



Back Roads

Sourland Planning Council

www.sourland.org

Spring 2009

Sourland Comprehensive Management Plan— Ready for Endorsement

The Sourland Mountain now has a plan that – once adopted by the five Sourland townships – will spur the creation of a Sourland Municipal Alliance and provide specific guidelines on ways to protect and restore one of the state’s most unspoiled regions.

The Plan was written by Banisch Associates, Inc. with assistance provided by Conservation Resources, Inc., Stony Brook–Millstone Watershed Association, and the Sourland Planning Council. The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs–Office of Smart Growth provided funding to the Sourland Planning Council to produce the plan under the Sourland Smart Future Project.

The Sourland Plan is based upon a comprehensive body of scientific and anecdotal information about the Sourland Mountain Region, with direct input from residents, environmental groups and municipal officials. The Sourland Region includes portions of the townships of East Amwell and West Amwell, and the City of Lambertville, in Hunterdon County; Hopewell Borough and Hopewell Township in Mercer County; and the townships of Hillsborough and Montgomery in Somerset County.

Unlike the “top-down” approach of

the Highlands Act that was mandated by the State, the Sourland Plan was built from the “ground up” through a grassroots outreach effort, and it leaves decision making in the hands of local municipalities, all of whom have acknowledged the importance of protecting Central New Jersey’s last remaining expanse of deep forest.

“The formation of the Sourland Mountain Alliance should be a joint effort of the host communities with input from the non-profit partners that have been so instrumental in the conservation and preservation efforts to date.”

The single most important recommendation found in the Sourland Plan is the formation of an inter-municipal alliance that would include all seven municipalities that fall within the Sourland Region. A Sourland Municipal Alliance would be tasked with developing and advocating for regulatory and non-regulatory actions needed to protect the mountain and restore specific elements of the landscape such as stream corridors.

The Sourland Plan recommends model ordinances that the municipalities would be asked to adopt. However,

a more effective approach is envisioned whereby the Sourland Municipal Alliance would develop ordinances that are more fine-tuned to focus on the broader ecosystem functions unique to the Sourland Mountain. Each municipality would still retain the right to tailor an ordinance to its liking.

The proposed Sourland Municipal Alliance would be based upon existing inter-municipal models in New Jersey, including the Ten Towns Committee that was formed in 1995 to protect the Great Swamp Watershed, and the more recently formed Raritan Highlands Compact.

Each of these inter-municipal organizations are managed by a committee made up of representatives appointed by each member municipality. The Ten Towns Committee has over time brought about significant improvements in the way each member municipality protects its share of the Great Swamp watershed, with the end result being dramatically stronger ordinances in place to protect riparian corridors, wetlands, woodlands and other critical watershed resources.

The focus of a Sourland Municipal Alliance would be much broader than the watershed-based approaches of the Ten Towns Committee

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The Sourland Planning Council is a non-profit organization working to protect the ecological integrity, historic resources and special character of the Sourland Mountain region.

Sourland Planning Council

Meeting information

The Sourland Planning Council trustees meet every first Monday of the even-numbered months at the Hopewell train station on Railroad Avenue in Hopewell Borough. Time is 7:30 pm. You are warmly invited.

Apr 6 Jun 1 Aug 3 Oct 5 Dec 7

Interim Executive Director

Judy Jengo, Hopewell Borough
 director@sourland.org
 609 466-1777

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 East Amwell Twp.

Vice President: Steve Bales,
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Sourland Journal

We welcome Judy Jengo Interim Executive Director



After serving a year and a half as our executive director, we say goodbye to John Brunner, who has accepted a full-time position as executive director of Bucks County Audubon Society. We are extremely grateful for the great work he did for us during a crucial time of growth for the organization and we wish him all the best of luck. BCAS is lucky to have him.

Now we begin the search for a new executive director ourselves and long-time trustee Judy Jengo has agreed to step in as our interim director during the search. Here's an inaugural message from Judy:

Having served as a trustee on the Sourland Planning Council for several years now, I have personally experienced and been humbled by the wealth of talent and dedication of the volunteer board. The intelligence, integrity, initiative and innovation of the board members, dedicated to the conservation of the Sourlands, is providing a huge service to the residents and ecology of the region.

As our capable Executive Director John Brunner departs to embark on a new nonprofit adventure, I have been invited to step in as interim Executive Director and I do so with a long-standing admiration of the organization and of the mountain. From this new vantage point, I am eager to help the SPC accomplish its goals.

Environmental care has been my passion for as long as I can remember. As a kid saving baby birds that fell out of their nests too soon because of a blustery wind or a particularly fidgety sibling who knocked them overboard, to the National Park Service in the 1970's, followed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Idaho, Department of Environmental Management in Rhode Island, Legislature and Governor's Office in New Jersey, Department of Environmental Management in New Jersey, Garden State Preservation Trust, and also an open space education and advocacy nonprofit in Pennsylvania. A favorite volunteer activity has been helping Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research care for birds unlucky enough to get oil coated during oil spills, willing them their lives back while trying to keep them from stressing too dangerously during the essential soapy bath to release the oil.

Having resided in Hopewell for more than 22 years, I have been so grateful for the nearby nature that the Sourlands provides, and relish the too rare opportunity to be out in the woods, uplifted by the beauty and the energetic yet calming sounds of running water and birds chatting, or even just the sounds of silence.

To all who have given or will give of their time, energy or resources to protect the Sourlands, thank you.

Judy Jengo, Interim Executive Director

Sourlands Steward

Providing for Wildlife

An excerpt from our Sourlands Stewards Handbook (forthcoming)

SPC is working on a Stewardship Handbook that we plan to send to all residents on the mountain. This article is an excerpt from one of its sections.

Some of life's sweetest simple pleasures can be found in our own backyards when we welcome wildlife to our homesteads. While weeding my vegetable garden one early summer afternoon, I became aware of a commotion around the birdbath—a very ordinary saucer from a now defunct planter. A family of blue jays had assembled in a nearby hemlock tree. I'd been watching or, rather, listening to the fledglings for days as they followed the parents around, begging for food with their scratchy, tremulous voices. As days went by, I noticed how the voices matured, sounding each day more like a jay and less like a squeaky wheel. But this was the first time I'd actually seen the whole family in full view. First, one adult came to the bath and took a drink. The second came and plunged right in. Then the two juveniles followed, a bit fluffier than their parents and quite eager to join in the fun. For several minutes, the four took turns splashing in the sun-warmed water, seemingly oblivious to my presence. When they finally took off together in a shower of droplets, I realized that I had witnessed a teaching moment. Mom and dad had brought their youngsters to my garden to show them where they could find refreshment on a warm summer day—knowledge that they will pass on to their own youngsters next year.

The Sourlands region is home to a remarkable diversity of wildlife: mammals, large and small, reptiles and

amphibians, butterflies and bees and, perhaps most notably, scores of bird species, some found nesting nowhere else in central New Jersey. Rare species of the Sourlands range from top predators such as the state endangered bobcat and red-shouldered hawk, to the threatened Cooper's hawk and barred owl, to grassland birds like the endangered upland sandpiper and the threatened bobolink and grasshopper sparrow. Many of our woodland birds are species of concern, especially migratory songbirds such as the wood thrush, scarlet tanager and Kentucky warbler.

Intact habitat is critical for these animals. Every time we clear a patch of woodland or turn a farm into a development, we are diminishing the breeding and feeding resources available to these creatures. We can take some simple steps to help compensate for that loss by providing for birds and other wildlife around our homes and, at the same time, increase our own enjoyment of nature.

We don't necessarily want to invite every critter onto our premises. Some denizens of the Sourlands, such as eastern coyote and black bear, are best appreciated from a distance. But most are good neighbors who can provide enjoyment, balance and even measurable benefits.

Provide and they will come

The three basic things that all animals need are water, food and shelter. Shelter includes protection from the elements and predators and a place to raise young. The following suggestions range from simple to ambitious. You may find that taking one little step will

pique your enthusiasm for doing more. Most successful backyard habitats are the product of a lengthy evolution.

Water

Even if you do nothing else, a reliable supply of clean water will bring a stream of visitors. An elaborate birdbath can be a wonderful enhancement for a garden but an old dog dish will do as well. Regardless of your choice, there are two rules: keep it clean, keep it filled. Birds have rather messy personal habits and droppings can contaminate the bath with harmful bacteria. Better they should find water elsewhere than get sick. Other animals will also come to drink. Squirrels—opportunists such as they are—will sit at the edge and drink from a birdbath.

Feeding Birds

Setting out food for birds can be a very enjoyable and rewarding hobby. Bird feeders can be a magnet for a dazzling variety of bird species ranging from hummingbirds to woodpeckers. Feeders can be very elaborate—and expensive—or very simple and budget-minded. Birds don't give a hoot about décor; it's the basic architecture of the feeder and what is in it that determines who will come to the table. After you've watched your busy feeders for awhile, you will notice that different birds have different food preferences and feeding habits. Chickadees, titmice and nuthatches like to cling to the cage-type sunflower seed feeders. Finches perch on tubes that hold niger (thistle) or finch mix. A hopper holding mixed seed will attract house finches, cardinals and the above-mentioned

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On the Mountain

Profiles of the Creatures & Features We Protect

The Coyote

Canis latrans

by Pat Sziber



There was something strange about the dog trotting along Pleasant Valley Road one early spring morning. A bit thin and motley, it appeared to be a German shepherd that perhaps had been lost on nearby Baldpate Mountain for a few days. My initial impulse was to stop and check to see if it had tags. But the gait seemed odd and the tail was held unusually straight, nearly horizontal. When our eyes briefly met I realized I was looking into the soul of an eastern coyote.

This was the first time I had laid eyes on the enigmatic canid. By all accounts, they are regular residents of the Sourlands. In fact, coyotes are found in all 21 counties in New Jersey. According to a 2006 New Jersey Fish and Wildlife survey there are at least 3,000 coyotes in the state and their numbers are increasing. This may come as a surprise because we rarely see them. They are secretive and, in populated areas, mostly nocturnal. More often heard than seen, they can fill the night with persistent howls, yips and barks. Experts say they are more vocal than wolves. Naturalist and photographer Leonard Lee Rue III said in his book *Furbearing Animals of North America* that coyotes are easily enticed to go on a howling spree by any high-pitched sound. He claims that he once triggered a chorus by playing his harmonica in the highest register.

The eastern coyote is thought to be a subspecies, or variant, of its western

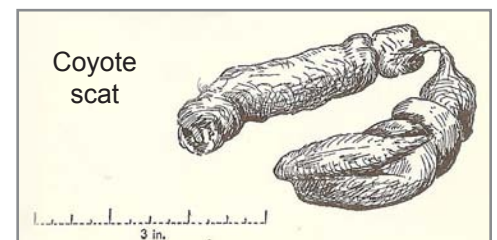
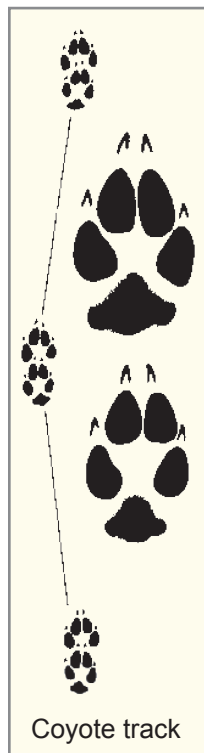
counterpart. Their larger size and color variation ranging from blonde to black suggest that coyotes that spread from the west interbred with gray wolves in our part of the continent. Eastern coyotes are a good 50 percent heavier than their western cousins, with males weighing up to 60 pounds or, one could say, the size of a slim, smallish German shepherd.

The one I saw jogging along the road was out of its element. Coyotes are woodland dwellers, preferring clearings or scrubby habitat. They live in the open, denning only when they are about to give birth in April or May. But they are very adaptable and have no qualms about visiting local farms and homesteads, given the right incentive. They are more likely to forage near human habitation in the spring, when the mouths of their three to nine hungry pups beg for food. They are omnivorous but, clearly, their teeth are designed for a carnivore. Their primary prey is rodents and rabbits but, as many a farmer can tell you,

they will take down sheep and chickens. They will also take young or frail deer and feral cats and are even known to bring down a full-grown deer.

There is plenty of room for coyotes in the 90 square miles of Sourland region. A female's territory is about 6 square miles, a male's 36 and territories may overlap. Though more than 50 percent of pups die or are killed by 7 months of age, the lifespan of survivors is 12 to 15 years, allowing for many reproductive years.

Someday I hope to see a coyote standing like a sentinel on a rock, muzzle raised to the sky, howling his secrets to the wind spirit. I have no fear...coyote attacks on humans are extremely rare. But, make no mistake, this is a predator, a top carnivore. Protect your pets and livestock. Do not feed pets outdoors, do not leave them untended and bring them in at night. For more information on coyotes, visit http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/coyote_info.htm. If you have a problem with a nuisance coyote, or significant damage, call the Division of Fish and Wildlife at (908)735-8793.



Sourland Slow Hikes

A Continuing Program of the Sourland Planning Council

The Sourland Planning Council invites you to explore the mountain by joining one of our “Slow Hikes.” We celebrate spring early with a vernal pools hike to witness one of the most wondrous, ephemeral and endangered types of Sourland habitat.

We call the hikes “slow hikes” because we will take the time to become immersed in native habitats—observing birds, woodland wildflowers, animal tracks, and the growth cycles of the forest. We will share lore, insights and appreciation of central New Jersey’s last great wilderness—Sourland Mountain.

All hikes are free of charge, but pre-registration is mandatory. Details about meeting time/place and trail condition will be provided upon registration. Please register by email, director@sourland.org. Folks who don’t use email can call Judy Jengo to register: 609 466-1777.

Sat., Apr. 4 10am-12pm
Vernal Pools of the Sourland Mountains


Vernal pools are an often overlooked and unique feature in some of our field and forest ecosystems. These pools are filled with water during the spring breeding season and harbor a variety of life, including amphibians, insects, reptiles, plants and other wildlife. Join naturalist Allison Jackson on this hike to explore vernal pools in the Sourland Mountains, learning about life cycles and the food web, perhaps encountering wood frogs or spotted salamanders,

as well as a variety of other native creatures. This program is co-sponsored by the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association and Sourland Planning Council.

Please call (609) 737-7592 to register or for more information.

* * *

SPC’s outdoor programs are an excellent way to explore Sourland Mountain’s treasured places. To ensure the quality of the programs, we have set some guidelines. Pre-registration is required, at which time specific details such as meeting place will be provided. The number of participants will be limited at the discretion of each program presenter. Participants will be required to sign a waiver.

Please dress appropriately with sturdy shoes or boots, etc. Please don’t hesitate to ask for more information about trail conditions and difficulty. Unless otherwise noted, these programs are designed for adults and older children. Dogs are not allowed. 

All hikes are free of charge.

SPC will have a table
EARTH DAY FAIR
Sunday April 26
Montgomery Twp.
Lower Middle School
373 Burnt Hill Rd., Skillman

Sourland Music Festival

June 27

Hillsborough Golf & Country Club

This year’s music festival will take place on Saturday, June 27 at the same wonderful site we’ve used in the past several years. Look for more details in our summer issue, with band line-ups and so on. In the meantime, we hope you will pencil it in on your calendars. And we welcome volunteers! We need folks to help with setup and cleanup, with the placement of signs ahead of time, with parking, admissions and the food tables. If you’re interested, contact Tom Kilbourne, 609 915-6945.

SPC Email Bulletins

SPC sends out periodic email bulletins to its members with news of upcoming events and issues. We currently do this through a relatively primitive but privacy-friendly Google Groups list. To make sure you’re signed up for SPC Bulletins please send your email address to: director@sourland.org.



We still have maps!

(They’re free.)

If you would like one (or more), please contact us

Providing for Wildlife

(continued from p. 3)


sunflower seed eaters, plus the occasional Carolina wren. Juncos, white-throated sparrows and mourning doves almost always eat on the ground or from a platform feeder near the ground. Woodpeckers love suet though they will also take seed and have been known to commandeer a finch feeder for 15 minutes at a time.

Note that we do not list some of the fancy fruit and nut mixes you may find in specialty stores. Try those if you wish, but they are probably a needless expense. Just throw in some raisins, dried cranberries, plain popcorn or unsalted nuts with your regular seed if you want to provide occasional treats. If you have overwintering bluebirds or robins, which do not normally eat birdseed, consider buying a small tub of meal worms and hang from a branch in an onion bag or just toss a few on the ground.

As with water, there are two basic rules that apply to bird feeders: keep them filled, keep them clean. Occasionally sweep up the mess under feeders with a broom or brush and shovel and discard in the trash. Wipe down perches with a mild bleach solution (one part household bleach to nine parts water or 1 ½ cup of bleach in a gallon of water.) Discard any food that looks wet, moldy or has fungus on it. Once a month or so, empty and wash the feeders. Pay special attention to finch feeders to avoid

spread of finch eye disease, actually a form of conjunctivitis. If you put out a hummingbird feeder in the summer, be sure to change the nectar solution every other day and clean with a solution of one part white vinegar to four parts water weekly. Rinse several times.

A comprehensive guide to feeding birds can be found at www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/index.html. The site has tips for choosing feeders and seed types, proper location of feeders and their maintenance and ideas for discouraging squirrels. Another excellent resource is www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/attracting/feeding/. Also keep in mind that a busy feeding station can be a magnet for some of the many hawks that are endemic to the Sourlands, such as sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks. They have to eat, too, and a large gathering of birds is an easy target. Birds will scurry to the shelter of nearby dense cover when danger approaches. Evergreen shrubs and trees are good hiding places but they should not be so close to the feeders as to provide a convenient hiding place for a cat.

A word about windows: birds cannot distinguish between real sky and trees and the reflection in a window. Pieces of tape, netting or screens, or hawk cutouts MOUNTED OUTSIDE can help prevent these accidents. 

Birdbath Maintenance

Change water daily, especially in warm weather. If you cannot have someone do this in your absence, empty the bowl and turn it upside down so it doesn't fill with rainwater.

Occasionally clean the birdbath with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water at least monthly.

Fill birdbaths with no more than 3 inches of water.

Some materials will crack when water freezes in them. Retire your fancy birdbath for the season and switch to a cheap, shallow dog bowl. Use two bowls; when one freezes, bring it inside and put the other one out.

For mosquito control in garden ponds, do not use chemicals. Mosquito Dunks, available in stores that sell pond supplies, are a safe biological control. Or simply leave the job to frogs.

Feeding Birds

Chickadees, titmice & nuthatches	Cage-type sunflower seed feeders
Finches	Tubes with thistle or finch mix
House finches, cardinals, chickadees, titmice & nuthatches	Mixed seed hopper
Carolina wren. Juncos, white-throated sparrows and mourning doves	Food on the ground or from a platform feeder near the ground

The Earth Hour

On March 28, 2009, from 8:30 PM until 9:30 PM, people around the world will turning out allt their lights. In 2008 fifty million people from Atlanta to Antarctica participated in this event, which could be seen from space. For more information check the website www.commit21.co.uk

Forest Stewardship Bill Update

Our forests need to be valued for their innate qualities and for the ecological benefits they offer: clean water, fresh air, wildlife habitat and organic carbon sequestration. Unfortunately, our choices for managing our forests are dictated by the outdated Farmland Assessment Act of 1964.

The State Senate made real progress towards sustainable forest management this past November when it passed the NJ Forest Stewardship Act by a vote of 36-3. If enacted, this bill will allow landowners to qualify for farmland tax assessment without meeting the current arbitrary income requirements, which often force logging, or culling of economically marginal but ecologically important species like Tupelo and Black Birch.

The NJ Forest Stewardship Act will provide a framework within which both private landowners and government entities can manage their forests for ecological health and diversity. The product of many years of concerted effort by foresters, conservationists and concerned citizens, the bill stands its best chance yet of passage. But its passage in the Assembly is far from assured. Currently it has been referred to the Assembly Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Only a show of public support will bring it to the full Assembly and motivate its enactment.

Many Sourlands landowners have Woodland Management Plans, and many have invested much time and emotion into them. The passage of this bill would give those landowners who have forested tracts a much fuller palette of options in stewarding their land.

Comprehensive Management Plan

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and Raritan Highlands Compact. The most obvious difference is that the latter two have a watershed focus that is relatively straightforward: water runs from upland areas down to the Great Swamp or the Raritan River.

The Sourland Mountain is a complex geological formation that includes headwater tributaries that feed into two distinct river basins: the Delaware River and Raritan River. A watershed approach is important for the mountain, but since it's an area where streams *begin*, the emphasis on groundwater and protection of the forest needs to be even more pronounced.

Water is an inherently fleeting and finite resource on Sourland Mountain, due mainly to the geological makeup of the region. The clay soils and hard rocks of the Sourland Mountain cannot readily absorb rainfall and snow melt, creating a double-edged sword of increased stormwater runoff and poor recharge of groundwater.

The inherent limitations of the region's geology have implications for Sourland residents who share a dwindling and vulnerable water supply. The Sourland Plan attempts to address the threat of groundwater depletion through a variety of recommendations.

The complete Assembly bill (3239) can be found here:


http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2008/Bills/A3500/3239_I1.PDF

A key area that the Plan identifies is "the hidden threats to the water supply" posed by re-development of undersized lots with larger replacement houses. This could lead to an unsustainable increase in water use, which tends to occur with the increased size of buildings and lawns. The Plan recommends that Sourland municipalities regulate the development of undersized lots with limits on tree removal, the development footprint and impervious surfaces.

Indeed, the greatest threat to the Sourland Mountain is the chipping away of the native forest by residential development, which more often than not replaces woodlands with a non-native and water-dependent landscape.

The Sourland Planning Council is currently working with the Smart Future Project Team to seek endorsement of the Sourland Comprehensive Management Plan by each of the five Sourland Townships; we hope to secure all the Plan endorsements by the end of May 2009.

To view the Sourland Plan and find out about the Sourland Plan endorsement schedule please visit SPC's website. 

Further information can also be found in the February 2008 issue of *Back Roads*, which provided an in-depth article on forestry issues in the Sourlands. 


**Visit Our Website
www.sourland.org**

It features

- A virtual tour of the Sourlands
- Maps of the Sourlands
- A calendar of events
- News and information about the organization and our planning initiatives
- A history of the Sourlands
- Links to related organizations
- The full Sourlands Smart Growth Phase I Report

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by email**

If you want to do a little bit to unburden our forests, we can send you a pdf file of *Back Roads* by email. An additional benefit of receiving the pdf is that it's in color—the photos that appear as black and white photos in the hard copy edition appear in color in the email edition.

If you would like to get your *Back Roads* as a pdf file by email, please provide your email address to our president, Andrea Bonette at abonette@comcast.net 

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Sourland Planning Council



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