

**TO:** FERC

**FROM:** Caroline Katmann on behalf of Sourland Conservancy

**RE:** Comments on Docket PF15-1-000, proposed PennEast Pipeline

**DATE:** July 10, 2015

The Sourland Conservancy opposes any destruction of forest habitat for the construction of the proposed PennEast Pipeline, including the destruction of forest habitat on Baldpate Mountain, the site of a proposed pipeline route.

In an April 21 report filed by PennEast to FERC, PennEast ponders the likelihood of its project impacting the state-endangered bobcat. As stated by the report:

*“The bobcat occupies various habitats including deciduous-coniferous woodlands and forest edges... Large tracts of habitat are most favorable... Once widespread and common in NJ, deforestation, development and changes in agricultural practices since the turn of the century have led to its decline... given the developed and fragmented nature of the areas crossed by the proposed Project, it is unlikely that the large tracts of habitat necessary to support this species are present or that bobcat would be expected in the Project area.”*

The plight of the bobcat speaks to the crucial importance of protecting Central Jersey’s remaining forest habitats. At 1,480 contiguous acres, Baldpate Mountain is the largest contiguous forest in Mercer County. Because of “deforestation, development and changes in agricultural practices,” as cited by PennEast, there are few places left in crowded Central Jersey, itself within the nation’s most densely populated state, likely to support species which require “large tracts of habitat.” Baldpate Mountain is the largest tract of forest habitat left in Mercer County, and one of the largest forested tracts left in Central Jersey overall. It therefore holds special importance to endangered, threatened and rare species.

According to the Washington Crossing Audubon Society, Baldpate Mountain has “the largest concentration of understory or ground layer forest breeding birds in central New Jersey, including Hooded, Kentucky, and Worm-eating Warblers. Thirty species of conservation concern nest at Baldpate Mountain either in the interior forest or in the adjacent forest edges and old fields. Nesting species include thirteen species of Warblers, the Yellow-breasted Chat, three vireo species, and two tanager species. Many more species use Baldpate as a migratory stop, including sixty-one species of conservation concern, including fifty species of Nearctic-neotropical migrants.”

To some, the continued existence of large intact forests in the heart of Central Jersey, close to both Philadelphia and New York, may be surprising. It is the result of decades of hard work by citizens and local government interested in preserving local biodiversity, the value of which cannot be calculated in cubic feet per day. Any disturbance of forest habitat within less-fragmented tracts of the Sourland Mountain region, including Baldpate Mountain, will have an amplified negative effect on local biodiversity, because most other tracts in the region are already of a “developed and fragmented nature.” Baldpate Mountain should be left wholly intact for the sake of giving rare, threatened and endangered species the best possible chance for finding suitable habitat.

Caroline Katmann, Executive Director, Sourland Conservancy

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