

*(Note: This letter is as submitted to the Daily Record, which was printed in edited form and not posted online.)*

## **Protect our forests, don't monetize them**

To the editor:

The Record's December article entitled "Sparta Mountain Gives Endangered Songbirds a Reason to Sing," a public relations piece by New Jersey Audubon, alerted conservation organizations that they better pay attention to the movement to log New Jersey's Green Acres forests.

Also in December, for the first time, the Division of Fish & Wildlife opened up for public comment the Sparta Mountain Forestry Stewardship Plan. The plan for the 3,282 acre forest was prepared by New Jersey Audubon with \$140,000 dedicated grant money from a hunting and fishing foundation and with in-kind cooperation from New Jersey' Department of Environmental Protection to support the Christie administration's promotion of commercial logging in our Green Acres forests under the guise of 'Stewardship'.

The logging plan for Sparta Mountain describes the activity as a moral one because "it should be considered a violation of the public trust" if public land management does not consider the monetary value of natural resources. Monetize New Jersey's Highland Green Acres! Is this what the public voted for year after year in favoring Green Acres bond issues? How different the Christie version of morality is from ancient scholars who pleaded "Hurt Not the Earth, Neither the Sea, Nor the Trees. Let us preserve our silent sanctuaries for in them we preserve the eternal perspectives."

The Christie version of the principles of ecological forestry at a landscape level calls for chain saws, herbicides, burning, clear cuts and logging roads to "create scrubby, patchy, disturbed portions of the forest" and to remove old trees for their market value as a 'New Jersey wood product'.

Many citizens and conservation organizations such as the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, have responded to the threats to our Green Acres legacy and have submitted comments to the State requesting that the Plan be withdrawn and that a public hearing be held.

New Jersey legislature has a legacy of protecting New Jersey's important and vital areas – the Pinelands and the Highlands. Our neighbor New York has a constitutional prohibition on logging in State owned forests within the Adirondacks and the Catskills. Their "Forever Wild" provision was adopted to protect New York's water supplies. Let's do the same! We need to make our Green Acres forests forever wild for now and for the future.

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