

Frenchtown adopts resolution to oppose rockfall mitigation

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Based on the Frenchtown, N.J., Environmental Commission's recommendation, the Frenchtown Borough Council on May 5 passed a resolution regarding the rockfall mitigation project at the Devil's Tea Table and along Routes 29 and I-78 in Hunterdon County.

Hunterdon County and Kingwood Township have adopted similar resolutions. According to the Devil's Tea Table Alliance, supervisors from Tinicum Township, Pa., are expected to consider a resolution Tuesday, June 15. Tinicum, is directly across the Delaware from the area eyed for rockfall mitigation. The resolution states that because the Middle and Upper Delaware River segments were designated a National Wild and Scenic River in 1978 by Congress and President Jimmy Carter in 1978, and the lower Delaware River was designated by Congress and President Bill Clinton in 2000 and the river bluffs from Byram to Devil's Tea Table are noted as having "remarkable scenic values" in the Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic River corridor, the borough council resolved NJDOT should immediately "pause moving forward with the rockfall mitigation plan ... and to immediately engage in a robust stakeholder process with residents and local officials within the communities impacted by this proposed project."

The resolution pointed out that Route 29 is the north-south commuting route in the area and the proposed project will cause significant traffic delays and detours for several months or years during construction. The council noted that construction will impact commuters in Frenchtown Borough, Kingwood Township, West Amwell Township, Stockton Borough, and the City of Lambertville.

The area is home to rare, threatened and endangered plants and wildlife, the bluffs along Route 29 contain world outcrops of Triassic-age lake cycles, considered “geologic heritage” the Devil’s Tea Table geologic formation also has unique local, historical and geological significance, and is believed to hold religious significance to Indigenous people, and the archaeological record of the Kingwood Township Route 29 corridor revealed artifacts of Indigenous people and prehistoric man inhabiting this portion of the river corridor dating from 6500 B.C. through the 1700’s, when the Turtle clan of the Lenape Indians occupied the area.

Kingwood Township residents are concerned about the condition of their wells and water supply and local residents have questioned the necessity of the project. A public records request submitted by local residents revealed that NJDOT has no records of accidents or fatalities related to rockfall incidents along Route 29 in Kingwood Township, according to the resolution.

The borough council called upon the NJDOT and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) to examine alternatives to the proposed rockfall mitigation plan as presented.

Copies of the resolution were sent to Gov. Phil Murphy, U.S. Representative Tom Malinowski, and state legislators.