

**Public Comment on Sparta Mountain Revised Forest Plan
March 1, 2016**



Perspective matters.

On February 4, 2016, American astronaut Edgar Mitchell died on the eve of the anniversary of his historic journey to the moon on February 5, 1971. That experience changed his life. Like so many others in the early astronaut corps, he had been a fighter-jet test pilot for the Navy. He went out into space as part of a military-based mission for national security.

When he returned from that mission, he told reporters that he had undergone a “lunar epiphany”. Part of it was “the realization that the molecules of my own body and the molecules of the spacecraft itself were manufactured long ago in the furnace of one of the ancient stars that burned in the heavens about me.”

The other epiphany was “ a sense of the Earth being in critical condition, a recognition of the massive insanity which had led man into deeper and deeper crises on the planet. Above all I felt the need for a radical change in our culture. I knew we were replete with untapped intuitive and psychic forces which we must utilize if we were to survive forces that western society had programmed us to disregard.”

On February 6, 2016, a group of 40 people gathered in Washington, NJ to explore how we might collaborate to do several things: One was to change the present state of farming in the Ridge and Valley and Highlands regions of northwest NJ. We came from as far north as Warwick, NY, just above the NY/NJ state line, from diverse places within the great water basin in which the Sparta Mountain preserve is situated. We came from Lake Hopatcong and the entire course of the Musconetcong River to its mouth into the Delaware River in Finesville, NJ

We had the belief that we could assist in transforming this river valley from a predominance of GMO and chemically based farm fields into healthy, ecologically safe, food-producing farms. We were especially focused on restoring grains, which could be milled locally for bakers desiring safe flour for their breads, and for livestock farmers desiring safe, chemical and GMO-free feed for their animals. We were well aware of the rising demand for safe, local foods happening not only in this region, but nation-wide.

We also sensed that in order to do this we needed to shift the way we ordinarily relate to land and water as “things” as private property, as commodities we can own, buy, sell and genetically-engineer for our own purposes.. We sensed we needed to “re-sacralize” the river and valley. As the Kentucky poet, farmer and philosopher Wendell Berry states, “ There are no unsacred places. There are only sacred places and desecrated places”

This gathering, initiated by ordinary, concerned people, arose from perspectives not unlike Edgar Mitchell’s. The satellite mapping that has become available to our human communities provides unprecedented perspectives on the wholeness and oneness of the entire planet as well as every region. It is a gift left by that courageous corps of astronauts.

While pouring over GPS maps revealing the interconnectedness of the great basin in which the Musconetcong river watershed shares the common water and soils as does the Sparta Mountain Area, we experienced a similar realization. Our political boundaries and lines are simply an abstraction by which we have been “programmed to disregard” the unity of a fragile and

interconnected water basin which is the source and sustainer of the living communities of this region of the North American continent.

Rather the “untapped intuitive and psychic (meaning soul) forces” that Mitchell described are wonder, awe and love, for the whole of the natural world. This perspective must become the basis of our planning for the future. There is nothing more important to do then to protect and foster what remnants are left after the ravages of our western society’s entrance into this region just 500 years ago.

The enlightened plan made decades ago by the NJ land conservancies, trusts and foundations, with the collaboration of earlier efforts in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, must not now be dwindled away by any inappropriate failure of good will toward the common good.

This water basin is not a commodity. Perspective matters.

Respectfully submitted,

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