

# Kingwood Township adopts resolution opposing Route 29 project

Thu, Apr 08, 2021

*Bridget Wingert*

The Kingwood Township Committee in Hunterdon County, N.J., has adopted a resolution opposing the New Jersey Department of Transportation's rockfall mitigation project on Route 29 without an environmental impact statement, public hearings and approval by the township, the National Park Service and the Delaware Scenic Byway Committee.

NJDOT intends to construct rockfall mitigation on cliffs adjacent to approximately 3 miles of Route 29 from Mile Post 27.3 near Byram to a point, north of the Devil's Tea Table, at Mile Post 30.43.

The project would include the removal of trees and vegetation, blasting on the rockface, rock removal and reinforcement, installing metal mesh or "draping" materials to the rockface, the creation of a new barrier or a "catchment ditch," and applying concrete to the smoothed rockface including to the Devil's Tea Table geologic structure, to keep rocks from falling onto Route 29.

The township's open public records request revealed that NJDOT had no records of accidents or fatalities related to rockfall incidents along Route 29 in Kingwood Township and that safety issues could be better addressed in communities where safety issues exist.

Lower Delaware River segments were designated a National Wild and Scenic River by Congress and President Bill Clinton in 2000 and the river bluffs from Byram to Devil's Tea Table were noted as having "remarkable scenic values" in the Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic River corridor.

The bluffs along Route 29 contain outcrops of Triassic-age lake cycles, known as Van Houten cycles, providing the textbook record of lake formation due to climate change in the Jurassic and Triassic Periods of the Mesozoic Era. According to the township, they could be considered "geologic heritage" because they possess aesthetic, intrinsic or scientific and educational value, and providing unique insight into geological processes.

The Devil's Tea Table geologic formation also has unique local, historical and geological significance, and is believed to hold religious significance to Native American peoples.

The area also contains rare plant species and ecological communities, and the area known as Devil's Tea Table, including siltstone and shale cliff and adjacent dry woods overlooking the Delaware River, is designated by NJDEP as a Natural Heritage Priority.

The project, the township said, will also negatively impact rare, threatened and endangered plants and wildlife including American Bald Eagles, copperheads, and several species of bats and fish.

The township also cited the loss of scenic value that would negatively impact tourism businesses, recreational value and the local economy of River Towns surrounding Kingwood Township – Stockton, Frenchtown and Lambertville, and towns across the river, in Pennsylvania.

The committee also cited concerns about groundwater, septic systems and private wells. And construction, it said, would cause significant traffic delays and detours for several months or years during construction.

The state has already banned tractor trailer trucks from the highway, a safety measure taken in 2011, reducing safety concerns of commercial traffic.

Archaeological research has uncovered artifacts of tribes and prehistoric man inhabiting this portion of the river corridor dating from 6500 B.C. through the 1700s, when the Turtle clan of the Lenape occupied the area, the committee pointed out.

“The rockfall project appears to be lacking sufficient study and analysis including a full and comprehensive traffic study, a historic/archeological impact study, a Delaware River Wild and Scenic River visual and environmental impact study, Scenic Byway visual impact study and an Environmental Impact Study,” the resolution says.

The Kingwood officials referred to a Route 46 project in Knowlton Township where a fence was erected without consulting the residents. Most residents felt it was not needed. “The Township Committee of Kingwood Township would like to avoid a similar debacle along a designated scenic byway stretch of Route 29,” according to the resolution.