

RESOLUTION 2009-45
NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
PSE&G SUSQUEHANNA-ROSELAND 500-KV TRANSMISSION LINE
HIGHLANDS ACT EXEMPTION AND CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) has created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council); and

WHEREAS, in Section 2 of the Highlands Act, the Legislature declared that the protection of the New Jersey Highlands, because of its vital link to the future of the State's drinking water supplies and other key natural resources, is an issue of State level importance;

WHEREAS, in Section 2 of the Highlands Act, the Legislature further recognized that the Highlands Region is an essential source of drinking water, provides clean and plentiful drinking water for one-half of the State's population, contains other exceptional natural resources such as clean air, contiguous forest lands, wetlands, pristine watersheds, and habitat for fauna and flora, includes many sites of historic significance, and provides abundant recreational opportunities for the citizens of the State; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act creates two areas within the Highlands Region – the Preservation Area, an area of the New Jersey Highlands with exceptional natural resource value that should be subject to stringent water and natural resource protection standards, policies, planning and regulation and the Planning Area, the area outside of the Preservation Area that should be part of a comprehensive planning approach that serves to protect the water and other significant resources of the entire Highlands Region while also accommodating appropriate patterns of development, redevelopment and economic growth; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act created the Highlands Council as a regional planning and protection entity, to develop, adopt and periodically revise a Regional Master Plan, with a primary goal of protecting and enhancing the significant values of the resources of the Highlands Region; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act required that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) adopt stringent water and natural resource protection standards governing major development in the Preservation Area;

WHEREAS, NJDEP has adopted Preservation Area rules at N.J.A.C. 7:38-1.1 et seq. governing the NJDEP's review of projects in the Highlands Region; and

WHEREAS, Section 30 of the Highlands Act includes seventeen exemptions (N.J.S.A. 13:20-28) and qualification under this section specifies that the project or activity is exempt from the provisions of the Highlands Act, the Regional Master Plan (RMP), any rules or regulations adopted by NJDEP pursuant to the Act, or any amendments to a master plan, development regulations, or other regulations adopted by a local government unit to specifically conform with the RMP; and

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WHEREAS, exemption #11 in Section 30 (N.J.S.A. 13:20-28.a (11)) specifies that the following activity is exempt from the Highlands Act: “(11) the routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility, provided that the activity is consistent with the goals and purposes of this act”; and

WHEREAS, NJDEP has adopted rules at N.J.A.C. 7:38-2.3 governing the NJDEP’s review of exemption determinations in the Preservation Area; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council has adopted Objective 7F1d in the RMP which specifies that the Highlands Council shall issue exemption determinations in the Planning Area; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council has adopted Objective 7F1f in the RMP which specifies that “[a]ctivities authorized under exemptions #9 and #11, which require a finding that the activity is consistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act, shall be based upon a finding that the proposed activities are consistent with Highlands Act, the RMP, any rules or regulations adopted by the NJDEP pursuant to the Highlands Act, or any amendments to a master plan, development regulations, or other regulations adopted by a local government unit specifically to conform them with the RMP”; and

WHEREAS, PSE&G submitted an application for a Highlands Applicability Determination for Exemption #11 on September 5, 2008 to NJDEP, with a copy to Highlands Council, for PSE&G’s proposed project to construct a new 500-kV transmission line between the Susquehanna switching station in Pennsylvania and PSE&G’s existing East Hanover/Roseland switching station (Project), portions of which are located in the Highlands Region in both the Preservation and Planning Areas; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council and NJDEP initiated a coordinated review of the Project due to the fact the Project is proposed to traverse 26 miles through the Highlands Region with 17 miles in the Preservation Area and 9 miles in the Planning Area; and

WHEREAS, on December 22, 2008, the Highlands Council completed an analysis of the Project using a Highlands RMP Consistency Determination (CD) template as a tool to examine whether the Project is consistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act as required by N.J.S.A. 13:20-28.a.(11) and in accordance with Objective 7F1f; and

WHEREAS, on December 22, 2008, the Highlands Council posted its draft CD for the proposed Project on its website for public comment, extending the original public comment period from January 7, 2009 to January 30, 2009; and

WHEREAS, on May 19, 2009, PSE&G submitted a revised application for Exemption #11 to NJDEP and the Highlands Council and the proposed Project was substantially revised based upon the findings of the draft CD, input from the Highlands Council staff, NJDEP, the public, and other agencies; and

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WHEREAS, the May 19, 2009 revised Project included the following: 1) relocation of the proposed switching station from Jefferson Township to the Borough of Hopatcong, significantly reducing the permanent impacts from this upgrade, 2) use of existing roads for access to the maximum extent possible, and 3) incorporation of a framework for a Comprehensive Mitigation Plan in response to project impacts to Highlands and other resources as part of the proposed Project; and

WHEREAS, on May 21, 2009, the Highlands Council posted a second draft CD for the revised Project on its website for public comment for a period ending June 12, 2009; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council staff analyzed the revised Project and the extensive public comments received during the two public comment periods and, on June 19, 2009, posted the following documents on the Council's website for the regularly scheduled June 25, 2009 Highlands Council meeting: 1) June 19, 2009 CD showing changes made in response to public comment, 2) Summary and responses to public comments received during comment period ending June 12, 2009, and, 3) Summary and responses to public comments received during comment period ending January 30, 2009; and

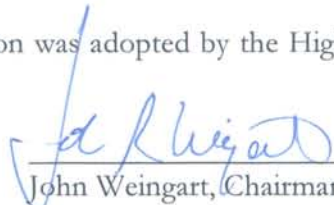
WHEREAS, the Highlands Council has duly considered PSE&G's revised Project, the Highlands Council staff draft CD, staff summaries and responses to public comments, all testimony and comment at Council meetings.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Highlands Council hereby finds that the revised Project constitutes "routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility" and that the proposed Project in both the Planning Area and Preservation Area "is consistent with the goals and purposes" of the Highlands Act;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Highlands Council that the Executive Director is hereby authorized, consistent with the Council's deliberations, to: 1) issue a final RMP Consistency Determination for this Project, 2) issue a Highlands Act exemption determination with appropriate conditions; and 3) enter into any agreements necessary to implement these determinations.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its meeting held on the 25th day of June, 2009.



John Weingart, Chairman

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**Vote on the Approval of
this Resolution**

	<u>Motion</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Abstain</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Councilmember Alstede			✓			
Councilmember Calabrese						✓
Councilmember Carluccio					✓	
Councilmember Cogger			✓			
Councilmember Kovach			✓			
Councilmember Letts					✓	
Councilmember Pasquarelli				✓		
Councilmember Peterson			✓			
Councilmember Schrier	✓		✓			
Councilmember Vetrano		✓	✓			
Councilmember Way				✓		
Councilmember Whitenack			✓			
Councilmember Weingart			✓			