Dave Golden, Chief
Bureau of Land Management
NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife
Department of Environmental Protection
P.O. Box 420
Trenton, NJ 08625-0420

February 17, 2016

Dear Mr. Golden,

I am writing on behalf of the Forest Stewards Guild to express support for New Jersey Audubon’s Forest Stewardship Plan for the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The Forest Stewards Guild is a national organization of foresters and allied natural resource professionals that practice and promote ecologically responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities that depend upon them. Our members in New Jersey have decades of experience in sustaining New Jersey’s forests through forestry, wildlife biology, ecology, and conservation. In addition, the Forest Stewards Guild has sponsored workshops on ecological forestry and fire, a workshop on restoration and resilience in New Jersey’s forests in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and a joint field trip to the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

New Jersey’s forests are an important resource in a fragmented landscape to wildlife, local residents, and to a struggling forest products industry. Therefore, the management of large, unfragmented properties such as the Sparta Mountain WMA and adjacent conservation ownerships is critical to sustaining the needs of these diverse interests. New Jersey Audubon is a leader in ecological forestry, and its Forest Stewardship Plan for Sparta Mountain has passed the scrutiny of the most rigorous of environmental programs. This is a testament to New Jersey Audubon’s complete commitment to upholding the highest ecological standards so that wildlife, the public, and the local economy might all benefit from thoughtful management. The Sparta Mountain WMA Forest Stewardship Plan reads as a comprehensive, considerate, and technically thorough story of this remarkable property.

The acceptance and implementation of this Forest Stewardship Plan is vital to ensuring that Sparta Mountain maintains a healthy, diverse forest that is resilient in the face of climate change; protects clean drinking water; provides sufficient habitat for golden-winged warblers and other birds, white-tailed deer, bats, and numerous other wildlife species; offers steady, if small, job opportunities within the struggling forest products industry; and retains the natural character that draws passionate New Jerseyans to live and recreate nearby.

The Forest Stewards Guild supports the adoption of this plan as proposed, and we offer our support to New Jersey Audubon, the New Jersey DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife, and partners in forest stewardship in helping see this plan implemented on Sparta Mountain. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Amanda Mahaffey, Northeast Region Director
Forest Stewards Guild