



## *Protecting the future of the Catskills*

### **2011 Executive Director's Report to Stakeholders**

In many ways it is hard to believe that we are already approaching the end of 2011 and it is time for me to write my stakeholders report to you. Despite the fact that this year has been the most significant since our founding in 2007, it has flown by very quickly.

While the focus on the gas drilling crisis continues to demand so much of our time, attention and energy, I would like to use this opportunity to step back and review Catskill Mountainkeeper's broader mission.

Catskill Mountainkeeper was created to provide the unique and incredible six county Catskill Region with a proactive advocate. In close proximity to our nation's largest metropolitan area, the Catskills provides clean water, fresh air, fresh food, and opportunities for outdoor recreation, a respite from urban life, a true wilderness and much more. It's where 450,000 people make their home and is truly an unparalleled resource for all of us who live and visit here.

Yet, we face many challenges. The region's economy continues to struggle and in the absence of good choices people are faced with tough decisions about how to generate income for their families. For some, destructive development options have become attractive, pitting neighbors against each other in bitter disagreement. In this environment it can become easy to bypass the hard work that will yield long-term sustainable solutions and seek the quick fixes frequently promoted by developers and industries from outside the region that will not be here to pick up the pieces.

Catskill Mountainkeeper is an organization that aggressively seeks sustainable development and attacks threats to our area with equal vigor. We make no apologies for passionately pursuing this mission and building a network of likeminded people to help us achieve our goals. When we committed ourselves to this work five years ago we had little more than this vision. It is so gratifying that we are becoming the advocate the Catskills need and deserves. We could not have even begun to achieve what we have without you, our stakeholders. Both we, and the Catskills, owe you a great debt of gratitude. So please read this report to understand what we together have achieved and look at how much more we need to do in 2012.

### **Summary of Major Achievements**

2011 has been a year of very important achievements for Catskill Mountainkeeper. They include:

- Opening an office in Woodstock, NY on Tinker Street in February to house our High Peaks Initiative.
- Retaining Dr. Kathy Nolan as the Regional Director of our High Peaks Program and Dylan Hershkowitz as a program coordinator. Our presence in Woodstock demonstrates our strong commitment to being an advocate for the entire Catskill Region.
- Making an important decision in early 2011 to dramatically increase our efforts to serve as a catalyst to help create economic growth in the Catskills by increasing the productivity of our agricultural sector. During this year we surveyed stakeholders to determine how we could best serve the farming community, conducted a substantial research study to fuel future programming and we expect to announce our first active program before the end of this year.
- Hiring Emily Deans as our Agricultural Coordinator to support our expanded agricultural efforts.

- Attaining recognition by the IRS as a 501 (c) (3) charitable foundation. We previously worked through a fiscal sponsorship relationship with another foundation.
- Publically calling for a statewide ban in New York State on gas drilling using hydrofracking, as the only sensible route to take given all that has been learned about the risks to our state's water, air, public health and the infrastructure of our communities. You will read much more about this in the Gas Drilling Section below.
- Substantially upgrading our technology capabilities in the database, communications and fundraising areas by acquiring Democracy in Action's "Salsa" platform.
- As the year ends, we'll be launching a new, redesigned website which will bring more critical information to our members and the public via new levels of organization and ease of use.

## Gas Drilling Update

The enormous risk posed by hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is the #1 environmental and public health threat in New York State and the Catskills, as well as a major concern nationwide. Almost since the founding of Mountainkeeper we have been one of the major organizations in the state leading this fight. This year, after extensive study and on the basis of growing scientific evidence, we determined that there is no safe way for our state government and the industry to conduct gas drilling in New York using hydrofracking. As a result we have publically called for a statewide ban. However, at the same time, we continue to work as hard as we can within the existing process to raise critical issues, pursue the best options available and widen the discussion of the impacts of drilling.

The following is a brief of our advocacy on behalf of the Catskills in 2011 concerning the gas drilling issue:

### **We positively impacted the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement**

On September 7, 2011, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) issued a revised draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Study, (dSGEIS); the permit conditions under which they propose to allow horizontal gas drilling using hydrofracking in New York State. Our input and advocacy along with other like-minded organizations have helped to make this draft a vast improvement over an earlier fatally flawed draft issued in September 2009. This is a huge accomplishment in light of the influence that the gas drilling industry has on policy. None-the-less, there continues to be substantial and dangerous deficiencies in the State's current plan. These deficiencies, a number of which are listed below, will create significant risk to our water, air and health. Catskill Mountainkeeper will not rest until these are satisfactorily resolved.

- Drilling is now prohibited in the New York City and Syracuse watersheds, but the DEC has failed to prohibit drilling around the infrastructure that brings the water from the Catskill watershed to New York City. This leaves the already aged and shaky infrastructure susceptible to the vibrations from drilling activities which could result in fracking fluids and other contaminants migrating from drilling operations and entering the water tunnels and polluting the water supply through cracks and fissures in the tunnel walls.
- Drilling is now prohibited in aquifers that serve as public drinking water supplies but this "prohibition" is limited to only 2-3 years, after which the state is free to "reconsider" the bans. And, the DEC does not lay out the conditions or criteria under which reconsideration would be done.
- Drilling is now prohibited on "certain state-owned land", but prohibitions do not apply to all state-owned land and fracking is allowed beneath all state-owned land.
- The DEC has proposed a system to track solid and liquid fracking waste, but leaves the responsibility to track this waste up to gas industry operators. It still does not classify fracking waste as hazardous, a very alarming omission.

- The DEC is requiring gas companies to reveal the chemicals they use in fracking TO THE DEC but have left a loophole that allows gas companies to deem them as “trade secrets” or “confidential business information”, and not be required to share the information with the public.
- The prior draft had an almost complete disregard for the cumulative impact of gas drilling activities to water, air and health, but the current draft continues to be unacceptably limited in its analysis of impacts.
- The DEC has sidestepped banning egregious open waste pits because they say that the gas industry has asserted that they are unlikely to use open pits for the storage of wastewater and they are proposing to allow the authorization of these open pits based on a review of a lone individual DEC employee, when in fact they should be banned outright.
- The section on air quality is immensely improved, however the analysis ignores the downwind impacts of air pollution, especially in places like New York City that already has significant air quality issues and also ignores the cumulative health impacts of degraded air quality from gas drilling. Mountainkeeper has retained an air quality expert named Susan Harvey from Harvey Consulting and she is currently working on a complete review of the air quality analysis, which will be completed by December 12, 2011.
- In October 2011, the DEC issued a rule-making package, which turns the permit conditions issued by the DEC into law. While legalizing the regulations is a step that was championed by Catskill Mountainkeeper, regulations should not have been issued until after the DEC had heard all of the public comment and expert testimony.

This year Catskill Mountainkeeper retained Tom Myers, a noted hydro geologist who conducted a study on our behalf that confirms the hypothesis that “fracturing by injecting fluids into the shale will cause conditions that make transport of contaminants from the shale to surface aquifers possible”. This document, plus documents from other experts that Catskill Mountainkeeper has retained, will be submitted to the DEC as comments to their dSGEIS. Additionally we are actively rallying our base to attend the four public hearings the DEC has scheduled in November.

### **We Pushed for Health Impact Hearings and an Assessment**

This spring the New York State Assembly held Health Impact Hearings. Along with other partners, Catskill Mountainkeeper organized a group of healthcare and scientific experts and together we provided hundreds of pages of written comments that were sent to the Assembly. We were also able to present the Governor with a letter signed by over 300 health professionals. While our ultimate goal of influencing the DEC to conduct an independent health impact assessment before moving ahead with permits was not achieved at this time, this process has helped to raise concern among legislators about the risk of fracking to public health.

### **The Most Recent Developments on Gas Drilling**

In October 2011, DEC Commissioner Martens contradicted previous statements about when gas permits might be issued by saying that it’s taking longer than anticipated to develop a report on the state and local resources that must be in place before his agency will issue permits for hydrofracking. That is a positive development because it gives us more time to influence legislation, educate New Yorkers about the danger of fracking and rally public opinion against it.

We are currently working with our grass roots partners to develop a legislative agenda for the session that starts in January 2012 and plan to have a new more robust website launched by the end of 2011 which will help clarify the issues.

Together with our partners we are working to promote the use of home rule to enable towns and municipalities in New York to limit and prohibit fracking on their own terms and are currently helping to defend towns that have been challenged in their attempts to use their home rule authority to limit

hydrofracking. Already Buffalo and Syracuse have enacted ordinances that effectively ban fracking. If and when drilling permits are issued, this movement will be critical to protecting New Yorkers.

### **Save the Catskill Park Campaign**

Catskill Mountainkeeper has launched a "Save the Catskill Park Campaign" with NRDC and the Theodore Gordon Fly Fishers to protect the Catskill Park from the industrialization and contamination that would be brought by gas drilling using hydrofracking. The Catskill Park is one of only 10 areas in the eastern half of the United States that has wilderness of over 50,000 acres. Each year it provides a wilderness experience for hundreds of thousands of eco-tourists who help make tourism the #1 industry in this region. The Catskill Park contains the headwaters of some of the cleanest rivers in our State and its waters feed into the unfiltered water system of New York City. Not only would pollution of these waters have terrible environmental impacts, the economic costs to build filtration plants for New York City would be in the billions. In 1894 when our legislators had the foresight to create this unique and special wilderness region, it was their intention to have it protected in its wilderness state forever. Gas drilling within the Catskill Park breaks this promise puts this special area at great risk and does not acknowledge that private property within the Park is different than private property elsewhere. There is no issue that is more core to our mission than fighting to save the Catskill Park.

### **Sustainable Economic Growth - Capital Access for Farmers**

The Catskills badly needs sustainable economic growth, especially to counter destructive choices, like gas drilling. Working with NRDC and other partners we have spent the last 12 months researching the needs, capabilities and developing trends within the Catskill agricultural industry. We have determined that agriculture, our second largest industry, is the best option for this growth.

Agriculture has the lowest start-up infrastructure cost of any land use for economic growth and an average economic multiple of 2.5, meaning that for every dollar earned by a farmer 2.5 dollars are pumped into the regional economy. Our region has ample land appropriate for crop, dairy and livestock farming on a scale that will support the needs of the local and regional area as well as room for growth. The cost for farmland in our region is among the lowest available within 100 miles of New York City and importantly, we have an abundance of accessible clean water.

Because of our strategic location to the 21 million consumer strong NY metro market we can take advantage of the movement toward buying locally produced food which is rapidly growing and where demand clearly will exceed supply for the near and midterm future. Other locales such as the Hudson Valley, the Berkshires and Southern New Jersey have a head start on the Catskills, but with the continuing growth of the market for fresh local food at the retail, restaurant and recently the institutional levels, this represents a strong opportunity for growth in our region.

As a result of research and in-market due diligence Catskill Mountainkeeper, along with our partners, has identified that the biggest stumbling block preventing the Catskill Region from competing more successfully for a bigger share of this growing market is the ability to expand production to provide a consistent, reliable and predictable flow of product to meet customer needs. As part of this process we have also identified that the biggest challenge to talented existing farmers in the Catskill Region in expanding their businesses is the lack of ACCESS TO CAPITAL. While many farms are viable small businesses, their lack of financial sophistication and business planning skills often presents a perception of bad risk among traditional lenders.

Catskill Mountainkeeper is currently working diligently to seek a solution to this challenge and find ways to make capital available for farmers in Sullivan, Delaware and Ulster Counties who have demonstrated the ability to succeed, and have good ideas to increase production and contribute to the economic growth of the region. We are extremely hopeful that we will be able to make an important announcement before the end of 2011 or early in 2012.

## **High Peaks Initiative**

As noted in the introduction, in February Catskill Mountainkeeper opened an office in Woodstock, NY to respond to the specific needs of the High Peaks Area. The office is focused on the challenges of reigning in poorly designed and over-reaching development, championing sustainable energy projects, open space preservation, advancement of recreational opportunities, the revival of our town and village centers and enlarging Catskill Mountainkeeper's ability to effectively battle unsafe gas drilling.

The Woodstock office is spearheading a new initiative to achieve net carbon neutrality, zero waste and a sustainable healthy living environment in the Catskills that includes promoting alternative green energy development. We are promoting community composting, solar panels on schools, businesses, and residences, increasing recycling/reusing and promoting other sustainable and healthy practices. We are connecting local schools with the resources to install solar energy so that they can then become leaders in New York's Green Schools Challenge. These efforts not only address carbon neutrality but are also creating the educational infrastructure to teach Catskills students about alternative energy and environmental stewardship to ensure a lifetime of environmental consciousness. As part of our effort to help residents use environmentally friendly energy, we are helping to educate people to switch to green energy through their current energy companies or by installing their own photovoltaic solar or wind power systems.

## **Casinos**

Catskill Mountainkeeper continues to work on our long-running campaign to block the construction of multiple Las Vegas-style casinos in the Catskills. In 2008, Catskill Mountainkeeper, working with NRDC and other environmental allies, played an instrumental role in the rejection by federal officials of several so-called "off-reservation" Indian casino proposals, including one to be built directly on the banks of the famed Neversink River. Unfortunately, recent federal policy changes have re-opened the possibility that these casinos could get the green light by the Obama Administration. And at the same time, owners of the Monticello Raceway and other of state racinos (which are a mix of horse racing and casinos) are pushing for an amendment to New York's Constitution to allow them to operate full-blown casinos as well. The threat of as many as four casinos along Route 17 near Monticello could not only bring a dramatic spike in traffic and pollution problems to the region, but could also forever change the unique rural character of the Western Catskills and bring serious infrastructure and social problems. We continue to vigilantly track these ever changing casino proposals and varying receptions to them at different governmental levels. We are ready to resume the active phase of our fight, including in court, against the building of numerous large-scale Catskill casinos as conditions on the ground warrant.

## **Securing an Additional Higher Educational Institution**

In order for the Catskill Region to successfully implement smart and sustainable economic growth as alternatives to short term opportunities that frequently benefit principals from outside the area and leave destructive repercussions, we must be able to generate new growth within our current infrastructure and attract outside investment to bring in clean industries and businesses. Key among these industries are agriculture, healthcare and technology. Each of them requires a workforce with higher training and skills.

Catskill Mountainkeeper is and has been working as a catalyst to attract one or more significant colleges and universities to locate a facility in the Western Catskills to meet this need. We continue to be in discussion with potential institutions, county and state governments. While this is not a simple goal or one that will happen quickly, we are persisting in our effort and are making progress.

## Trailkeeper

Trailkeeper is a project that was undertaken by Catskill Mountainkeeper in collaboration with Delaware Highlands Conservancy, the Sullivan County Visitor's Association, Morgan Outdoors, SCCC Hiking Class and the Sullivan County Division of Planning and Environmental Management.

The goal of this program is to create a one-source on-line outlet for information on the location of trailheads, trail routes, and facilities as well as information on surrounding local businesses such as retailers, restaurants, accommodations, etc. in the Catskills. Trailkeeper volunteers are currently working on completing the database, which will contain area trail maps, hiker hints, tips and photos, information, recommendations for specific trails and local area amenities and attractions as well as an interactive social media component. Once completed Trailkeeper will make the extensive network of trails, some of the finest in New York State, more accessible and promote the Catskills as an attractive destination for eco-tourists.

I said at the top of this report that 2011 has probably been the year of the most significant activity and achievement for Catskill Mountainkeeper. Now you know more about what, where, how and why.

I think you'll agree that this year, more than ever, we have demonstrated the depth of our commitment to be an advocate for the Catskills and our ability to act on that commitment in a strategic, passionate and effective way. The fact is, however, that without the continuing financial support of our core constituency, including you, our work simply can't continue.

If you have already made a donation to the Catskill Mountainkeeper this year, thank you. It is truly appreciated. If you can consider making another meaningful gift, that would be of great importance. If you haven't yet made your contribution this year, please take a moment and do so now.

There are two simple ways to make a donation to Mountainkeeper. You can go online at [www.catskillmountainkeeper.org](http://www.catskillmountainkeeper.org) or mail a check to: Catskill Mountainkeeper, PO Box 381, Youngsville, NY 12791.

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,



Ramsay Adams  
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