

OPINION

THE HIGHLANDS ACT

AUGUST 7, 2010

Columnist grinds an axe

Paul Mulshine again has shared his dislike of protecting New Jersey's open spaces and water supply, particularly in the Highlands and Pinelands.

In his Aug. 1 column "Highlands Act is an idea whose time has gone," he names a prominent Highlands Act opponent who, he claims, pre-Highlands Act, had 17 lots available to sell. She had nothing of the sort. The land was never subdivided, and until it is, the owner does not know how many lots she might have had available to sell. A particular feature of that Highlands property is that it is crossed by high-tension electric wires, making part of it unsuitable for development, devalued, and likely unattractive to many potential buyers.

Mulshine goes on to say he spoke with state Sen. Michael Doherty, who told him he has sat through a few sessions of the Highlands Council. "You listen to the Highlands folks talk and you're actually dumber after you leave the meeting than when you went in," was how Doherty summarized it. An accusation such as that should at least have a shred of veracity to it.

The senator has never been seen by the public at Highlands Council meetings — maybe once in 2004, shortly after the council began to meet in Chester. If the senator actually said such a thing, he owes these volunteer commissioners an apology; if he didn't, Mulshine owes them all an apology, and surely should have shown the good sense to check his facts before he is published.

He has the bully pulpit, but he shouldn't abuse it.

Julia Somers, executive director, New Jersey Highlands Coalition

Supports Highlands Act

I am incensed that you continue to give a platform, via Paul Mulshine, to the hysterical Deborah Post, alleged to be egregiously deprived by the Highlands Act and left with only a "big house with a big back yard." Boo hoo! I wish someone would give me what Post has been left with after this alleged "taking" by the Highlands Council. Maybe I should whine to the Legislature to be compensated for continued and harmful exposure to Post's rants. The conservative U.S. Supreme Court has decided that the Highlands Act is not a taking, so there.

Here is the way it is in New Jersey: When Post and other large landowners win by selling land to developers, homeowners lose. Many of the things we cherish about our communities are destroyed by development while we homeowners are left to pay higher property taxes for the windfall given to Post and others. My taxes would essentially pay for her retirement in Monte Carlo while I'm stuck living in a dump. It is a zero-sum game, and that is why I support the Highlands Act, now and forever.

Laura Oltman, Phillipsburg

Real farmers are ignored

Has Paul Mulshine become a political pundit whose time has gone? I believe so. In his Aug. 1 column he attempts to defend unfettered profits for a "McMansion farmer" — profits that come at a huge cost to the environment and existing members of the local community — while continuing to be a mouthpiece for the right-wing nuttery of the likes of state Sen. Michael Doherty.

Maybe if Mulshine and Doherty spent more time analyzing the plight of local farmers, they'd realize it is a long history of poor federal farm policy, subsidizing the huge corporate farms of the Midwest and penalizing local New Jersey farmers, that has laid waste to the culture of the small farmers of Hunterdon, Sussex and Warren counties.

If Mulshine and Doherty really cared about these farmers, they would be rallying for good land-use planning, increased farmland preservation and efforts to keep farming sustainable in rural New Jersey, not for the right to bulldoze, build and pave over some of the finest soils in the state.

Why don't Mulshine and Doherty care about real farms and farmers — the hard-working folks who provide the food and backbone of New Jersey's future?

Scott Olson, Sparta