

Updated August 23, 2016 with results of 2016 breeding survey. Originally sent October 9, 2015

FERC Docket# CP15-558

Submitted for Washington Crossing Audubon Society

Because of the extreme ecological sensitivity of Baldpate Mountain, Washington Crossing Audubon Society opposes routing the PennEast pipeline through the JCP&L power line cut that bisects Baldpate Mountain. An outlier of the Sourland Mountains, Baldpate Mountain contains some of the richest biodiversity in New Jersey. Southern and northern species meet at Baldpate, enriching the flora and fauna. Due to the high quality habitat, including areas of intact understory, and the mingling of southern and northern species, Baldpate Mountain has the highest concentration of breeding Neotropical migrants in New Jersey. The thirty-one Neotropical breeding species include thirteen warblers and the Yellow-breasted Chat, two tanagers, three vireos and two thrushes. Twenty-eight breeding Neotropical migrant species are ranked by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) as birds of conservation concern. Baldpate is also an important migratory stop for Neotropical birds. Fifty species of Neotropical migrants of conservation concern use Baldpate Mountain as a migratory stop. A total of 170 species have been reported to eBird at Baldpate; sixty-one of these are ABC species of conservation concern that use Baldpate for breeding, a migratory stop or as part of a resident territory.

Because Baldpate Mountain is long and narrow, it is highly sensitive to disruption from activity on the power line cut that bisects the forest lengthwise. Of special concern is noise from blasting and construction that would penetrate deeply into the forest, interfering with vocal communication between birds at a critical time during the breeding season.

Construction along the power line cut and especially extending the width of the power line cut would destroy or degrade adjacent breeding habitat along the length of the mountain. Because Baldpate breeding territories are saturated, these birds cannot move further back into the interior forest if disturbed. There is no place for the displaced birds to go. Blue-winged and Chestnut-sided Warblers, species of conservation concern that breed at the forest-power line ecotone, would be especially affected.

Increasing the width of the power line clearing would also extend the edge effect further into the core forest, allowing increased access for brown-headed cowbirds, a nest parasite, and invasive plant species. The ecosystem at Baldpate is intact but stressed, making Baldpate sensitive to new disturbances.

The blasting necessary to penetrate the extremely hard diabase substrate has the potential to affect the springs that feed the creeks that originate on Baldpate, disrupting their flow and the animals that depend on them, including the breeding Louisiana Waterthrush, a species of conservation concern.

The potential damage to the breeding birds of conservation concern cannot be mitigated as there is no other high quality habitat for relocation of these species in central New Jersey. The Sourland Mountain habitat is similarly saturated and the areas adjacent to Baldpate are too degraded to support healthy populations of birds that require closed canopy, healthy understory or interior forest. Healthy forest habitat takes decades to develop, considerably longer than the lifetime of the forest breeding birds, making mitigation impossible. The affected species are of conservation concern because they are declining at an unsustainable rate or their habitat is being destroyed or degraded at an unsustainable rate.

The power line cut predates the requirement for an environmental impact statement. Considering the ecological sensitivity of Baldpate Mountain, the power line cut should have never been placed there. A thorough biological inventory and environmental impact statement would clearly show why. The damage to the fragile but intact Baldpate Mountain ecosystem should not be compounded by allowing PennEast access for their pipeline. We urge FERC to rule "no action" on the proposed Baldpate route.

Sincerely,

C. Sharyn Magee

President, Washington Crossing Audubon Society

Table #1: Baldpate Breeding Species of Conservation Concern

Species	Audubon Watchlist	ABC Status	eBird Breeding	BFL	Baldpate Mapping
Yellow-billed Cuckoo		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Chimney Swift		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Eastern Wood Peewee		yellow	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
Yellow-throated Vireo		yellow	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
Wood Thrush	yellow	orange	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
Veery		yellow	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
Ovenbird		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Worm-eating Warbler		yellow	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
Blue-winged Warbler	yellow	orange	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Louisiana Waterthrush		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Kentucky Warbler	yellow	orange	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
Prairie Warbler	yellow	orange	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Black-and-white Warbler		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Common Yellowthroat		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Hooded Warbler		yellow	yes	confirmed breeding	confirmed breeding
American Redstart		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Chestnut-sided Warbler		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Yellow-breasted Chat		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Eastern Towhee		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Field Sparrow		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Summer Tanager		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Scarlet Tanager		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Baltimore Oriole		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding
Indigo Bunting		yellow	yes	NA	confirmed breeding

All the species in Table 1 are Neotropical migrants except for Eastern Towhee and Field Sparrow. The Pine Warbler barely extends its winter range into the Neotropics with most of the population wintering in the southern United States.

Watchlist Status: National Audubon 2007 Watchlist Species

ABC Status: American Bird Conservancy Conservation Rankings. Birds are scored for population size, range size, threats, and population trends. Yellow: potential concern. Orange: Vulnerable. Red: At-Risk. Green: Secure

eBird: Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology eBird Data base.

BFL: Birds in the Forested Landscape, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology citizen science protocol. Four study sites are located at Baldpate Mountain. The protocol was repeated twice per breeding season at Sites 1 & 2 in 2004 & 2005; Sites 1-3 in 2006-2008 and Sites 1-4 from 2009 through 2014.

Confirmed breeding: Species detected both sessions 2-3 weeks apart in at least one year.

NA: Species not included in study.

Baldpate Breeding Studies: Mapping singing males in six sessions per season 2008-2014 at Baldpate Mountain

Breeding Confirmed: Male singing three times on territory during breeding season in at least one year.

Table#2: Number of Breeding Territories at Baldpate Mountain for Birds of Conservation Concern

Species	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2	1	1		1	0		1	1
Chimney Swift								1	2
Eastern Wood-Pewee	32	16	27	33	28	18	18	13	16
Eastern Phoebe	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Great-crested Flycatcher	2	3	1	1	2	0	1	0	3
Red-eyed Vireo	14	10	18	21	17	27	24	12	16
White-eyed Vireo	3	2	1	10	5	2	5	4	6
Yellow-throated Vireo	1	4	6	2	7	5	4	7	14
House Wren	1	1	1		2	3	1	4	2
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher		2		1	2	0	3	2	2
Wood Thrush	34	34	58	58	60	54	68	67	67
Veery	57	41	57	68	54	44	60	42	47
Gray Catbird	32	23	45	53	53	46	61	37	58
Blue-winged Warbler	7	3	8	12	8	11	5	14	10

Yellow Warbler	4	3	5	8	8	8	5	3	8
Chestnut-sided Warbler	10	8	7	14	10	7	10	11	10
Prairie Warbler	3	2	2	1	0	3	2	2	3
Pine Warbler	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Worm-eating Warbler	4	5	11	7	7	8	5	7	6
Black-and-white Warbler	5	6	9	14	16	14	17	27	13
American Redstart	2	2	4	5	5	6	8	10	7
Ovenbird	107	116	130	133	115	129	132	130	168
Louisiana Waterthrush					1	1	1	1	1
Kentucky Warbler	4	7	10	10	3	3	2	1	3
Common Yellowthroat	58	30	40	70	51	51	50	68	68
Hooded warbler	32	29	38	30	29	19	30	21	26
Yellow-breasted Chat		1						0	0
Summer Tanager					1	1	1	1	1
Scarlet Tanager	15	15	24	29	26	25	32	17	27
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		5	4	4	7	8	11	12	8
Indigo Bunting	10	9	17	16	21	14	6	9	12
Eastern Towhee	52	24	37	46	40	41	46	38	49
Baltimore Oriole	7	8	13	13	10	11	12	9	19

Breeding Bird Survey: Each route was surveyed a minimum of six times between May and early July. In addition, Pine Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush breeding sites were surveyed in April since these species start and finish the breeding cycle early. The Louisiana Waterthrush site, which is not on the routes described below, was only surveyed since 2012. Data from Baldpate and Fiddler's Creek routes were combined. Baldpate was surveyed in two routes because it was not possible to cover the four high quality habitats in one morning.

Breeding territories were determined by a male singing on territory at least three times.

Routes:

2008-2016 Baldpate:

Straight trail from Pleasant Valley parking lot to connector trail to North-east paths.

Ridge Trail (White Trail) from Pleasant Valley Road parking lot to old logging trail /horse trail going from tenant farm to power line & return by Northwest Trail (new white trail 2008); Red Trail (North-west loop); return on Ridge Trail (White Trail) from pine windrow to parking lot.

Approximately 6 miles loop including three high quality spicebush thicket areas.

2008-2016 Fiddler's Creek Baldpate: Summit Trail from Fiddler's Creek parking lot; loop around summit; return by road.

Approximately 2.3 miles loop including high quality spicebush thicket adjacent to trail and road.

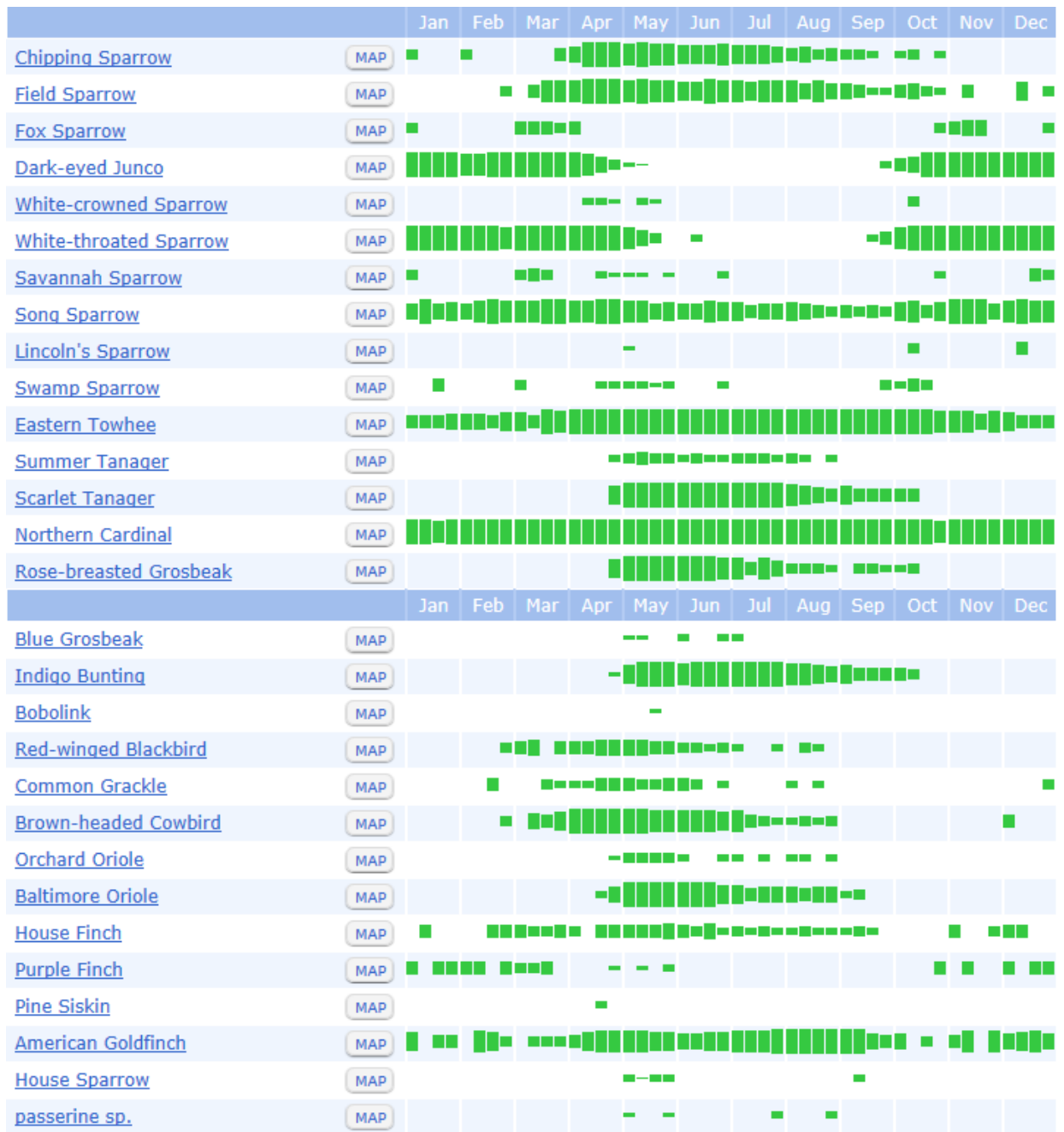
Documentation for Statements Made in Letter: Bird Records for Baldpate Mountain

Washington Crossing Audubon has documented the statements made in our letter concerning the proposed PennEast pipeline route through Baldpate Mountain.

eBird records from Baldpate Mountain:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/GuideMe?step=saveChoices&getLocations=hotspots&parentState=US-NJ&bMonth=01&bYear=1900&eMonth=12&eYear=2014&reportType=location&hotspots=L200757&continue.x=35&continue.y=11>

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Prothonotary Warbler	MAP				■	■							
Tennessee Warbler	MAP				■	■			■	■	■		
Nashville Warbler	MAP				■	■			■	■	■		
Connecticut Warbler	MAP								■	■			
Mourning Warbler	MAP				■	■		■		■			
Kentucky Warbler	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Common Yellowthroat	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Hooded Warbler	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
American Redstart	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Cape May Warbler	MAP				■	■			■	■			
Cerulean Warbler	MAP				■	■			■	■	■		
Northern Parula	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Magnolia Warbler	MAP				■	■		■	■	■	■	■	
Bay-breasted Warbler	MAP				■	■			■	■	■		
Blackburnian Warbler	MAP				■	■			■	■	■		
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Yellow Warbler	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Chestnut-sided Warbler	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Blackpoll Warbler	MAP				■	■	■			■	■	■	
Black-throated Blue Warbler	MAP				■	■	■		■	■	■	■	
Palm Warbler	MAP				■	■	■			■	■	■	
Pine Warbler	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	MAP	■	■	■	■	■	■			■	■	■	■
Yellow-throated Warbler	MAP				■	■	■						
Prairie Warbler	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Black-throated Green Warbler	MAP				■	■	■		■	■	■	■	
Canada Warbler	MAP				■	■	■		■	■	■	■	
Wilson's Warbler	MAP				■	■				■	■		
Yellow-breasted Chat	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Grasshopper Sparrow	MAP				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
American Tree Sparrow	MAP	■	■	■	■							■	■
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec



KEY: | = insufficient data |  = rare to widespread

[Download Histogram Data](#)