcement problems created by all the illegal riders. Incidentally, law enforcement is not among the permissible uses for TEA-21 funds.

The NJ Department of Parks and Forestry is currently developing a proposed policy on the lease of State land for motorized trails. Hopefully, by the time you read this, there will be an open period for comments, and you will be able to make your voice heard. Please contact me if you need addresses or other help in sending a message. The feds have led us into temptation. Will we be delivered from noisy, air-polluting, terrain-destroying motorized vehicles?



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