



Connecticut-New Jersey-New York-Pennsylvania Highlands Region

Regional conservation of important lands

Description: The Highlands region of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania is a forested oasis of national significance on the doorstep of an ever-expanding metropolitan area. Spanning 3.5 million acres, the region's abundant private and publically owned natural resources provide quality drinking water, recreation, and economic opportunities to millions of residents and visitors alike.

The Highlands Conservation Act of 2004 (HCA), PL 108-421, directed the U.S. Forest Service to do three things. 1) Expand the *New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study: 2002 Update* to include the Highlands of Connecticut and Pennsylvania. As was done in the original studies, the Update analyzed the region's natural resources and the effects of land use change. 2) Provide Federal assistance through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) for land conservation projects to help Highlands States acquire and permanently protect land or an interest in land from a willing seller. 3) Help Highlands States identify and use Forest Service and other technical and financial assistance programs of the Department of Agriculture. **The HCA was authorized through FY2014.**

Key Issue:

1. The HCA studies affirmed that forests provide critical and vital benefits to the Highlands region and are being continually threatened by land use changes and development.
2. Though the Act has not been reauthorized, Congress appropriated funds to continue the program in FY2015 and FY2016.

Accomplishments:

- **Highlands Regional Study: Connecticut and Pennsylvania 2010 Update:** This document, the third Highlands region report published by the U.S. Forest Service, follows the original New York-New Jersey study in 1992 and the New York-New Jersey Update in 2002. It contains an assessment of conservation values and analyzes the current and potential impact on those values. It also identifies regional conservation focal areas and strategies. [The Connecticut and Pennsylvania 2010 update is available on the Web.](#)
- **Land Acquisition:** The land acquisition component of the program has been administered by the FWS since Land and Water Conservation Fund money was initially appropriated in FY2007. During this time, over \$27 million has been appropriated for the program; these funds have been leveraged with non-Federal funds to acquire important conservation lands in the natural resources-rich Highlands region. All of the Highlands States have acquired lands in fee under this program for conservation purposes as outlined in HCA.

Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NA S&PF) Funded Restoration Projects – Examples of Competitive Grant Projects in the Highlands:

- **Continuing Conservation Beyond Preservation:** In 2011, NA S&PF invested \$228,000 to develop collaborative forest stewardship projects for two of the most important forest tracts in the New Jersey Highlands. The National Forest Foundation matched the seed money. A Forest Stewardship plan has been completed for the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area.
- **New Jersey Highlands Restoration Initiative on the South Branch of the Raritan River:** In 2012, NA S&PF invested \$95,000 in Forest Stewardship, Forest Health, and Urban and Community Forestry funds to return unproductive agricultural lands to natural forests unique to the Highlands. The restoration will allow these forests to regenerate, helping to ensure clean, plentiful water and other benefits for 1.5 million New Jersey residents.



Reauthorization of the HCA Program and FY2016 Appropriations: At this time Congress has not reauthorized the HCA. In February 2016, the House Natural Resources Committee did a markup on H.R. 894 (Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-NJ) “to reauthorize the Highlands Conservation Act through 2021.” The 2016 appropriations bill provided \$10 million for HCA grants, and the Congressional Committees directed the FWS to work with the Highlands States regarding priority projects for FY2016. The U.S. Forest Service will continue its partnership with the Highlands States and FWS and move the program forward.

Budget History:

Highlands Conservation Act Program
(dollars in thousands)

FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
\$1,971	\$1,722.7	\$1,450	\$4,000	\$0	\$4,992	\$0	\$0	\$3,000	\$10,000

Future Direction:

- NA S&PF will continue to coordinate with FWS in soliciting and evaluating land conservation partnership projects in FY2017 and beyond as appropriate.
- NA S&PF will help Highlands States, local units of government, individual landowners, and private organizations identify and use U.S. Forest Service and other technical and financial assistance programs.

Interactive maps from the Highlands Study 2002 and 2010 Updates are available at the [Rutgers University Center for Remote Sensing and Spatial Analysis](#).

James S. Barresi
Acting Area Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
610-557-4103
jbarresi@fs.fed.us

Robert Lueckel
Field Representative.
180 Canfield Street
Morgantown, WV 26505
304-285-1540
rlueckel@fs.fed.us

Connie Carpenter
Field Representative
271 Mast Road
Durham, NH 03824
603-868-7694
conniecarpenter@fs.fed.us

