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New Grant Program in Highlands

Water Use and Conservation Management Grant Program to distribute \$1 million

CHESTER, N.J. – The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council approved today its 11th grant program, one aimed at assisting communities address water deficit areas.

“We hope the grant program we created here today will become a state-wide model for good water planning,” Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said. “Identifying and, where possible, mitigating areas in water deficit is becoming an increasingly critical issue.”

The \$1 million grant program will assist communities in developing Water Use and Conservation Management Plans, which are required for all Highlands watersheds under the Highlands Regional Master Plan. In addition, Governor Jon S. Corzine’s Executive Order 114 emphasized the need to implement water conservation and management plans at a municipal level.

In October, the Highlands Council sought detailed proposals for a Water Use and Conservation Management Plan Pilot Project. Ten pilot project areas, affecting up to 20 subwatersheds in the Highlands Region, will be selected and funded through the grants program. The pilot project areas selected will represent a wide array of conditions and situations, with the goal of reducing or eliminating low to moderate water deficits.

“The lessons we will learn as we address these deficits will be applied to other water deficit areas in the Highlands Region and will share those lessons with others facing the same challenges elsewhere in the State,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said. “We are embarking on a type of water use planning that hasn’t happened before in New Jersey.”

The Water Use and Conservation Management Grant Program follows the 2009 Plan Conformance Grants Program, which was created in December, that allocated up to \$7.5 million to Highlands municipalities and counties. The Plan Conformance Grants Program assists those municipalities and counties that have adopted a Notice of Intent to Conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan to

cover conformance-related expenses. To date, 70 municipalities have issued a Notice of Intent to Conform, and 50 of those municipalities have applied for a \$50,000 Plan Conformance Grant, bringing the total amount to \$2,500,000.

The Highlands Council also has an Initial Assessment Grants Program that allocates up to \$15,000 to Highlands municipalities and counties to cover expenses related to consideration of Plan Conformance. Sixty-eight municipalities have applied for a total of \$1,014,767.

Maps of the Highlands Region municipalities that have applied for the Plan Conformance and Initial Assessment grant programs, as well as a map of the municipalities that have filed a Notice of Intent to Conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan, can be found on the Highlands Council website: <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/stake/municipalities.html>.