



**Highlanders for Responsible Development**  
P.O. Box 685 Monterey, VA 24465 [www.protecthighland.org](http://www.protecthighland.org)

## **Newsletter**

**November 2013, No. 4**

### **HRD Proposes Emphasis on Natural Resources Education**

A proposal to enhance an appreciation for the unique natural resources of Highland County among the county's school students has received initial approval from the Board of Directors of Highlanders for Responsible Development. The concept was outlined to attendees of the organization's September 29 annual public meeting, and subsequently reported on in *The Recorder*. The water resources, geology, wildlife and botanical characteristics of the county are among the topics being considered for inclusion in the overall program, which is expected to include the development of supplemental curriculum materials and special field trips.

Work on the proposal will be directed by an Education Committee consisting of Norm Bell, Dan Foster, Lew Freeman and Lee Taplinger. Initial discussions have taken place with Highland County Schools' Superintendent William Crawford. Further details on the proposal's development will be shared in future issues of the newsletter.

### **On the Waterfront**

The HRD Water Resources Committee has been monitoring changes in state and local water quality protection and regulatory programs. The list of current program changes includes the transfer of stormwater and construction-related runoff control responsibilities from the state to local governments and revision of permit requirements. The intention for these changes is to better protect and improve surface water quality and to advance restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. This, however, will not be accomplished unless citizens remain informed and engaged in the process.

One issue of real concern arose when proposed revisions of the state's *General Permit for Discharges of Stormwater from Construction Activities* would have allowed developers to deny public access to their Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPP), essentially eliminating citizen oversight and participation. Fortunately, citizens and conservation organizations, including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, responded to the poorly considered regulatory change, arguing that availability of the SWPPP for public review is both essential and legally required. The State Water Control Board subsequently published new draft regulations that again provide for public access to the SWPPP. The Water Control Board will make a final decision after its meeting later this year.

Public access to contents of the SWPPP was critical in 2009 when Highland New Wind Development was moving forward with inadequate runoff control plans.

## Wildlife and Wind Turbines

High levels of bird and bat mortality remains a major problem for utility-scale wind energy development in the central Appalachian mountain region. News in just the last few weeks has included the following:

- Duke Energy Renewables pled guilty in November to a violation of the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act* in connection with the deaths of 14 golden eagles and 149 other protected birds at two wind projects in Wyoming. The company was sentenced to pay fines and costs totaling \$1 million, to apply for an Eagle Take Permit, and to implement a plan to protect golden eagles. This precedent has significant implications for the eastern U.S. where the golden eagle population is much smaller and high bird mortality has been documented at wind projects on Appalachian ridges.
- The current issue of *Biological Conservation* reports on research indicating that bird mortality from collisions with wind turbines is on the rise as more and taller turbines are built. The researchers estimate that a mean of 234,000 birds are killed annually by collisions with the newer monopole turbines in the contiguous U.S., and they predict that 1.4 million birds per year will be killed if enough turbines are built to produce 20% of U.S. electricity. They also found that widely spaced turbines in open areas have lower mortality rates than turbines along mountain ridgelines.
- Research published in the December issue of *BioScience*, using available fatality information for wind projects, estimated that more than 600,000 bats were killed in 2012 in the contiguous U.S. due to interactions with wind turbines. The highest estimated fatality rates occurred in the Appalachian mountain region, where populations of many bat species have already been subject to rapid and dramatic reductions as a result of white-nose syndrome.

More information is available at <http://www.vawind.org>.

## HRD Will Issue Year-End Report

A report reviewing the highlights and accomplishments of Highlanders for Responsible Development in 2013 will be sent to all newsletter recipients the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of December. We welcome your feedback and suggestions, and appreciate your interest in HRD's activities.

**Highlanders for Responsible Development** is a citizens group that promotes stewardship of Highland County, Virginia's unspoiled landscape, natural resources and exceptional quality of life. We support policies and activities that are based upon informed community discourse, democratic decision making, prudent land use and sustainable economic development. The newsletter is issued quarterly (February, May, August and November) to provide information on issues of relevance to the citizens of Highland County. Our website – [www.protecthighland.org](http://www.protecthighland.org) – archives past newsletter issues and referenced documents. For questions or to make comments, write [HRD@protecthighland.org](mailto:HRD@protecthighland.org).

**The next HRD Newsletter will be February 2014**