



## NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COALITION

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# Press Release

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## Highlands Plan Still Needs Work – Gov Veto Necessary

*New Jersey Highlands Coalition restates its concerns over current Highlands Plan*

**The Highlands Region, NJ:** Today, leaders of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition restated concerns raised over the recently adopted Highlands Regional Master Plan and called on the Governor to uphold his responsibility as the guardian of the public's drinking water resources by vetoing the minutes of the Highlands Council and directing them to fix specific areas of the plan which will threaten the water quality and quantity that serves over 5.4 million residents of New Jersey.

“For over four years, the Coalition and its many members have worked cooperatively and constructively to help the Council craft a Regional Master Plan we should be confident in. We are disappointed that critical flaws – that can easily be corrected – will prevent the Plan from adequately protecting the Region,” said **Julia M. Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.**

**Michele Byers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation** agreed, stating “We have all worked hard to make the RMP as strong as possible, and the issues we have put forth to strengthen the plan are sound.”

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition has long been and will continue to be the leading voice in supporting a Highlands Regional Master Plan which lives up to the mandates of the 2004 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act. The Plan must adequately protect drinking water supplies for 800,000 Highlands residents and for the 4.6 million residents of water receiving communities outside the Region, including the state's 3 largest industries. The current RMP, adopted by the Highlands Council on July 17<sup>th</sup> does not live up to these necessary benchmarks. Therefore the Coalition's members have called on Governor Corzine to veto the minutes of the July 17<sup>th</sup> meeting and send the Highlands Council back to the table to fix specific areas of the plan.

Responding to a recent press release by an ad hoc group of civic organizations, **Jeff Tittel, Executive Director of the New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club** said, “These are groups who have never worked in the Highlands, they have always opposed environmental legislation and they are merely providing cover for the builders. The statement issued by this group is filled with distortions. The Highlands Act is about water, not lies.” No member of the ad hoc group has been active in development of the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition's comments on various drafts of the Plan and at every recent Council meeting have been thoughtful, consistent and science-based. The Coalition's comments throughout the entire planning process have been developed with the input and direction of leading experts in the fields of environmental resource management, water supply protection, regional planning and municipal land use law, many of whom are Board Members of the Coalition, and/or active supporters of its work.

The current plan does not meet the mandates of the Highlands Act; it will result in the loss of up to 20% of the Region's farmland; it plans to degrade groundwater quality adjacent to wells serving clustered developments; it will permit the destruction of pristine stream buffers for redevelopment projects; and it allows additional, new

development to continue in water deficit areas. These concerns reflect a clear need to protect the public health of the people of New Jersey that Executive veto of the Highlands Council minutes can correct.

*The NJ 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 NJ Highlands*

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