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Towns File to Comply with Highlands Plan

56 communities join with Highlands Council to preserve resources

CHESTER, N.J. – The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council announced that 56 municipalities in the Highlands Region have filed Plan Conformance documents.

Of the 859,355 acres in the Highlands Region, 52 municipalities with lands in the 414,957-acre Preservation Area are required by the Highlands Act to submit petitions of conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan by December 8th. Yesterday, the Highlands Council received petitions covering 549,602 acres of the entire Highlands Region. Documents were received from six municipalities that are entirely in the Planning Area.

“Today’s action by these many municipalities is a huge step toward full implementation of the Highlands Act,” Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said yesterday. “It will benefit not only the people who live in the Highlands, but also the millions of other New Jersey residents who depend on this region for their drinking water.”

Fifty-six municipalities filed documents by December 8th to conform to the Regional Master Plan, covering 395,660 acres in the Preservation Area and 153,942 acres in the Planning Area. That represents 95 percent of the Preservation Area and 35 percent of the Planning Area, where conformance is voluntary.

Numerous municipalities with lands in the Planning Area have submitted a Notice of Intent to Conform and continue to study the implications of plan conformance with the Highlands Council. Planning Area municipalities can choose to conform at any time.

“Conformance relies upon collaboration and we would like to thank the Highlands municipalities and their professionals who have worked so hard during this process,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said. “These municipalities have completed a detailed analysis of the Plan and its implications in order to make an informed decision.”

Municipalities that file Petitions for Plan Conformance are eligible for state grant funding to cover the cost of conformance and other planning activities consistent with the Regional Master Plan, as well as priority funding under the Green Acres and State Farmland Preservation programs. Municipal Plan Conformance also carries all the benefits of endorsement by the State Planning Commission. Conforming municipalities also receive legal protection for challenges to master plans, land use ordinances, and local decisions, including legal representation if necessary.

The following Highlands Region communities have filed to conform to the Regional Master Plan for lands in the Preservation Area and also indicated an intent to conform in the Planning Area: Alexandria Township; Bethlehem Township; Bloomingdale Borough; Byram Township; Chester Township; Town of Clinton; Clinton Township; Denville Township; Greenwich Township; Hampton Borough; Holland Township; Kinnelon Borough; Lebanon Township; Lopatcong Township; Mahwah Township; Pohatcong Township; Randolph Township; Rockaway Township; Tewksbury Township; Union Township; Wanaque Borough; Washington Township (Morris County); and Washington Township (Warren County). In addition, the Planning Area-only municipalities of Far Hills Borough, High Bridge Borough, Lebanon Borough, Parsippany-Troy Hills Township, Stanhope Borough, and Wharton Borough also have indicated their intent to conform to the Regional Master Plan. (High Bridge Borough has only introduced an ordinance to conform.)

Allamuchy Township, Bedminster Township, Boonton Township, Franklin Township, Green Township, Hackettstown, Hardyston Township, Harmony Township, Hopatcong Borough, Jefferson Township, Liberty Township, Montville Township, Mount Arlington Borough, Mount Olive Township, Oakland Borough, Ogdensburg Borough, Oxford Township, Pequannock Township, Roxbury Township, Sparta Township, Vernon Township, and White Township have petitioned to conform to the Regional Master Plan only for lands in the Preservation Area. In addition, petitions were submitted by the Preservation Area-only communities of Bloomsbury Borough, Califon Borough, Glen Gardner Borough, Ringwood Borough and West Milford Township.

A map highlighting the municipalities that filed Plan Conformance documents by December 8th is available at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/images/MuniResos.jpg> (color) or http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/images/MuniResos_BW.jpg (black and white).