

New Jersey Highlands Council **Letter 50**

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Web Response

I will refer you to the comments I made along with busloads of other people before the law was passed as well as those made to the DEP when their rules were proposed and the comments we made on a monthly basis at the Highlands Council Meetings that I attended for years. You can also take a look at the lawsuit filed initially by Warren County, then followed through by several private individuals. And, of course, feel free to read the constitution of the United States and you will realize that the Highlands Act is clearly unconstitutional. Despite the promises, absolutely nothing has been done to provide just compensation to landowners whose property rights have been taken by the government. None of the issues in all of these comments have been addressed, yet the fears the landowners had turned out to be well founded. The value of our land has been almost completely taken away resulting in financial devastation for many of us. The average age of a farmer at the time the Highlands Act was passed was well known, yet nothing was ever done to compensate middle aged and elderly farmers for the loss of 90% of their wealth. We feared for the economic futures of our towns, and those fears were well founded too. We have lost population and businesses. More heartbreaking, we have lost elderly landowners who died after losing their land equity to the government. Property taxes are sky high and unmanageable, so ever year we see an increase in taxes and decreases in services. There is little to attract new business since population and disposable income are both declining in most of the rural towns where the preservation area dominates. The land that the state owns continues to be ignored with invasive species and underbrush choking out the trees - something that the state does not tolerate from landowners applying for farmland assessment. And, of course, the rules for farmland assessment and forest stewardship have gotten even more onerous, further discouraging private property ownership. For the most part, there's nothing to be said that hasn't been said already by hundreds of landowners who have commented over the years. Luckily it is easy for you to find it all thanks to things like Google, which was in its embryonic stage when the Highlands Act was passed. And all you folks probably have smart phones, which were invented after the Highlands act was passed. Or even fiber optic or 4 G internet access. I don't have any of that because the capacity for building the infrastructure is forbidden by the DEP Highlands regs. I still don't have reliable cell phone service where I am and never will since it is illegal to build a cell phone tower in the area. So, although we predicted being left in the dark ages so to speak, you should know that we were right. If only I could go to a Starbucks for internet access, but there are no Starbucks out where I live because we're all too dirt poor to drop three bucks on a cup of coffee so even if Starbucks could find a nice brownfield lot to build on, there will never be any demand for their pricey coffee. So I tolerate my second class citizen lifestyle out here in the Highlands Preservation area with poor cell phone service, spotty internet service, and abandoned state owned land all around me ready to go up in smoke at the next lightening strike. But I'm not going to waste my time commenting yet again on the RMP. As I said - go back to the original hearings before the Highlands Act was passed and the comments made at the Highlands Council meetings and the lawsuits. You'll find that not one of our concerns has been addressed, so feel free to pick something and fix it.

Respondent

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