**PA-CT Highlands study public comments/transcript from 5/24/10 meeting in Reading, PA:**(names listed as available; categorized as Q for Question; A for Answer; or C for Comment; organization [USGS, Yale, FS] to answer question is listed in **BOLD brackets** if I thought it should be addressed in the final report)

1. Q: Will data files be available online?
A: Yes.
2. Q: Have you anticipated need for these data files? Local groups will be doing groundwork and will need the files. PA DCNR and William Penn foundation are working on these files and could incorporate the Highlands study data files.
A: FS will work to post metadata for conservation values assessment online.
3. Q: Will USGS files be available too?
A: Curtis Schreffler, USGS, said he’s not sure.
4. Q: For the data tables to build each of the layers on the maps, was there weighting applied to different layers?
A: Yes, weighting is available in the table in the study that is online.
5. Q: Did you lump the 200 M gallons used surface water and groundwater together with the 50 thermoelectric, 25-266 for domestic use. Where is component for commercial/industrial? – 81-2 total.
A: Curtis Schreffler, USGS, said: Public withdrawal might include commercial /industrial but still considered public in the surface water section.
6. Q: Jon Meade - Unexpected to me that that much water was included in the commercial/ industrial that completely outweighed the thermoelectric, i.e. TMI was not included in calculations even though in the Highlands most of the water comes from outside the area.
A: Curtis Schreffler, USGS, said: (also stated in a report footnote), that the biggest problems is that the Highlands region is based on municipal boundaries, which made it difficult to do the calculations for the actual physiographic boundary of the Highlands.
7. Q: Paul Zeph, formerly with PA DEP, now with PSU sea grant. PA DEP did analysis of development corridors in the Appalachian region of PA. He met with Dr. Pidgeonoski (sp?) of Indiana U (of PA?) on land use projections, and he discovered that an anomaly popped up wherever a casino was, there was a sudden explosion of development, not sure what effect that may have on the region in the future but might want to take note of where casinos will be.
A: Myrna Hall, SUNY ESF: Tested in CT that theory but in overall model it was not a large factor. Zeph said might depend on whether casino goes into an already developed area vs. rural and then Myrna said depends on scale of report. Same issue with ski resorts in Catskills – lots of new development over all but not significant if look over entire NYC watershed.
8. Q: Jon Meade: Obviously the data is out of date now. Are there any plans to update this data in the future?
A: Martina Barnes, USFS: Unless there is additional federal directive on updating the study. There would probably have to be state/federal direction to update this study, current HCA authorization is good thru 2014.
9. Q: Paul Zeph: looking at all the data as you go through this project, did you find that some of the data really didn’t help you very much. Are there things that you’ve learned through this process on what you would prefer to use next time?
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale: There are challenges with the satellite imagery because it doesn’t distinguish between lawns, golf clubs, etc. We wouldn’t use 100 some factors in model next time
10. Q: Paul Zeph; Recent data sets are done by TOPO GEO but weren’t available at the time the project was started, it might be a better data set to use next time.
A: Curtis Schreffler, USGS: He said other photos give different information than what they needed. Myrna Hall, SUNY ESF: They validated their model by trying to match what actually happened by their projections. After getting good matches, they felt comfortable making short term projections for the future growth analysis.
11. Q: Kristen Sykes, AMC: What is most important need or conclusion to prioritize land conservation in this PA area.
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale: She said watch out for your forests! Lots of concentration on preserving farmlands but watch for forests because they contain diversity much more than farmlands.
12. Q: Brad Elison, PA DCNR: The size of farms had decreased on average, was there any effort to decide what caused that?
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale: She said they did talk to folks involved in farmland preservation. Farmers said developers are all over looking for land to develop. Farmers get calls every week to sell their land, development pressure. The Amish also subdivide their land among their children, but Mary said unable to get “plain people” to comment. Myrna Hall, SUNY ESF: She said farmers are unable to get problem fixed; that if farmers could make enough money and not pay taxes, they may be less inclined to sell land. If builders had an easier process to build in cities, if ways to change policies to make it easier to build in cities and more dense housing in urban areas were developed, then we could attract people to come back and live in those cities, esp. families with children. There is a finite amount of land out there, policies might be directed on other core solutions, besides just land protection.
13. C: Paul Zeph: PA has money to protect land. The study will be a useful tool to help groups focus and partners to get stuff done.
14. Q: Robert Lonsdorf, Brandywine Conservancy: I like what you said about forests. Forests are at heart a preservation issue. The fact that the study included the entire boundary of municipalities, watered down the importance of forests; much more money is going to farmland preservation. I would like to hear a sense of urgency come out of the study. There are lots of big figures, but I am not getting a sense of urgency for what the risks of not preserving are…water quality, forest quality, fragmentation? The future loss of interior forests doesn’t come through; the report doesn’t drive the points of fragmentation dangers home.
A: Martina Barnes, USFS: This was not a policy document but an analysis. The charge was to do an analysis of the natural resources. The final report will not give a policy recommendation. Bob Lueckel, USFS: The report describes what will happen to forests. We can be more specific about in the “what will happen if” scenario, of poor water quality, etc., if interior forest areas are lost. **[USGS, Yale, FS]**
15. Q: Jon Meade: Can the USFS be more specific on some conclusions from this report to guide legislators to help conserve these areas? For example: “Based out of this analyses, here are some distilled items out of this study…” What are the next steps for the USFS? Priority landscape? What is the impact of this study on current FS policy?
A: Bob Lueckel, USFS: The state forest resource assessments are identifying priority landscape areas, and one of the multi-state priority areas is likely going to be the Highlands region. The Highlands will likely remain a priority landscape for the Forest Service. We will try to address some of your concerns about distilling the information down in the final report. **[USGS, Yale, FS]**
16. C: Brad Elison, DCNR: If a state wants Federal resources they must do a state assessment and establish priority areas. The fact that there is a Highlands Conservation Act shows that the Federal government has a role. This is a geography and landscape priority. It should be a priority landscape, and the process of evaluating the Highlands will happen at a geographic level, and not only at a program level. Try to emphasize it as a priority landscape and not just a program.
17. Q: Brad Elison: What is the mechanism for money set aside for land conservation? Does Congress decide where it goes? The Highlands conservation landscape is identified as a PA priority. A lot of the money for land protection goes to conservation landscape areas on the state side.
A: Martina Barnes, USFS: A 7-person subcommittee of state and Federal partners make decisions on the project rankings and 50% of the funds appropriated by Congress goes to the top-ranked project, the rest of funds are divided 3 ways for the 3 remaining states.
18. Q: Paul Zeph: The USFS has ecological expertise and should try to translate the importance of watershed protection for the municipality. Help them understand the basic ecosystem values of these different areas. The USFS has the ecological expertise to steer the general public with maps. Perhaps say: “if you do nothing else on the local level, please protect these places”. This might be a way to put more spotlight and services at local level priorities, in specific areas.
A: Martina Barnes, USFS: We will try to address some of your concerns about distilling the information down to local level priorities in the final report. **[USGS, Yale, FS]**
19. Q: Mark Zakutansky, AMC: What is the impact to baseflow? Where will we start to impact the creek ecosystem? Forests vary a lot in services they provide, what type of forest is best? What are the limiting factors that local governments need to know to make policy and priorities. **[USGS, Yale]**
20. C: Larry Lloyd, Berks Conservancy: The Chesapeake Bay program gets lots of bog turtle and nutrient trading money. Why not get Highlands to get some of that money instead? How do we get other agencies to fund the Highlands instead of other areas?
21. C: Mark Zakutansky, AMC: We should value natural capital by quantifying the value of certain areas such as wetlands. Putting a value on drinking water may help to prevent destruction of watershed areas.
22. C: Paul Zeph: If we lose natural resources due to the degradation of trout fishing streams, we also lose the money brought in by these uses. If degraded to point where activities cannot continue to occur, how much money is lost by that?
23. C: Myrna Hall: The big question is what is the breaking point for when the small increments add up and lead to the total degradation of the natural resources.
24. C: Mark Zakutansky, AMC: New Jersey tracks when baseflow levels go to a certain low level where trout fishing will be affected.
25. C: Paul Zeph: Percent impervious surface is good predictor of when water and other natural resources will be affected.
26. C: Myrna Hall, SUNY ESF: Percent impervious surface was most highly correlated to problems in the study done in the Catskills. If we know the tipping point, will folks act faster? Some conservation efforts that are the most successful just draw a line in the sand and work from there – right or wrong. Ability for us to put specifics into this document is not as important.
27. C: Paul Zeph: You need to make sure that the right stuff is in this report, to point out to legislators: “Legislators - we need to do this because the USFS said this.” Local zoning and political fragmentation across all municipalities and most local ordinances are recipes for sprawl; the study confirms this. Speak to forest fragmentation directly in the report. You talk around it, but it is not said directly. **[Yale, USFS]**
28. C: Myrna Hall, SUNY ESF: It doesn’t matter what the constraints are, it will go somewhere: infill, mixed use, etc. Bob Lueckel, USFS said he would like to see transfer of development rights tools to be included into the Conservation Strategies. **[USFS]**
29. C: Robert Lonsdorf,Brandywine Conservancy: pg142, part 4: Add “forests are NOT well protected” forests and farms are mostly developed, but forests are not protected. The Highlands is 30% forested but state is 42% forested so there is a deficit of forests in Highlands . Forests are an extremely rare resource and this should be stated in the report. **[Yale, USFS]**
30. Q: Myrna Hall, SUNY ESF: The big message that I got from this meeting is that folks want the data to be online. A: Martina Barnes: The actual GIS files will need to be released to online with complete metadata, as required by the US Forest Service. We should have the information posted in July for the Conservation Values Assessment. Ed Boyer, former Highlands Coordinator: There is lots of information about all four states on the Rutgers HiRIS website, and it’s available now. **[USFS, Yale]**
31. C: Mark Zakutansky: PA DCNR and the Appalachian Mountain Club are partnering to put stuff online, too. The information gets stale and needs to be timely. Information/data for PA is more important than waiting for entire report to be released.

**PA-CT Highlands study public comments/transcript from 5/26/10 meeting in Torrington, CT**(names listed as available; categorized as Q for Question; A for Answer; or C for Comment; organization [USGS, Yale, FS] to answer question is listed in brackets if I thought it should be addressed in the final report)

1. Q: Peter Rostenberg, CT Highlands Coalition: Was there a study of pharmaceuticals in watersheds?
A: Liz Ahearn, USGS: There was sampling for caffeine, hormones and personal care products.
2. Q: Tom Worthley, UConn Extension: How readily available is the data used for analysis?
A: Martina Barnes, US Forest Service: The results of the Conservation Values Assessment are available on the HiRIS website; the CT Conservation Values Assessment data will be available on the Forest Service website soon, once the metadata is written.
3. Q: Pat Comins, Audubon Society: What sort of wildlife or habitat data was used for the study? They are looking for data sets, such as non-listed species of concern.
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale: DEP biological data. There is a strong bias toward forests. The Macedonia area is rich in biodiversity.
4. C: Elaine LaBella, Housatonic Valley Association: In the polished document, we need to improve images and graphics. Figure 4: legend shows 3 different ecoregions- all of the colors are not identified. Pg 46 Bantam plant- some inconsistencies here. Water quality analysis personnel put water budget and water quality first. Spell out CT. Most people don’t know that their drinking water is sometimes treated effluent. The Trust for Public Land has pulled out of the Litchfield Hills Greenprint project – it’s a project of the Housatonic Valley Association. **[US Forest Service, USGS]**
5. Q: Pat Comins, Audubon Society: His interests are in fishing. Development is taking place along the streams. He thinks development should be limited along river corridors. Averages don’t capture the quality of individual sites.
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale: Patterns of development in the Housatonic corridor-including transportation, slopes, water, and regulation, all contribute to development patterns. Perhaps we can study development that occurs in the popular fishing corridors.
6. C: Tom Worthley, UConn Extension: If this study triggers more analysis at a local level- it’s working. If permits allow development along streams, that’s where the development is going to be.
7. C: Peter Rostenberg, CT Highlands Coalition: The Highlands Conservation Act does not seem to protect ridgelines and slopes. It mainly protects the water resource.
8. C: Tom Worthley, UConn Extension: Precipitation occurs everywhere and all of the land is involved.
9. C: Marge, Naromi Land Trust: Graph that showed zone regulations seemed to imply that a zone with greater than 5 acres would be better; towns think large-lot zoning is better, but larger zoning results in more fragmentation not less.
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale University: larger lot sizes are not the answer and we used half to 2-acre zoning in the analysis because that is more common. An EPA study showed that larger lot sizes make things worse.
10. C: Tom Worthley, UConn Extension: One of the failings of these analysis is that 35% of the land is available for development, but we should not advertise that.
11. Q: Pat Comins, Audubon Society: What was the outreach for the meeting? Local officials are missing. Are we looking for officials to contribute? Suggest that you send out to CT Environmental leader list, Nancy Cohen- Hartford (CT) Courant.
A: Martina Barnes, US Forest Service: Public comment period open through June 18th.
12. Q: Patrick Comins, Audubon Society: Who will champion this project to community officials? It will be an uphill battle to get local officials engaged. Water quality speaks louder than any other item we have listed. Unfortunately, people don’t take notice until it’s a problem. All change is in the hands of local officials. Congressman Murphy’s office might be good to help get the word out. Another contact is the CAIWCC (CT Association of Inland Wetlands and Conservation Commission. Send information about the report to selectmen and ask them to send to commissions. We need to extend the deadline for public comments if we want town input.
13. C: Marcus Phelps, Southwick, MA: Community preservation committees- if they had this data it could help focus preservation and development areas. Zoning overlay districts or aquifer protection overlays are some methods.
14. Q: (Commenter?) Can the comment period be extended?
A: Martina Barnes, US Forest Service: It’s been published in the Federal Register and the comment period has already been extended. Anne Archie: There were not so many comments on data. We can enhance strategies to include specific tools such as overlay districts, and strengthen language on the role of the Forest Service. **[US Forest Service]**
15. C: Chris Martin, CT DEP: There’s a certain amount of buzz once the report is released, expect questions about what it is about.
16. Q: Larry Rousseau, CT DEP: CT has data gaps; we need to close those gaps. How does CT compare to the other 3 states?
A: Mary Tyrrell, Yale University: In PA, most of the changes are on farmlands. The development pattern is much denser in PA, scattered in CT. Impact is different in CT than the other states. CT takes its forests for granted. Land preservation and conservation is on agricultural land. CT has large chunks of forest conserved. Hydrofracking is not an issue in the Highlands.
17. C: (Commenter?) There’s a fire sale in the Highlands landscape.
18. C: (Commenter?) There is local distaste for large developments.
19. C: (Commenter?) The CT Highlands doesn’t have transportation issues like in NJ- but it does have the fight of Super Route 7.
20. C: (Commenter?) Watch for trains- they may be coming along Route 22 in NY.
21. C: (Commenter?) There is primarily local planning in PA, too. They don’t need to follow county plans. In CT, people are careful but they shouldn’t become too complacent.
22. C: (Commenter?) In PA’s rust belt cities growth is around the cities; inner cities are undesirable.
23. C: Mary Tyrrell, Yale University: A mini report will be produced for each CT town and provided to them.
24. Q: (Commenter?) Can they be posted on the FS website?
A: Martina Barnes, US Forest Service: I can’t see why not. The information can be posted at several websites.
25. C: Gary (last name?): Town specific data needs a context, particularly with water. Communities within a watershed protection project should try to engage all communities in the watershed. What happens upstream impacts downstream communities. A logical watershed-based planning model makes more sense than municipal planning.