



THE

STERLING MESSENGER

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Sterling Forest Corporation presents a very drafty Draft Environmental Impact Statement for its Sterling Forge Luxury Estates and Golf Course development

“It ain’t over til it’s over”.

By Mary Yrizarry

Yogi Berra’s wisdom applies. The fight to save ALL of Sterling Forest isn’t over yet. In fact it’s in full swing! Here’s an update.

In the fall of 2001, the Sterling Forest Corporation (SFLLC) submitted a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to the Town of Tuxedo, as lead agency under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), to build a golf course and a 103 luxury homes on a parcel of land surrounded by Sterling Forest State Park. The site is characterized by extensive wetlands, steep slopes, rock outcroppings and forest. The development is to be named Sterling Forge Estates.

While the DEIS seemed benign at first reading, in reviewing the document, members of the Sterling Forest Partnership were appalled at the amount of environmental damage the project would inflict on the State Park. We found the devil in the details. The appendices were either sketchy or else so detailed as to require experts to decipher the data. We engaged environmental consultant Steve Gross to examine the document, and he found much information that was bad or missing, maps that were inaccurate, and statements that were misleading. We felt it essential to engage several additional specialists to review the DEIS for content and completeness.

We assembled a team of highly respected experts who have extensive experience with the Sterling Forest region. The consultants included a hydro-geologist, a herpetologist, a geologist, a botanist, an engineer, an archeologist, and a law firm that specializes in SEQRA.



Flip De Rey, Program Director of the New Jersey Audubon Weis Ecology Center, brought a red tail hawk to Sterling Forest Conservation Day festivities.

Story on page 3.

Prior to the DEIS public hearing, we asked three of these consultants to present reports to the Board of Trustees of the Village of Tuxedo Park, outlining the underlying geology and water issues, particularly the negative effects the development could have on drinking water in Tuxedo Lake. This “heads-up” briefing was well received by the Board.

Our costs were considerable, but thanks to financial assistance from the NYNJ Trail Conference, AMC, the Thendara Mountain Club, Tuxedo Park Trustees and private donations, we were able to cover the consulting fees. With Steve Gross as coordinator, all provided written and oral testimony on the DEIS.

At the first Town of Tuxedo public hearing on November 28, 2001, so many people signed up to speak that it required an additional two hearings before everyone had a chance to provide testimony.

Under SEQRA procedures, the Town Board of Tuxedo, as lead agency, and The Sterling Forest Corporation are required to address and answer all the issues that were raised in the public testimony. Our consultants’ testimony forced the Corporation to make map corrections and, in

consultation with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, to redesign the golf course. The Tuxedo Town Board conducted workshops in June and September in which their hired consultants provided observations. (Note: A third workshop is scheduled for November 13.) These workshops are open to public audience, but public comment is not permitted in session. In our view, the Town's consultants in these workshops generally provided superficial and in some cases incorrect data, suggesting ways that environmental damage can be accommodated or mitigated.

The Tuxedo Town Board's review awaits final reports from their consultants. There seems to be a question whether the Board plans to require a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), and if they do, it may be very narrowly focused. We are concerned that the Tuxedo Town Board, disregarded much of the information we provided in the public testimony, thus encouraging their consultants to review the project favorably without reference to our concerns. In order to make the Town Board aware of our position on these issues, we drafted a letter with input from several of our environmental consultants and submitted it with a cover letter from our legal consultants. Our comments in this letter are summarized and condensed below:

SEIS/FEIS

We are concerned that at the September 9, 2002 Town Board workshop on the Sterling Forge project there was no mention of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). The information we presented at the public hearings last November made it clear that much was missing in the applicant's DEIS. This belief was borne out by several additional studies that Sterling Forest Corporation has commissioned. The sheer volume of new information alone should require the preparation of a SEIS. It is the only means for the public to have an opportunity to review the revisions as a completely new plan with all the provisions contained in SEQRA intact.

Segmentation

We have questioned a technical issue with regard to the completeness of the DEIS in that only the golf course area is being reviewed. There is no detailed information on the environmental impact of the housing units which the corporation intends to leave to the planning board. In our view, this is considered segmentation which is a violation of the SEQRA law.

Dissemination of Public Testimony

In the June 2002 Tuxedo Town Board workshop, it became apparent that the Town's consultants had not seen the information presented by the Sterling Forest Partnership and its team of specialists at the November 2001 public hearing. Again, at the September 9, 2002 workshop, the Town's consultant on wetlands seemed to not be aware that this information existed. He was working with an outdated map and was not conversant with details of the surface water drainage. This led us to question the depth of their understanding of the project. How thorough and independent can a consultant's observations and recommendations be if they are based on outdated material, partial information, and field observations made while being chauffeured by the developer?

Regional Water Issues

We have also forwarded information to the Tuxedo Town Board on how to access the NYS Attorney General's review of the environmental impact of golf courses which provides many cautions and concerns.

Water is not an infinite resource or a local one. With the significant increases in regional housing development, both recent and projected, the project's water availability and usage should be carefully reviewed with an understanding of its cumulative affect on the entire region.

Summary

These observations and those of our consultants are not meant to be frivolous remarks to annoy the Board or the developer. They reflect our serious concerns having to do with the SEQRA process and the ability for any agency to conduct a thorough and impartial review. As other issues arise, we will continue to provide our observations and input.

The Sterling Messenger is published by the Sterling Forest Partnership, Inc., a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Sterling Forest as open space.

The Messenger is edited by Rodger Friedman.

Torne Valley stitched in time

The Torne Valley, in the extreme western part of Rockland County close to Hillburn and Sloatsburg, continues to face threats of industrialization. The Valley is rich in Revolutionary War history, Native American sites, 19th-century industrial remains, wildlife and natural beauty. Bounded on three sides by Palisades Interstate Park (Harriman Park) land, much of its 1,500 acres forms a part of the federally designated sole source Ramapo aquifer. The aquifer/Ramapo River complex provides one third of Rockland County's water and 100% of the water for several downstream New Jersey communities. This land forms a critical part of the local watershed whose preservation becomes more important by the day as we reel from one drought to another.

Over the past four years Torne Valley has been under intense development pressure from three major projects: a 500 acre stone quarry and two electrical generating plants. Just over three years ago the Torne Valley Preservation Association formed to prevent industrialization and promote acquisition of the land. After a long educational effort and creation of both New York and New Jersey political support with the contributions of many individuals and organization, our first success occurred when the Sithe Power Plant decided not to pursue its application. Just this September American National Power, the second power plant, decided to withdraw its application. Concerns about rattlesnake habitat, effect on our water supply and air pollution questions all played a role in this decision. Now we move on to the land purchase phase. Anyone wishing further information please see our web site at <http://savetorne.home.att.net>.

The Verizon Foundation doubled the success of this year's Sterling Forest Conservation Day

Our 15th annual Sterling Forest Conservation Day was held at the park's Visitor's Center on Saturday, September 21. Programs included a hike to the fire tower and another along the Appalachian Trail, butterfly and bird walks, a 17-mile bike tour and nature programs for children. It was a splendid day, crisp and bright.

Fund raising during Conservation Day has always been important, but this year it took on an added dimension. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Jeff Hunter who volunteered to take over the logistics for this event, it was our most successful yet. Over the last few years, the Sterling Forest Partnership has acquired an unexpected partner in the struggle to save Sterling Forest. That partner is the Verizon Foundation. Since last year, the Verizon Foundation has contributed over \$15,000 to SFP through a variety of corporate programs. These valuable funds are currently being used to oppose the Sterling Forge Estates development in the heart of the State Park.

Partnership board member Jeffrey Hunter has helped to tap these funds from his employer. In addition to matching employee contributions, Verizon has contributed \$500 in each of the last three years to acknowledge Hunter's volunteer efforts, and over \$13,500 this past September to match pledges obtained by a Team of 14 Verizon employees taking part in our 15th Annual Conservation Day. Thank you Verizon!

Jeff's devotion in helping to promote environmental education and ecosystem preservation was recognized by Verizon. During the picnic, Verizon presented to Jeff the 7th annual John S. Balaguer Environmental Excellence Award for demonstrating outstanding leadership in the community regarding environmental issues. Congratulations, Jeff!

If you are a contributor to Sterling Forest Partnership, check with your employer to see if they have a matching donation program. It's a great way to leverage your donation, and help us in our efforts to protect all of Sterling Forest.

Yes, I would like to support the Partnership in its efforts to protect Sterling Forest State Park.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Enclosed is my membership donation of \$ _____

Enclosed is my employers matching gift form _____
Please Make checks payable to Sterling Forest Partnership. Send to: 7 Spring Rock Dr., Goshen, NY 10924 Phone: 845-783-4302
 Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



Sterling Forest Partnership board member Jeffrey Hunter received the 7th annual John S. Balaguer Environmental Excellence Award for demonstrating outstanding leadership in the community regarding environmental issues.

Thanks to Friends and Partners

Friends of the Sterling Forest Partnership helped provide door prizes and supplies for Sterling Forest Conservation Day. We are very grateful to the Ramsey Outdoors Store, Inserra Supermarkets, Dunkin' Donuts, Catskill Hiking Shack, Outdoors in Chester, Wadson's Home Center, Pennings Farm Market, Davis Sport Shop, Peach Grove, Campmor and the Exposures Gallery. Special thanks are also due to the publishers who contributed books for naturalists from their current lists: Houghton Mifflin, Alfred A. Knopf, Fordham University Press, Oxford University Press, North Point Press, and Countryman Press.

Tuxedo Reserve Project in Final Stage

The Town Board of the Town of Tuxedo is in the final stages of reviewing the Tuxedo Reserve project. The project as proposed calls for 1375 residential units in the Southern Tract of land owned by the Tuxedo Park Associates. The targeted development area lies between Tuxedo's Hamlet area and Sloatsburg. The main entrance will be in the Village of Sloatsburg and nearly all traffic will flow from the proposed development onto Route 17.

The Board has reviewed the project, which was revised downward in 1999 from the originally proposed 2450 units to the current 1375. As part of that revision all residential development was taken off of the northern tract which abuts Sterling Forest State Park and placed on the southern tract. However, commercial space (nearly 200,000 square feet) is slotted for the northern tract, off Route 84. The proposal also calls for approximately 80,000 square feet of retail space in the southern tract.

Concerns about the development have centered on impacts to Tuxedo's fiscal health, school district financial viability and, of course, traffic. The project will generate approximately 1000 additional cars traveling on Route 17 during rush hours. United Water's management of onsite wells and ties to the proposed Rockland sewer district are also matters of concern.

The Town Board and its consultants are concluding the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) phase of the review. Once the FEIS is completed, a public hearing is expected before the Board issues findings upon which a final decision will be made.

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