

SHAWANGUNK RIDGE
CONSERVATION AND
DESIGN GUIDEBOOK
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PUBLISHED BY
THE CATSKILL CENTER FOR CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT, INC.
IN COOPERATION WITH
THE NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

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Use of the model regulations contained in this guidebook is encouraged.

The Catskill Center would appreciate notification of use and/or the successful adaptation and application of the model regulations within local laws.

Publication of this book was made possible by a generous grant from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

Additional funding was supplied by the American Conservation Association
and the New York State Council on the Arts.



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ISBN 0-9616712-1-1

Design: Jerry Novesky / The Catskill Center

Printed on recycled paper

*The Telecommunications Towers Model Regulation (Appendix C) was originally written in 1990
by David Church and Luther Propst, working for the World Wildlife Fund, as a commission for
Friends of the Shawangunks.*

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How we treat our land is one of the most important challenges facing us today. Many critical decisions about land use are made at the local level, through a community's master plan, zoning laws, subdivision regulations and complementary programs. When a landowner proposes to subdivide his or her property or change its use from farmland or forest, the community has an excellent opportunity to help guide the future use of that parcel to meet the needs of the landowner and the greater public. This opportunity is best met when the community seeks in advance to understand its own land-use interests.

The purpose of this guidebook is to challenge those involved in making land-use decisions to discover better solutions for creating the built environment in which they wish to live. The guidebook shows, using the Shawangunk Ridge as an example, how municipal officials, landowners, developers and public interests can use the zoning and subdivision process to make towns more livable and economically stable while preserving the very best of our environmental resources.

By focusing on the Shawangunk Ridge, its resource values and development trends, this guidebook seeks to provide an example of how municipalities, through their home-rule authority, can deal with a significant, regional geographic feature. Our hope is that this guidebook can be a tool not only for those looking at lands on the Shawangunk Ridge but also for anyone considering the balance between conservation and development in other mountain or ridgeline terrain.

USING THIS GUIDEBOOK

With the Shawangunk Ridge as an example, this guidebook is intended to serve:

- As a rationale for enhancing municipal zoning and development reviews so as to clearly consider ridge and mountain terrain as a valuable resource;
- As a sourcebook presenting issues and design standards that can be referred to when reviewing development projects or community planning actions affecting mountainous terrain;
- As a compendium of specific, model municipal regulations that can be adopted in whole or in part by any municipality along the Shawangunk Ridge, or by other locales with similar upland resources.

This guidebook consists of three main sections:

The first section, “The Shawangunk Ridge as a Region-Wide District,” describes why land use on the Shawangunk Ridge, a unique and valuable resource, needs careful planning. The section explains why traditional zoning laws have been ineffective in mountainous terrain and why other techniques, complementary to such zoning, can be more effective in preserving the mountain character.

In particular, the guidebook advocates use of a “ridge overlay district” that can easily be adopted by a municipality without having to amend other potentially controversial aspects of local zoning such as lot size or allowable uses. This ridge overlay district can concisely and consistently address land-use issues for each and every community sharing ridge property. The model overlay district also packages several land-use techniques that can be used in part or in whole depending on a given municipality’s existing efforts and interests.

The second section, “Examples of Conventional Development vs. Ridge Overlay Development,” presents three hypothetical examples of ridge development. Based on the authors’ experiences, each example reflects aspects of real development projects that have been proposed—or might likely be proposed—for ridge terrain. Each is presented in three scenarios: one providing a baseline assessment of the property as it exists; one presenting use of the property through conventional, existing zoning regulations common to our region; and a third using techniques advocated in this guidebook. The results of each approach are discussed.

The third section, “Model Shawangunk Ridge Overlay District,” is a model “ridge overlay district” regulation that can be used in whole or can be modified to suit a town’s particular needs. With careful reading, modification and application, this model can give local officials the ability to design how they want the Shawangunk Ridge to be used in the future.

Additional model regulations for timber harvesting, telecommunications towers and critical environmental area designation are also appended and can be used as needed.
