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**NEW PENNSYLVANIA HIGHLANDS REPORT IDENTIFIES NEARLY 247,000 ACRES AS  
TOP CONSERVATION PRIORITY**

*Pennsylvania Highlands Conservation Atlas Released; Research Combines Scientific Analysis  
and Public Input*

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Highlands Coalition, and The Trust for Public Land (TPL) today released the "Pennsylvania Highlands Conservation Atlas," a resource for prioritizing land conservation opportunities in the 1.4-million-acre Pennsylvania (PA) Highlands region stretching across southeastern PA. Of the 246,992 acres identified as the highest priority Conservation Areas in the region, which extends from the Delaware River to the Maryland border, 85 percent are unprotected and at risk of development.

The Pennsylvania Highlands Conservation Atlas combines, for the first time, science-based data on land ownership, natural resources, and recreational assets with a participatory approach to conservation planning, including input from state and local government officials, local land trusts, and outdoor recreation groups.

"The Conservation Atlas represents the critical intersection between scientific data and people in identifying the most at-risk lands and fully understanding the ecological and community values in need of protection," said Kristen Sykes, Mid-Atlantic Project Manager, Appalachian Mountain Club. "The insight and feedback received from local partners was instrumental in prioritizing conservation landscapes, and we're enthusiastic about the potential of the Atlas to serve as an important tool in protecting a wide range of natural and recreational resource values."

The Atlas identifies 11 high-priority Conservation Areas in 13 counties where outstanding resource values—such as clean water, unfragmented forest, and endangered and threatened animal habitat—overlap with stakeholder priorities for trails, greenways, and open space. These areas include: Northampton Highlands in Northampton and Bucks Counties; South Mountain in Lehigh and Northampton Counties; Oley Hills in Berks County; Unami Hills in Montgomery and Bucks Counties; Hopewell Big Woods in Berks and Chester Counties; Welsh Mountain in Lancaster and Chester Counties; Furnace Hills in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties; Sand Hills in Dauphin County; Conewago Mountains in York County; Whiskey Springs Uplands in Cumberland and York Counties; and South Mountain Faces in Adams County.

A key component of the Atlas is a PA Highlands Greenway Map that identifies interconnecting corridors between priority Conservation Areas to support plant and animal biodiversity, providing a vision for a connected greenway through the PA Highlands.

"Land in the Pennsylvania Highlands is being developed at an accelerating pace," said Andy Pitz, Chair of the Pennsylvania Committee of the Highlands Coalition and Vice President, Strategic Policy and Planning at the Natural Lands Trust. "The Conservation Atlas allows us to strategically focus on the lands with the most ecological and community significance and align the efforts of all our organizations to protect them."

Located in close proximity to Philadelphia, Allentown, Reading, Pottstown, and Harrisburg, the PA Highlands region lies in the shadow of the most densely populated area of the state. It is part of a four-state, three-million-plus-acre regional landscape that stretches from northwestern Connecticut across the lower Hudson Valley of New York through northern New Jersey and southeastern PA to the Maryland state line.

The Conservation Atlas was created by AMC, the Highlands Coalition, and TPL to assist state and county agencies, local officials, and land trusts throughout the state in setting land conservation priorities. This is particularly important as new land conservation funding for the region becomes available through the federal Highlands Conservation Act. Pennsylvania is nationally among the states with the most rural land lost to development.

“The counties within the PA Highlands region rank among some of the fastest growing in the state, amounting to thousands of acres lost annually to development,” said Terrence Nolan of The Trust for Public Land. “If a regional greenway plan is successfully implemented, it will serve as an important front line against rapid sprawl and positively impact the quality of life for the millions of people who rely on the PA Highlands for clean drinking water, accessible recreation, and tourism opportunities.”

The Highlands Conservation Act, which the U.S. Congress signed into law in 2004 to authorize new funding for conservation projects in the Highlands, authorized Congress to spend \$100 million over 10 years for land protection in the broader four-state Highlands region in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. It is expected that at least \$1 million will be appropriated for 2007, with some of the funds going toward the protection of the Oley Hills.

The Pennsylvania Highlands Greenway Planning Project was a shared effort between the AMC and the Highlands Coalition, with input from federal agencies, state, county, and local government, and citizens’ organizations. Funding was generously provided in part by grants to The Trust for Public Land from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, under the Community Conservation Partnerships Program; and grants to the Appalachian Mountain Club from the William Penn Foundation.

To read the “Pennsylvania Highlands Conservation Atlas and Greenway Map” and access additional resources, visit [www.outdoors.org/PA\\_Highlands](http://www.outdoors.org/PA_Highlands). To order a free copy, email [mahighlands@outdoors.org](mailto:mahighlands@outdoors.org).

Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the nation. With 90,000 members in the Northeast and beyond, including more than 5,000 members in its Delaware Valley Chapter, the nonprofit AMC promotes the protection, enjoyment, and wise use of the mountains, rivers and trails of the Appalachian region. The AMC supports natural resource conservation while encouraging responsible recreation, based on the philosophy that successful, long-term conservation depends upon first-hand enjoyment of the natural environment. ([www.outdoors.org](http://www.outdoors.org))

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national, nonprofit, land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, community gardens, historic sites, rural lands, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. Since 1972, TPL has worked with willing landowners, community groups, and national, state, and local agencies to complete more than 3,000 land conservation projects in 46 states, protecting more than two

million acres. Since 1994, TPL has helped states and communities craft and pass almost 300 ballot measures, generating over \$19 billion in new conservation-related funding. ([www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org))

The Highlands Coalition includes more than 150 national, state, regional and local organizations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut working together to protect and enhance the sustainability of natural and human communities in the Highlands. This region of forest, farmland and rugged hills provides clean drinking water for over 14 million Americans, habitat for over 250 threatened and endangered plants and animals, and numerous recreational opportunities. ([www.highlandscoalition.org](http://www.highlandscoalition.org))