

**The Connecticut Highlands**

**Part I, Public Input  
Technical Report**

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**Prepared for:**

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# Regional **Plan** Association

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## MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 13, 2010

TO: Connecticut Highlands Study Team

FROM: Emily Moos  
Robert Pirani

RE: Public Input for Connecticut Highlands Regional Study

This memo summarizes the input we received from the Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> work group, the three listening sessions in October and November, and completed surveys. The meetings were held at three different locations in the Connecticut Highlands (locations and addresses are noted in the meeting comments document). Participants at all four meetings were a range of private citizens, farmers, foresters, conservationists, representatives from community organizations, local business owners, planners, developers, local planning and zoning commissioners and state and local representatives. The working group meeting was comprised of a smaller group of the abovementioned people; however, in preparation for the listening sessions, approximately 1,100 postcards were sent to all of the abovementioned people including the public. The study team also coordinated a press release, newspaper and radio announcements in the local media.

We have attached:

### **Appendix A, Summary of Listening Sessions**

These comments are divided up by the type of information gathered:

- 1) Environmental Resource Information
- 2) Informational Resources (people, data, etc.)
- 3) Public Outreach
- 4) Future Actions/Approaches/Questions to consider

### **Appendix B, Sample Questionnaire**

**Based on these sources as well as our own notes, here is what we would consider to be the most important take-away messages from the public.**

**1)** Water, Biological and Agricultural Resources are clearly the top resource priorities. . Priorities within all resource categories reflect greater interest in overall open space and ecosystem protection than in active recreation and resource production. These sentiments were true for both listening session participants and the work group

- Groundwater and wetlands were the top Water Resource categories. Participants suggested using DPH and SWAP Reports; identify aquifer recharge areas, and working with CT DEP Bureau of Water Management Integrated Water Resource Group which is now evaluating state's water resources.
- Quality habitat and non-game species were considered more important than game species.
- Large contiguous forests more important than traditional forest products. There was concern voiced at meeting for conservation of stands of mature trees.
- Protecting, buffering, connecting existing parks and conservation easements more important than active recreational uses

**2)** Specific pieces of land, specific species and special places carry as much if not more value than the overall resource concepts. People were interested in preservation of specific places. They were engaged in the special places mapping exercise. They wanted to know how the study and HCA would help them protect their specific resource priority. There were questions as to how the assessment would relate to special places and other specific parcels.

**3)** Local government and local land trusts are the critical audiences for the assessment. It is in the best interest of this study and of the public for the team to reach out to local government officials and make all types of information gathered through this process available and usable to them. Regional Planning Organizations should also be key participants in future and may be valuable informational resources.

**4)** There was concern over social and economic changes in the region. People saw sprawl and the threat of development as critical. They were also concerned over losing farmland and farmers, lack of affordable housing, ability to make fair market offers given real estate prices in the area. There was concern expressed over the public's ability to manage property.

**5)** A combination of website postings, summary reports and presentations are the preferred means of distribution for both the work group and listening session participants. Posting a report and presentation on the web in addition to giving presentations in communities would provide multiple and sufficient opportunities for the public to access study findings.

## **Appendix A, Summary of Listening Sessions**

### **CONNECTICUT HIGHLANDS REGIONAL STUDY SUMMARY OF LISTENING SESSIONS**

#### **NM = New Milford Listening Session**

New Milford High School, 288 Danbury Road, New Milford, CT 06776

#### **T = Torrington Listening Session**

UCONN Torrington, 855 University Drive, Torrington, CT 06790

#### **FV = Falls Village Listening Session**

Housatonic Valley Regional High School, 246 Warren Turnpike Road, Falls Village, CT 06031

### **1) Environment Resource Information**

- Wildlife corridors (NM - 1)
- Farmland protection (NM - 1)
- Wild forestland/uncut naturally evolving forest (NM - 1)
- Older growth/several hundred year-old forest stands (NM - 1)
- Viewshed protection (NM - 1)
- Check any buffer areas to correspond with Connecticut law (FV - 1)
- Not just protected lands (FV - 1)
- Does forest cover more than forestry (FV - 4,1)
- What is definition of forest goal? (FV - 4,1)
- Can well managed forests provide multiple values? (FV - 4,1)

### **2) Information Resources (people, data, etc.)**

- USFS Study info available for Towns to use in local plans of C&D (NM - 2)
- Program success depends on participation of local officials (FV - 2)
- Conservation districts (in workgroup) (FV - 2)
- Local land use commissions are resources for project (FV - 2)
  - Outreach to boards
- Input from land trusts – how to gather (FV - 2)
- Bring the UHVNHA into process (FV - 2)
- Participation by the regional planning organizations – Team should make presentations to RPOs (FV - 2)

### **3) Public Outreach Input**

- Distribution of information to town land use boards and commissions (T - 3)
- Make digital data available in Mac format or Mac compatible (T - 3)
- Use public TV/Radio to get info out (T - 3)
- Study team give presentations to local groups (T - 3)
- Town websites linked to USFS Highlands website (T - 3)
- Post in every town hall (FV - 3)

#### 4) Future Actions/Approaches/Questions to Consider

- Availability of land is independent of priorities (FV - 4)
- Context for study re: HCA and other benefits.
- Can both fee and less than fee be protected through HCA? (FV - 4)
- How can we account for social context of farming and forestry? e.g. affordable housing (FV - 4)
- How are the special areas going to be related to the assessment? Should the absolute number of nominations for any one special area matter? (FV - 4)
- Recommendations from plans for E&D could be put in assessment (FV - 4)
- How will assessment take into account size of places? (FV - 4)
- Linking existing preserved lands (NM - 4)
- Ecological-holistic perspective (NM - 4)
- Organizational cooperation and partnership (FV - 4)
- Bring draft maps to RPOs to ensure CEO input (FV - 4)
- How to provide digital info into towns – esp. towns without GIS (FV - 4)
- Does forest cover more than forestry (FV - 4,1)
- What is definition of forest goal? (FV - 4,1)
- Can well managed forests provide multiple values? (FV - 4,1)

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#### Appendix B, Sample Questionnaire

##### WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE CONNECTICUT HIGHLANDS?

We need your help!

As part of the Highlands Regional Study, the USDA Forest Service is working with the University of Connecticut and other partners to prepare maps and descriptions of important natural resources in the Connecticut Highlands. This information will be compiled in a Geographic Information System Database and used to prepare assessments of water, forest, biodiversity, agriculture, and recreational resources. One of the principle products will be a map showing areas of high conservation value in the Highlands, a necessary component of land conservation partnership projects authorized under the federal Highlands Conservation Act.

Please take the time to answer the following two questions. Your response will be used by the Forest Service and University of Connecticut researchers to help identify which resources to include in the Geographic Information System and how best to prioritize those resources within the assessment study process.

Thank you!

1. The New York – New Highlands Regional Study established five goals to guide its resource assessment. **Please rank these five goals as to their importance in the Connecticut Highlands with 5 being most important and 1 being least important:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ **WATER:** Maintaining an adequate supply of high quality water;
- \_\_\_\_\_ **FOREST:** Conserve productive forest lands;
- \_\_\_\_\_ **BIOLOGICAL:** Conserve areas of high biodiversity and habitat value;
- \_\_\_\_\_ **AGRICULTURE:** Conserve productive agricultural land;
- \_\_\_\_\_ **RECREATION:** Provide adequate recreational opportunities, including natural, historic, and cultural resource-based uses.

2. The New York – New Jersey Highlands Regional Study identified and mapped more than 70 different natural or cultural resources whose conservation will help meet the study’s goals. **Please indicate whether you feel the conservation of these natural or cultural resources is very important, somewhat important, or not important for meeting the identified goal.** We recognize that many are important for more than one goal and that some of these overlap. **Please also note if there are other important natural or cultural resources that Study should identify and map.**

**WATER:** Maintaining an adequate supply of high quality water;

	Importance for Meeting Study Goal		
	Very	Somewhat	Not
Groundwater Aquifers			
Public water supply wellhead protection zone			
Riparian zones including streams with 150 ft buffer			
Headwater streams			
Steep slopes greater than 15 percent			
Wetlands			
Other:			

**BIOLOGICAL:** Conserve areas of high biodiversity and habitat value;

	Importance for Meeting Study Goal		
	Very	Somewhat	Not
Significant animal habitat containing Federal or State listed rare, threatened or endangered species			
Significant plant habitat containing Federal or State listed rare, threatened or endangered species			
Vegetation communities representative of the			

Connecticut Highlands and/or of exceptional quality			
Other:			

**RECREATION:** Provide adequate recreational opportunities, including natural, historic, and cultural resource-based uses.

	<b>Importance for Meeting Study Goal</b>		
	Very	Somewhat	Not
Recreational trails			
Existing parks/preserves			
Conservation easements or watershed management lands			
Buffer areas that connect parklands or other protected areas			
Historic, cultural or recreational resource areas or site			
Lakes/reservoirs with public access			
Canoeable river or stream			
Trout production and maintenance streams			
Scenic viewsheds			
Visible ridgetops			
Other:			

**AGRICULTURE:** Conserve productive agricultural land;

	<b>Importance for Meeting Study Goal</b>		
	Very	Somewhat	Not
Cultivated lands			
Contiguous cultivated farmland			
Preserved farms			
Other:			

**FOREST:** Conserve productive forest lands;

	<b>Importance for Meeting Study Goal</b>		
	Very	Somewhat	Not
Forest Stewardship lands (where landowner has			
Contiguous forest tracts > 1000 acres			
Contiguous forest tracts < 1000 acres			
Other:			