



NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COALITION

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Press Release

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Enviro's to Highlands Council: No Water, No Build

Highlands Council finds Entire Great Swamp watershed is being depleted of water at greater rate than it can sustain

Harding Township, NJ: Today, the New Jersey Highlands Coalition joined local officials to highlight the possible implications of the Highland Council's Final Draft Regional Master Plan (RMP) on the watershed of the Great Swamp, the headwaters of the Passaic River, and to urge public participation to strengthen the plan by attending the upcoming public hearing on February 6th at the Haggerty Education Center at the Morris County Frelinghuysen Arboretum in Morristown at 4:00 P.M.

“Charged to protect, restore, and enhance water quality, quantity, and other natural resources and cultural resources of the New Jersey Highlands, the Highlands Council’s plans do not provide adequate protections. Steps need to be taken before adoption to strengthen the Final Draft Regional Master Plan in a number of areas if they are to meet their mandate,” **stated Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.** She continued, “Allowing additional development in water deficit areas—which would be permitted-- is like handing a stressed credit card to my 16 year old daughter, sending her to the mall and assuming that she will pay off 125% of any purchases she makes.”

The current Final Draft RMP, out for public comment until February 28th, illustrates that over 110 of the 183 sub-watershed in the Highlands Region are currently in deficit, meaning more water is used from these sources than is replenished. All streams in the Great Swamp watershed are currently in deficit, which has profound implications for the Passaic River, the major source of drinking water for millions of New Jersey residents. The New Jersey Highlands Coalition fears that continued development in these deficit watersheds will only exacerbating a looming public health emergency. The Final Draft RMP would allow additional development in these depleted watersheds with a condition of a 125% water replenishment; it has yet to be demonstrated how a rabbit can be pulled from this hat.

“Great Swamp Watershed Association is pleased that the Highlands Act is attempting to preserve our rapidly depleting natural resources.” **Sally Rubin, Executive Director of the Great Swamp Watershed Association adds,** “We hope that the land use capability maps can be revised to provide greater protection to the headwaters of the streams that flow into the Great Swamp which ultimately flows into the Passaic River and provides drinking water to over a million people. The Great Brook and the upper Passaic River have their headwaters in Morristown/Morris Township and Mendham Borough respectively and are currently in designated community development zones. Great Swamp Watershed Association hopes that these areas can be redesignated as

community development zones with constraints to provide additional protections to these two streams which are already in deficit condition.”

On Tuesday, the New Jersey Highlands Coalition and a many other environmental organizations in New Jersey called upon the Governor to issue an Executive Order requiring the Highlands Council to submit a finding of “no adverse impact” on Highlands resources for any major Highlands development until the Final Draft RMP is strengthened and the Plan can adequately protect drinking water resources.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is urging members of the public to attend one or more of the three public hearings being held by the Highlands Council on February 6th at the Haggerty Center at the Morris County Arboretum in Morristown at 4 PM; on February 11th at Passaic County Community College in Paterson at 6 PM; or on February 13th at Voorhees High School in Glen Gardner at 6:30 PM. The Coalition urges members of the public to echo New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Commissioner Lisa Jackson's comments to the Senate Environment Committee on January 28th, 2008, in reference to the Highlands Council's Final Draft RMP: "I believe we are on a path to make the plan stronger, but I can't say that definitely. Our goal is to come up with a set of revisions we can agree on with the council."

“The Passaic River provides drinking water to hundreds of thousands of people in New Jersey. Yet, near its headwaters in the Great Swamp, where it should be creating water surpluses for consumption downstream, local use already outstrips what it can generate,” **John Malay, Bernards Township Committee Member, explains.** “This is bad news for our urban areas. The Highlands Act and the Regional Master Plan need to address this deficit through sound watershed management, conservation of water resources and protection of areas that contribute water to our state supplies.”

John Malay continued, “I urge every concerned individual to attend one of the three public comment sessions and voice their concerns and their support to guarantee adequate water supplies for all our residents. Without clean plentiful water, our state's future will dry up and blow away.”

Some specific concerns of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition in the Highlands Council's Final Draft RMP are: the continued development permitted in watersheds that are already in a water deficit; the possibility of extending sewers into the Preservation Area; the need to require a clear hierarchy of preventing damage to natural resources first and foremost, requiring applicants to move through avoidance, minimization and mitigation; the need for clearer and more protective standards for map adjustments; and the lack of supporting documents and standards necessary to make the programs possible.

Ron Goldberg, Morris Township Committee Member, reflected, “The New Jersey Highlands Coalition helps me remember that the Highlands Act is about ensuring that millions of future New Jerseyans have an adequate supply of safe drinking water. In this, the most densely populated state, it has become necessary to add land use tools to ensure that New Jersey can continue to develop in a sound way. We need government, developers, environmental organizations and, most of all, the citizenry, to seize the opportunity that the Highlands Act has created. We must discuss, plan and act to refine and strengthen the Highlands Act, but we cannot afford to reject it.”

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is made up of a diverse and effective group of organizations and individuals — small and large, local, regional, statewide and national — all working together to protect, enhance and restore the New Jersey Highlands.

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