



Protecting the future of the Catskills

2009 Executive Director's Report to Donors

INTRODUCTION

This year Catskill Mountainkeeper has seen the emergence and intensification of critical threats that affect the environment, the local business community and the very fabric of life in the Catskill region. At the same time we have been able to identify and move forward on significant opportunities for much needed sustainable growth in the Catskills.

The following report has been written to give our donors a clear understanding of the key issues we have dealt with this year and as importantly to spell out what our achievements have been.

Thank you for your past support. We could not have done our work without it. It's that simple. As you consider your giving over the remainder of this year, please give serious consideration to making a yearend gift to Catskill Mountainkeeper. Should you have any questions about this report, please don't hesitate to give me a call at 845-482-5400.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT CATSKILL MOUNTAINKEEPER

- Catskill Mountainkeeper is a not-for-profit corporation incorporated in the State of New York.
- All donations to Catskill Mountainkeeper are tax deductible to the extent allowed by state and federal law.

What we are:

- Catskill Mountainkeeper is a community based environmental advocacy organization dedicated to creating a flourishing sustainable economy in the Catskills and preserving and protecting the area's long term health.
- We address issues of water integrity, the defense of the vast woodlands of the Catskill Forest Preserve and the New York City Watershed as well as farmland protection.
- We promote "smart" development that balances the economic needs and concerns of the Catskill's citizens and the protection of our abundant but exceedingly vulnerable natural resources.

What we do:

- We are the eyes and ears of the people who live, work and visit here. We address issues that matter most to them and act as their voice.

- We organize concerned citizens to help preserve jobs and industry and to take care of our abundant but vulnerable natural resources.
- We identify and pursue sustainable development opportunities, serving as a facilitator to bring potential partners together.
- We coordinate over 20 grassroots organizations as well as national environmental groups to ensure that our combined efforts are maximally effective.
- We communicate directly with all levels of government to make sure that the voice of the people of the Catskills is clearly heard.

Who we are:

- We are run on a day to day basis by a small professional staff, but we have access to the resources of some of the most accomplished environmental organizations in the country. We also have a growing cadre of well qualified volunteers and thousands of members.

MAJOR THREATS AFFECTING THE CATSKILLS THAT WE ARE ADDRESSING

GAS DRILLING THREAT

Background

- The Catskills are a prime drilling location for natural gas because it sits on top of the Marcellus Shale field, the Utica Shale field and three other target formations. These are enormous, subterranean layers of rock between 6000 – 8000 feet below the surface that run east from the Catskills, south from the Mohawk Valley to West Virginia and west through Pennsylvania and Ohio.
- Until recently it was not cost effective to “mine” this natural gas, however in the last several years new processes called hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling were developed that overcame this challenge. They involve injecting toxic chemical solutions into well bores under high pressure to fracture bedrock and release natural gas. Using horizontal drilling to maximize the productivity of each well, wells are vertically drilled down approximately 1 mile and then make a 90 degree turn and drill horizontally for long distances to access the maximum amount of gas bearing shale.
- The byproducts of the horizontal “fracking” process are documented to contaminate aquifers, pollute water, sicken people, destroy land, lower property values and create significant social problems.
- In neighboring Pennsylvania where gas drilling using fracking started almost two years ago, there have been numerous reported “accidents” as well as unknown numbers of unreported incidents where wildlife has been killed, farm animals have been diseased and residents sickened from poisoned water.
- Well heads operate 24X7, are serviced by 18 wheelers that constantly travel the roads at all hours of the day and night, use klieg lights to illuminate the sites through the night and make the noise of multiple jet engines.

Current Situation

- Under pressure from Catskill Mountainkeeper and other groups, the New York DEC agreed to do a significant Environmental Impact Study in 2008 on the impact of gas drilling using hydraulic fracturing before allowing drilling in New York State.

- This was correctly hailed by many, including Catskill Mountainkeeper, as an enormous opportunity to show enlightened state leadership and “get it right”.
- The DEC released its SGEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Study) on September 30, 2009. While there are minimal new protections, New York State has missed their historic opportunity, has left our region and state woefully unprotected and hasn’t lived up to its responsibility to the people of New York.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper has enumerated the shortcomings of the Environmental Study in recent alerts. Some of the major issues are:
 - Lack of provision for aggregate effect. The EIS provides for each well to be a freestanding entity monitored and measured separately. There is no provision for the cumulative effect on the environment, people and animals. This failing has been assailed by virtually all who have reviewed the document.
 - In spite of the fact that Chesapeake Energy, a leading gas driller has announced that they don’t intend to drill in the watershed, regulations still permit any company to drill in the watershed and dangerously close to the water tunnels.
 - Lack of appropriate requirements for the handling of wastewater. Each well generates millions of gallons of toxic wastewater that is stored in open pits until it can be transported to a wastewater facility. The draft provides a tracking system for wastewater, but the NY State wastewater infrastructure is deteriorating and there is no money to upgrade it. The toxic wastewater that would come from fracking would completely overwhelm it.
 - Unfair burden on local county governments. While the gas drilling companies, state government and private landowners who lease their property would have very large revenue streams, county governments would have the unfair burden of monitoring private wells, dealing with accidents, road repair, social problems and much more without new revenue. This is likely to result in increased local taxes.

In recent weeks Catskill Mountainkeeper and its allies have fought hard to get the New York State DEC to extend the comment period. Just days ago, we learned that our efforts had been successful and the public comment period has been extended until December 31, 2009. This is an example of what strong advocacy can accomplish.

What Catskill Mountainkeeper is Doing

- Catskill Mountainkeeper was one of the first organizations to research and address the potential risks of gas drilling in New York State.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper has led this issue by successfully hosting and staging multiple public forums in 2008 to raise the awareness and knowledge of the citizenry in the Catskill region.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper has built a coalition of local and national groups (NRDC, Riverkeeper, Earth Justice, Sierra Club, and OGAP) as well as over 20 local organizations and has been working hard with them on this issue.
- When the Draft SGEIS report first came out, Catskill Mountainkeeper submitted detailed and extensive comments, and we are now in the process of submitting comments on the final SGEIS report.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper has testified at every opportunity and continues to do so including before the State Assembly, at the first public meeting in Loch Sheldrake and at Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan.

- Catskill Mountainkeeper is preparing an extensive “book of commentary and testimony” that will be submitted to the DEC.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper has run many events to educate the public.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper anticipates that unless maximum pressure is brought against the DEC and Governor Patterson a final DEC document will be forthcoming by first quarter of 2010 clearing the way for horizontal fracking that will put the Catskill region and NY State in significant jeopardy. Mountainkeeper is doing everything within its power to elevate public awareness and bring that pressure.
- Should gas drilling commence, we will play a critical role in making sure that drilling is monitored, controlled and abuses are identified and addressed quickly.
- If the DEC does not address the issues we are raising in their final document, Catskill Mountainkeeper is prepared to sue to make sure that the people of New York have all of the critical protections needed if and when gas drilling begins in the Catskills.

CASINO GAMBLING THREAT

Background

- Establishing casino gambling in the Catskills has been proposed and pushed since the 1970’s by a continuing parade of by developers starting with the owners of the traditional “Borsht Belt” resort operators.
- More recently there has been an effort to establish large scale Las Vegas style casinos by a partnership of real estate speculators, Native American tribes who live hundreds of miles from the Catskills and offshore casino management firms.
- Attempts to create casinos have been cyclical and the combination of public outrage and the skills of various environmental organizations including Catskill Mountainkeeper have been able to fight off more recent attempts until now.

Current Situation

- The threat of multiple massive casinos in the Catskills is now more imminent than ever.
- There is an aggressive federal push to get the new Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to change the rules that currently make it extremely difficult for Native American tribes to build casinos long distances from their reservations.
- If the federal government alters its policies, this will open Sullivan County to the strong possibility of at least three “off-reservation” Atlantic City sized casinos by the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe, the Seneca Nation, the St. Regis Mohawks or other competing tribes.
- Certain legislators are pushing hard to establish casino gambling in the Catskills so they can raise revenues without confronting the difficult task of raising taxes. They hope to avoid the public outcry that comes from raising taxes.
- In effect, they are knowingly exchanging all of the negative outcomes of casinos for a dramatic infusion of cash. What they are not seeing or acknowledging are the tremendous costs that would come with legalized gambling in the Catskills.

- Catskill Mountainkeeper strongly opposes bringing off reservation casinos to the Catskills because of the pervasive and compelling environmental, social and economic problems that will without question accompany casino development.
- Casino development will destroy broad swathes of the area's thriving habitat, plant and animal life, compromise our water resources through deforestation, erosion and construction blasting, increase the risk of toxic substances entering the surface and ground water and exacerbate the danger of flooding threatening all of our homes and property.
- It will drastically increase the number of travelers to the area, bringing pollution and gridlock.
- While casinos are promoted as helping the local economy by bringing people to the area and increasing the local business base, each casino will be a self-contained destination "city" that will have all of the services, food, and retail outlets that visitors will need.
- Instead of promoting business they will create new levels of competition causing many of our businesses to go out of business. And they will bring the huge social problems like increased crime, prostitution, poverty, violence, child and elder abuse, chemical dependency and suicide that will affect virtually everyone in our community.

What Catskill Mountainkeeper is Doing

- Catskill Mountainkeeper is the on the ground grass roots organization that is working to win this battle.
- We are pushing the government to do a comprehensive environmental review which had been bypassed by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs during the Bush administration.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper made sure the voice of opposition to casinos was heard by Larry Echo Hawk, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior when he made a recent listening tour by putting together a coalition of concerned groups and lobbying hard - face to face with Mr. Echo Hawk. We provided dramatic, impassioned testimony that made it clear casinos are a bad idea economically and not "everyone" wants them.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper has been in direct contact with our state and federal elected representatives to make sure that they are fully aware that the citizens of the Catskill area will not sacrifice our environment, our way of life, our small businesses and our ability to travel our roads so that the state can get a quick infusion of cash instead of creating long term solutions to revenue shortfalls.
- All signs indicate that the casino issue will heat up as 2009 comes to a close with a brazen end run attempt to ram necessary regulations through to clear the way for casinos and avoid environmental impact studies, public comment and other reasonable steps. Catskill Mountainkeeper is monitoring the situation extremely closely and will take needed positions, keep the public informed, mobilize constituents and keep legal action a viable option.

LARGE SCALE DEVELOPMENT THREAT

Current Situation

- Major ridge-top developments have been proposed near the Belleayre State Park Ski Center and along the Bashakill Ridge in Sullivan County as well as in Delaware, Greene and Ulster Counties.
- These threaten the character of our region. They will destroy natural resources and negatively affect our way of life. The development of our ridge-tops is one of the most significant threats to the Catskills.
- The destruction to the land by clear-cutting, bulldozing and blasting results in deforestation and erosion. This leads to the danger of excessive flooding which threatens existing homes and properties.
- More importantly it is the undeveloped nature of our mountains that makes them so unique and valuable. Development on mountaintops ruins view sheds and dramatically impacts the scenic nature of the region. Visit the Catskill Heritage Alliance website to find out more about the Belleayre development proposal.

What Catskill Mountainkeeper is Doing

- Catskill Mountainkeeper has been researching hillside and ridge-top regulations that have been enacted in other parts of the country to document best practices so we can best support aesthetically pleasing development while protecting our mountains and slopes.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper and its affiliated organizations have been in direct negotiations with developers seeking ridge-top construction to find ways to help these projects reach their goals without causing the kind of destructive consequences described above.
- Catskill Mountainkeeper will host a "Summit on Summits" with the Catskill Heritage Alliance in Spring '10 to discuss ways to protect our ridgelines from destruction. We will send you more information as plans are finalized. If you are interested in helping organize the summit email us at info@catskillmountainkeeper.org.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

People in the Catskills want jobs – jobs that develop new skills, pay higher wages and salaries and are economically sustainable.

Catskill Mountainkeeper is actively promoting the following opportunities for economic growth:

EXPANDING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CATSKILLS

Catskill Mountainkeeper is serving as a facilitator to develop a private/public partnership between a major university, community colleges in the region and local businesses to create a new institution of higher learning in Sullivan County. This undertaking would establish a degree granting institution focused on offering bachelor degrees in healthcare, environmental studies/agriculture and music therapy. It would enable the residents of Sullivan and Orange counties to locally attain continuing and higher education, create a well-educated and highly trained workforce for the region and advance the goals of all the stakeholders.

THE MODEL FARM

Catskill Mountainkeeper is a founding partner with NOFA (Northeast Organic Farming Association of NY) and seven other nonprofit organizations to create a model working farm where prospective farmers can learn everything about sustainable farming from crops and equipment to business and product strategy. The Catskills are ripe for a farming resurgence - we have the land, we have access to markets, but we don't have enough people who either want to stay in farming or go into farming.

By helping new and established farmers acquire 21st century expertise they will be able to use less land, lower costs through technology, grow higher profit crops and become successful niche farmers that can compete with the megalithic corporate farms.

OTHER INITIATIVES

Catskill Mountainkeeper has been working for you on many more fronts.

SAVING THE BEAVERKILL CAMPGROUND

In the Spring of 2009 Catskill Mountainkeeper learned that the state intended to close the Beaverkill Campground as a part of budgetary cutbacks. This campground is the second oldest in the state and brings customers to many tourist oriented businesses in the Town of Rockland.

Mountainkeeper successfully organized a campaign to keep the Beaverkill Campground open including an online petition in partnership with Friends of the Beaverkill, Roscoe Chamber of Commerce, Livingston Manor Chamber of Commerce and the Sullivan County Visitors Association. The result was a partnership between the DEC and Sullivan County where the county ran the campground for a shortened season, giving many loyal campers the ability to enjoy another summer at this picturesque facility and maintaining the flow of customers to local businesses.

SUPPORT OF THE POTTERS OF SULLIVAN COUNTY

In May Catskill Mountainkeeper teamed up with the Potters of Sullivan County to sponsor an Annual Hot Kiln Tour Weekend to display and sell the work of many of the area's potters.

ROUTE 28 ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY PROGRAM

Catskill Mountainkeeper has adopted two sections of Route 28 in Ulster County to help keep the Catskills clean. We run regular cleanup sessions to keep this stretch of Route 28 pristine.

SUCCESS IN STOPPING A PROPOSED POWERLINE

Catskill Mountainkeeper filed a federal lawsuit against New York Regional to stop a proposed power line that would have run from Oneida County to Orange County. The result was that New York Regional Interconnect announced this spring that it was suspending its efforts to site a power line in New York.

BARN FEST PROGRAM

On July 11th Catskill Mountainkeeper's first annual Barn Fest and Field Day was held to celebrate all things Catskills. Despite a rainy day over 400 people attended. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. gave a heartwarming keynote speech about the significance of protecting the places we love. Delicious local

food was served from providers like Gasko and Meyer, the Beaverkill Valley Inn, and Flour Power Bakery. The Stoddard Hollow String Band and Kurt Knuth delivered music for all the guests. The event was a great opportunity to learn about local art and history and get an update on Catskill Mountainkeeper and its programs. Andrea Brown from The Outsider's Studio curated a silent auction, Lisa Lyons of Morgan Outdoors shared her extensive map collection and Sabrina Artel brought her "Trailer Talk" radio program. This celebration of the Catskills was such a success we're looking forward to larger, better event next year.

SUPPORT FOR THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINKEEPER

As a result of reading this report I'm confident that you will conclude that the threats and opportunities the Catskills face are very significant. I think you'll also conclude that Catskill Mountainkeeper is providing new levels of needed leadership to actively pursue opportunities and vigorously defend the region against threats.

We have plans and strategies in place to increase our advocacy for the Catskills in 2010. But frankly none of this will take place unless we can increase the funds we raise by at least 33% in this down and difficult economy.

We are 100% reliant upon financial contributions to do our work and that's where you come in. As a current member and contributor to Catskill Mountainkeeper, we know you agree with us that it's important to have the Catskills continue to exist as the wild, beautiful and colorful place it is today. But exactly how important is it for you not to be tied up on Route 17 due to casino traffic? How important is it for you not to have your well water fouled by gas drilling? How important is it for you not to hear water tankers every hour or see gas wells down the road from your home? How important is it to you to see the resurgence of our towns and hamlets continue instead of seeing them shrivel away?

If you have already made a donation to the Catskill Mountainkeeper this year, thank you. It is truly appreciated. We would very much appreciate if you would consider making another meaningful gift. If you haven't yet made your contribution this year, please take a moment and do so now.

In addition to your contribution please consider volunteering your time and skills.

I am available anytime to answer your questions, discuss your opinions or talk about the future of the Catskills, a passion we both share.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ramsay Adams". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Ramsay Adams
Executive Director, Catskill Mountainkeeper