

CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS FOR HILLSDALE

A proposal from the Hillsdale Conservation Advisory Council

WHAT IS A CEA?

A Critical Environmental Area (CEA) is a geographic area designated by the town or the state because of special natural or cultural characteristics. The purpose of the designation is to alert landowners, developers, and regulatory agencies to the features of concern so that harm to important areas can be minimized, or environmental hazards can be avoided. The establishment of CEAs is authorized under subdivision 6 NYCRR 617.14(g) of the State Environmental Quality Review regulations (SEQR).

An area may be designated as a CEA if it has:

- a feature that is a benefit or threat to human health;
- an exceptional natural setting;
- exceptional social, historic, archaeological, recreational, or educational values; or
- an inherent ecological, geological or hydrological sensitivity to change that may be adversely affected by any physical disturbance (6 NYCRR 617.14[g]).

TWO PROPOSED CEAS

The Hillsdale CAC proposes the establishment of two CEAs: the unconsolidated aquifer area and the Taconic Mountains.

Aquifer Areas

In the Groundwater Resources Study and Protection Plan (Winkley 2009), Steven Winkley recommended the establishment of an Aquifer Overlay District; see the attached Figure 15 from the groundwater study) that encompasses the potential unconsolidated aquifers and the areas of high hydrogeologic sensitivity. This includes the areas with the largest volumes of easily accessible groundwater, and the areas most susceptible to groundwater contamination from surface activities. The CAC proposes an Aquifer CEA that approximates the area that Winkley recommended for this district.

Taconic Mountains

The narrow part of the Taconic Mountains that lies along Hillsdale's eastern boundary contains the highest elevations and the largest areas of unfragmented forest in town.

The Taconic Mountains straddle the eastern boundary of New York from Vermont to Connecticut. They have large areas of contiguous, high quality, northern hardwood forest, are known to support a number of rare plant and animal species, provide important wintering and nesting habitat and a migration corridor for migratory birds, and are an important source of groundwater and surface water for low-lying areas to the east and west. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation has identified the Taconic Range as a Significant Biodiversity Area (SBA)—one of only two such areas in Columbia County. The SBA status has no regulatory weight, but is intended to alert landowners, regulatory agencies, and others to the ecological importance and potential sensitivities of these areas.

The CAC proposes a Taconic Mountain CEA that approximates the SBA area in Hillsdale; see the attached Figure 3 from the 2010 Hillsdale Habitat Summary.