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U.S. Forest Service releases update to Highlands Regional Study

LITCHFIELD, Conn. – The U.S. Forest Service has released the *Highlands Regional Study: Connecticut and Pennsylvania 2010 Update*. The *2010 Update* identifies areas of high conservation value, the impact of land use change on natural resources, and conservation strategies in the Connecticut and Pennsylvania portions of the Connecticut-New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania Highlands Region.

The *2010 Update* is the final publication from the four-state Highlands regional study. The Forest Service published final findings and conservation goals for New Jersey and New York in 2002.

"This Connecticut and Pennsylvania update will be a great resource for the towns and States of the Highlands, as well those groups interested in land use and conservation in the region," said Terry Miller, U.S. Forest Service field representative to the Northeast. "I'm very proud of the dedicated, interdisciplinary efforts of partner, state, and federal experts."

The Highlands Conservation Act of 2004 directed the Forest Service to expand the *New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study: 2002 Update* into Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Similar assessment and public input methods for Connecticut and Pennsylvania ensured consistent results across the Highlands. The *2010 Update* creates a seamless natural resources and growth and impact analysis of the entire 3.5 million acre region.

"It's an honor for us to support woodland and water quality conservation across this vast, privately owned landscape," said Miller.

The conservation goals identified in 2002 for New York and New Jersey carry through to the *2010 Update*:

1. Manage future growth that is compatible with the region's ecological constraints;
2. Maintain an adequate surface and ground water supply that meets the needs of local and downstream users;
3. Conserve contiguous forests using management practices that are consistent with private property rights and regional resources;

4. Provide appropriate recreational opportunities; and
5. Promote economic prosperity that is compatible with goals 1-4.

The Forest Service identifies seven strategies for stewardship of the Highlands' resources. These strategies were developed in stakeholder meetings and workshops held throughout the study process, and included input from Federal, State, local, and nonprofit organizations active in the region and familiar with the landscape:

1. Reach out and inform.
2. Monitor landscapes and resources.
3. Demonstrate conservation.
4. Conserve land through acquisition.
5. Make resource conservation a planning and design issue.
6. Increase coordination with other Federal and State agencies, and with private groups.
7. Consider the four-State Highlands region.

"The *2010 Update* will strengthen our ongoing work in the Highlands, by serving as a credible resource and catalyst for bringing even more partners together to engage in natural resource conservation," said Mike Dudley, acting director of the Forest Service Northeastern Area.

Connecticut DEP Commissioner Daniel C. Esty said, "The 2010 Update from the Highlands Act makes clear the value of conserving critically important forest land in Northwestern Connecticut. The challenge we face is that the majority of these lands are privately owned by individuals and families. Since future decisions these landowners make regarding their forestland has the potential to affect the quality of our lives, natural resources and the economy, we must continue to develop strategies that encourage and provide incentives for the proper stewardship of these forest areas."

The *Highlands Regional Study: Connecticut and Pennsylvania 2010 Update* is available at <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/highlands/> .

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Media kit: <http://na.fs.fed.us/highlands/media-kit/>