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Highlands Council helps preserve 116 acres in Kinnelon Borough

*First acquisition in matching grant program will provide protection
of abundant natural resources*

CHESTER, N.J. — The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) recently completed a transaction that will allow Kinnelon Borough to permanently protect 116 acres around Untermeyer Lake. Other partners in the project include The Trust for Public Land (TPL), the Morris County Preservation Trust, and the Morris County Board of Freeholders. The property will be owned by Kinnelon Borough, and managed in collaboration with the Morris County Park Commission. The entire property lies within the “Special Environmental Zone,” a designation within the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) that indicates the property is critical to the protection of water resources in the Highlands.

“The property being preserved contains lands that are among the most environmentally sensitive in the region and were prioritized for preservation in the RMP,” explained Highlands Council Chairman Jim Rilee. “This is also a property that Kinnelon has been targeting for preservation as part of their larger vision for the municipality, and we were pleased to help facilitate the acquisition.”

“Kinnelon values the preservation of open space for passive recreational needs and views this acquisition as an important step in achieving the goal of preserving pristine property that protects the aquifer and safe drinking water not only for our residents but for the entire State,” Kinnelon Mayor Bob Collins said of the importance of the acquisition to the Borough. I thank all of the funding partners who share a vision of protecting our natural resources future generations to come.”

The Untermeyer Lake tract is a high groundwater recharge area, consisting of a mature mixed hardwood forest, steep slopes and some freshwater wetlands. The property offers a diverse habitat that supports a variety of state threatened and endangered species. The preserved property sits between Pequannock’s Mountainside Park and Morris County’s Waughaw Greenway to the south. The Greenway provides linkages that encourage multiple recreational uses for hikers, bikers and pedestrians between local, county, state and nonprofit recreational facilities in the region. The Morris County Park Commission plans to create a network of mountain bike trails linking these areas.

“With this acquisition in Kinnelon, residents and visitors will now have better access to the trails and natural areas that make the New Jersey Highlands a spectacular resource for our state,” said Anthony Cucchi, NJ State Director of The Trust for Public Land, who submitted the application to the Highlands Council.

The Highlands Council’s Open Space Partnership Funding Program is a matching grant program, open to nonprofit and government entities, that provides up to a 50 percent match for property preservation via fee simple acquisition or through conservation easements. In evaluating applications, primary consideration is given to lands with high conservation or agricultural value as mapped in the 2008 RMP. Proximity to existing open space is also a factor. In addition, because funding for the program currently comes from compensation received by the Council in connection with a mitigation agreement related to a utility project, priority is also given to properties in close proximity to that project, or properties that provide protection of scenic resources. The Highlands Council contributed \$300,000 toward the \$1.1 million acquisition in Kinnelon.

“This is the first acquisition to close in our Open Space Partnership Funding Program,” said Rob Walton, Chairman of the Highlands Council’s Landowner Equity and Land Preservation Committee. “We launched the program last year with the intent of engaging nonprofit, municipal

and county partners in open space acquisition within the Highlands Region. The application submitted by TPL for the Kinnelon property ranked very highly against our program criteria and so we were very happy to help Kinnelon advance its preservation goals through this acquisition.” An additional four applications have been approved for funding in the program and all are expected to close within the next 12-18 months.

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency, established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, and is charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands.

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Attachments

Map: Untermeyer Lake Acquisition

Photo 1: View of Untermeyer Lake.

Photo 2: View from property.

Photo 3: (l to r) Kinnelon Mayor Bob Collins, Highlands Council Executive Director Margaret Nordstrom at closing.

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