



NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COALITION

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Press Release

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Highlands Plan Adopted

More Development in Drinking Water Deficit Areas; New Disturbances in Waterway Buffers; Polluted Groundwater Serving Wells; Unscientific Changes to the Plan

Today, despite overwhelming calls for substantial amendments, the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council voted nine to five to adopt the Regional Master Plan. Three minor amendments and no major strengthening amendments were also adopted. Of speakers present, three-quarters urged the Council to adopt all of the strengthening amendments or withhold support for the Plan.

“We are deeply disappointed by the Council’s action,” said Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. “The Council has adopted a plan that does not adequately protect Highlands’s water, streams, or farmland soils. It encourages the Region’s groundwater to become polluted in a way that could have a profound impact on the public’s health.”

The Coalition supported proposed amendments that would have:

- Prevented new water uses in watersheds that have water shortages, more than 50 of which are in a critical condition.
- Protected the streams and riparian areas of the region by preventing buffers on our state’s highest quality waterways from being reduced and degraded.
- Ensured that groundwater from clustered development on farmland did not become polluted beyond the safe drinking water level for people who live in the cluster. The Coalition also supported amendments that would set science-based nitrate pollutant limits in all of the Region’s groundwater.
- Prevented unscientific changes to the land use zones that the Council had developed with the most advanced and current data of the Highlands Region, called the Map Adjustments program.

“The Governor is the only one now who has the ability to fix the plan and insist that it protects New Jersey’s water supplies and economy,” explained Julia Somers. The Governor has the ability to veto the minutes and require the Council to return to work and strengthen the plan.

The Coalition recognizes the tireless work of several Council members who have made a significant effort to fulfill the intent and mandates of the Highlands Act. They are: Tracy Carluccio, public member; Liz Calabrese, Bergen County Freeholder; Tim Dillingham, public member; Debbie Pasquarelli, Warren County member; and Tahesha Way, Passaic County Freeholder. “Without their diligence and hard work the plan may never have even made it this far.

“Support for the Coalition and its work has been growing rapidly. As we move forward, the Coalition will be working hard to strengthen the Regional Master Plan and assist conforming communities who should understand that this plan sets minimum standards. It does not set the ceiling and towns can choose to pursue much stronger protections than the plan affords. We will be there to help them protect their communities and seek much stronger protections than the Council was willing to adopt today,” explained Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.

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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