



Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street NE, Room 1A
Washington, DC 20426

RE: FERC Docket CP15-558-000

November 23, 2015

Dear Secretary Bose:

I am writing on behalf of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space to state our objection to the routing of the proposed PennEast pipeline on more than 4,000 acres of preserved open space and farmland. Millions of dollars in taxpayer money have been invested in these lands to preserve habitat, protect water quality and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation....not to provide a convenient location for a gas conduit which would scar the landscape, damage soils and habitat, impose safety threats and compromise the quality of surface waters.

Our organization is part of a 350-member coalition that has worked hard over the years to secure support for New Jersey Green Acres funding for open space, farmland and historic preservation. New Jersey voters have consistently approved funding measures by significant margins because they understand how precious undeveloped land is in New Jersey. Every parcel preserved using Green Acres funding is bound by a Deed of Conservation Restriction, which states in part that the land will be protected and used "only for Park Purposes." A pipeline does not fit this definition.

Nearly \$11.5 million in public funds and nine years of hard work were invested in the preservation of the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain, which was finally celebrated in April, 1998. Intensive biological studies over the years have provided ample documentation of the ecological uniqueness of the Preserve, which is at the western terminus of the 90-square mile Sourlands region. Baldpate Mountain has been designated an Important Bird Area (IBA), a national program, based upon the documented presence of its large assemblage of migratory bird species. It holds Mercer County's largest contiguous forest, which provides exceptional migratory, nesting and overwintering habitat for the County's most extensive and diverse bird populations, including some that are listed as threatened or as species of conservation concern by the New Jersey Non-game and Endangered Species Program. Of special note are documented nesting pairs of Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler and Worm-eating Warbler, whose very specific nesting habitat requirements are found in a very limited number of locations in central New Jersey. Baldpate Mountain is one of those few. The proposed route of the PennEast pipeline would compromise—possibly completely destroy—the preferred nesting sites of



some of these birds, which tend to return to the same nesting site year after year, generation after generation. Because these birds require forest habitat with healthy understory structure—and the forest along the Baldpate ridge is a rare example of such healthy forest in central New Jersey—they may have nowhere else to go.

Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space has worked with the Mercer County Park Commission over the years with biological survey work and habitat preservation and improvement on Baldpate Mountain. We were a partner in creating the Management and Protection Plan for the Ted Stiles Preserve, and were the main author of its Habitat Protection section. We have secured grant money to fund removal of invasive species and to plant tree seedlings to fill in forest gaps. It will be decades before these plantings actually become part of the contiguous forest. We cannot stand by and be silent when we see a plan that would actually remove trees that are part of this woodland, or would deposit construction spoils that would smother the understory, a necessary part of a viable forest structure. Removal of any part of this intact forest cannot be mitigated; its special attributes would be lost forever.

The Preserve has become a destination not only for birders from throughout the region but also for anyone who seeks a quiet walk in unspoiled nature, especially families with young children—we see them often on the mountain. But the proposed pipeline would actually encroach on the popular Ridge Trail, a favorite of family groups, and would cross through the Pleasant Valley Road access area, thus diminishing the recreational and scenic value of this very special preserve. We remind you, New Jersey voters have enthusiastically supported open space and farmland preservation funding for the intrinsic values of the land, not to provide a substrate for a pipeline whose supposed public need is not supported by any available data and whose construction threatens the very values that people so willingly do support.

We stand with those who care about the land, water, and a safe environment in opposition to the PennEast pipeline.



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