

The Truth about the Sparta Mountain Forest Stewardship Plan



Myth: *The forest stewardship project is unnecessary; nature can take care of itself.*

Fact: No, it is desperately needed. The forests on Sparta Mountain are between 65 and 100 years old. Today, the forests lack the natural disturbances (e.g., forest fires, flooding, wind, ice) that would have allowed the forest to naturally rejuvenate. Because the forests are of the same age, they are susceptible to disease, insects and other pests. They are not providing habitat for the wildlife they historically accommodated. If we don't diversify the age of the forests by creating young forest habitats, we risk the forests' future and all the wildlife that depend upon a diverse forest.

Myth: *New Jersey Audubon is trying to profit from activities at Sparta Mountain.*

Fact: No. New Jersey Audubon is a *nonprofit* that has been serving the State for 119 years. The mission of the organization is to foster environmental awareness and a conservation ethic among New Jersey's citizens; protect New Jersey's birds, mammals, other animals, and plants, especially endangered and threatened species; and promote the preservation of New Jersey's valuable natural habitats. New Jersey Audubon has partnered with the State Department of Environmental Protection to bring public and private funding to the conservation and stewardship of state land.

Myth: *New Jersey Audubon wants to do logging in Sparta Mountain to make money.*

Fact: Once again, no. The forestry work that is being proposed for Sparta Mountain is being done to create wildlife habitat and improve the health of the forest. Those who undertake tree harvesting projects on public land must go through a state bidding process, with the State overseeing and managing all finances associated with the harvesting. Any revenue is directed to the State Division of Fish and Wildlife. Simply stated, the project is about wildlife and habitat, not about making money!

Myth: *New Jersey Audubon only cares about preserving the Golden-winged Warbler*

Fact: While New Jersey Audubon is concerned about this state-endangered songbird, which would be helped by this stewardship plan, there is a greater concern. The struggles of this songbird are indicative of many other species of birds, and other wildlife, which are struggling to find adequate habitat at Sparta Mountain. Young forest habitat is lacking, as forests have matured and development has converted former farms and forests into houses and office parks. The forest at Sparta Mountain, and throughout New Jersey, are predominantly the same age, with little young and old forest. The Sparta plan would create young forests and would enhance mature forests with gaps, creating habitat for a diversity of wildlife including birds, bats, turtles and more. New Jersey Audubon is advocating for the plan because we are concerned about all wildlife, as well as the health of the forest.

Myth: *We don't need this forest project; there are plenty of utility right-of-ways that can be used by wildlife.*

Fact: No. While utility rights-of-way are providing important habitat for a suite of wildlife of conservation concern, these linear corridors can concentrate predators. In addition, utility companies are required to routinely control vegetation such that it doesn't interfere with the utility. Consequently, while the right-of-way can provide important habitat it tends to only maintain that habitat for a short period of time. We need to find additional areas that can sustain wildlife beyond the right-of-way; wildlife management areas are exactly those places to create and manage wildlife habitat.

Myth: *This project violates the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act.*

Fact: No, the Highlands Act was designed to protect water resources and control and direct development, not to prevent forestry or forest stewardship. This project would follow all applicable laws, rules, and best management practices to ensure the ongoing health and integrity of the forest as a whole.

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Myth: *This forest stewardship program would harm and threaten endangered species.*

Fact: This plan has undergone extensive review by specialists who work with threatened and endangered species. The plan safely creates needed habitats for wildlife. Moreover, the plan is designed to specifically ensure habitats are not disturbed during critical time periods. For example, forestry activities take place during the winter months when turtles, snakes, other reptiles and amphibians are hibernating, and birds are not breeding. The plan would also avoid areas of the wildlife management area where there are rare plant species.

Myth: *New Jersey Forestry Best Management Practices are outdated and are not appropriate guidelines to use as standards for the proposed work at Sparta Mountain.*

Fact: No, the New Jersey Best Management Practices are industry standards that ensure water quality and natural resources are protected. New York released standards in 2011 that are consistent with New Jersey's Best Management Practices (released in 1995). While the date of NJ's publication may seem old, the New Jersey Best Management Practices are still the best standards for ensuring water and natural resource protection.

Myth: *Creating young forest habitat will harm wildlife.*

Fact: False, the latest research on interior forest dwelling birds indicates that birds once thought to rely solely on deep forest as habitat, also utilize young forest habitat. Cerulean Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers and other birds have been confirmed foraging in young forest habitat through research and have also been observed doing this at Sparta Mountain where young forest has been created. Many birds are utilizing the forest openings at Sparta Mountain and observations are continuing to increase as the young forest continues to grow and develop. In addition, in areas where young forest is created mature trees are left, such as shagbark hickory, benefiting species like the northern long-eared bat and Indiana bat by providing roosting sites.

Myth: *There is no need to create habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler because the species' range is shifting north due to climate change.*

Fact: While climate models project the endangered species is likely to shift its range to the north it is expected that this range expansion will take place over a 60-year timeframe, if not longer. This project, meanwhile, is focused on helping the species now. The Sparta Mountain project is focused on creating young forest habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler, *as well as other birds and wildlife*, to stabilize and increase their populations over the next 15-20 years.

Myth: *Extensive herbicide use will be necessary to control invasive plant species and will have a negative impact on water quality.*

Fact: Invasive plant species presence in areas where young forest has been created or is proposed is low, if present at all. If needed, herbicide application will be done by licensed applicators following strict protocols. Treatment methods such as "cut-stump" or "basal bark" applications are the most frequently used techniques that utilize a minimal amount of herbicide directly targeting individual plants with little to no residual herbicide migrating into the soil.

Myth: *New Jersey Audubon is cutting an old growth forest.*

Fact: The forest at Sparta Mountain, as determined by tree coring, is between 65 and 100 years old. Sparta Mountain has a long history of human use of the land and natural resources, most notably from the work of Thomas Edison and his mining company in the early 1900's. In addition to creating young forest habitat, the Forest Stewardship Plan also calls for Forest Stand Improvements in areas of even-aged, closed canopy forest. These practices will ultimately create conditions for a true old growth system to exist. Current conditions of the unmanaged forest won't truly allow such a system to develop.