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**CONSISTENCY REVIEW
AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

**APPROVED BY
RESOLUTION # 2021-12**

**PETITION FOR PLAN CONFORMANCE:
COUNTY OF HUNTERDON**

Prepared by the State of New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and
Planning Council in Support of the Highlands Regional Master Plan

MAY 20, 2021

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Petition for Plan Conformance – Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

INTRODUCTION

On November 7, 2018, the Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders (now County Commissioners) adopted a Resolution to Petition the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (“Highlands Council”) for Plan Conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (“RMP”). On February 28, 2021, Hunterdon County submitted a complete package of Plan Conformance documents to support the County’s Petition. The County aims to align its planning documents, policies, and capital improvement plans with the goals and policies of the RMP “in order to gain support for those initiatives and to bolster the Plan’s regional objectives.” The County Plan Conformance process is intended to form the basis for a “sustainable environmental and economic future.” (Hunterdon County Self-Assessment Report, January 2021)

The County’s goals for economic and environmental sustainability are supported by the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP). A collaborative relationship between Hunterdon County and the Highlands Council will further mutual goals and facilitate the County’s role as a leader in planning and sustainable economic growth and position the County as a model for other counties in the Region.

This Consistency Review and Recommendations Report (Report) contains the findings of the Highlands Council and sets forth an agenda for implementation. It begins with a brief summary of findings, displayed in a table format, to provide an at-a-glance overview of the results.

The context for this review is derived from criteria outlined in the Highlands Council’s Plan Conformance Procedures (RMP Addendum 2019-2). The county conformance program is designed to mesh with the comprehensive land use planning and municipal coordination efforts that counties in the Region already undertake. It seeks opportunities to promote and further RMP goals, policies, and objectives by engaging with county planning officials to identify and address shared priorities. The Highlands Council partners with counties to achieve these priorities, using both traditional and innovative planning approaches.

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PETITION SUMMARY

Municipality:	<u>County of Hunterdon</u>
Date of Petition Submission:	<u>February 28, 2021</u>
Conformance Area:	<u>Preservation and Planning Areas</u>
Staff Recommendation:	<u>Approve Petition with Conditions</u>

Summary of Petition Submittal

1. Hunterdon County Resolution to Petition the Highlands Council for Plan Conformance, adopted November 7, 2018
2. Hunterdon County Self-Assessment Report (Appendix C)
3. Hunterdon County Highlands Master Plan Element (Appendix D)
4. Hunterdon County Implementation Agenda
5. Hunterdon County Resolution forwarding complete Petition to the Highlands Council for Plan Conformance, adopted February 16, 2021

Hunterdon County is a rural/suburban county with diverse communities of primarily residential and low intensity commercial developments. It is characterized by historic settlement areas, small downtowns and business centers, rural landscapes, and generally low density growth patterns.

Hunterdon County has prioritized preservation of open space and agriculture in its land use planning objectives. The County recognizes these resources as vital elements of both a high quality environment and a thriving economic future. As of 2017/2018 the County has 80,718 acres of preserved open space, representing 28.80% of the total land area of the County, and includes 8,423 acres of county parkland with natural areas and both active and passive recreation opportunities. As of January 1, 2021, the County also has 453 preserved farms, totaling 34,551.87 acres.

Hunterdon County has 128,934 acres in the Highlands Region, with 64,945 acres in the Preservation Area and 63,989 acres in the Planning Area. Of the 15 Highlands municipalities within Hunterdon County, all but one are conforming for at least some of their land area, with one municipality's petition pending. Of those, 11 municipalities are conforming for the entirety of their land area.

In 2018 the Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders (now County Commissioners) adopted a resolution stating their intention to conform with the RMP. Subsequently the County undertook the preparation of a Self-Assessment Report which analyzes the County's existing planning documents, policies, and procedures and determines how they align with the RMP.

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The Hunterdon County Self-Assessment Report states that

“The County views the Highlands Plan Conformance process as an opportunity to take a proactive approach to planning for a sustainable environmental and economic future. The County hopes to align its planning documents, policies, and capital improvement plans with the Highlands Regional Master Plan in order to gain support for those initiatives and to bolster the Plan’s regional objectives. The County’s primary goals in the process are to promote sustainable economic development in the County that accounts for sensitive environmental features and guides investment in a responsible manner consistent with the RMP and principles of smart growth. Other objectives include establishing a system of mutual support with the Highlands Council and bolstering collaborative relationships with its constituent municipalities. In addition, the County wants to be recognized as a leader in planning, sustainable economic growth, and as a model for other counties considering the Plan Conformance process.”

Hunterdon County Self-Assessment Report, January 2021, page 2

The Self-Assessment Report includes a summary of each of the current plans/documents that the County has adopted and is operating under. A number of these are slated to be revised/updated as part of the Plan Conformance implementation process.

Upon conclusion of the Self-Assessment, the County undertook preparation of a Highlands Master Plan element. Although completion of the Highlands Master Plan element is a requirement of County Plan Conformance, it is not required to be accomplished prior to a Petition hearing. Nevertheless, the County determined that it would be appropriate to complete this important task as part of their Plan Conformance Petition documents.

Hunterdon County’s Highlands Master Plan Element (the Plan) establishes the framework for compliance with the RMP and identifies a set of activities for future implementation. The Plan consists of three sections that provide an overview of the County’s physical characteristics, demographics, land use and planning activity, and future goals related to Highlands Plan Conformance.

Section One of the Plan is an overview of the Highlands regional context within Hunterdon County. It includes a summary of County property, such as parks, buildings, roads under County jurisdiction, and a discussion of stormwater management and drainage facilities.

Section Two of the Plan is a review of the County’s planning documents and explains how each is in alignment with the Highlands RMP and where amendments may be needed to bring them into conformance.

Section Three of the Plan provides a set of potential implementation actions for the County to undertake in partnership with the Highlands Council during the Plan Conformance Process. Several priority implementation actions were identified in the Implementation Agenda as noted below.

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In accordance with the requirements of Plan Conformance review, the County of Hunterdon submitted an Implementation Agenda as part of its Plan Conformance Petition documents. The Implementation Agenda identifies three plan conformance tasks for completion under Highlands Council funding during Fiscal Year 2021. The first of these is an update to the Hunterdon County Master Plan, also referred to as the Growth Management Plan. The second task is an update to the County's Historic Preservation Plan. The third task is an economic development project identified as Hunterdon County Tourism Marketing. These are described in more detail under the Implementation Plan and Schedule of this report.

In accordance with Section 14 and 15 of the Highlands Act (N.J.S.A. 13:20- 14 & 15) the County has indicated its intent to align its county master plan and associated regulations, as applicable, with the goals, requirements, and provisions of the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

Staff Recommendation

On the basis of the components of the Conformance Petition, outlined above, and the adoption of the County's Self-Assessment Report and Highlands Master Plan element, Highlands Council Staff recommends that the Petition for Plan Conformance and the accompanying Implementation Plan and Schedule for the County of Hunterdon be approved with conditions as outlined below. The funding approved as part of the Petition approval is shown in the Implementation Plan and Schedule (see Appendix A). Additional Plan Conformance implementation tasks are anticipated for future years and are also outlined in the Implementation Plan and Schedule.

1. **Highlands Notice Requirements** – The County shall adopt administrative requirements necessary to incorporate such items as Highlands Council notice requirements and referrals, as required pursuant to the Highlands Act for certain types of development applications and county capital projects.
2. **Stormwater Management Plan** – The County shall prepare a comprehensive stormwater management plan developed with professional assistance for county-wide application and use, based on implementation of green infrastructure techniques and best practices in stormwater management and intended to reduce/eliminate flooding, protect water quality, and maximize groundwater recharge. The Highlands Council shall provide technical assistance, funding, and additional guidance as necessary.
3. **Water Use and Conservation Management Plan** – The County shall prepare a comprehensive water use and conservation management plan developed with professional assistance for county-wide application and use based on analysis of watersheds within the County and intended to reduce/eliminate areas of water deficit, retain/enhance water quality, and ensure a sustainable water supply into the future. The Highlands Council shall provide technical assistance, funding, and additional guidance as necessary.
4. **Growth Management Plan/Master Plan** – The County shall prepare an updated Growth Management Plan. The existing Growth Management Plan (GMP) was adopted in 2007, one

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year prior to the adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The GMP is not only due for a comprehensive overview and update but can also now be brought into full alignment with the RMP. Among the County's stated goals for this task are modernizing baseline assumptions and objectives, bringing the GMP into harmony with other County planning documents, incorporating a focus on strategic investment opportunities (including development, redevelopment, protection, and preservation where appropriate), and, significantly, integrating the County's Plan Conformance efforts and actions. Specifically, Hunterdon County intends to ensure that the GMP is consistent with the RMP and to incorporate recommendations and best practices from the Highlands Council's Monitoring Program Recommendations Report. A scope of work will be provided to the Highlands Council for review and approval prior to commencement of work.

5. **Historic Preservation Plan** – The County shall prepare a comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan. The existing historic preservation plan element, "Sites of Historic Interest," dates from 1979. The last comprehensive update to the County's inventory of historic sites and districts was conducted in 2002, and this update did not alter the recommendations of the 1979 element. As the current historic preservation element far predates both the RMP and the Highlands Act, a thorough update or addendum is justified. The County shall prepare and adopt an Historic Preservation Plan which would overhaul the existing document, establish digital and online resources, incorporate strategies to promote sustainable economic development and recreation, make recommendations to strengthen key land development regulations, and address the Highlands RMP and its goals. A scope of work will be provided to the Highlands Council for review and approval prior to commencement of work.

6. **Hunterdon County Tourism Marketing** – The County shall prepare a marketing program to expand on the recently completed tourism study. Between 2017 and 2019, Hunterdon County made use of Highlands Council grant funding awarded as part of a sustainable economic development planning initiative to complete a three-phase study of tourism within the County. This initiative produced a slate of recommendations for implementation in keeping with the Highlands RMP. The County will continue its engagement with the Highlands Council to implement and expand its tourism programs and promote that segment of the economy in a sustainable manner. A scope of work will be provided to the Highlands Council for review and approval prior to commencement of work.

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C. SUMMARY OF COUNTY COMMENTS

County Comments: Hunterdon County acknowledges and accepts the provisions included in this Consistency Review and Recommendations Report. By and large the required plan conformance tasks are either already being pursued by the County under various existing undertakings or are anticipated next steps for projects underway, such as the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Highlands Council Response: The Highlands Council appreciates the County's review and anticipates continued coordination with all of the plan conformance activities.

D. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Final Draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report was posted to the Highlands Council website for review and comment by the general public.

One comment was received during the period established by the Highlands Council for receipt of written public comment (March 29, 2021 – April 29, 2021). The comment/response document is attached to this document at Appendix E.

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APPENDIX A

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND SCHEDULE
County of Hunterdon

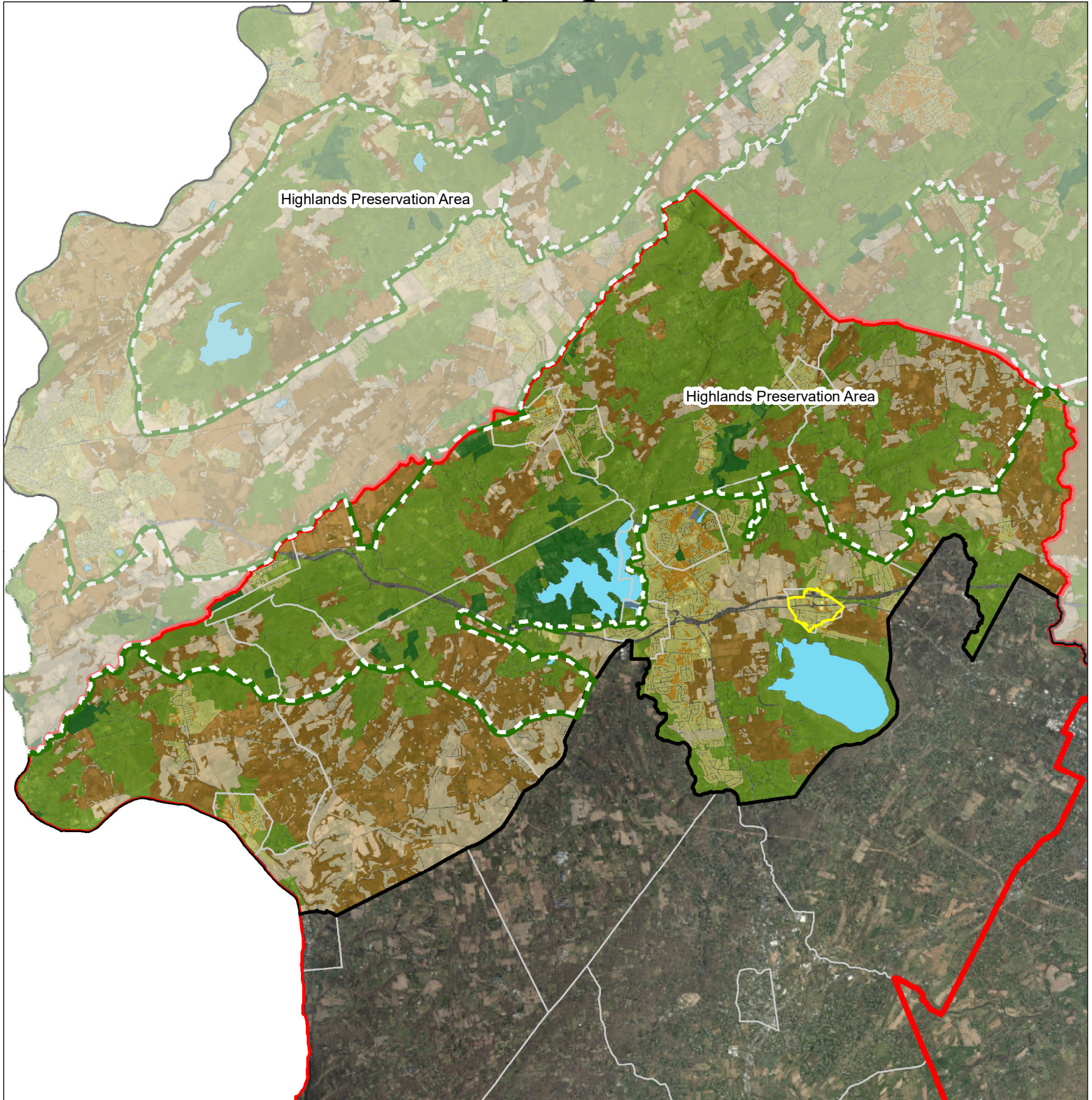
March 2021	Hunterdon County		Highlands Council Implementation Plan						
Amended Grant Agreement Task #	PLAN CONFORMANCE TASK	Reimbursed to Date		FY2021	FY2022 (proposed)	FY2023 (proposed)	Total Budget (Current and Future)	Completion Date	Status and Comments
	County Master Plan								
	Growth Management Plan / Master Plan			\$75,000			\$75,000		Hunterdon County's Master Plan Land Use Element to guide land use and decision making throughout the County and in alignment with the Highlands RMP within the Highlands Region.
	County Transportation Plan					\$50,000	\$50,000		Reflect changes over the last decade, include conformance with the Highlands RMP, and evaluate opportunities for transit-oriented development and how to capitalize on existing infrastructure in the County with a special focus on the Highlands Region.
	Agricultural Retention/Farmland Preservation Plan				\$50,000		\$50,000		Supplement, enhance, and complete ongoing work being done by the County.
	Historic Preservation Plan			\$100,000			\$100,000		Update historical sites inventory update historic preservation plan, clearinghouse of municipal historic preservation ordinances and documents. Survey of historic sites.
	TDR Plan					\$50,000	\$50,000		Explore potential County-wide TDR program in collaboration with municipalities in the Highlands. It will be essential to review the full implications of infrastructure capacity, property tax implications, school district impacts (look at regional school districts), affordable housing obligations, and political buy-in.
	Economic Development Projects								
	Strategic I-78 / Rt 22 Corridor Plan				\$50,000	\$25,000	\$75,000		Comprehensive corridor planning project to promote sustainable economic development, inter-municipal policies, and sensible land use and development along the I-78 and Route 22 corridor through Hunterdon County.
	Hunterdon County Tourism Marketing			\$75,000	\$25,000	\$50,000	\$150,000		Tourism marketing initiatives in collaboration between Hunterdon County Economic Development and Hunterdon Tourism Partnership.
	Resource Management Plans and Programs								
	Stormwater Management Plan				\$100,000				Comprehensive stormwater management plan for county-wide application and use, based on implementation of green infrastructure techniques and best practices in stormwater management and intended to reduce/eliminate flooding, protect water quality, and maximize groundwater recharge.
	Water Use and Conservation Management Plan					\$100,000			Comprehensive water use and conservation management plan for county-wide application and use based on analysis of watersheds within the County and intended to reduce/eliminate areas of water deficit, retain/enhance water quality, and ensure a sustainable water supply into the future.
	Scenic Resource Management Plan				\$30,000		\$30,000		Establish criteria / nomination process for designating regionally significant Scenic Resources in collaboration with the Highlands Council. Develop branding and marketing efforts to encourage visitors, sustainable use of natural areas. This ties into tourism and marketing efforts outlined by the County's Tourism Research Initiative. Scenic byways.
	Forest Stewardship Plan				\$30,000		\$30,000		Use existing Woodland Conservation Plan as a base to develop specific plans and action items to promote forest stewardship and reforestation and protect and enhance forests in the Highlands Region. Incorporate woodland conservation, restoration, and development best practices into updates to the Growth Management Plan and other relevant planning documents.
	Implementing Ordinance for Management Plans								
	Septic System Maintenance					\$40,000	\$40,000		Septic system management - Web-based program / database to help with municipal septic monitoring and inspections.
	Highlands Center and Highlands Redevelopment Areas								
	Highlands Redevelopment Area Planning				\$30,000		\$30,000		Work with municipalities and the Highlands Council to identify Highlands Redevelopment Areas as targets for investment and growth opportunities.
	Implementation								
	Trails and recreation implementation				\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000		Continue implementation efforts for projects outlined in the County Strategic Park and Open Space Plan with design projects.
Totals		\$ -		\$250,000					

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APPENDIX B

HIGHLANDS RESOURCE MAPS
County of Hunterdon

Exhibit 1: Land Use Capability Map Zones

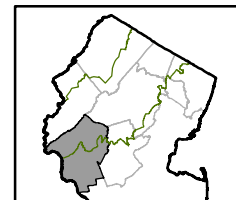


Regional Master Plan Overlay Zone Designation

Zone	Sub-Zone	Conservation
Protection	Existing Community	Environmentally Constrained
Conservation	Environmentally Constrained	Lake Community
Existing Community		Wildlife Management
Preservation	Municipal Boundaries	Lakes Greater Than 10 acres
County Boundary	Highlands Boundary	Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

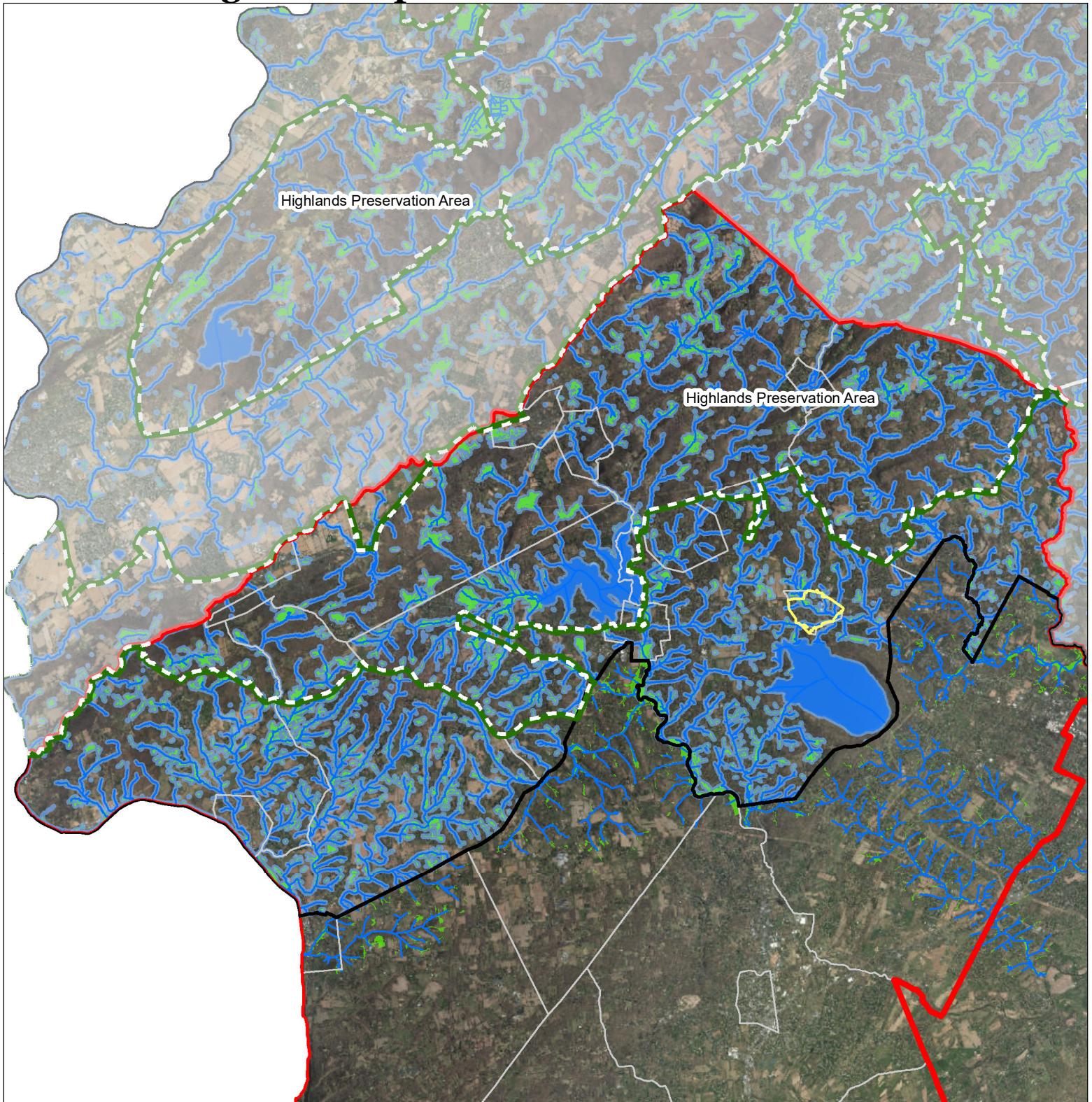
1 inch = 3.193 miles



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March 2021



Exhibit 2: Highlands Open Waters

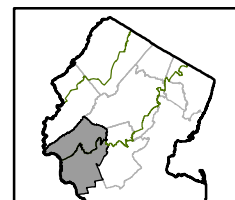


- Highlands Open Water Protection Area (300 ft)
- Streams
- Wetlands
- Lakes and Ponds

- Preservation Area
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundaries
- Highlands Boundary
- Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

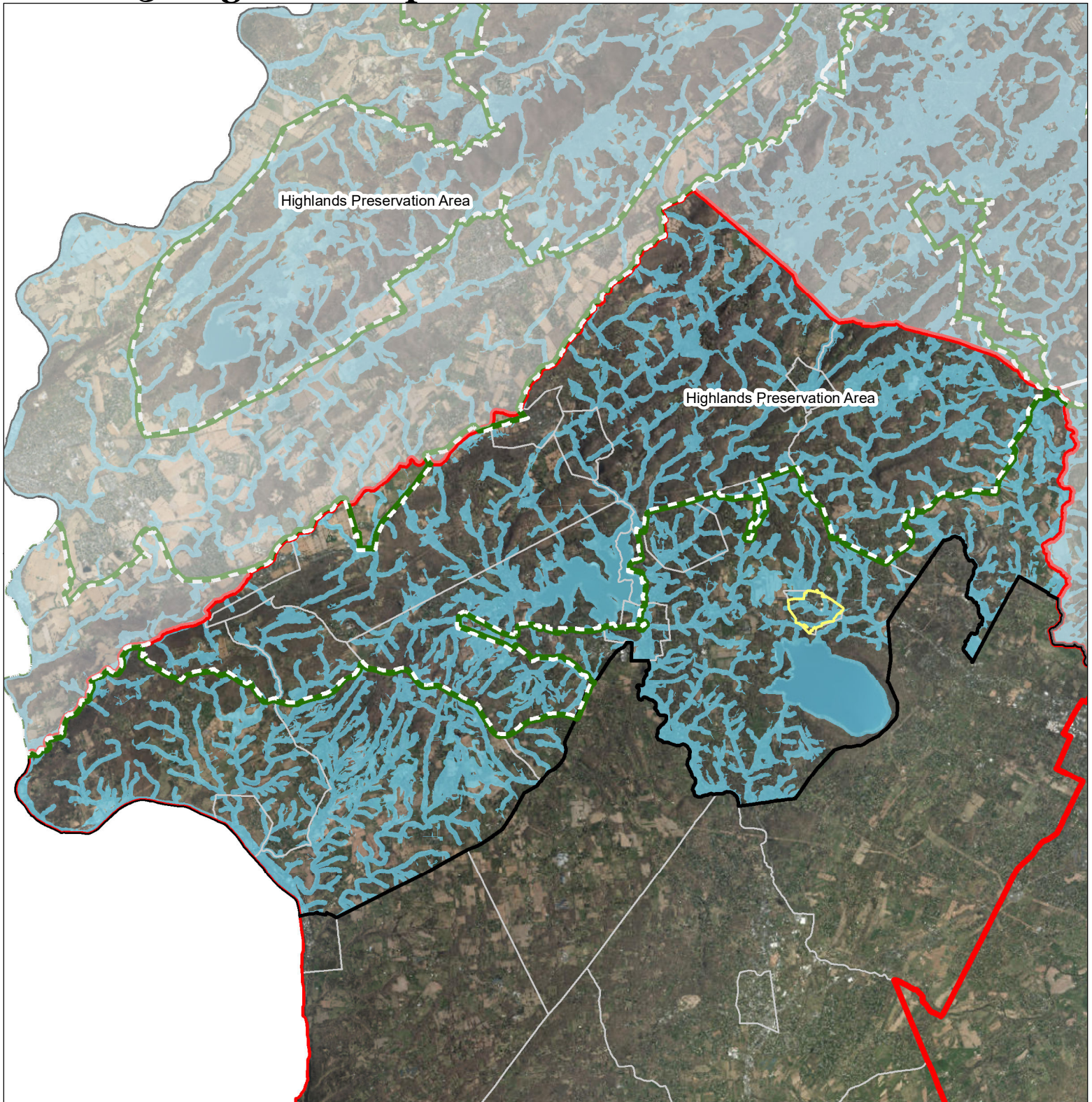
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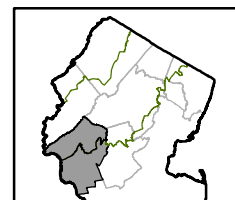
Exhibit 3: Highlands Riparian Areas



-  Riparian Area
-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

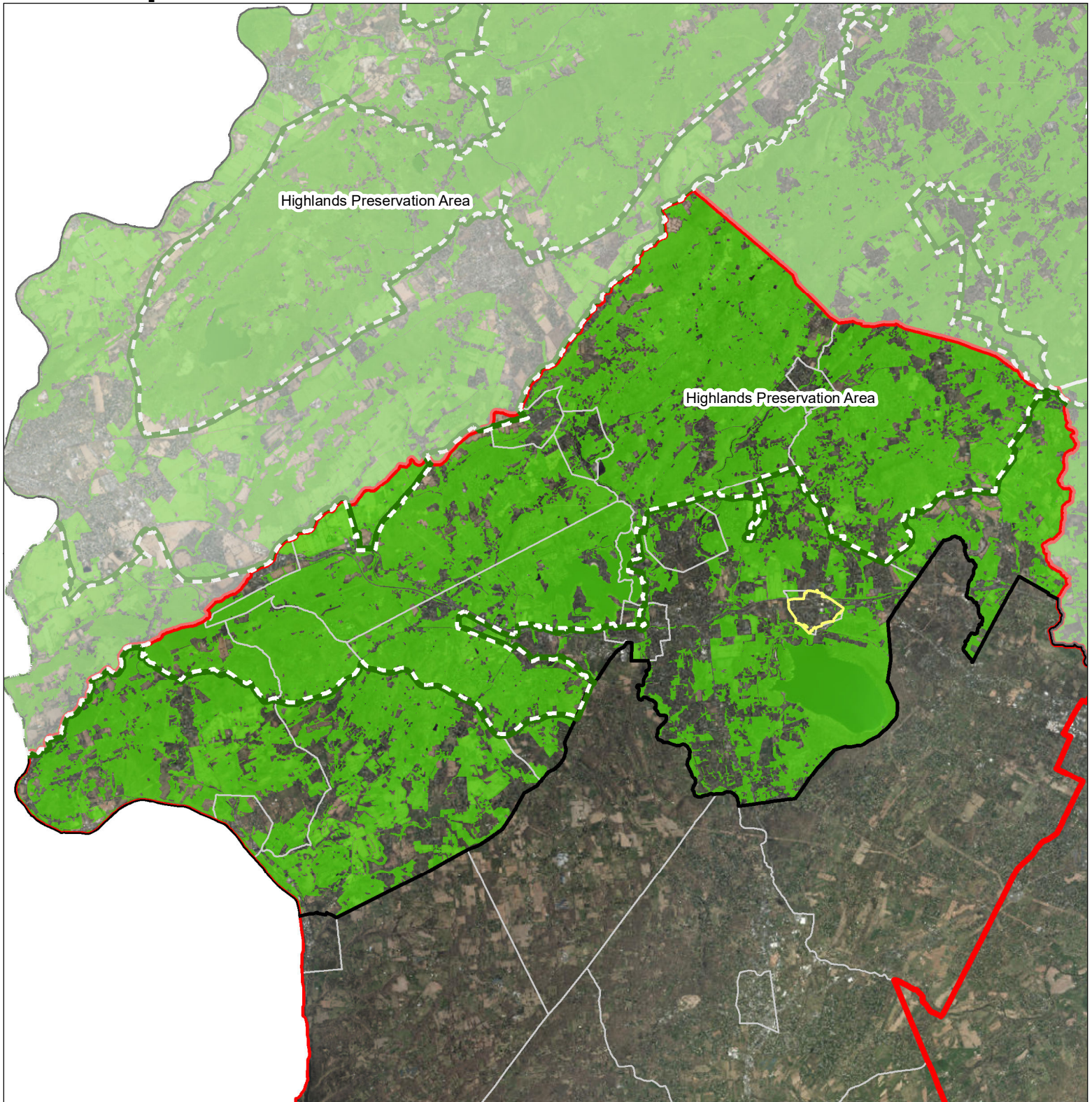
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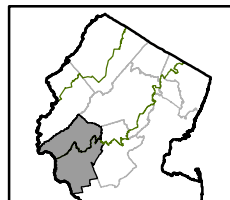
Exhibit 4: Critical Wildlife Habitat



-  Critical Wildlife Habitat
-  County Boundary
-  Preservation Area
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

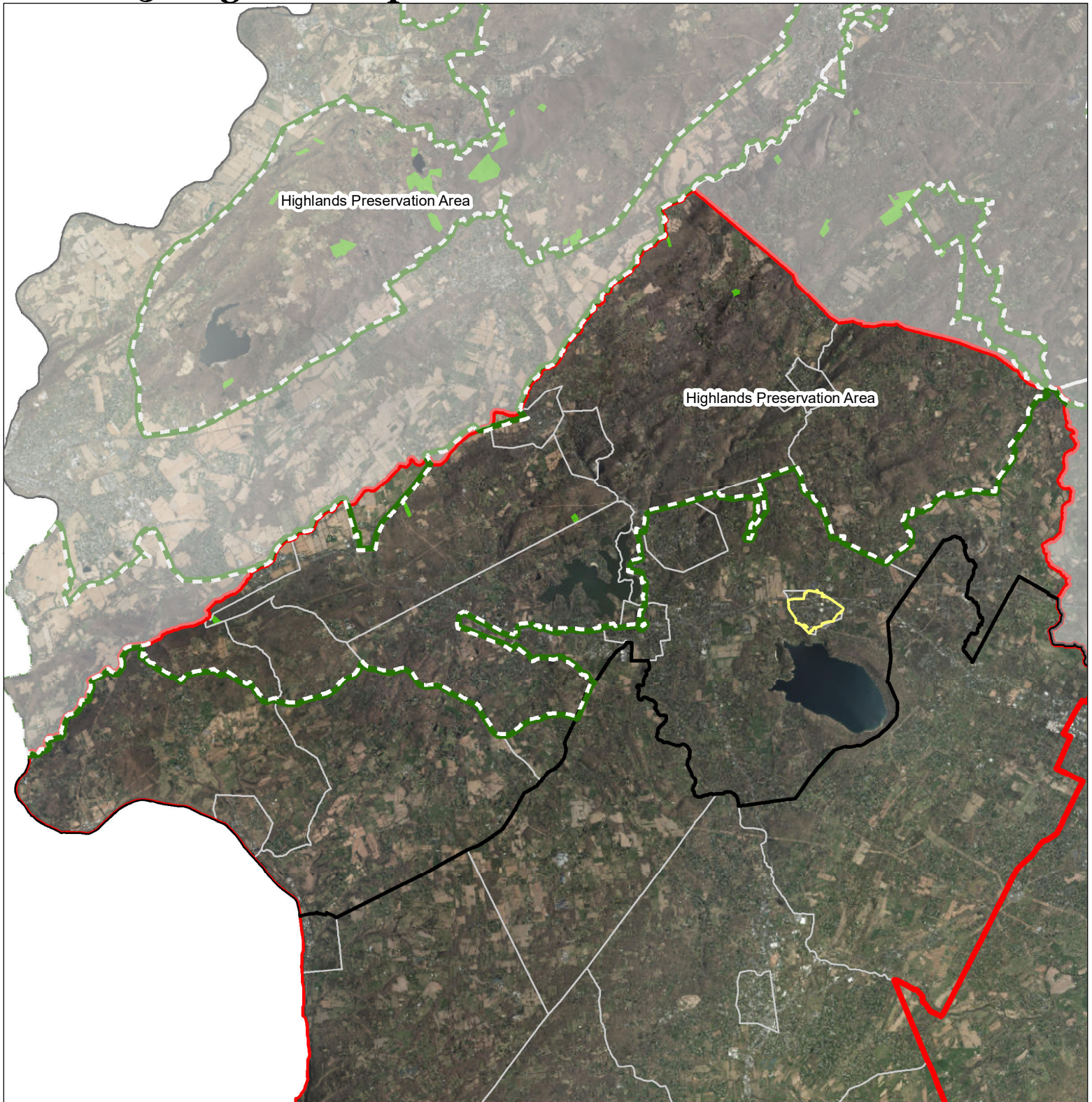
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March 2021



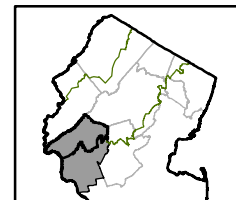
Exhibit 5: Highlands Special Environmental Zone



-  Special Environmental Zone
-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

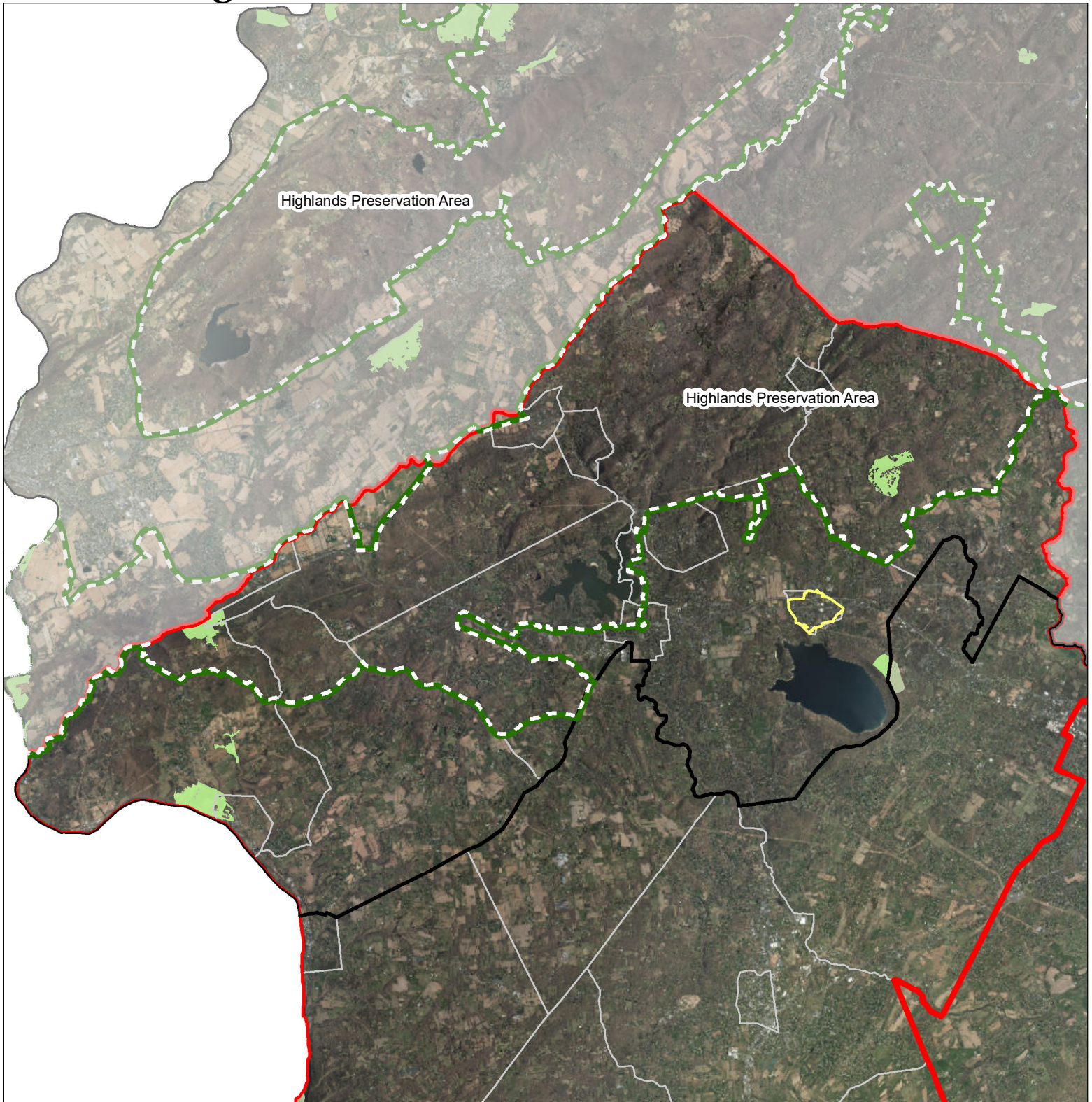
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March 2021



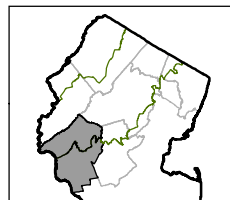
Exhibit 6: Significant Natural Areas



-  Significant Natural Areas
-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

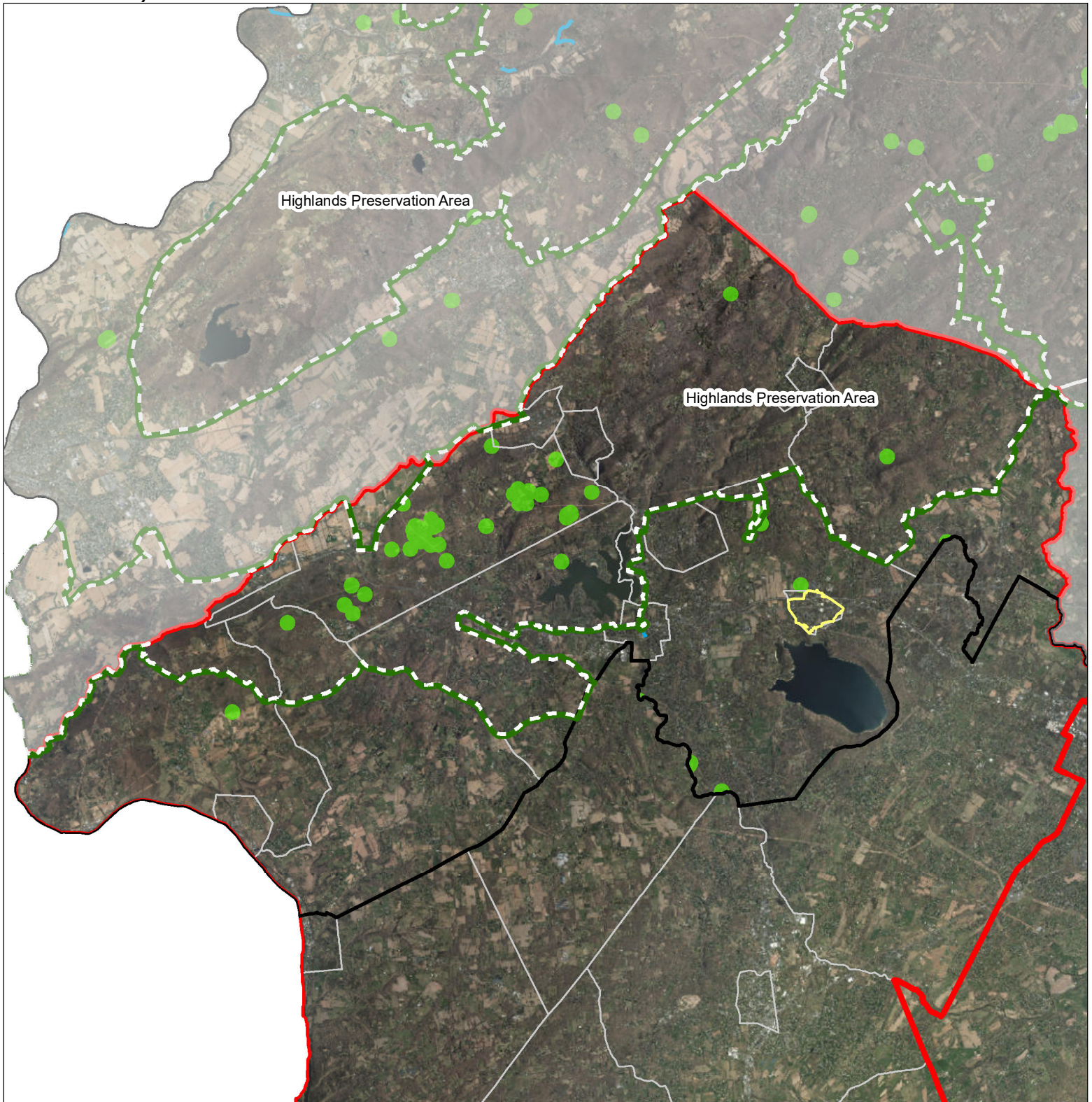
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Highlands Council
New Jersey
March 2021



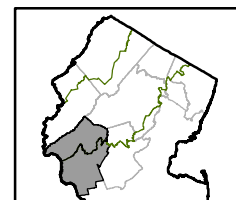
Exhibit 7: Vernal Pools



- Confirmed Vernal Pools + 300m buffer
- Critical Freshwater Mussel Habitat
- Preservation
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundaries
- Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

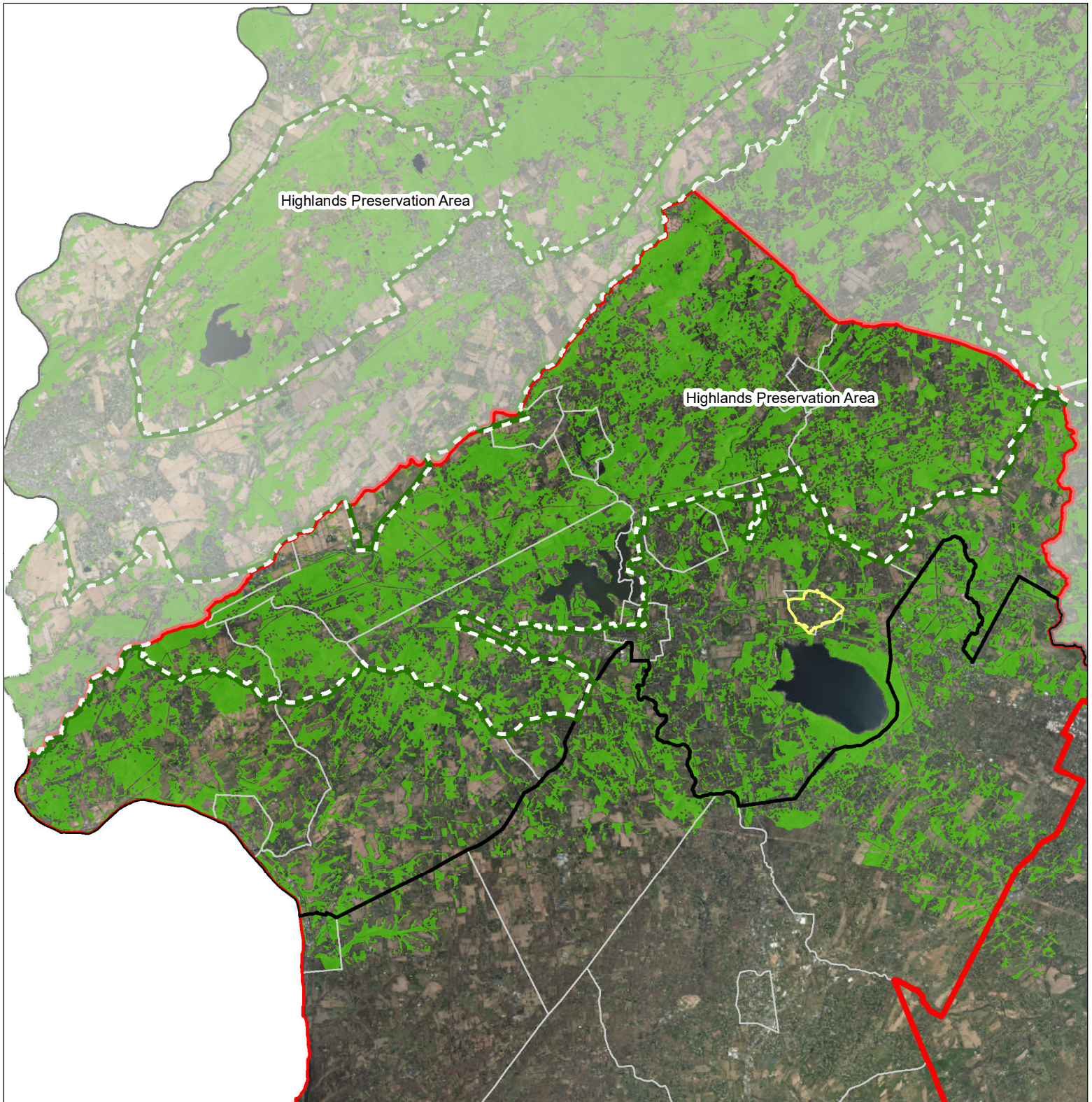
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Highlands Council
New Jersey
March 2021



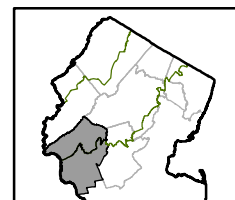
Exhibit 8: Total Forest Area



- Forested Areas
- Preservation Area
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundaries
- Highlands Boundary
- Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

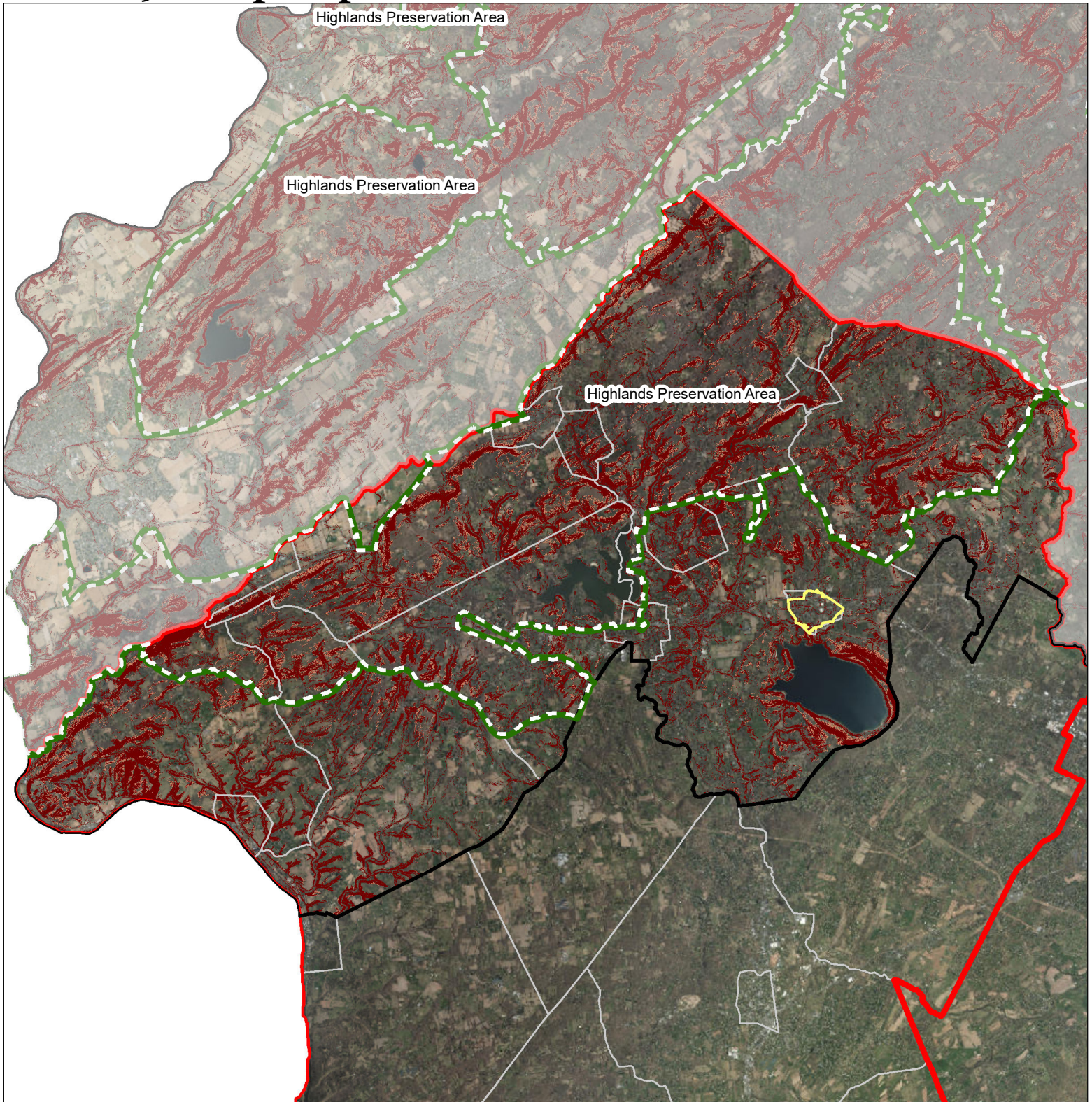
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March 2021








Exhibit 9: Steep Slope Protection Areas



Steep Slope Protection Area

-  Severely Constrained
-  Moderately Constrained

-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

1 inch = 3.193 miles

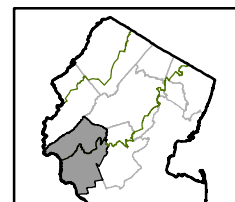
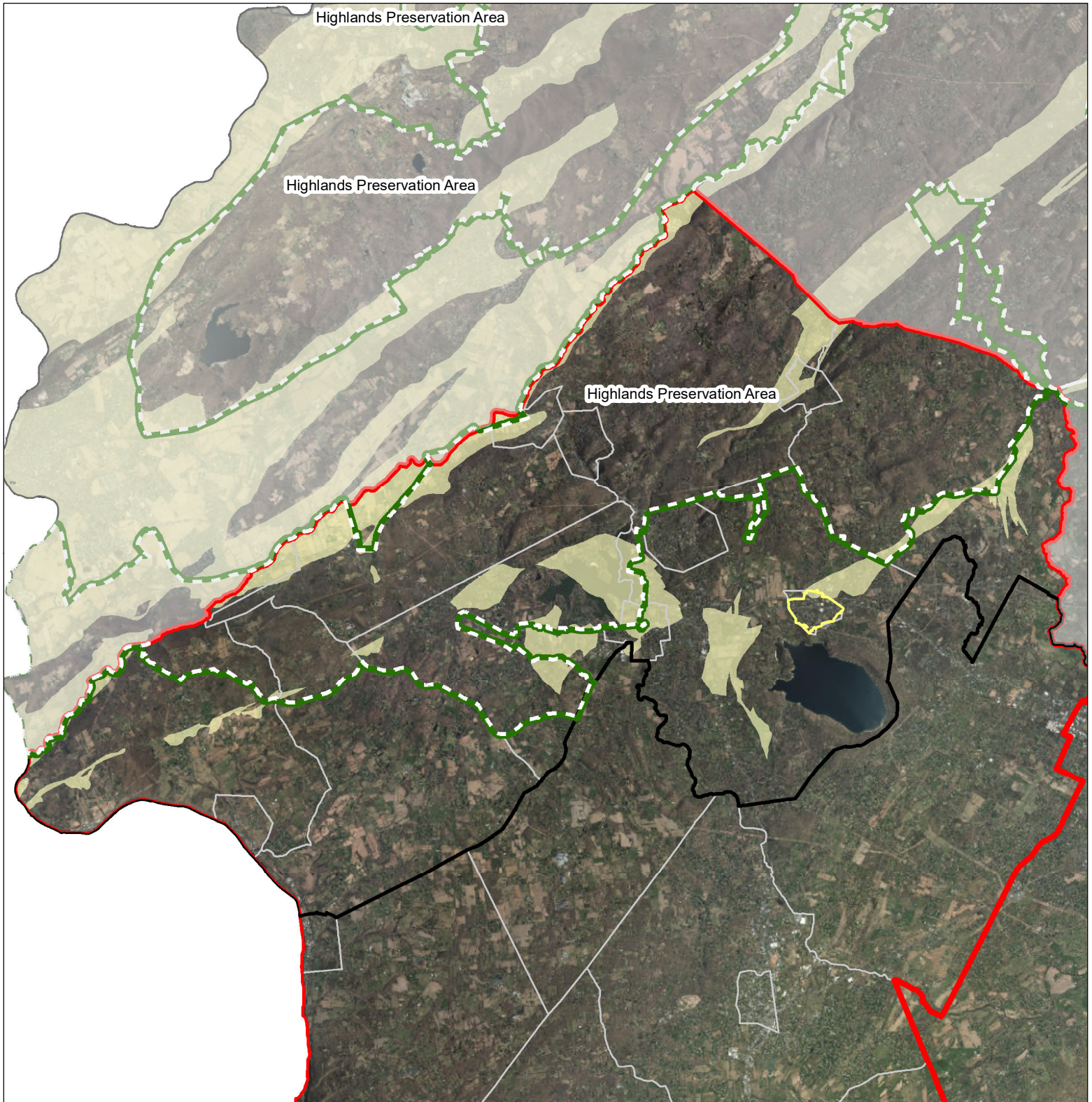








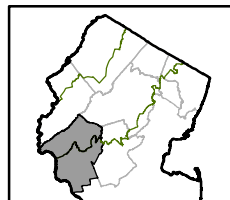
Exhibit 10: Carbonate Rock Areas



-  Carbonate Rock Area
-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

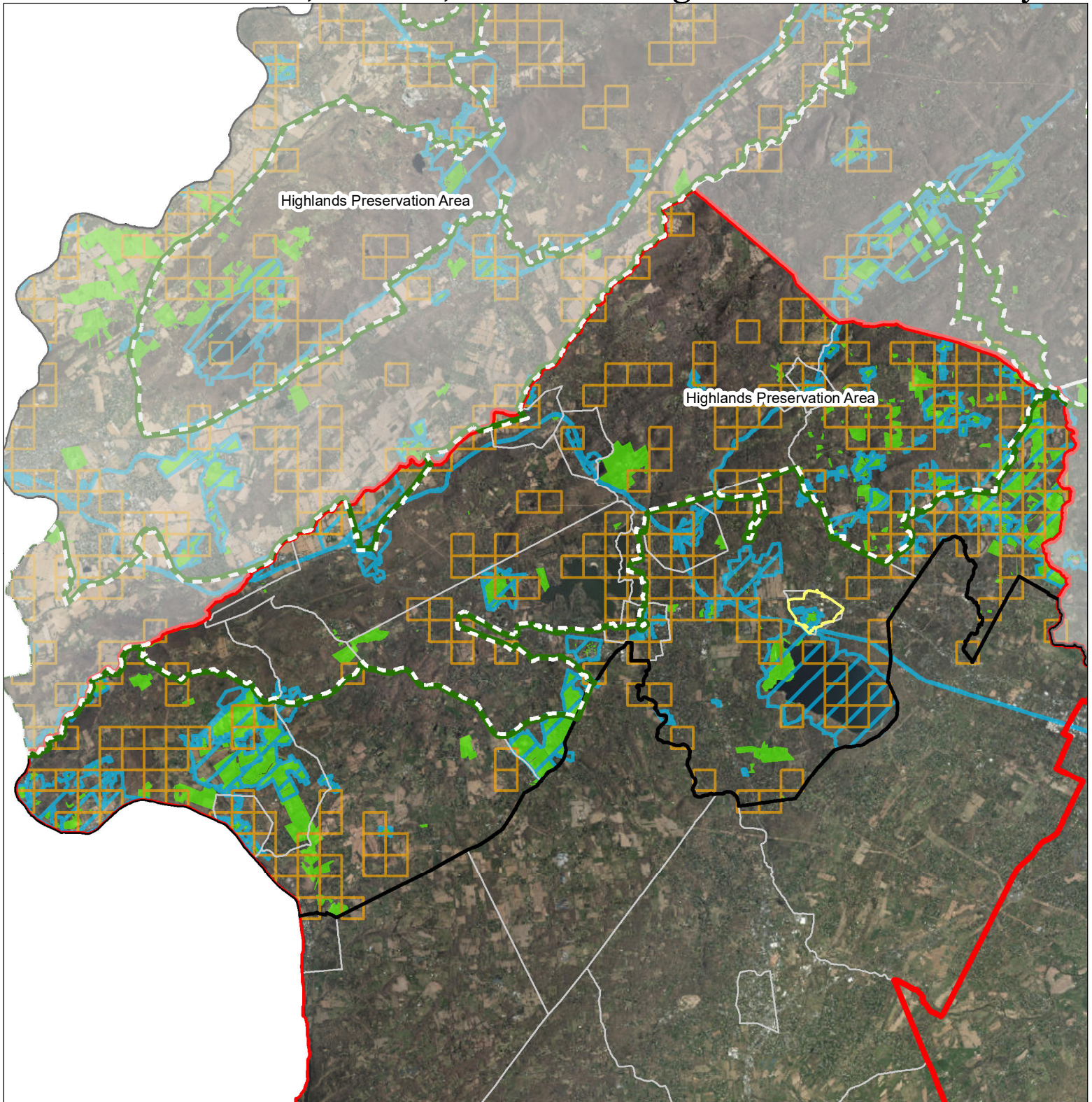
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New Jersey
March 2021



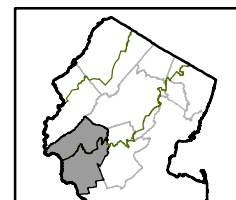
Exhibit 11: Historic, Cultural, and Archaeological Resource Inventory



- Archaeological Grids (1 sq mi)
- NJ Historic Districts
- Historic Property Polygons
- Preservation Area
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundaries
- Highlands Boundary
- Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

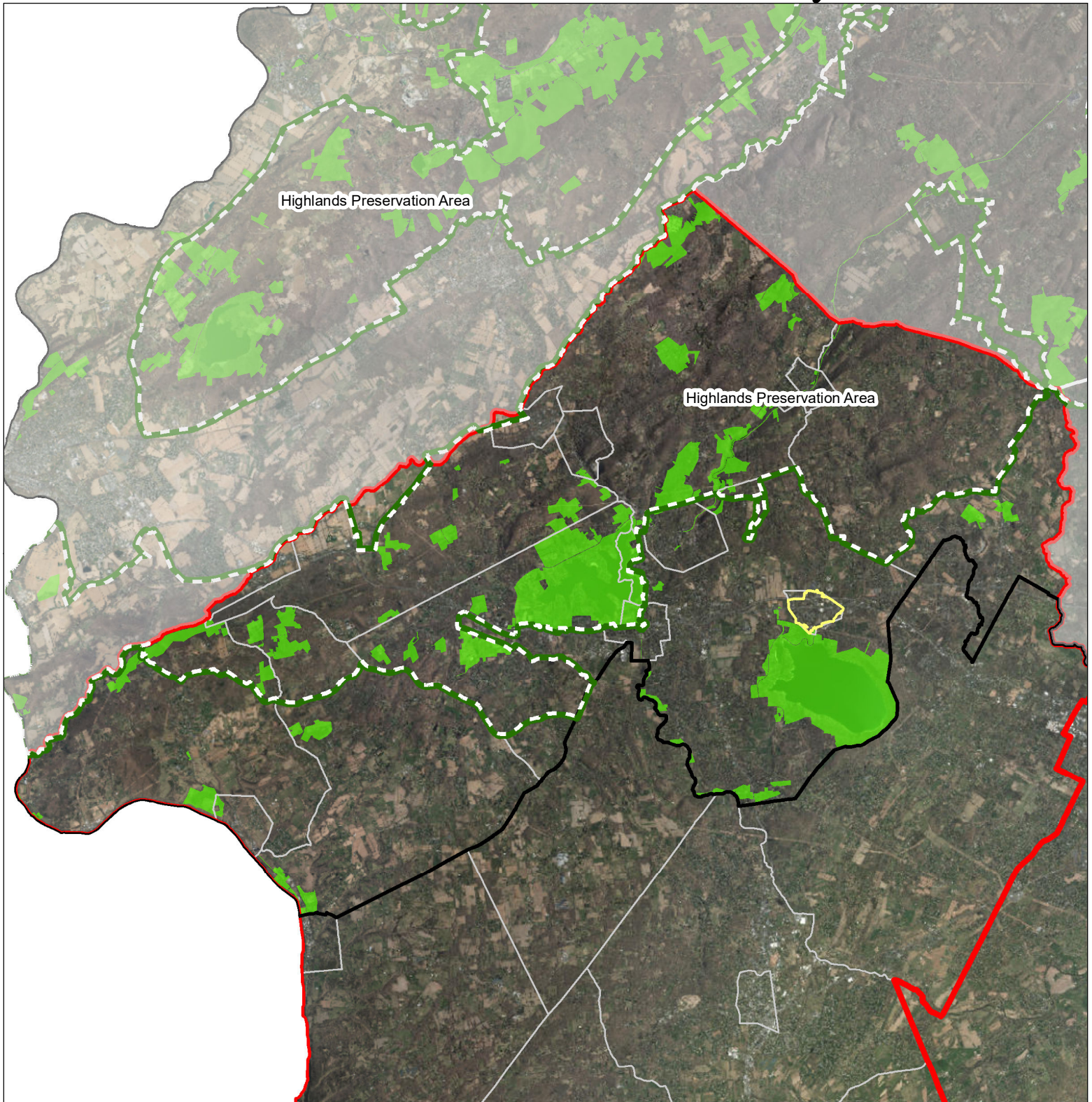
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New Jersey
March 2021



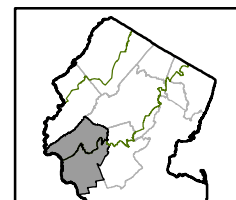
Exhibit 12: Baseline Scenic Resources Inventory



-  Scenic Resources
-  Preservation Aera
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

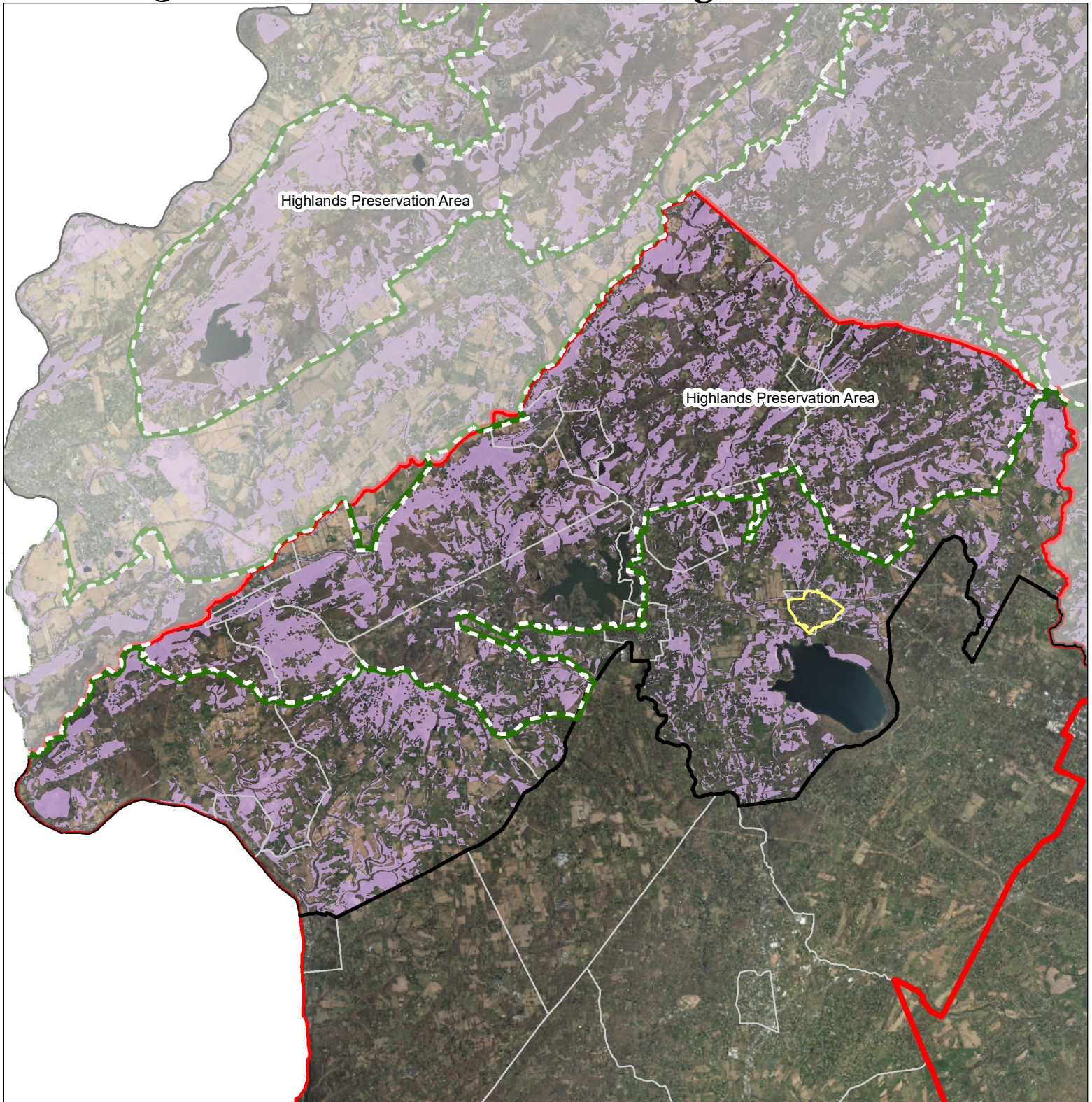
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March 2021



Exhibit 13: Prime Ground Water Recharge Areas

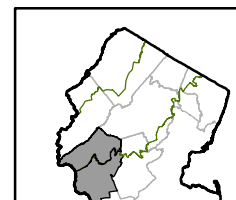


 Prime Groundwater Recharge Areas
 Preservation

 County Boundary
 Municipal Boundaries
 Highlands Boundary
 Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

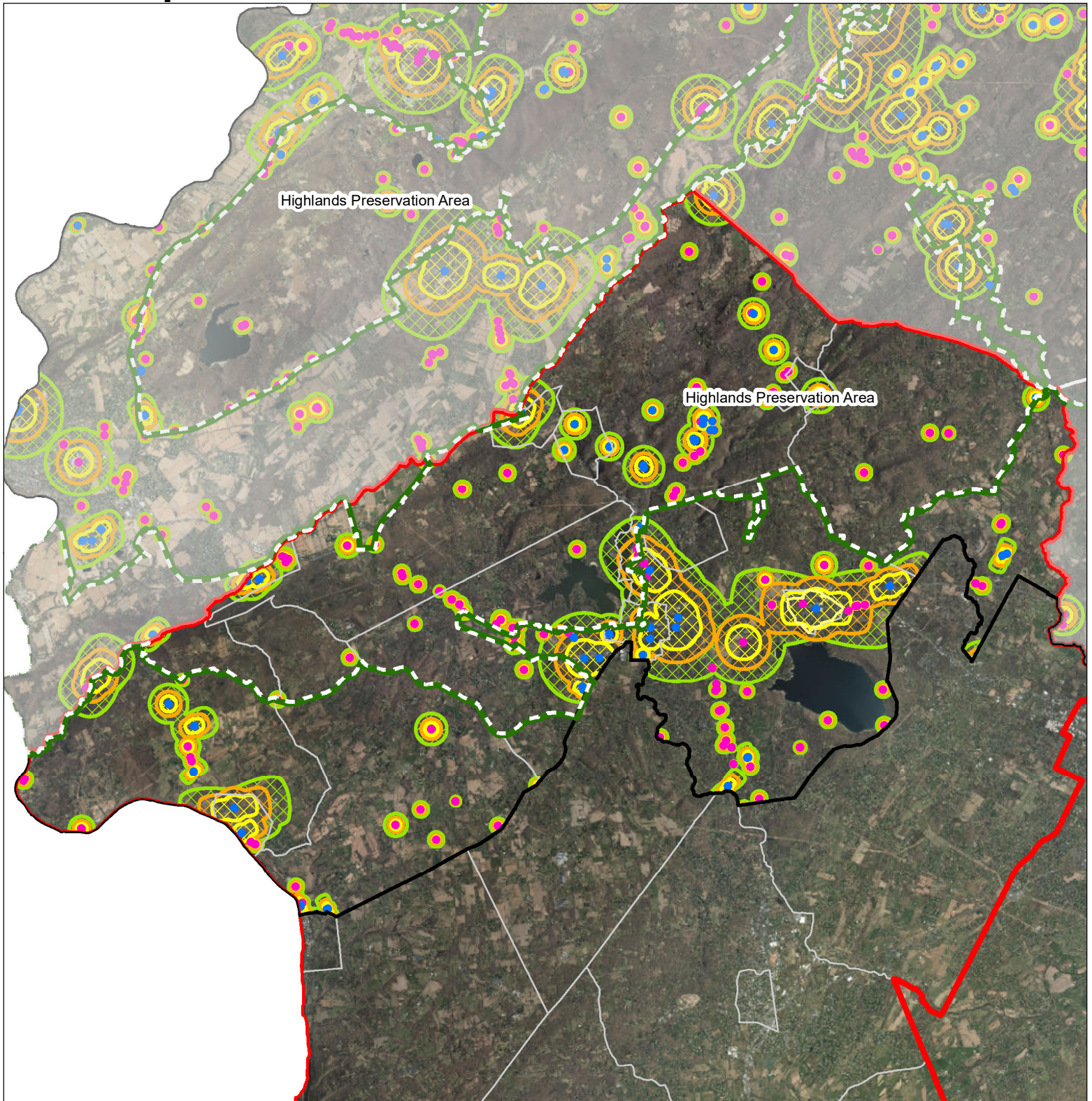
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March 2021



Exhibit 14: Wellhead Protection Areas



● Public Community Wells ● Public Non-Community Wells

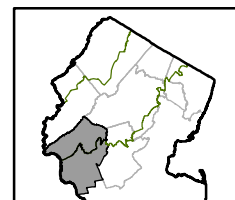
Wellhead Protection Areas

-  2 - Year Tier
-  5 - Year Tier
-  12 - Year Tier

-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

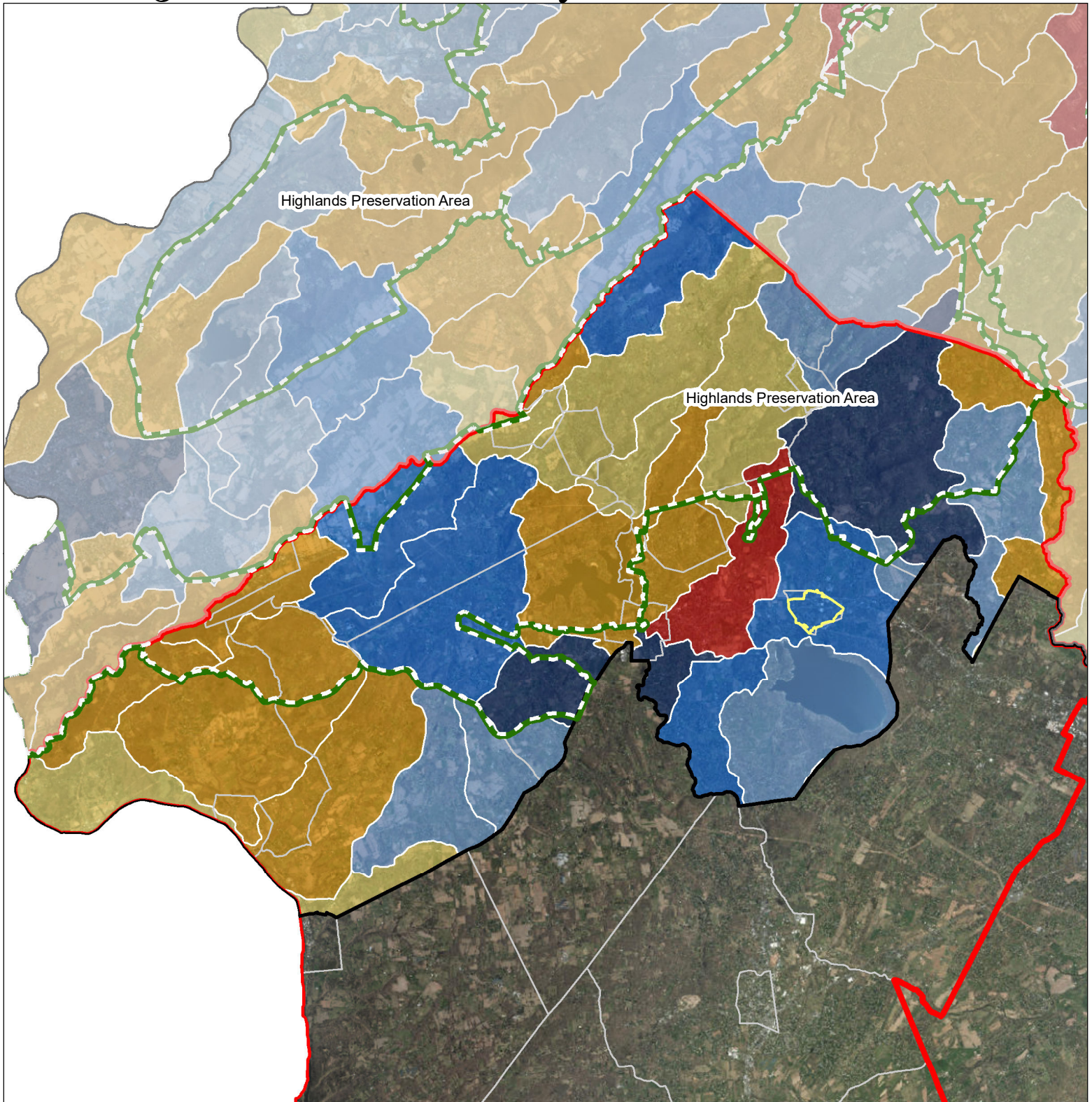
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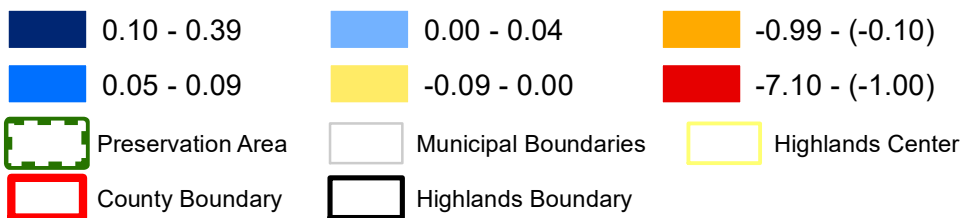
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March 2021



Exhibit 15: Net Water Availability



Net Water Availability



Hunterdon County

1 inch = 3.193 miles

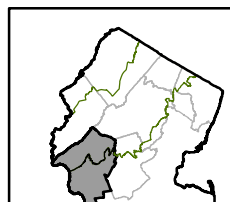
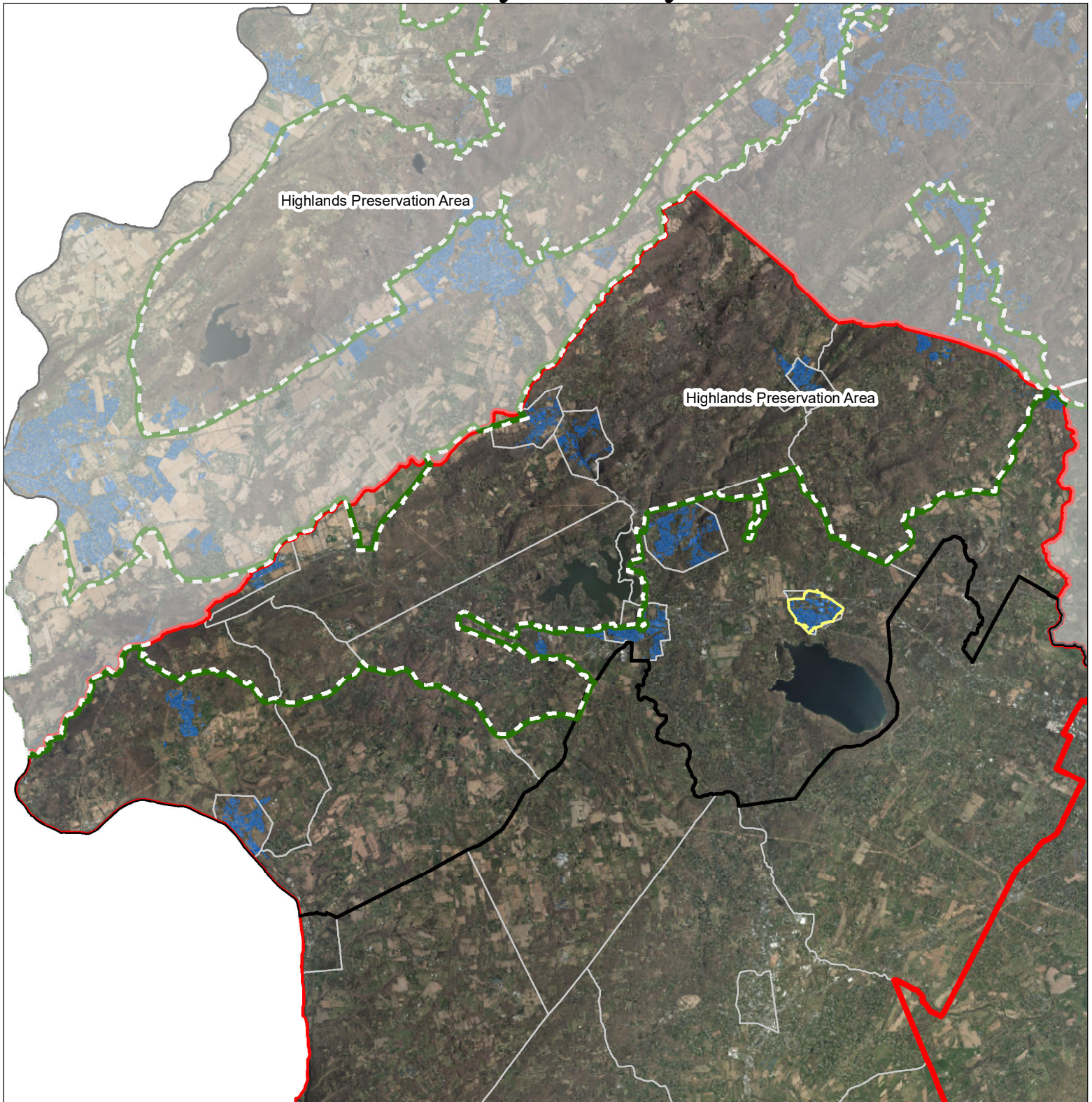








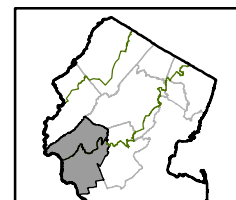
Exhibit 16: Public Community Water Systems



-  Public Community Water Systems
-  Highlands Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

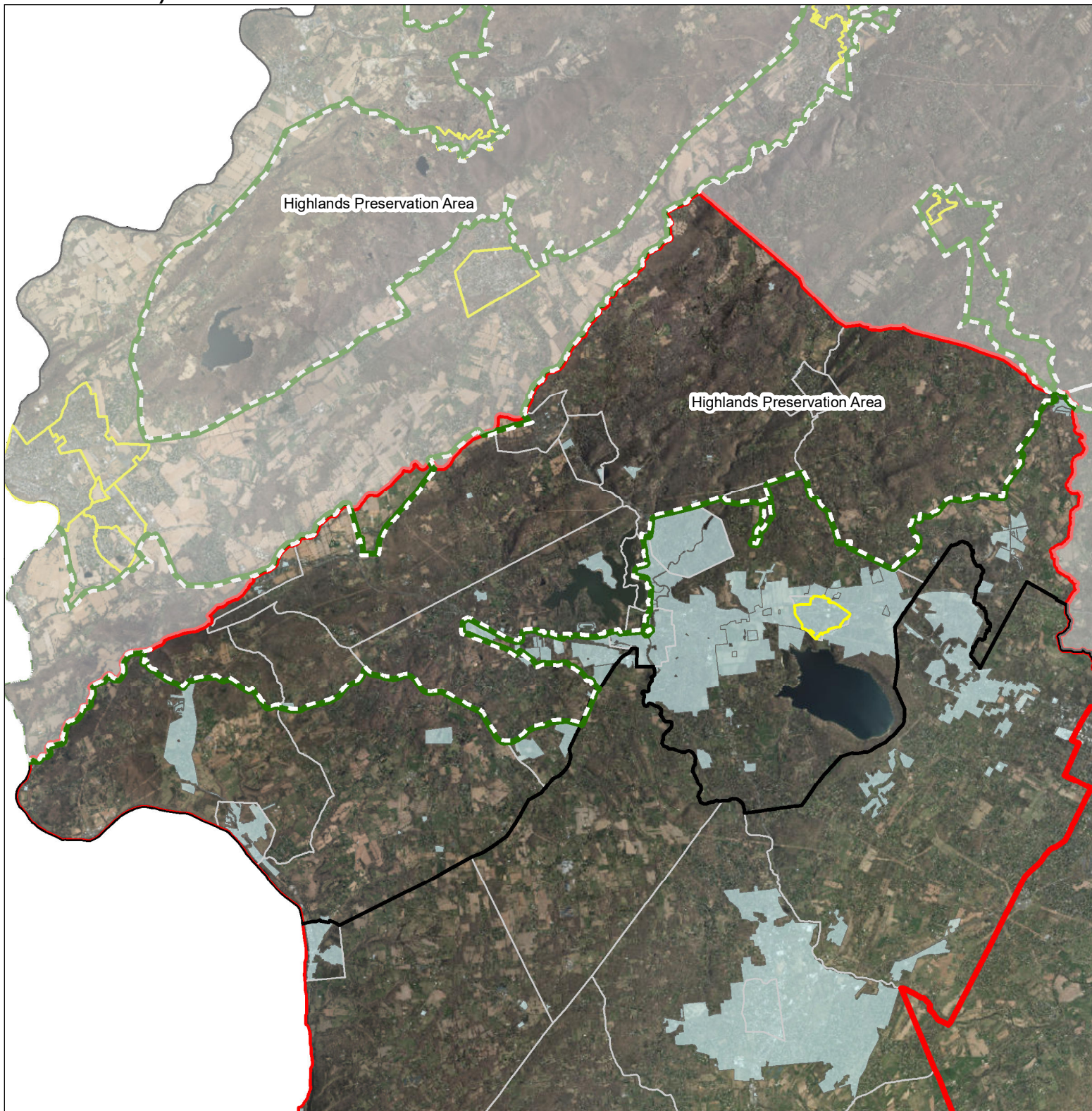
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








New Jersey
March 2021



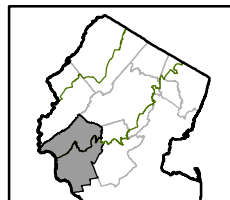
Exhibit 17: Sewer Service Area



-  Sewer Service Area
-  Preservation Area
-  County Boundary
-  Municipal Boundaries
-  Highlands Boundary
-  Highlands Center

Hunterdon County

1 inch = 3.193 miles



Highlands Council
New Jersey
March 2021



NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Petition for Plan Conformance – Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

APPENDIX C

HUNTERDON COUNTY SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Petition for Plan Conformance
County of Hunterdon

HUNTERDON COUNTY SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Hunterdon County, New Jersey

January 2021

Prepared by

Heyer, Gruel & Associates



236 Broad Street
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INTRODUCTION AND PLAN CONFORMANCE TO DATE

Hunterdon County is pleased to be working with the Highlands Council in pursuing conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The County Board of Chosen Freeholders adopted a resolution on November 7, 2018 authorizing the preparation of the petition for Plan Conformance. In December 2018, the Highlands Council voted to award a grant for County Plan Conformance.

The County was previously involved with the initial stages of Plan Conformance in 2009. Draft documents were prepared based on the Highlands Council's model documents that were in use at that time. An Initial Assessment Grant Findings Report outlined some of the proposed tasks that the County might undertake.

In July 2019, the Highlands Council adopted Regional Master Plan (RMP) Addendum 2019-2 that updated and revised the Plan Conformance Procedures. The first step in the Plan Conformance Process is an Initial Assessment Report. This Report focuses on the County's existing planning documents, policies, and procedures and how they align with the RMP. The principal focus for counties is on roadway improvements and stormwater systems that are under their jurisdiction and compliance with the administrative requirements outlined in the Highlands Act.

Considering the new Plan Conformance Procedures, the previous draft and model documents that were prepared a decade ago are set aside in favor of a new review and assessment of the County's status.

COUNTY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The County views the Highlands Plan Conformance process as an opportunity to take a proactive approach to planning for a sustainable environmental and economic future. The County hopes to align its planning documents, policies, and capital improvement plans with the Highlands Regional Master Plan in order to gain support for those initiatives and to bolster the Plan's regional objectives.

The County's primary goals in the process are to promote sustainable economic development in the County that accounts for sensitive environmental features and guides investment in a responsible manner consistent with the RMP and principles of smart growth. Other objectives include establishing a system of mutual support with the Highlands Council and bolstering collaborative relationships with its constituent municipalities. In addition, the County wants to be recognized as a leader in planning, sustainable economic growth, and as a model for other counties considering the Plan Conformance process.

The County's planning documents, policies, and investment strategies will consider existing and future infrastructure within the Highlands Area through this lens.

EXISTING PLANS

Most of the County's planning documents predate the adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. While the Plans are consistent in many ways with the RMP, they need to be comprehensively reviewed and updated. Updates to the plans will reflect changes in the County since they were adopted and bring them into full conformance with the RMP.

SITES OF HISTORIC INTEREST – HUNTEDON COUNTY MASTER PLAN (1979)

The 1979 Sites of Historic Interest report provides a county-wide survey of historic sites. The report includes a review of resources, historic preservation tools and programs, and funding mechanisms. The report includes six recommendations. In general, the report recommends cooperation between governmental entities and private citizens, that the County Planning Board continue its efforts in historic preservation, that the County provide a clearinghouse of information, that the County Planning Board consider historic sites and districts in its review of development proposals, and that municipal and County planning activities consider historic sites and their preservation within their respective long-range planning efforts.

HISTORIC SITES AND DISTRICTS IN HUNTERDON COUNTY (2002)

This is a pamphlet prepared by the Hunterdon County Cultural & Heritage Commission that provides an inventory of historic sites and districts listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places located within Hunterdon County municipalities. The report consists of a profile sheet for each district or property and provides a brief history, photographs, and cadastral maps showing boundaries. This report serves as an inventory and, does not make any recommendations.

Recommendation

The Highlands Regional Master Plan includes several goals related to the protection of historic, cultural, and scenic resources.

- Goal 4A - Protection and preservation of the historic, cultural and archaeological resources of the Highlands Region
- Goal 4B - Protection and enhancement of the scenic resources within the Highlands Region
- Goal 4C - Conforming municipalities and counties include minimum standards for historical, cultural, archaeological and scenic protection in municipal and county master plans and land development regulations

The County "Sites of Historic Interest" Historic Preservation Element was prepared in 1979, predating the Highlands Act and RMP. The document should be reviewed and updated. New properties and historic districts have been added to the State and National Registers in the last forty years, and the particulars of the preservation and funding tools has changed. A section should be added to the Plan to address the Highlands RMP and its goals.

An update to the Historic Plan Element should consider how historic preservation can be used to promote sustainable economic development and recreation. Historic sites attract visitors and can host weddings and other events.

In addition, the portions of the County Land Development Standards pertaining to development applications in historic districts should be reviewed and revised if necessary, to strengthen regulations associated with historical, cultural, archaeological and scenic protection.

WOODLAND CONSERVATION PLAN (2003)

The County's Woodland Conservation Plan is a general guidance document for municipalities. The Plan outlines the benefits of woodlands in terms of ecology and economy. They provide carbon sinks to counter climate change, critical habitat, assist with stormwater management, beautification of scenic areas, and help reduce energy use when structures are constructed strategically.

Recommendation

Protection of forest resources within the Highlands Region is a critical component of the Highlands RMP.

- a. RMP Goals 1A, 1B, and 1C deal with forest resources within the Highlands Region:
 - i. Goal 1A - Protection of large areas of contiguous forested lands of the Highlands Region to the maximum extent possible
 - ii. Goal 1B - Protection and enhancement of forests in the Highlands Region
 - iii. Goal 1C - Conforming municipalities and counties include forest protection programs in their masterplans and development regulations
- b. The RMP encourages the following programs centered around forest resource management and sustainability:
 - i. Forest Sustainability
 - ii. Provide a Model Municipal Tree Ordinance
 - iii. Provide Guidance for community forestry plans for Highlands
 - iv. Provide guidance for forest conservation and mitigation plans

The Woodland Conservation Plan provides general guidance. The County may consider updating and incorporating some of the concepts within the Growth Management Plan, Land Development Standards, or broader land use planning strategies.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN (2007)

The 2007 Growth Management Plan (GMP) begins with a County profile covering natural resources, land use, transportation, economic development, people and housing, public schools, infrastructure, land preservation and historic resources. The Plan includes a step-by-step plan for growth management – Establish Community Goals, Balance the Preservation of Rural Character with Population Growth, and Foster Innovative Planning and Design. The Plan predates the Highlands RMP but is largely consistent with its goals and policies.

Recommendation

The Growth Management Plan is the County's Master Plan. It is nearly thirteen years old, and the conditions under which it was written have changed. The County should perform a comprehensive review and update to the Growth Management Plan.

- Ensure that the GMP aligns with the Highlands RMP
- Review the baseline conditions, assumptions, visions, goals, and recommendations outlined in the Plan in the current context. There have been significant changes in the County since 2007.
- The Growth Management Plan is the County's Master Plan – a Highlands Plan Element should be developed and incorporated into the GMP. In addition, the GMP should be in sync with the County's Transportation, Farmland Preservation, Open Space and Recreation, and Economic Development Plans.

HUNTERDON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION PLAN (2008)

The Transportation Plan uses the 2007 Growth Management Plan as a framework and examines the existing conditions to make recommendations with a focus on Smart Growth planning techniques. The Transportation Plan is the result of the guidance of the steering committee, public information meetings and surveys, as well as a traffic safety study. The Transportation Plan is divided into chapters covering the county profile, transportation network, transportation modes, regional transportation planning, preserving historic character, transportation projects and studies and the draft Highlands Regional Master Plan, as well as strategies and actions.

The following policy recommendations contained in the RMP are consistent with the County's transportation recommendations:

- The use of compact, mixed land uses combining jobs, housing and retail is supported.
- Compact development around existing transportation infrastructure using Transit Oriented Development (TOD) should be promoted.
- Transportation improvements should incorporate safety features such as dedicated right-of ways and safe connections for pedestrians and bicyclists, traffic calming measures, and safe routes for children to travel to and from schools

Recommendation

Review and update the County Transportation Plan to ensure full alignment with the Highlands RMP, which was in draft form when the Plan was adopted.

The Plan should include a focus on County Roads and the extent to which the County has jurisdiction for land development review and investment purposes along those corridors.

COMPREHENSIVE FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN (2008)

The plan outlines the farmland preservation programs, makes recommendations for accommodating future demand and improving the current program, and meets the State requirement for a county comprehensive farmland preservation plan. The County is in the process of updating its Farmland Preservation Plan.

Recommendation

Ensure that the ongoing Farmland Preservation Plan update is consistent with the NJ State Agricultural Development Committee's requirements and the goals and objectives of the Highlands RMP. A focus should be placed on farmland retention and sustainable economic development activities.

COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDDS) (2014)

The Hunterdon County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDDS) was adopted in December of 2014. The Plan is a product of the combined efforts of the Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders, the CEDDS Governing Committee which consists of public and private stakeholders, the Hunterdon County Planning Board Staff and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. The Action Plan of the CEDDS identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by the County, the resulting goals and objectives, and performance measures.

The CEDDS states that the County is faced with the task of encouraging municipalities to resolve local zoning with Highlands regulations while still maintaining high value job creators, such as advanced manufacturing, which is a small subset of employers that is expected to grow within

the County. Additional creative solutions may be necessary to promote sustainable economic development in the County.

Recommendations

The County is not required to conform their CEDS with the RMP as part of their plan conformance process. However, The County Economic Development division is currently working with the Highlands on an economic sustainability study and a potential study to develop an inventory of developable land in all of Hunterdon to include the Highlands Area.

Both of these efforts shall inform how the County economic development effort evolves moving forward.

STRATEGIC PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLAN (2018)

The Strategic Park and Open Space Plan was prepared in 2018. The Plan is organized into three parts: Background Studies, Analysis of Current Operations, Vision, Goals and Policies. The vision for the plan entails preserving the County's dominant and unique regional landscape features, continue the environmental role of the County Park System, distribute traditional and new recreation facilities throughout the County, and promote the County Parks as tourist destinations.

Recommendations

The recently adopted Plan is consistent with the Highlands RMP and reflects the County's current goals and objectives. The Plan should be used to inform the updates of other planning documents where overlap may occur.

LAND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

The County's Land Development Standards (LDS) were last amended in 2000, which predates the Highlands Planning Act and the adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The County is in the process of reviewing and updating the LDS.

Recommendation

The review should include adding definitions and standards associated with the Highlands and bringing the LDS into conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The LDS may include additional standards specific to the Highlands Region within the County.

ACTION ITEMS

Hunterdon County will work with the Highlands Council to ensure that its planning documents are consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan and are aligned with the County's and

Council's goals. The following action items will be considered in the context of those planning documents and the implementation agenda for Plan Conformance:

- Offer support to municipalities to promote inter-municipal and inter-governmental cooperation and comprehensive planning.
- Consider regional impacts and direct infrastructure investment to areas whose environmental characteristics can support growth and away from the most sensitive areas.
- Review Open Space and Farmland Preservation Investment policies and scoring process.
- Ensure that land development standards are updated to reflect Highlands RMP goals and objectives. Include specific standards within the Highlands Protection Area?
- Confirm that all administrative requirements related to Highlands Council referrals and notice are incorporated into the County's policies.
- Consider opportunities for collaboration with the County's Highlands municipalities to create a detailed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Plan within the framework of the Highlands Plan.
- Evaluate potential Highlands Centers and potential innovative techniques for the County to take the lead on intermunicipal and corridor based center delineation.
- Engage with the Highlands on permitting and administrative requirements for County capital improvements and public works projects.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This Self-Assessment document is part of the Plan Conformance petition to the Highlands Council. The accompanying Highlands Plan Element outlines the County's policy goals for its relationship with the Highlands Council and the Plan Conformance Process. The Highlands Plan Element includes goals, objectives, recommendations, and strategies for implementation. The accompanying Implementation Agenda builds on the initial review of action items from the Self-Assessment and the strategies in the Highlands Plan Element to define specific projects that the County will pursue in partnership with the Highlands Council to achieve Plan Conformance.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Petition for Plan Conformance – Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

APPENDIX D

HUNTERDON COUNTY
HIGHLANDS MASTER PLAN ELEMENT

Petition for Plan Conformance
County of Hunterdon

HIGHLANDS MASTER PLAN ELEMENT

Hunterdon County, New Jersey

January 6, 2021



Adopted by County Planning Board February 4, 2021

Endorsed by Board of County Commissioners February 16, 2021

Acknowledgements

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John E. Lanza, Deputy Director
J. Matthew Holt
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Prepared by



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The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John A. Barree', written over a horizontal line.

John A. Barree AICP, P.P. #6270

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Introduction

Hunterdon County's Highlands Master Plan Element (the "Plan") outlines the framework for the County's compliance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (the "RMP") and defines a set of activities for future implementation. The Plan Conformance process is the core of the Highlands interaction with municipalities and counties. In Hunterdon County, thirteen of the fifteen municipalities in the Highlands Region have approved petitions for Plan Conformance. Of the seven counties in the Highlands, only two have approved petitions for Plan Conformance, with the most recent having been approved in 2011.

To kick-off the Plan Conformance process, the County Board of Chosen Freeholders adopted a resolution on November 7, 2018 authorizing the preparation of the petition for Plan Conformance. In December 2018, the Highlands Council voted to award a grant for County Plan Conformance, which funds this process.

The County was previously involved with the initial stages of Plan Conformance in 2009. Draft documents were prepared based on the Highlands Council's model documents that were in use at that time. An Initial Assessment Grant Findings Report outlined some of the proposed tasks that the County might undertake. The Highlands Council adopted RMP Addendum 2019-2 in July 2019, which modified the Plan Conformance and Highlands Center Designation procedures. Based on these new standards, Hunterdon County is hoping to be a new model for the county Plan Conformance process.

The Plan consists of three sections that provide an overview of the County's physical characteristics, demographics, land use and planning activity, and future goals related to Highlands Plan Conformance. The process of developing the Plan includes conversations with representatives from the Highlands Council and outreach to municipal officials and members of the public. A public information and listening session was held on the morning of February 4, 2020 at the County Administration Building in Flemington. The session was well attended and resulted in valuable input from the participants.

A subsequent public meeting was held on September 29, 2020 via Zoom, an online platform, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A draft version of the Plan was provided to the public in advance of the meeting. The meeting included opening remarks from County Commissioner Director Shaun Van Doren and a presentation of the Plan by Elena Gable, AICP, PP from Heyer, Gruel and Associates. There were twelve attendees who participated in the question-and-answer session following the presentation. The meeting reinforced the recommendations in the draft Plan and did not result in any substantive modifications.

Section One of the Plan is an overview of the Highlands regional context within Hunterdon County. The County context regarding each section of the Highlands RMP, adopted in 2008, and the Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (the "MPRR") that was drafted in 2018, is evaluated. The Highlands Region in Hunterdon County consists of 15 municipalities in the northern portion of the County. The section also provides an overview of County facilities including property (parks, facilities, etc.), roads under County jurisdiction, and a discussion of stormwater management and drainage facilities.

Section Two of the Plan is a review of the County's planning documents to demonstrate how they comply with the Highlands RMP, and where amendments may be needed to bring them into conformance. The County's Sites of Historic Interest Plan, Woodland Conservation Plan, Growth Management Plan, Transportation Plan, Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Tourism Research Initiative, Strategic Park and Open Space Plan, and Land Development Standards are evaluated.

Section Three of the Plan provides a set of potential implementation actions for the County to undertake in partnership with the Highlands during the Plan Conformance Process. The County hopes to create a partnership with the Highlands that encourages sensible land use policy, target investment in a strategic manner, and promote sustainable economic development while preserving a high standard of living for its residents.

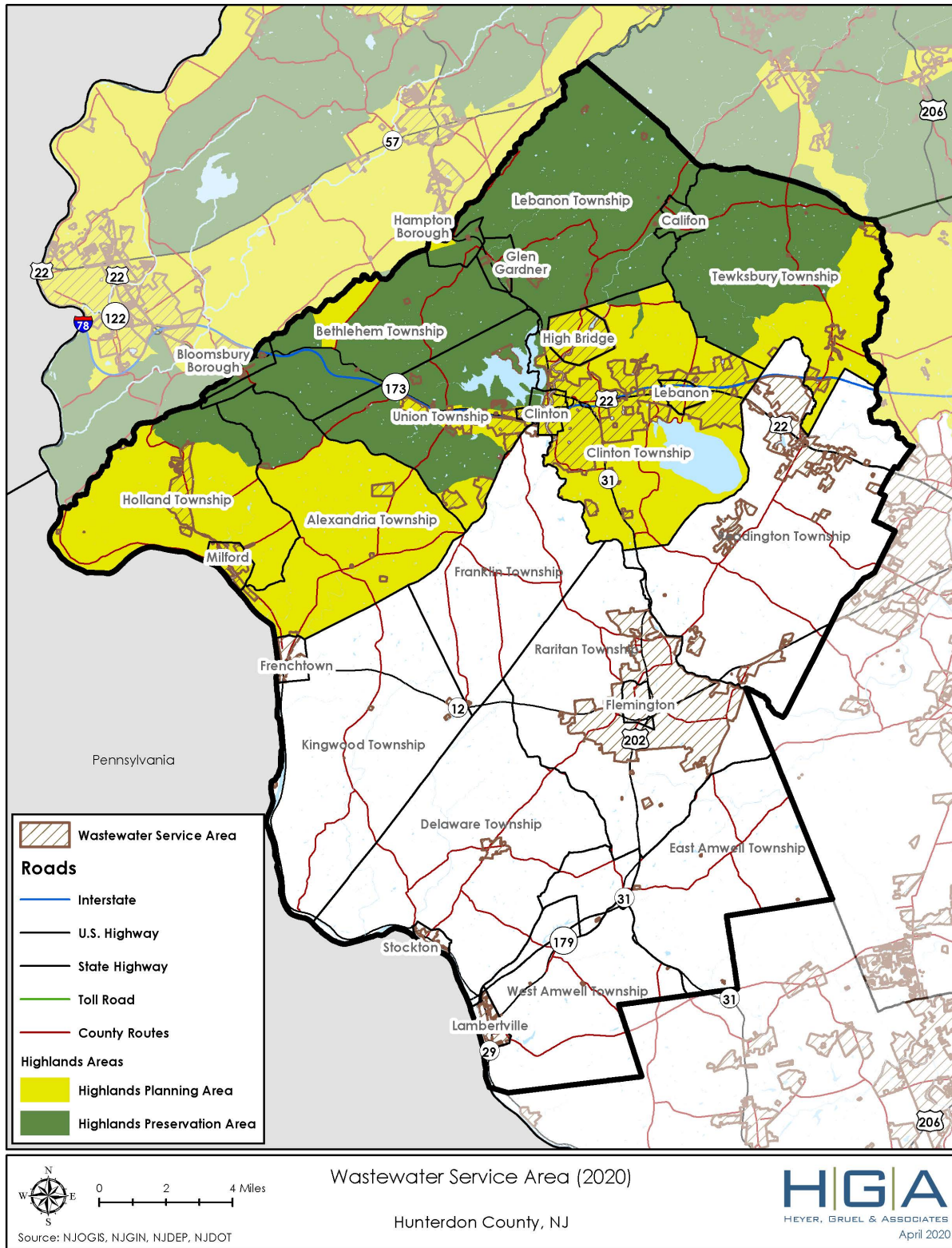


Figure 1 - Wastewater Service Area in Hunterdon County

Section 1: Overview of Highlands Regional Master Plan

The Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) contains areas of practice that guide its implementation and support long-term protection of the Highlands Region. The RMP, adopted in 2008, contains a detailed analysis of the physical and natural systems that define the Region and a variety of policies, goals, objectives, implementation measures, and indicators.

In 2018, the Highlands finalized the Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (MPRR), its first review of the Highlands Region and the RMP policies since the adoption of the Plan. The MPRR outlines the changes that have taken place to the natural and physical landscape through a review of the key indicators established in the RMP. The MPRR makes a series of new recommendations about overcoming barriers to plan conformance and implementation, and revises some of the policies and recommendations established by the RMP.

In 2019, the Highlands Council amended the Highlands Plan Conformance process. The guidance for counties is limited in scope; it states:

“For all counties, the extent of modifications to existing documents to achieve RMP consistency will focus on: a) provisions pertaining to roadway improvements and stormwater systems over which the county has jurisdiction, as may be identified through the initial assessment process; and b) administrative requirements needed to incorporate such items as Highlands Council notice requirements and referrals, as required pursuant to the Highlands Act for certain types of development applications and county capital projects. Additional RMP implementation initiatives are optional for counties and will include items such as development of Sustainable Economic Development Plans, Farmland Preservation Plans, and Agricultural Retention/Expansion Plans. Options will be outlined in the information packets provided to each county following the Initial Assessment, inclusive of grant funding opportunities that will assist in their completion.”

The guidance is consistent with the County Planning Act (N.J.S.A. 40:27-1 et seq) which provides counties with jurisdiction over projects that affect county infrastructure such as roads and drainage.

HUNTERDON COUNTY IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION

Within Hunterdon County, there are approximately 129,000 acres in the Highlands Region split nearly evenly between the Planning Area and the Preservation Area. The Preservation Area contains the most significant and unique natural resources and sensitive surface and ground waters that define the Highlands Region. Conformance with the Preservation Area requirements is mandatory. The Planning Area is intended to promote a balance of environmental protection and responsible land use policies. Conformance with the Planning Area is voluntary.

In Hunterdon County, the Preservation Area comprises 64,925 acres and the Planning Area comprises 63,985 acres. Thirteen of the fifteen municipalities have participated in the Plan Conformance process. Union Township's activity with the Highlands Council is still pending, and Milford Borough has not filed a petition for Plan Conformance to date. The following outlines the status of each municipalities Conformance:

- Alexandria Township – Approved 2012 – Preservation Area only
 - Bethlehem Township – Approved 2010 – Preservation & Planning Area
 - Bloomsbury Borough – Approved 2011 – Preservation Area only (no Planning Area)
 - Califon Borough – Approved 2010 – Preservation Area only (no Planning Area)
 - Town of Clinton – Approved 2011 – Preservation & Planning Area
 - Clinton Township – Approved 2015 – Preservation & Planning Area
 - Glen Gardner Borough – Approved 2010 – Preservation Area only (no Planning Area)
 - Hampton Borough – Approved 2010, Borough rescinded Planning Area in 2017
 - High Bridge Borough – Approved 2011 – Planning Area only (no Preservation Area)
 - Holland Township – Approved 2011 – Preservation & Planning Area
 - Lebanon Borough – Approved 2010 – Planning Area only (no Preservation Area)
 - Lebanon Township – Approved 2011 – Preservation & Planning Area
 - Milford Borough – No petition – Planning Area only
 - Tewksbury Township – Approved 2011 – Preservation & Planning Area
 - Union Township – Pending – Preservation & Planning Area
-

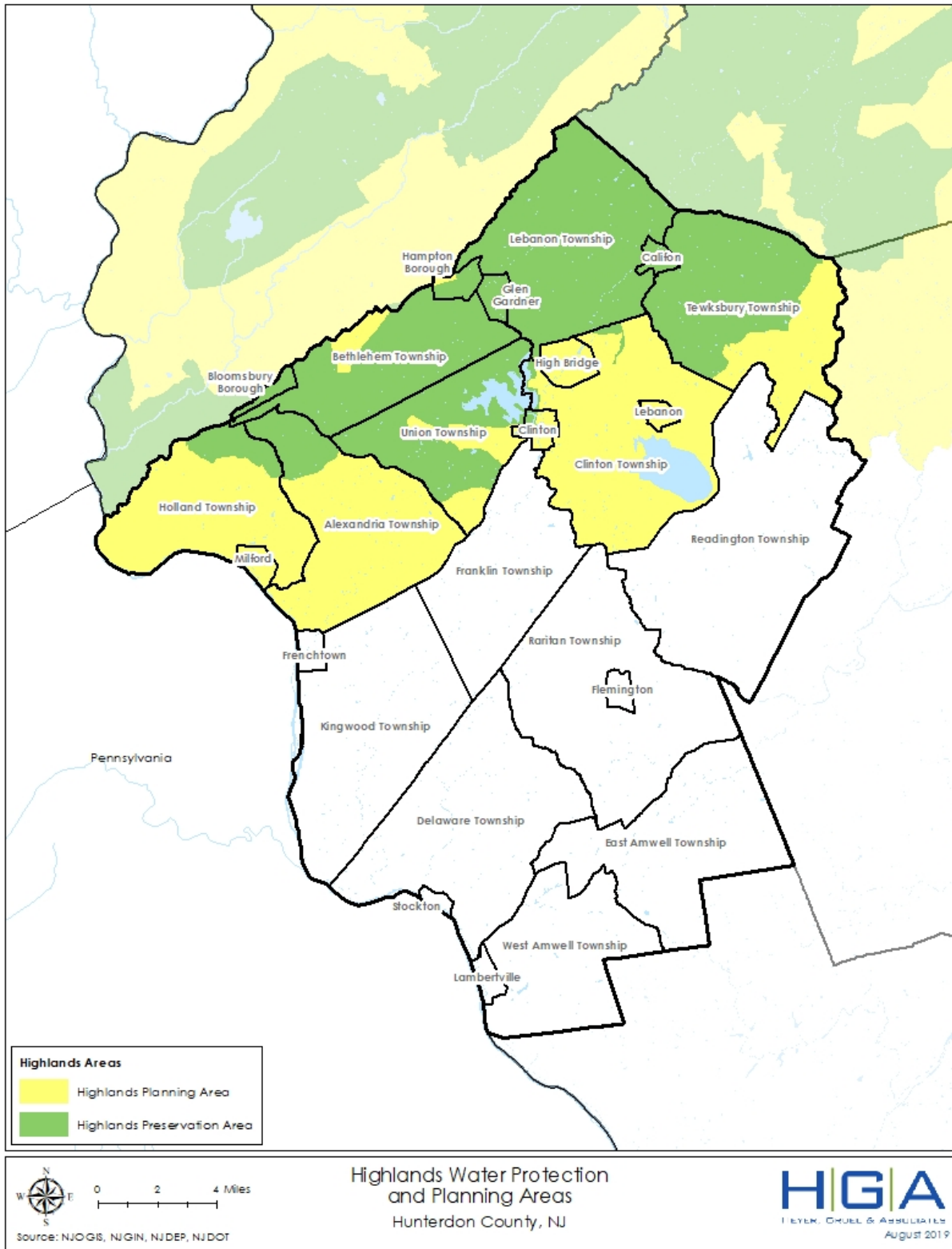


Figure 2 - Highlands Region in Hunterdon County

PART 1 – NATURAL RESOURCES

The Highlands Act and Highlands RMP are focused on the protection of natural resources, particularly water supplies and water quality in the Highlands Region. The RMP reviews how land use patterns and planning efforts can balance economic development and private property rights with protecting the Region's natural resources. The ultimate sustainability of the Region depends on achieving harmony between principles of equity, environmental preservation, and economic development. The natural resources section of the RMP is broken down into the following subparts:

Subpart A: Forest Resources

Forests are an essential part of the Highlands ecosystem that play an important role in groundwater recharge, surface water filtration, carbon sequestration, and habitat support. In Hunterdon County, the Forest Resource Area stretches along most of the northern portion of the County. The highest quality forest resources are in Holland Township, Bethlehem Township, Union Township, Hampton Borough Lebanon Township, and Glen Gardner.

In the 2008 RMP, forest resources are classified at the HUC 14 sub-watershed level. Approximately half the forest resources in the County are considered "High Integrity", approximately half are "Moderate Integrity, and a small area in Alexandria Township is identified as "Low Integrity". Most of the high integrity forests are in the Highlands Preservation Area.

The Hydrological Unit Code (HUC) is a system of identifying watersheds. The more digits in the code, the smaller the sub-watershed. Each sub-watershed has a unique code that establishes its place in the overall drainage system. There are 183 HUC 14 (sub-watersheds defined to 14 digits) in the Highlands Region. This level of definition is based on NJDEP data and provides a more granular identification of watersheds than those defined by the US EPA.

The 2018 MPRR indicates that the preservation of forested lands increased significantly in the decade since 2008. This may be in part due to improvements in the quality of data used to measure the extent of forested areas. For future mapping and modeling, the Council's "Total Forest Area" data layer, which models the location of forested areas, is a better source than the sub-watershed level "Forest Resource Area" layer used in the RMP.

The MPRR also adds new recommendations and implementation strategies. One strategy is to develop a methodology for ecosystem valuation that can help quantify impact assessment of

development and assign appropriate mitigation actions for environmental impacts. The model has been developed and is being tested and refined. Others include:

- Developing Region-wide forest management guidance
 - Invasive species control plans and actions
 - Deer management
 - Reforestation efforts
-

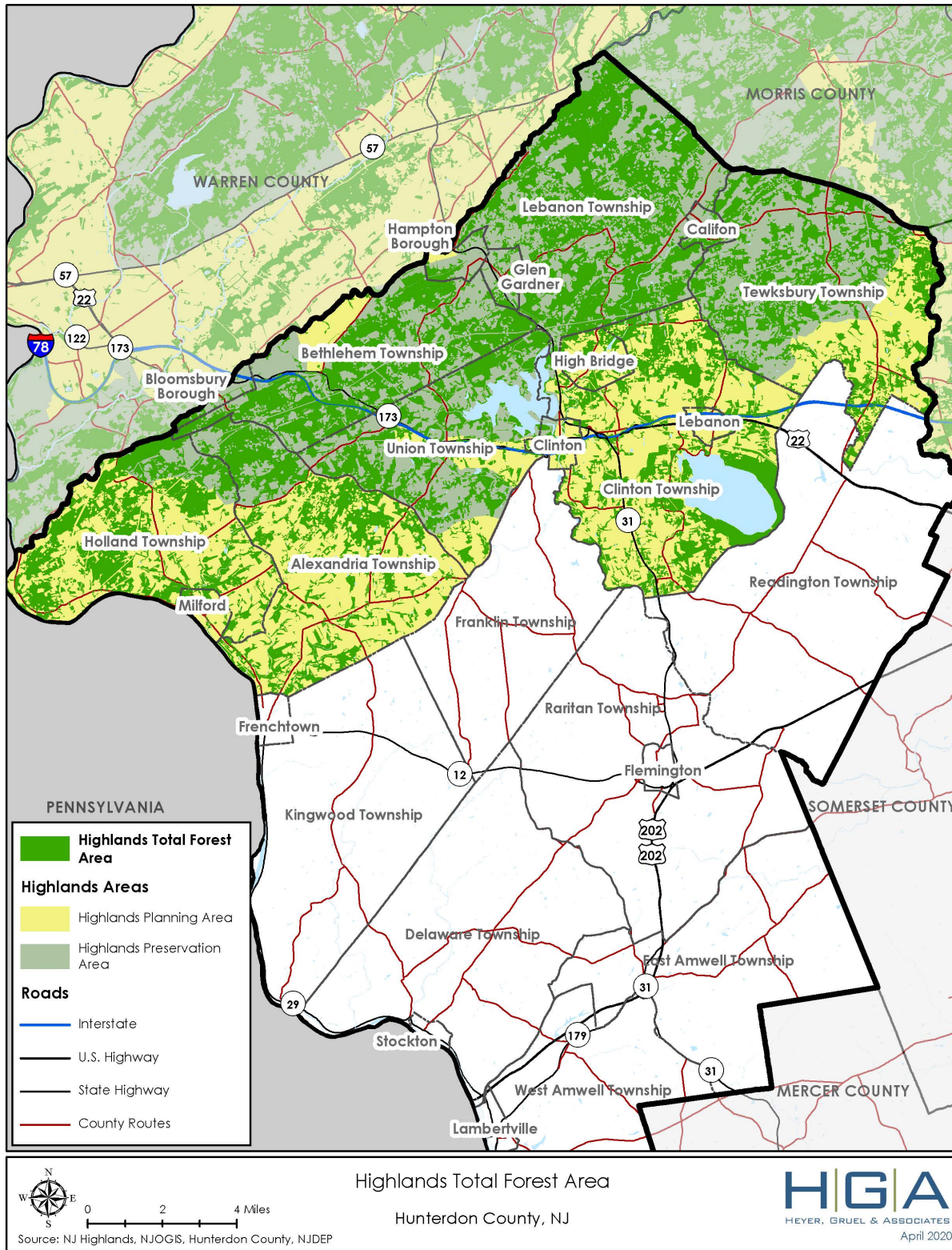


Figure 3 - Highlands Forest Area in Hunterdon County

Subpart B: Highlands Open Waters and Riparian Areas

Highlands Open Waters consist of surface water bodies including springs, wetlands, streams, and natural and artificial bodies of water, and their adjacent riparian areas. The Highlands RMP includes an evaluation of watershed values and riparian area integrity. Watersheds are evaluated based on the percentage of developed lands, habitat quality, percentage of total forest, percentage of core forest, and proportion of total forest. The riparian areas are evaluated based on impervious coverage, agricultural land use, number of road crossings per linear stream mile, vegetation condition and amount of habitat suitable for water / wetland dependent species habitat.

In Hunterdon County, the distribution of High, Moderate, and Low resource value watersheds roughly follows the respective categories of Forest Resources and is also defined at the sub-watershed level. The High Resource Value watersheds are located along the northern portion of the County in Holland Township, Alexandria Township, Union Township, Bethlehem Township, Glen Gardner, Lebanon Township, and Califon. Most of the riparian areas within the County are classified as moderate integrity. Most of the high integrity riparian areas are within Bethlehem and Lebanon Townships.

The MPRR indicates that there has been limited implementation of stream and riparian area restoration plans. A new approach is suggested to facilitate coordination between municipalities that share sub-watersheds to implement stream corridor protection and preservation plans. The County may consider working with its constituent municipalities and the Highlands Council to coordinate these planning efforts.

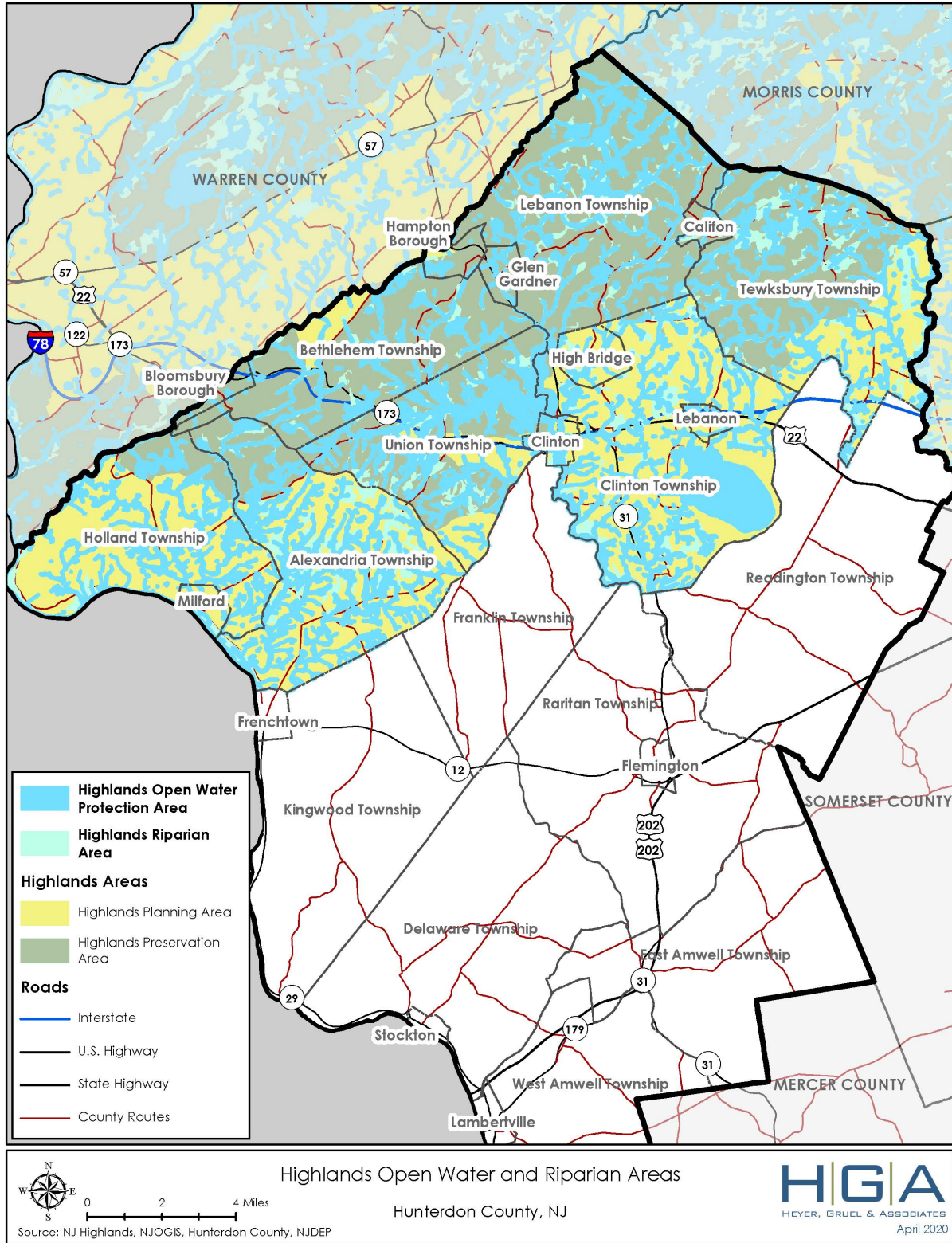


Figure 4 - Highlands Open Water and Riparian Areas in Hunterdon County

Subpart C: Steep Slopes

Protection of steep slopes within the Highlands Region is essential for the preservation of habitat and water quality. Disturbance of steep slopes can cause erosion and sedimentation that impacts water quality, the integrity of wetland and drainage patterns. Slopes within the Highlands Region are classified into three categories. Slopes greater than 10%, greater than 15%, and greater than 20%.

Most of the Highlands Region in Hunterdon County is impacted by steep slopes. The southern portion of the Region in Alexandria Township, Clinton Township and Tewksbury Township, along with the Interstate 78 corridor through Union Township are generally flatter than the rest of the Region.

The 2018 MPRR retains most of the same guidance related to protecting steep slopes. It notes that the Highlands Council does not have an inventory of existing steep slope protection ordinances that municipalities within the Region have adopted. As a potential implementation activity, the County could work with its municipalities to assemble a clearinghouse of adopted steep slope protection ordinances and best practices.

Subpart D: Critical Habitat

Protecting biodiversity and habitat for threatened and endangered species is a key component of the Highlands RMP. There are three categories of critical habitat identified within the Highlands Region: Critical Wildlife Habitat, Significant Natural Areas, and Vernal Pools.

Within Hunterdon County, most of the Highlands Region is home to Critical Wildlife Habitat. Several Significant Natural Areas are identified in the County: a portion of northern Holland Township in the Musconetcong Gorge, an area in central Tewksbury Township, and the Thomas F. Breden Preserve at Milford Bluffs in Holland Township and Milford Borough along the Delaware River. The identified Vernal Pools in the County are mostly in Bethlehem Township, with several others scattered throughout the region.

The MPRR identifies that there has been limited implementation to date of critical habitat conservation and management measures. A revised goal is to refine the habitat data to improve the accuracy of the mapping and, where appropriate re-delineate critical habitat areas.

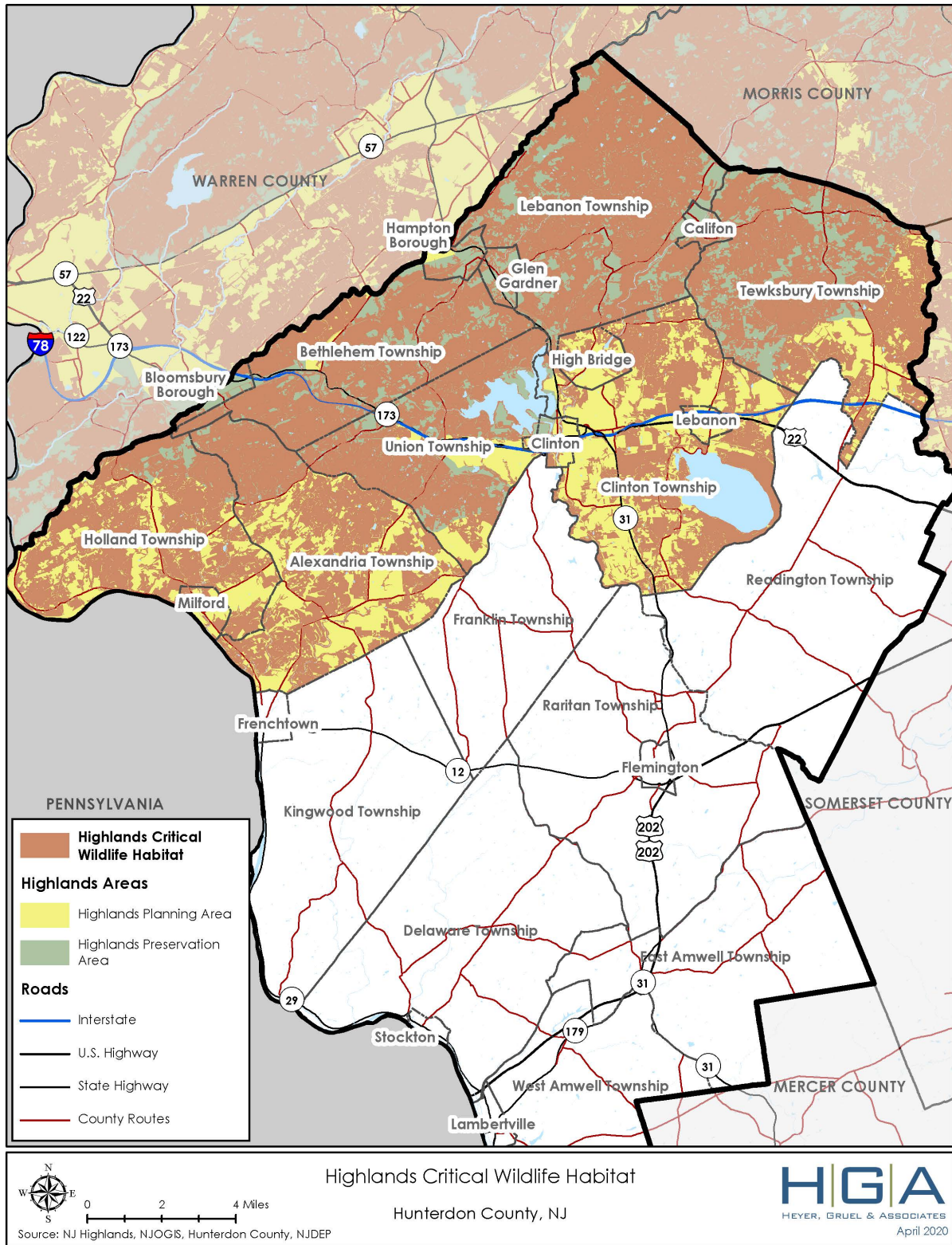


Figure 5 - Highlands Critical Wildlife Habitat in Hunterdon County

Subpart E: Land Preservation and Stewardship

Land Preservation and Stewardship are critical actions to ensure the protection of sensitive environmental areas within the Highlands Region. There are a variety of sources of funding and programs used for preservation efforts. Within Hunterdon County, there are open space and recreation lands preserved by the State, County, local municipalities, non-profit groups, and preserved farmland. The most significant areas of State preserved land are Round Valley Reservoir, Spruce Run Recreation Area, Voorhees State Park, and Ken Lockwood Gorge. Preserved farmland is mostly concentrated in the southern part of the Region in portions of Holland Township, Alexandria Township, and Clinton Township.

Hunterdon County has a dedicated open space trust fund. Of the fifteen municipalities in the Highlands Region, seven (Alexandria, Bethlehem, Califon, Clinton Township, Lebanon Township, Tewksbury, and Union) have a municipal open space assessment, while the remaining eight (Bloomsbury, Town of Clinton, Glen Gardner, Hampton, High Bridge, Holland, Lebanon Borough, and Milford) do not.

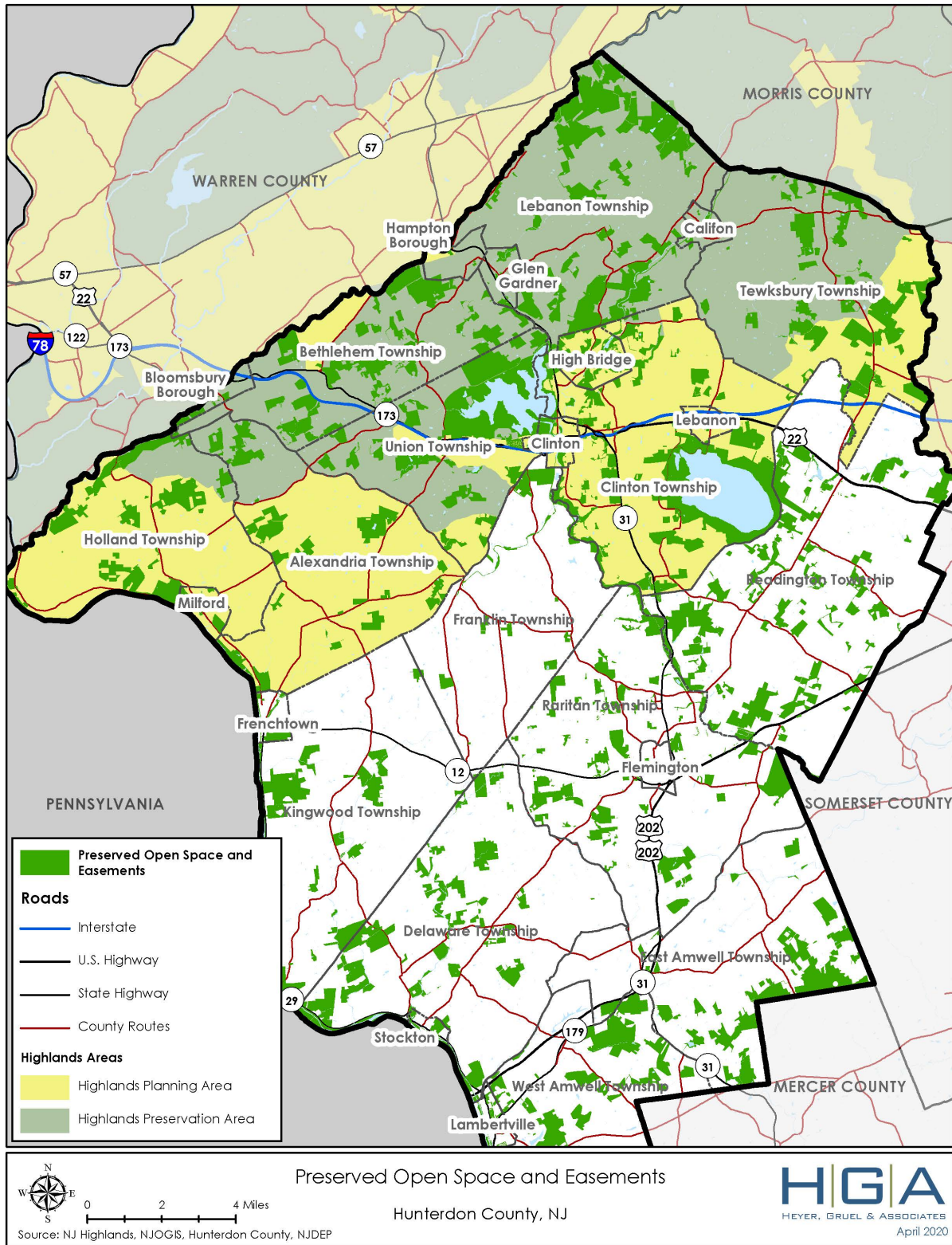


Figure 6 - Preserved Open Space and Easements in Hunterdon County

Subpart F: Carbonate Rock (Karst) Geography

Karst is a topography that “indicates dissolution of underlying carbonate rocks (such as limestone and dolomite) by surface water or ground water over time.” Surface depressions, sinkholes, sinking streams, bedrock fractures, caves, and underground streams can result in karst formations. As a result, surface water runoff and contaminants from stormwater basins, septic systems, sewers, agricultural and lawn runoff, and other features can feed directly into ground water, without filtration, through karst features.

In Hunterdon County, the most significant Carbonate Rock areas are along the Musconetcong Gorge in Bloomsbury Borough and northern Bethlehem Township, in Califon and Lebanon Township along the South Branch of the Raritan River, along the Interstate 78 corridor through Union Township, Town of Clinton and Clinton Township near the Spruce Run and Round Valley reservoirs, and through central Tewksbury Township.

The MPRR reinforces the importance of careful land use and stormwater management planning in areas with carbonate rock formations. Detailed mapping of these areas can be improved through interagency coordination and maintaining an inventory of geotechnical investigation reports prepared as part of development activity.

The Council plans to develop best management practices (BMPs) and a unified approach to stormwater management in areas with Karst terrain. Low impact development techniques that consider natural features and systems from the beginning of the design process are important to minimizing negative impacts. Green infrastructure designs and other stormwater management BMPs can mitigate impacts on groundwater.

Subpart G: Lakes, Ponds, and Reservoirs

Lakes and other waterbodies are significant natural resources within the Highlands Region. The RMP promotes the protection, restoration, and enhancement of lakes in the Highlands. In Hunterdon County there are two significant resources that fall under this category. Round Valley Reservoir in the southeastern portion of the Region in Clinton Township and Spruce Run Reservoir in Union Township and Town of Clinton.

The MPRR suggests creating a best practices manual for dam and lake maintenance. The County's main reservoirs are both within State-owned preserved lands.

PART 2 – WATER RESOURCES

Subpart A: Water Quantity, Availability, and Use

The RMP includes an analysis that determines the amount of water needed to protect natural systems and the amount “available” for water supply, commercial, industrial, and agricultural uses. The sub-watersheds were analyzed to determine the net water availability. Net water availability is calculated by subtracting consumptive and depletive water uses from ground water availability. Where net water availability is positive, there is surplus capacity beyond existing demand. Where it is negative, there is a deficit meaning current consumption is unsustainable.

The Highlands Region in Hunterdon County is split approximately evenly between areas with water availability surplus and deficit. Most of the County is toward the middle of the distribution with a slight surplus or deficit. Several sub-watersheds in Union Township and Tewksbury have more substantial surpluses, and one sub-watershed primarily in Clinton Township has a more substantial deficit.

The MPRR indicates that between the drafting of the RMP and the release of the MPRR the consumption of water has decreased throughout the region and that there are positive trends in preservation and development in Critical Water Resource Areas. Best management practices related to water conservation and low impact development are encouraged throughout the Highlands Region.

Water Use and Conservation Management Plans (WUCMPs) identify deficits in water supply. Highlands conducts a review if a proposed development will increase water use by more than 6,000 gallons per day. Deficit mitigation requires enhanced groundwater recharge depending on the magnitude of the deficit.

As a potential future implementation action, the County may review its role in the review process with the Highlands Council. The County may explore options for collaboration to help streamline the review of projects under its jurisdiction, which would require a Memorandum of Understanding between the County and Highlands Council.

Subpart B: Groundwater Recharge Areas

Groundwater recharge is an essential component of maintaining water quantity and quality. Factors including soil types, precipitation levels, and land cover impact the recharge rate and level of filtration. Areas with the highest recharge rates are identified as Prime Groundwater Recharge Areas. These Prime Areas are scattered relatively evenly throughout the County.

The MPRR encourages further investigation and data refinement to more accurately identify critical groundwater recharge areas.

Subpart C: Water Quality

Surface water quality, ground water quality, and wellhead protection are components that go into ensuring a sustainable supply of potable water in the Highlands Region. NJDEP's Surface Water Quality Standards (SWQS) establish thresholds for designated uses and the water quality needed to support them. NJDEP has regulatory plans known as total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) to reduce pollutant levels and return surface waters to the requisite standard. Within the Highlands Region, many of the sub-watersheds have impaired surface waters.

In Hunterdon County, portions of Tewksbury Township, Clinton Township and Union Township have non-impaired waters, while most of the rest of the County has impaired waters. The area along the Musconetcong River in northern Bethlehem and Bloomsbury is moderately impaired.

Within the Highlands Region, most residents and businesses rely on ground water as the primary source of potable water. Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPAs) are a critical component of the Highlands efforts to preserve water quality. WHPAs are mapped areas around public water supply that include three tiers. Tier 1 is the two-year time of travel (ground water flows to the well within a two-year time period), Tier 2 is a five-year time of travel, and Tier 3 is a twelve-year time of travel. Public community water supply wells serve at least 15 connections or 25 full-time residents.

In the Hunterdon County section of the Highlands Region, there are approximately 38 public community wells with delineated three tier protection areas. These wells are scattered throughout the Highlands Region with the largest concentration of protection areas along the Interstate 78 corridor through Clinton and Union Townships.

The MPRR indicates that there is not enough data to discern any trends in increases in impervious cover or impacts on water quality since the release of the RMP. The MPRR recommends watershed-based management plans and regional stormwater management plans.

The County may consider methods to facilitate collaboration between municipalities that share sub-watersheds to encourage the development of plans based on natural systems rather than municipal boundaries.

Subpart D: Water Supply Utilities

Water supply utilities are essential to support growth in the Highlands Region. System capacity and demand, which leads to a net utility capacity to support development are essential

measurements to plan for sustainable growth. The NJDEP Bureau of Water Allocation regulates ground and surface water withdrawals. Combined withdrawals of up to 100,000 gallons per day are permitted in the Planning Area and up to 50,000 gallons per day in the Preservation Area.

There are several public community water systems within the Highlands Region in Hunterdon County. The Boroughs of Hampton, Glen Gardner, High Bridge, Califon, Bloomsbury, and Milford have public systems with limited available capacity. Areas along the Interstate 78 and Route 31 corridors in Clinton Township, Town of Clinton, Lebanon Borough, and Union Township have public systems with moderate available capacity.

Subpart E: Wastewater Utilities

The main large-scale wastewater collection and treatment systems in the Highlands are Highlands Domestic Sewerage Facilities. These facilities have permitted discharges of more than 0.15 million gallons per day to surface water or 0.075 million gallons per day to ground water. There are a total 42 Sewerage Facilities in the Highlands. Part of the sustainable management of future growth within the Highlands Region involves careful planning and limitation on the extent of sewer service areas and the capacity of sewerage facilities. The RMP focuses on identifying existing sewer service areas, identifying areas that can support expansion of infrastructure, and determining wastewater system capacity.

Sewer service areas and wastewater system capacity in the Hunterdon County part of the Highlands Region is concentrated in several areas. The Interstate 78 and Route 31 corridors through Clinton Township, Town of Clinton, Union Township, and Lebanon Borough, along with High Bridge Borough have sewer service areas with some capacity available. Portions of Holland Township and Milford Borough have service areas with more limited system capacity. Several small portions of Tewksbury have service areas with no additional capacity.

The MPRR indicates that the preparation and adoption of municipal wastewater management plans (WMPs) is still a priority in the Highlands Region and that the process should be accelerated. The Statewide rules for WMP adoption were amended in 2016. The post-2016 updates for municipalities in Hunterdon County are still being finalized. Highlands Council staff is responsible for the preparation of WMPs for Municipalities that are conforming to the Highlands RMP while County planning department staff is responsible for preparing WMP chapters for Municipalities not conforming.

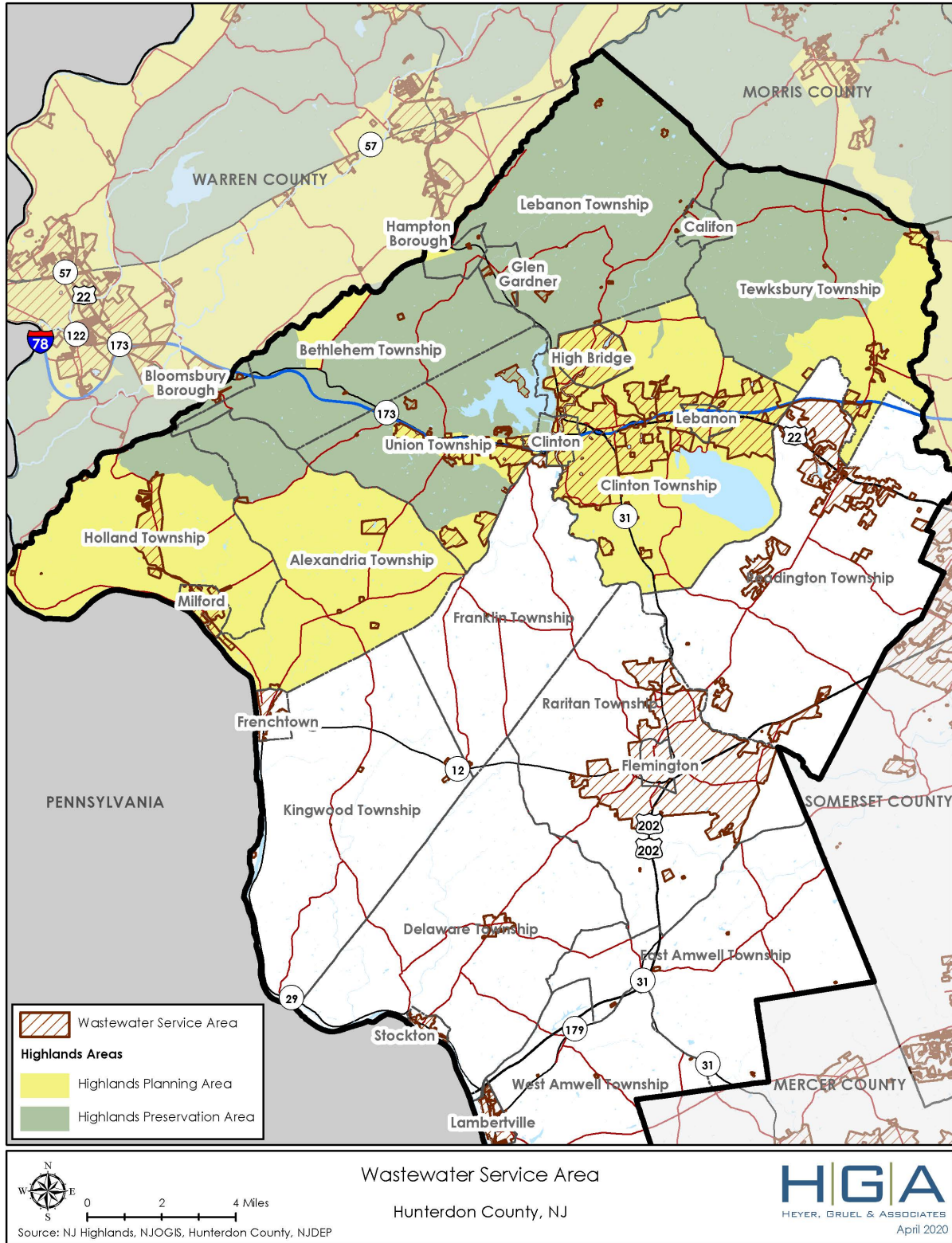


Figure 7 - Wastewater Service Area in Hunterdon County

Subpart F: Septic System Capacity

Nitrate concentrations are linked to the impairment of ground water related to land use. Elevated concentrations of nitrate are related to agricultural runoff and soil contamination from septic system effluent and chemical lawn applications. The Highlands RMP includes target nitrate concentrations for each of the Region's sub-watersheds to protect water quality.

In Hunterdon County, the sub-watersheds in the Highlands Region mostly have nitrate concentrations in the moderate range. Portions of Alexandria, Tewksbury, and Bethlehem Township have higher concentrations. The sub-watersheds around Round Valley and Spruce Run Reservoirs have the lowest concentrations in the Region.

Inspection, administration, and maintenance of private septic facilities is important to protecting sensitive environmental features. Morris County developed a web-based program and database to help municipalities with septic system monitoring and inspections. Hunterdon County, with guidance and assistance from the Highlands Council, may consider developing a similar tool.

PART 3 - AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

Agriculture is an important part of the economy and the rural character of the Highlands Region. For decades, suburban sprawl and development pressure have led to loss of productive farmland and a diminution of economic activity associated with agriculture. Since the global recession in the late 2000s, the trend has slowed somewhat and an increased focus on agriculture as a key component of sustainable economic development in the Region has emerged. The Highlands RMP seeks to identify high quality agricultural lands that face development pressure and are suitable for preservation. In order to encourage their preservation, funding, institutional resources, and support for the agricultural community are essential.

In Hunterdon County, there are in excess of 34,000 acres of preserved farmland in 442 farms. Approximately one third of the farms and acreage are within the Highlands Area. Table 1 shows the breakdown of farmland by municipality in the Highlands. Figure 8 shows the location of preserved farmland throughout the County.

Table 1 - Preserved Farms in Hunterdon County Highlands Region

Municipality	Preserved Farms	Preserved Acreage
Alexandria Township	46	2,776
Bethlehem Township	18	1,503
Califon Borough	1	9
Clinton Township	8	875
Holland Township	27	2,272
Lebanon Borough	2	26
Lebanon Township	17	1,391
Tewksbury Township	27	1,457
Union Township	9	580
Total (3 Farms are in multiple Municipalities)	152	10,889

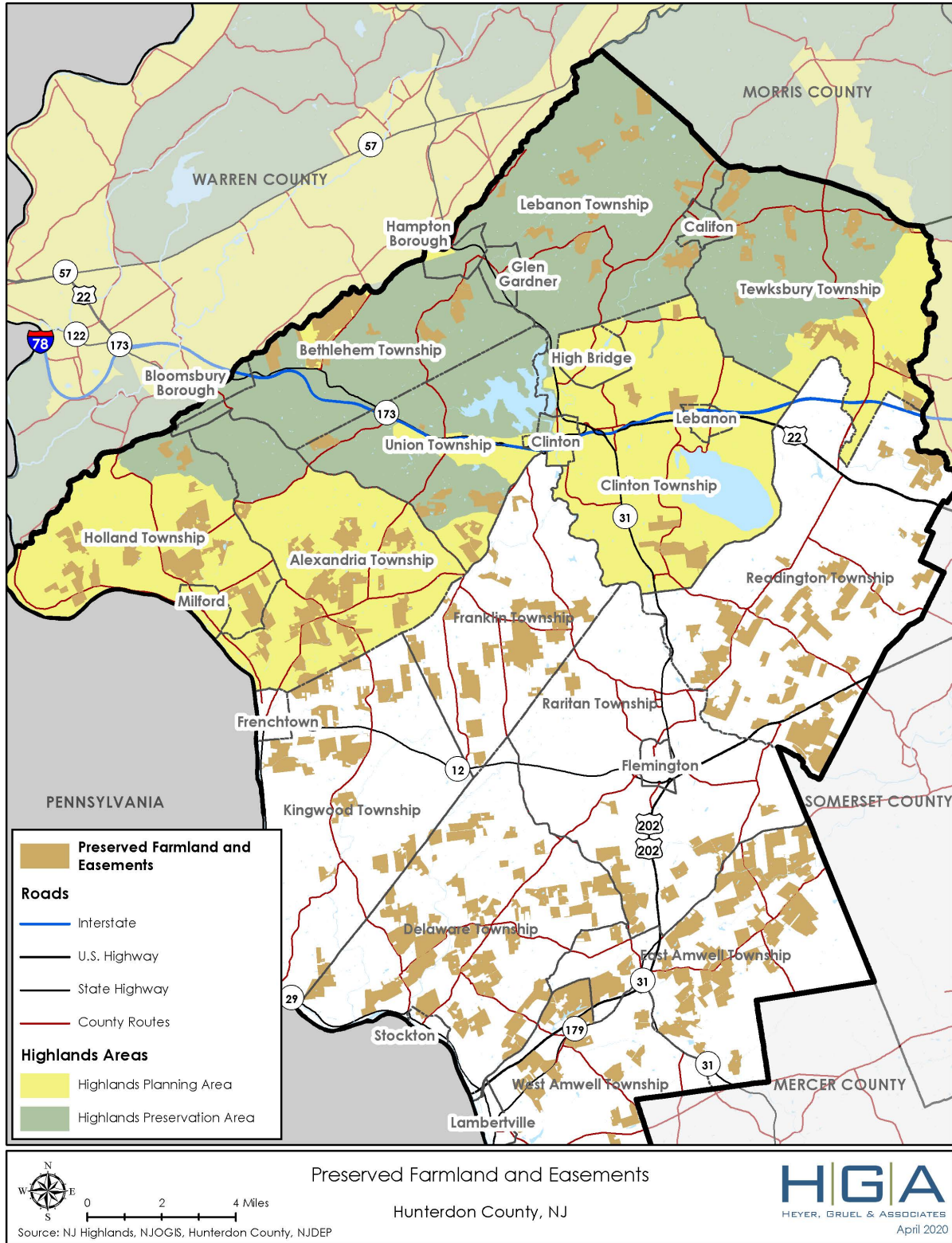


Figure 8 - Preserved Farmland and Easements Hunterdon County

Farmland preservation is an important growth management and sustainable economic development tool in Hunterdon County. Agritourism, which is an important component of sustainable economic development can attract visitors and lead to positive economic multiplier effects with complementary businesses. Targeting specialized crops in partnership with local restaurants, farmers markets, retailers, and other outlets can diversify the production base to improve profitability. The ongoing expansion of medical marijuana programs in the State and potential legalization for recreational adult consumption offers a novel economic development opportunity for the agriculture industry.

The MPRR identifies several recommendations and implementation objectives related to sustaining the agriculture industry. One recommendation is for the Highlands Council to take the lead on developing a best management practices manual for integrated crop management and integrated pest management. Economic development recommendations include identifying markets for niche crops, promoting and expanding agritourism opportunities, and encouraging the development of value-added facilities like on-site processing, storage, and cooperative partnerships.

Hunterdon County is working on an update to its Farmland Preservation Plan. The County intends for the update to be consistent with the Highlands RMP and will work with the Highlands Council as the process continues.

PART 4 – HISTORIC, CULTURAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL, AND SCENIC RESOURCES

Historic, cultural, archaeological, and scenic resources are an important part of the Highlands character. These resources attract visitors and contribute to tourism and sustainable economic development. Identification of resources, maintaining, preserving, managing, and marketing them are all important parts of the Highlands RMP and efforts in Hunterdon County.

Subpart A: Historic, Cultural, and Archaeological Resources

Historic and cultural resources in the Highlands area includes properties listed on the New Jersey or National Register of Historic Places, properties that have been deemed eligible for the registers, and properties for which a formal State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) opinion has been issued. The breadth of resources in the Highlands includes sites important to agricultural history, historic landmarks, archaeological sites of native populations and early settlers, industrial facilities, military history sites, recreational landmarks, and transportation facilities.

In the fifteen municipalities in the Hunterdon County Highlands Region, there are twenty-five (25) historic sites that have been designated on both the State and National Registers. One (1) site that

was only designated on the State Register. Twenty-four (24) historic districts are on the State and National Registers. Sixty-seven (67) sites or districts have received SHPO opinions. In addition, several sites have received Certificates of Eligibility.

The Hunterdon County Cultural and Heritage Commission works with the Division of Planning/GIS Services to update the 1986 Sites of Historic Interest survey as time and staffing permits. In collaboration with GIS staff it is creating an interactive website, HuntHistory.org, to provide enhanced content supporting its historic marker program.

Through the New Jersey Historical Commission, a Division of the Department of State, the Commission provides County History Partnership Program (CHPP) re grants for General Operating Support and history Projects to qualified applicants annually. It is an active Heritage Partner of the Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage National Heritage Area.

The Commission's Executive Director is a founding member of the Hunterdon County Tourism Research Initiative, as well as the Hunterdon County Film Commission <https://filmhunterdon.com/about>. Both were created in partnership with the Hunterdon County Division of Economic Development and the Chamber of Commerce. She is also a member of the NJ250's Advisory Council, providing input on New Jersey's Semiquincentennial planning.

The Commission's offices are located in the historic Hunterdon County Courthouse. The New Jersey Historic Trust awarded Hunterdon County a major grant in 2020 for exterior restoration and upgrades, which will improve the building's security, ability to host programs and exhibits, and visitor access.

The Commission administers re grants through the Local Arts Program (LAP) funded by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Similar to the CHPP, the LAP re grants provide General Operating and Project support to Hunterdon County arts nonprofits, as well as to other agencies for arts programs benefitting county residents.

The Commission hosts the Creative Assets Inventory, which supports cultural and arts agencies in the County - <https://creativehunterdon.org/>. The Inventory was initially created by Sustainable Hunterdon and funded by a grant from Sustainable New Jersey. With nearly 200 Creative Assets listed, it continues to grow and support the Hunterdon County Creative Community.

The MPRR recommends promoting the development of Historic Preservation Master Plan Elements, historic surveys, and heritage tourism planning. These are activities eligible for funding through Highlands Grants. New and updated planning documents can support the development of heritage tourism programming and ensure the preservation of the County's history.

Subpart B: Scenic Resources

Natural beauty and scenic resources are an important part of the character of the Highlands Region. Throughout the Region and in Hunterdon County places of scenic beauty attract visitors for all types of outdoor recreation.

The MPRR recognizes the importance of scenic resources in the Highlands Region. The RMP does not include specifics on the designation of special scenic resources. The Highlands Council may establish a procedure for nomination, evaluation, and inventory of regionally significant scenic resources. Hunterdon County may consider its own process for designating scenic resources based, at least in part, on its newly adopted Open Space and Recreation Plan. It could be beneficial for the County and Highlands to partner on the identification, branding, and marketing of these resources as part of future tourism and sustainable economic development planning efforts.

PART 5 – TRANSPORTATION

The road network in the Highlands Region includes Interstate Highways, US, State, County, and Local routes. There is also limited passenger rail service in Hunterdon County and freight rail lines throughout the Region. Limited bus service is available. There are several park and ride lots served by private bus carriers that provide service to New York City. In addition to ground-based transportation, there are several small airports in the Region.

The Highlands RMP encourages smart growth-based land use policies that concentrate development and a mix of uses in locations accessible to existing transportation infrastructure. Transit-oriented development and increased density near multiple modes of transportation is encouraged. New road construction is encouraged to incorporate “Green Streets” elements as a method of low impact development that manages runoff in a sustainable way and protects water resources.

In the Highlands Region in Hunterdon County, the main highway is Interstate 78, which runs east-west through the County and connects to New York City, central Pennsylvania, and the broader Interstate Highway System. I-78 is a major freight route for truck traffic. US 22 is another east-west route that is contiguous with Interstate 78 for a portion of the County. State Route 31 is an important north-south route that runs through the center of Hunterdon County. State Route 173 runs parallel to Interstate 78 in the western part of the County.

The County Road network includes 500- and 600-series County Routes throughout the County and in the Highlands Region. The 500-series routes are inter-County roads that form a secondary

network that supplements the State highway system. The 600-series routes are more akin to local roads within the County that are under County jurisdiction.

In the Hunterdon County Highlands Region there are three passenger rail stations on the New Jersey Transit Raritan Valley Line. The stops are in Lebanon Borough, Annandale (Clinton Township) and High Bridge. Limited service is available Monday through Friday, which includes three early morning New York-bound departures between 5:50 and 6:45 AM, and hourly return trips during the evening. No service runs to these stations on weekends.

Park and ride lots provide parking for car and van pools and act as stops for private bus service managed by Trans-Bridge. Trans-Bridge provides service to Jersey City and the financial district in Manhattan. Trans-Bridge service is available at the Annandale Square and Clinton Point lots in Clinton Township, and the Hunterdon Hills Playhouse lot in Union Township. The Oldwick park and ride lot in Tewksbury Township serves car and vanpools.

The MPRR notes that since the RMP was adopted, commuter trends appear to indicate that more people are working from home than in the past. In the interim between the adoption of the RMP and the drafting of the MPRR, there have been changes to the demographics in the County, technological advancements and changes to the nature of the workforce that affect employment and commuting patterns, and a period of recession followed by a slow recovery. These trends warrant additional monitoring.

The MPRR continues to encourage transit-oriented development where feasible and taking advantage of existing transportation corridors, hubs, and freight routes. The MPRR notes that there has been a decline in rail freight lines and spurs. It is recommended that land use planning consider options for reuse of existing and unused rail rights-of-way. Consideration of specific benefits or incentives for properties in Highlands Centers and Redevelopment Areas that can use freight rail access may be worthwhile.

Transportation planning in the Region is encouraged to consider Scenic Byway Designations and integrating tourism planning efforts with these designations. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and site design elements are encouraged. Designing green streets to improve the stormwater management sustainability of transportation projects is also encouraged.

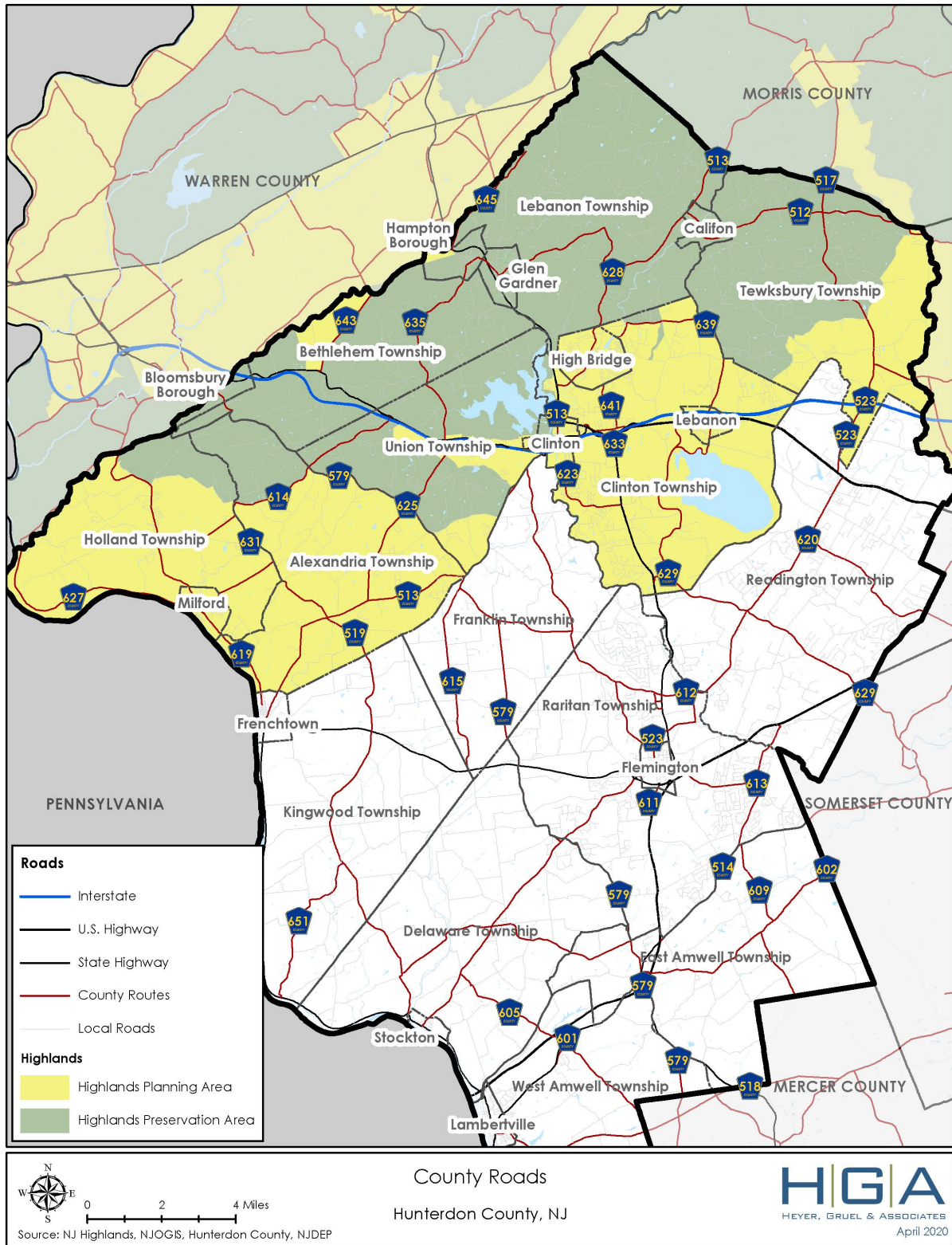


Figure 9 - Hunterdon County Roads

PART 6 – COMMUNITY CHARACTER

The Highlands RMP includes socio-economic conditions, land use and zoning, development and redevelopment, and future land use within the Community Character section. The demographic conditions that support the socio-economic findings and land use conclusions in the RMP have changed since 2008. The broader conclusions regarding land use capability are valid, but it is reasonable to update the underlying demographic data.

Subpart A: Socio-economic Conditions

At the time the Highlands RMP was released, the population of the Highlands Region was growing at a rate faster than that of the State as a whole. The housing market crash and global recession began shortly after the release of the Highlands RMP, which impacted new housing construction, home values, and demographic trends.

Table 2 - Hunterdon County Population

Hunterdon County Population		
Year	Count	Change
1920	32,885	-
1930	34,728	5.6%
1940	36,766	5.9%
1950	42,736	16.2%
1960	54,107	26.6%
1970	69,718	28.9%
1980	87,361	25.3%
1990	107,776	23.4%
2000	121,989	13.2%
2010	128,349	5.2%
2018 est.	125,051	-2.6%
Source: US Decennial Census, 5-Year ACS		

Population growth in Hunterdon County was robust throughout the second half of the 20th Century, with four straight decades of nearly 25% increases. The growth rate began to slow in the 1990s and the trend has led to an estimated population decline from 2010 to 2018.

The median household income for Hunterdon County residents is above average for the State at \$111,269. This represents a raw increase from \$100,980 in 2010, but a slight decrease when adjusted for inflation.

The unemployment rate in the County was estimated to be 3.6% in February 2020 immediately preceding the sharp rise in unemployment numbers caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic and State of Emergency.

The following table shows the breakdown of employment in the County by industry. Between 2010 and 2018, most industries were stable; however, several experienced significant increases or declines. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining was the smallest number of workers of the listed industries but grew by the greatest percentage (48%). Educational services, health care and social assistance grew by over 15%, arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services grew by nearly 27%, and other services grew by 17%. The principal declining industries were manufacturing (-10%) and retail trade (-16%).

Table 3 - Hunterdon County Employment and Industries

Hunterdon County Employment and Industries		
	2010	2018
Total Employment	64,890	66,375
Unemployment Rate	6.1%	4.0%
Industries		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining:	482	713
Construction	4,225	4,117
Manufacturing	8,399	7,530
Wholesale trade	2,141	2,306
Retail trade	7,559	6,367
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities:	2,117	2,050
Information	2,650	2,537
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing:	5,797	6,065
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services:	9,546	9,367
Educational services, and health care and social assistance:	12,716	14,695
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services:	3,943	4,994
Other services, except public administration	2,531	2,969
Public administration	2,784	2,665
Source: ACS 5-Year 2006-2010, 2014-2018		

Single-family homes are the predominant housing model in Hunterdon County, making up nearly 85% of all housing units. Only 7.4% of housing units in the County are in buildings with five or more units. At the statewide level, about 64% of housing units are single-family and nearly 21% are in buildings with five or more units. Of the approximately 50,500 housing units in the County, the vacancy rate is about 5.4% per the 2018 5-year American Community Survey estimates. The

median value of a home in Hunterdon County is estimated at about \$423,000. The value of housing in the County is significantly higher than the State median, which is about \$328,000.

Hunterdon County has a higher proportion of single-family households, fewer larger multi-family buildings, and more valuable housing than the corresponding statewide numbers. This is consistent with the County's rural character and lack of urban centers. However, the statistics are also consistent with high housing costs and lack of housing diversity that can create affordability problems for low- and moderate-income households.

Table 4 - Hunterdon County Housing

Hunterdon County Housing Types		
Unit Type	Count	Percentage
1-unit, detached	38,594	76.5%
1-unit, attached	4,210	8.3%
2 units	1,943	3.9%
3 or 4 units	1,806	3.6%
5 to 9 units	1,432	2.8%
10 to 19 units	1,264	2.5%
20 or more units	1,066	2.1%
mobile home	139	0.3%
Source: 2014-2018 5-Year ACS		

Subpart B: Current Land Use

Land Use

The RMP breaks the developed areas down by Core Developed Areas, Moderate Developed Areas, Suburban Fringe Developed Area, and Rural Developed Areas. Within the Hunterdon County Highlands Region, the Core Developed Areas are concentrated in locations served by public sewer and water systems. The areas are concentrated along the Interstate 78 corridor, in the Boroughs (Town of Clinton, Lebanon, High Bridge, Hampton, Califon, Milford) and limited portions of Holland and Tewksbury Townships. Moderate and Suburban Fringe Developed Areas are mainly adjacent to the Core Areas and along the Route 31 corridor.

The Highlands RMP defines seven Land Use Capability Zones (LUCZ) that are broken down into three primary overlay zones and four sub-zones. The zones are defined by their existing development patterns, natural resources, and ability to accommodate future growth and development.

Protection Zone

The Protection Zone “consists of high resource value lands that are important to maintaining water quality, water quantity, and sensitive ecological resources and processes. Land acquisition is a priority in the Protection Zone and development activities will be extremely limited; any development will be subject to stringent limitations on consumptive and depletive water use, degradation of water quality, and impacts to environmentally sensitive lands.”

Wildlife Management Sub-Zone

The Wildlife Management Sub-Zone “consists of all National Wildlife Refuges managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Wildlife Management Areas administered by the NJDEP Division of Fish & Wildlife’s Bureau of Land Management, within the Highlands Region. These areas are part of a network of lands and waters for conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats and permit compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.”

Conservation Zone

The Conservation Zone “consists of areas with significant agricultural lands and interspersed with associated woodlands and environmental features that should be preserved when possible. Non-agricultural development activities will be limited in area and intensity due to infrastructure constraints and resource protection goals.”

Conservation Zone – Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone

The Conservation Zone – Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone “consists of significant environmental features within the Conservation Zone that should be preserved and protected from non-agricultural development. Development activities will be constrained through restrictions on the extension or creation of water supply and wastewater services.”

Existing Community Zone

The Existing Community Zone “consists of areas with regionally significant concentrated development signifying existing communities. These areas tend to have limited environmental constraints due to previous development patterns and may have existing infrastructure that can support development and redevelopment provided that such development is compatible with the protection and character of the Highlands environment, at levels that are appropriate to maintain the character of established communities.”

Existing Community – Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone

The Existing Community – Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone “consists of significant environmental features within the Existing Community Zone that should be protected from further fragmentation. They serve as regional habitat “stepping stones” to larger contiguous critical habitat and forested areas. As such, they are not appropriate for significant development and are best served by land preservation and protection. Development is constrained through restrictions on the extension or creation of water supply and wastewater services.”

Lake Community Sub-Zone

The Lake Community Sub-Zone consists of patterns of community development around lakes that are within the Existing Community Zone and within 1,000 feet of lakes in order to protect water quality, resource features, shoreline development recreation, scenic quality and community character.

The MPRR notes that there has been a higher concentration of new development within the Existing Community Zone and increased preservation in the Protection and Conservation Zones. At the macro level, these land use categories appear to have guided development and preservation in a manner consistent with the RMP's goals.

Housing

The provision of a realistic opportunity for the development of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income families is enshrined in New Jersey Law through the Fair Housing Act and a series of Court cases known as Mount Laurel I – V. The most recent round of affordable housing planning, which began in earnest after the dissolution of the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) and the Mount Laurel IV Decision in 2015 covers the period between 2015 and 2025. In the Highlands, the land use and infrastructure implications of addressing affordable housing obligations must be reconciled with the broader goals of the Highlands Act and RMP.

In the Highlands Region of Hunterdon County, each town has different approaches to addressing its affordable housing obligation. As of this writing, municipalities are at different stages of the affordable housing settlement and planning process.

Zoning

Local zoning regulates land uses, bulk standards, density, and other controls in each municipality in the State. The Highlands RMP reviews land use policy in the context of a balance between existing land use, infrastructure and natural resource capacity, and zoning. The municipalities in the Highlands Region of Hunterdon County, except for Union Township and Milford Borough, have

completed, at minimum, the initial Plan Conformance process. As such, their planning and land use documents are aligned with the goals of the RMP.

One of the County's implementation goals is to prepare a priority investment framework that identifies strategic areas to invest in new growth and development and areas to invest in preservation. The framework will be based in part on existing land use and zoning, infrastructure, natural features, transportation networks, and other factors. Within the Highlands Region, the Land Use Capability Zones will be a vital input to this process.

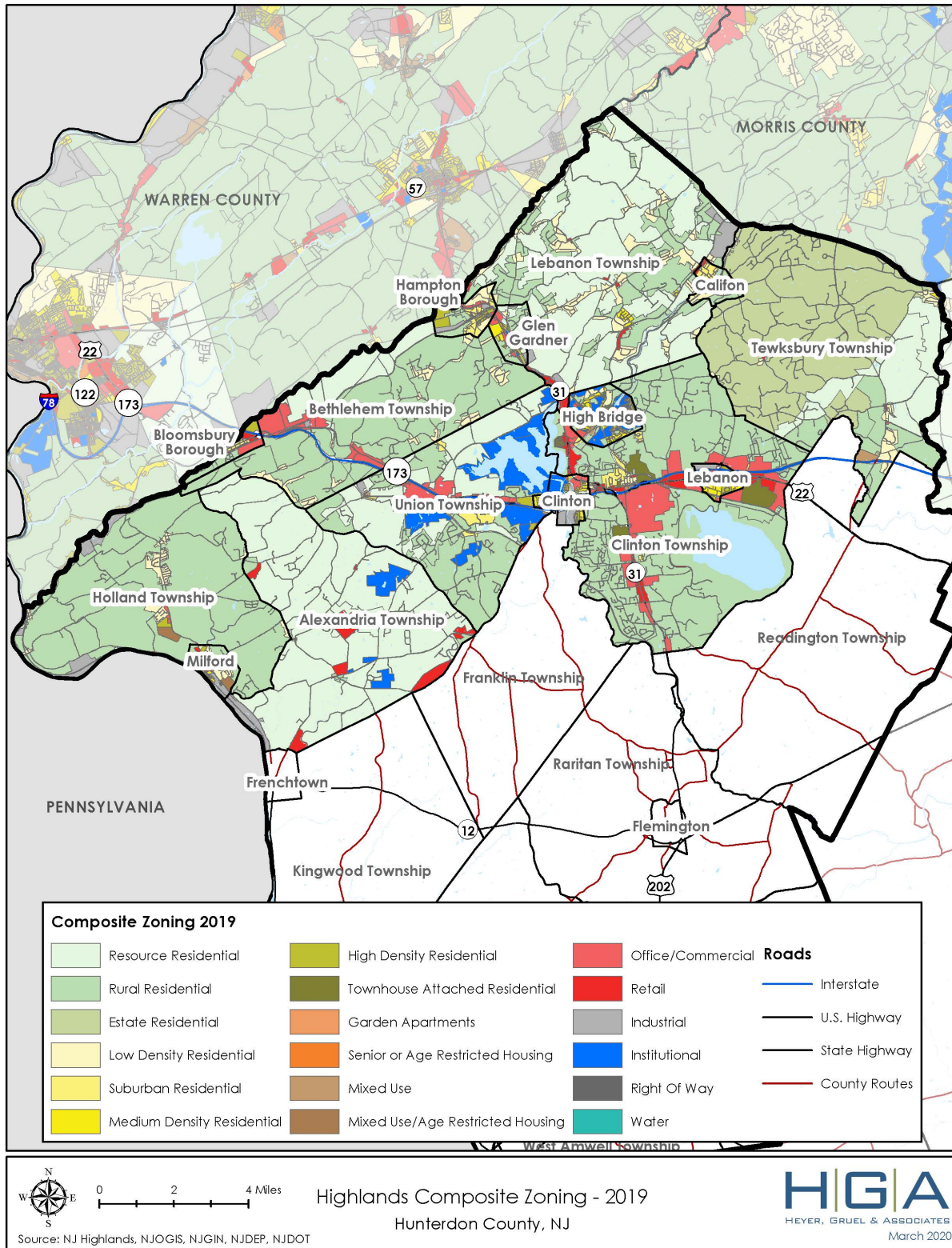


Figure 10 - Composite Zoning Hunterdon County Highlands Region

Subpart C: Development and Redevelopment

The Highlands RMP prioritizes future development and redevelopment efforts within the Highlands Region in areas served by existing infrastructure, areas with existing impervious coverage and "Brownfields" and "Grayfields". Key factors that influence the development or redevelopment potential in a given area include water availability, community water system capacity, wastewater capacity, and septic system concentration

Highlands Centers

Highlands Centers, which may be incorporated into municipal Plan Conformance petitions, are analogous to State Plan Centers designated through the State Plan Endorsement process. These are areas where development and redevelopment are planned and encouraged. Highlands Centers are intended to support balance in the Highlands Region by providing for sustainable economic growth while protecting critical natural and cultural resources.

Hunterdon County may be interested in engaging the Highlands Council in a discussion about the potential for corridor-based or inter-municipal centers. At present, Lebanon Borough is the only Highlands designated center in Hunterdon County.

The MPRR recommends further evaluation of centers designated in the State Development and Redevelopment Plan and the Plan Endorsement process. Guidelines for establishing distinct types of Highlands Centers that are like the SDRP Centers may be appropriate. Different center types include cores, nodes, villages, hamlets, and freight.

The MPRR also recommends that the Highlands Council review opportunities to expand the use of both contiguous and non-contiguous cluster development as part of center planning. Cluster development is a method of concentrating development within a dense area to avoid disturbing and permanently preserving sensitive or valuable environmental features. Contiguous cluster development takes place within a single parcel or adjoining parcels. Non-contiguous cluster development functions as a "junior" version of transfer of development rights by using the development potential from one parcel on another to preserve environmental features.

Redevelopment

The Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, the "LRHL" (N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1, et seq) is a statutory mechanism to pursue redevelopment throughout New Jersey. Areas that meet one or more criteria set forth in the LRHL may be designated an area in need of redevelopment or rehabilitation. Criterion "b" of the LRHL was recently amended to specifically target commercial retail strips and malls and office parks that have experienced significant vacancies. Where these

facilities exist, either on a large or small scale, there is often ample existing impervious coverage. Areas so designated, for which a redevelopment plan has been adopted, can be eligible for development incentives, financing mechanisms, and other tools to enable development projects that may not happen without public intervention.

Highlands Redevelopment Areas can be locations within the Highlands Region that have a high percentage of impervious cover (grayfields) or known environmental contamination (brownfields). These previously disturbed, developed, and otherwise compromised areas can be redeveloped in a denser manner than other lands in the Highlands.

There is potential interplay between the LRHL and the Highlands Redevelopment Area and Center Designation processes. Part of the County's strategic review of future investment priorities may consider how these designations and regulatory tools can nest to create robust opportunities for sustainable economic development.

The MPRR notes that twelve Highlands Redevelopment Areas have been designated. The RMP does not include procedures for designating Highlands Redevelopment Areas in the Planning Area. The MPRR recommends that the Council develop a process for doing so.

As part of the Plan Conformance implementation process, the County may wish to evaluate areas within the Highlands Region for their redevelopment potential. The County could work with municipalities and the Highlands Council to identify Highlands Redevelopment Areas, and/or potential redevelopment or rehabilitation areas as set forth in the LRHL.

Subpart D: Future Land Use

The Highlands RMP utilizes the Environmental Resource, Water Availability, Community Water System Capacity, and Wastewater System Capacity mapping to establish Land Use Capability Zone maps. These maps define areas for protection, conservation, and existing developed communities.

The Land Use Capability Zone map combined with local zoning regulate future land use and development in the Highlands Region. In Hunterdon County, most of the Highlands Region is in the Protection Zone, Conservation Zone, and Conservation Zone – Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone. Existing Community Zone areas are concentrated along the Interstate 78 and Route 31 corridors, in Hampton, Glen Gardner, Bloomsbury, Califon, High Bridge, and Milford Boroughs, and in portions of Holland and Tewksbury Township. Within the Existing Community Zone are limited pockets of the Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone. The remainder of the County is in the Wildlife Management Sub-Zone.

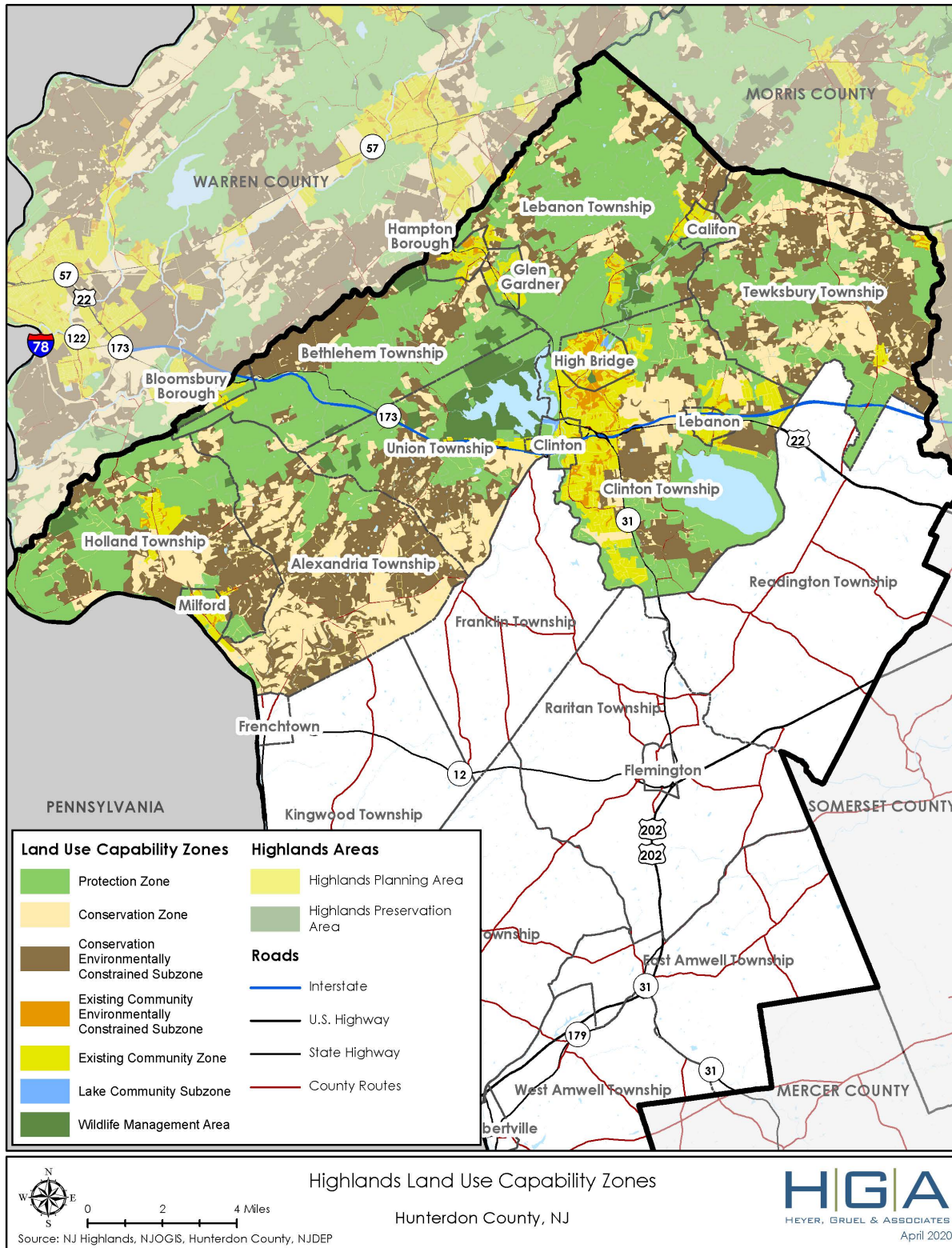


Figure 11 - Hunterdon County Highlands Land Use Capability Zones

PART 7 – LANDOWNER EQUITY

A significant concern about the adoption of the Highlands Act and implementation of the Highlands RMP is the impact on property values and property rights. All zoning and land use controls impact property values and property rights to some degree. The Highlands RMP includes several programs designed to balance these property interests with broader policy goals.

Subpart A: Transfer of Development Rights

The Highlands includes a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program. TDR creates credits to remove the ability to develop property from environmentally sensitive areas called “sending zones” and allows property owners or developers to acquire those credits to develop more densely in areas that can support growth called “receiving zones”. The Highlands Development Credit Bank was created and funded to acquire credits from interested landowners in sending zones and to act as an intermediary to sell the credits to individuals in receiving zones.

Hunterdon County Highlands Development Credits (as of March 2020)

- 71 requests from property owners
- 29 approved requests (95 approved throughout the Highlands Region)
 - 16 pending transactions
 - 3 withdrawn transactions
 - 10 completed purchases (49 completed throughout the Highlands Region)
- 10 Completed Purchases
 - 259.83 acres (18% of 1,445.01 total acreage preserved through HDC program)
 - 171.25 Highlands Development Credits (13.5% of 1264.25 HDCs acquired)
 - 5 in Bethlehem Township
 - 2 in Union Township
 - 2 in Lebanon Township
 - 1 in Clinton Township

The program has received interest and completed credit acquisitions to preserve land, but the lack of receiving areas and a viable market has curbed the program's ability to expand. The voluntary receiving zone program is open to any municipality in the State, not just towns in the Highlands Region. The Highlands Council offers grant funding for feasibility study, implementation, and other planning projects associated with the establishment of a receiving zone.

Municipalities with receiving zones have the ability to charge up to \$15,000 in impact fees per unit. Impact fees are typically not permitted in New Jersey. Limited forms of impact fees may be

authorized in off-tract improvement ordinances. In those cases, the fees are tied to a pro rata share of improvements that have a direct nexus to the scope of development. The impact fees authorized in the Highlands Receiving zones can be used for infrastructure, recreational improvements, streetscape improvements, and other broader projects that may not be directly tied to the development.

Hunterdon County has several areas served by infrastructure that may be candidates for receiving zones. The County, as part of its broader strategic analysis, may engage with its municipalities to determine if evaluating the creation of a receiving zone is a viable project.

The MPRR provides a status update on the TDR process. Since the adoption of the RMP, the Highlands Council has awarded twenty TDR Receiving Zone Feasibility Grants. These grants have failed to develop viable receiving zones. Three municipalities in Hunterdon County received funding for the feasibility studies. Town of Clinton was determined to be inappropriate due to water capacity issues. Tewksbury Township was not feasible due to infrastructure capacity. High Bridge Borough was awarded a grant but has not completed the study. The private market demand for credits that was envisioned to support receiving areas has not materialized. The Council may consider other incentive strategies to encourage local governments to establish receiving areas.

Subpart B: Exemptions and Waivers

The RMP allows for exemptions and waivers for certain types of development activity. Municipalities that have attained Plan Conformance can adopt an ordinance permitting the municipality to issue certain Highlands Act Exemption determinations. The County could engage with the Highlands Council about the possibility of a similar option for projects dealing with County infrastructure within the Planning Area. Projects within the Preservation Area will remain subject to oversight and review by NJDEP.

PART 8 – SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Highlands RMP includes a focus on sustainable economic development within the region. The Region's and the broader economy have evolved in novel ways since the adoption of the RMP. There has been a trend of corporations leaving suburban campuses and moving to the urban core in part to cater to the desires of the workforce. The exponential increase in the market share of online commerce has hurt brick and mortar retail. Between Amazon and similar "e-tailers" and price pressures from "big box" stores, local businesses and downtowns have struggled to remain viable. Throughout New Jersey, towns and counties have struggled to support traditional

downtowns and to revitalize and reimagine aging commercial strips, malls, and corporate campuses.

In the Highlands Region, creativity and a measured, targeted approach to economic development are vital to overcome these structural challenges. Hunterdon County has been engaged in economic development planning and has been working with the help of the Highlands Council to create a model for sustainable economic development. The Highlands Region has outdoor recreational attractions, areas of natural beauty, cultural and historic features, and agriculture related experiences as opportunities to draw tourists and promote economic activity.

The MPRR clarifies and updates some of the RMP recommendations related to sustainable economic development. The recommendations focus on developing a region-wide "Smart Growth Capability Map" that identifies the areas most appropriate for future economic development and redevelopment. Economic development planning should focus on capitalizing on existing strengths including outdoor recreation (hiking, hunting, fishing, etc.), agriculture, and tourism.

Hunterdon County is in the middle of a multi-phase process to evaluate the County's tourism market, establish a destination marketing organization (DMO), and attract new industries. Hunterdon County Economic Development has been targeting industries including technology, life sciences, agribusiness, and advanced manufacturing and providing services such as a site selection clearinghouse. In addition, the County has been providing grant funding to support economic development related planning efforts at the municipal level.

Hunterdon County's Highlands planning efforts will include a strong focus on promoting sustainable economic development. This effort will require a multi-faceted approach. Promoting agri-tourism and supporting the agriculture industry will be vital for parts of the Region. Other areas can focus on development and redevelopment along the major transportation corridors where public infrastructure is available. The traditional small-town centers in the Region's Borough's can take advantage of their scenic charm and cultural and heritage tourism.

Section 2: Hunterdon County Plans and Land Development Standards

This section of the Plan provides a review of Hunterdon County's planning documents and relevant studies and their relationship to the Highlands RMP. The County has been active in preparing and updating planning documents. Its most recent endeavors have focused on sustainable economic development strategies and studies and updates to its Open Space and Farmland Preservation Plans. Generally, the Plans have similar goals and objectives as the Highlands RMP, so the County is well positioned to work with the Highlands Council. However, some of the Plans predate the adoption of the RMP and may need to be updated as part of a comprehensive Plan Conformance process.

SITES OF HISTORIC INTEREST – HUNTERDON COUNTY MASTER PLAN (1979)

The 1979 Sites of Historic Interest report provides a county-wide survey of historic sites. The report includes a review of resources, historic preservation tools and programs, and funding mechanisms. The report outlines six recommendations including promoting cooperation between governmental entities and private citizens, that the County Planning Board continue its efforts in historic preservation, that the County provide a clearinghouse of information, that the County Planning Board consider historic sites and districts in its review of development proposals, and that municipal and County planning activities consider historic sites and their preservation within their respective long-range planning efforts.

HISTORIC SITES & DISTRICTS IN HUNTERDON COUNTY, NJ (2002)

This is a pamphlet prepared by the Hunterdon County Cultural & Heritage Commission that provides an inventory of historic sites and districts listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places located within Hunterdon County municipalities. The report consists of a profile sheet for each district or property and provides a brief history, photographs, and cadastral maps showing boundaries. This report serves as an inventory and, does not make any recommendations.

HUNTERDON COUNTY OPEN SPACE, FARMLAND, AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST FUND PLAN (2016)

Since 1999, voters in Hunterdon County have voted several times to establish and re-establish an "Open Space, Recreation, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund." The Fund provides an annual revenue stream from a dedicated tax assessment that can be used for acquisition, development, improvement, and maintenance of lands for conservation and recreation purposes. The County Freeholders are strongly committed to preservation efforts to maintain the character and quality of life in the County.

Grants from the Trust Fund can be used for the “preservation of historic structures, properties, facilities, sites, areas, or objects.” Municipalities and qualifying “Charitable Conservancies” can apply for grants. Priority is given to projects that can leverage funding from other sources.

Highlands RMP Analysis

The Highlands Regional Master Plan includes goals and associated policies related to the protection of historic, cultural, and scenic resources.

- Goal 4A - Protection and preservation of the historic, cultural and archaeological resources of the Highlands Region.
- Goal 4B - Protection and enhancement of the scenic resources within the Highlands Region.
- Goal 4C - Conforming municipalities and counties include minimum standards for historical, cultural, archaeological and scenic protection in municipal and county master plans and land development regulations.

The RMP advocates for a variety of efforts to protect historic and cultural resources within the Highlands Region including:

- Identification of historic, archaeological and cultural resources
- Protection and management of Historic Resources
- Education and outreach

Recommendation

The County “Sites of Historic Interest” Historic Preservation Element was prepared in 1979, predating the Highlands Act and RMP. County staff has been in the process of updating the County’s public-facing information about historic sites. The development of new digital and online resources is underway and is recommended to continue. It is also recommended that the County prepare an update / addendum to the Historic Preservation Element that identifies new digital resources and provides information about new properties and historic districts have been added to the State and National Registers in the last forty years. The Element should also include an overview on how preservation and funding tools have changed. A section should be added to the Plan to address the Highlands RMP and its goals.

An update to the Historic Plan Element should consider how historic preservation can be used to promote sustainable economic development and recreation. Historic sites attract visitors and can host weddings and other events.

In addition, the portions of the County Land Development Standards pertaining to development applications in historic districts are being reviewed and revised where necessary, to strengthen regulations associated with historical, cultural, archaeological and scenic protection.

WOODLAND CONSERVATION PLAN (2003)

The Hunterdon County Planning Department, in a joint effort with the North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council and the steering committee, compiled a county-wide Woodland Conservation Plan that was adopted in 2003.

The County's Woodland Conservation Plan is a general guidance document for municipalities. The Plan outlines the benefits of woodlands in terms of ecology and economy. They provide carbon sinks to counter climate change, critical habitat, assist with stormwater management, beautification of scenic areas, and help reduce energy use when structures are constructed strategically.

The Plan provides guidance for municipalities in determining how to evaluate woodland resources for conservation and how to implement conservation efforts in planning documents and ordinances. The Plan includes sample goals and statements that can be used in Master Plan Reexaminations and Conservation Plan elements.

The Plan encourages municipalities to update their landscape performance standards and integrate tree conservation in with natural resource conservation ordinances in such a way that is tailor-made for each district. The Plan then provides sample ordinances and legal guidance on how municipalities can achieve this integration.

Highlands RMP Analysis

Protection of forest resources within the Highlands Region is a critical component of the Highlands RMP. Woodlands provide critical habitat as well as stormwater management, energy reduction, and overall beautification that can improve real estate value. Forested areas are vital for carbon sequestration and mitigating the effects of climate change. In addition to preserving existing high-quality forests, the RMP and MPRR include a goal of enhancing existing forests and reforesting appropriate areas.

The following RMP Goals deal with forest resources within the Highlands Region:

- Goal 1A - Protection of large areas of contiguous forested lands of the Highlands Region to the maximum extent possible.
 - Goal 1B - Protection and enhancement of forests in the Highlands Region.
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- Goal 1C - Conforming municipalities and counties include forest protection programs in their masterplans and development regulations.
- Goal 1J – Preservation of forests in private ownership through creation of a forest preservation easement program.

The RMP and MPRR include the following recommendations centered around forest resource management and sustainability:

- Forest Sustainability – Develop incentives to encourage invasive species control and deer population management.
- Provide a Model Municipal Tree Ordinance
- Provide Guidance for community forestry plans for Highlands
- Provide guidance for forest conservation and mitigation plans – Continue to improve mapping and resource identification to highlight the areas most critical for conservation. Include a focus on preserving and linking contiguous tracts. For mitigation analysis, develop models (Function Ecosystem Valuation “FEV”) to quantify the value of forest resources, which include the value of carbon sequestration, for purposes of mitigation assessment.

Recommendation

The Woodland Conservation Plan provides general guidance for municipalities to incorporate. The Plan predates the adoption of the Highlands RMP. As the Highlands Council evaluates region-wide strategies and recommendations, the County may consider partnering with the Highlands to create an updated County Woodland Conservation Plan. In addition, the County will work to incorporate woodland conservation, restoration, and development best practices into updates to the Growth Management Plan and other relevant planning documents.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN (2007)

The 2007 Growth Management Plan (GMP) begins with a County profile covering natural resources, land use, transportation, economic development, people and housing, public schools, infrastructure, land preservation and historic resources. The Plan includes a step-by-step plan for growth management – Establish Community Goals, Balance the Preservation of Rural Character with Population Growth, and Foster Innovative Planning and Design. The Plan predates the Highlands RMP but is largely consistent with its goals and policies.

The GMP included a public outreach process. When the Plan was being prepared, the biggest issues identified by residents were the loss open space and farmland, overdevelopment, and

traffic. Generally, the GMP sought to address those issues by prioritizing environmental preservation, using context sensitive design to preserve rural character in housing and commercial developments, ensuring the protection of water supply and other natural resources, and providing for a mix of housing choices and managing density through transfer of development rights.

Highlands RMP Analysis

The Highlands RMP includes numerous goals and policies that are relevant to the County's Growth Management Plan. Both documents seek to guide future land use in the Region. While only a portion of Hunterdon County is within the Highlands Region, the County's broader development context should consider how the Highlands impacts land use. Some of the Highlands Municipalities in Hunterdon County have opted in to Plan Conformance in the Planning Area, and they have complied in the Preservation Area.

Managing growth in a sustainable way requires focusing on development and redevelopment where infrastructure capacity exists. Preservation efforts support permanent protection of land that is vital to watershed quality, sensitive steep slopes, habitats, and forest resources, and valuable for agricultural production and scenic beauty.

The following RMP goals are especially relevant to the GMP:

- Goal 2A: Protection of the value of the Highlands Region as an "Essential source of drinking water, providing clean and plentiful drinking water for one-half of the State's population", along with the ecological values of clean water, through the protection, enhancement and restoration of water resources quantity, flow characteristics, and quality as fundamental to ensuring that there are adequate water supplies to support these needs.
 - Goal 2B: Protection, restoration, and enhancement of water quality and quantity of surface and ground waters...and to determine "the amount and type of human development and activity which the ecosystem of the Highlands Region can sustain while still maintaining the overall ecological values thereof, with special reference to surface and ground water quality and supply..."
 - Goal 2D: Maintenance of hydrologic integrity through the protection of ground water recharge.
 - Goal 2E: Improvement of ground water recharge through regional management efforts.
 - Goal 2H: Limitation of the type and amount of human development in the well-head protection areas of public water supply wells.
 - Goal 2I: Limitation of the expansion of water and wastewater infrastructure in the preservation area.
-

- Goal 2J: All existing and future development in the Highlands Region that use public water supply systems are served by adequate and appropriate infrastructure.
 - Goal 2K: All existing and future development in the Highlands Region that use public wastewater treatment systems are served by adequate and appropriate infrastructure.
 - Goal 3C: Minimize construction of non-agricultural development-inducing water and wastewater infrastructure in agricultural resource areas.
 - Goal 6A: Use the Highlands Land Use Capability Zone map series as a framework for determining the character, location, and magnitude of new growth and development in the Highlands Region.
 - Goal 6B: Preservation of the land and water resources and ecological function of Highlands Areas in the Protection Zone.
 - Goal 6C: Limitation of development in the Protection Zone to development and redevelopment which does not adversely affect the natural resources of the Highlands Region ecosystem.
 - Goal 6E: Incorporation of regional development patterns and related environmentally sensitive areas within Existing Community Zones.
 - Goal 6F: Support of compact development, mixed use development, and redevelopment and maximization of water, wastewater, and transit infrastructure investments for future use of land and development within the Existing Community Zone.
 - Goal 6H: Guide development away from environmentally sensitive and agricultural lands and promote development and redevelopment in or adjacent to existing developed lands.
 - Goal 6I: Conforming municipalities and counties incorporate regional and local land and water resource planning and management programs in their master plans and development regulations.
 - Goal 6J: Accommodation of regional growth and development needs through the reuse and redevelopment of previously developed areas, including brownfields, grayfields, and underutilized sites.
 - Goal 6K: Concentrate residential, commercial, and industrial development, redevelopment, and economic growth in existing developed areas in locations with limited environmental constraints, access to existing utility, and transportation infrastructure.
 - Goal 6L: Conforming municipalities and counties consider development, redevelopment, and brownfields opportunities in their master plans.
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- Goal 6N: Use of smart growth principles, including low impact development, to guide development and redevelopment in the Highlands Region.
- Goal 7B: Provision for compensation through a region-wide program of transferable development rights to landowners whose properties have limited or no capacity to support additional development based upon analyses conducted by the Highlands Council and who are disproportionately burdened by the provisions of the Highlands Act.
- Goal 7D: Establishment of sufficient Highlands Receiving Zones to create a positive market for TDR credits.

Recommendation

The Growth Management Plan is the County's Master Plan. It is nearly thirteen years old, and the conditions under which it was written have changed. The County should perform a comprehensive review and update to the Growth Management Plan.

- Ensure that the GMP aligns with the Highlands RMP
- Review the baseline conditions, assumptions, visions, goals, and recommendations outlined in the Plan in the current context. There have been significant changes in the County since 2007.
- The GMP should also be reviewed in the context of the County's other planning documents. The updated GMP should be consistent with the vision, goals, objectives, and recommendations of those plans.
- The GMP should incorporate a specific section dealing with the Highlands and the County's Plan Conformance efforts and actions. The revised GMP should be consistent with the Highlands Plan and incorporate additional recommendations and best practices from the MPRR.
- Develop the updated GMP with a focus on strategic investment in development and redevelopment and protection and preservation in appropriate location.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN (2008)

The Transportation Plan uses the 2007 Growth Management Plan as a framework and examines the existing conditions to make recommendations with a focus on Smart Growth planning techniques. The Transportation Plan is the result of the guidance of the steering committee, public information meetings and surveys, as well as a traffic safety study. The Transportation Plan is divided into chapters covering the county profile, transportation network, transportation modes, regional transportation planning, preserving historic character, transportation projects and studies and the draft Highlands Regional Master Plan, as well as strategies and actions.

Highlands RMP Analysis

The rural nature of much of the Highlands Area and the existing transportation infrastructure influence patterns of development. Maintenance and upkeep of existing infrastructure is prioritized over new extensions that may induce growth in undeveloped areas. Within centers (designated or otherwise naturally occurring) there may be potential to focus on transit-oriented development, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure. In areas served by freight rail lines, sidings, spurs, and other connections can be important for supporting existing and new economic development.

The following RMP goals are consistent with the County's transportation recommendations:

- Goal 5A: Provision of safe and efficient mobility within the Highlands, and between the Highlands and destinations outside of the Region.
- Goal 5B: Maintenance of a safe and effective level of service on the existing Highlands road system without the use of capacity improvements that could trigger additional development in area that are not appropriate for "growth inducing" land uses.
- Goal 5C: Transportation improvements within the Highlands Region that are consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
- Goal 5D: A multi-modal transportation system which facilitates the movement of people and goods within and through the Highlands Region without adversely affecting ecosystem integrity and community character.
- Goal 5E: Minimization of travel demand and vehicle miles of travel.

Recommendations

The County's Transportation Plan is nearly twelve years old. The County should work to update the Plan in concert with the Growth Management Plan update. The Highlands RMP was in draft form when the 2008 Transportation Plan was adopted, so the update should review its alignment with the Highlands RMP and subsequent guidance.

- Review and update the County Transportation Plan to ensure full alignment with the Highlands RMP.
 - Evaluate opportunities for transit-oriented development and redevelopment projects throughout the County with a special focus on the Highlands Region.
 - Focus on existing infrastructure and how the County can capitalize on highway corridors, interchanges, transit stations, park and rides, and other transportation facilities.
 - Consider opportunities for "last mile" connections and other links between employment and residential centers and transit.
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- Review the County's efforts to enhance pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure with a focus on traditional and emerging centers, links to transit, and on- and off-road connections with greenways and recreational amenities.
- Work with the Highlands to ensure the County can perform needed maintenance and upkeep of its facilities in the Highlands Region in a timely and cost-effective manner.

COMPREHENSIVE FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN (2008)

The plan outlines the farmland preservation programs, makes recommendations for accommodating future demand and improving the current program, and meets the State requirement for a county comprehensive farmland preservation plan. The County is in the process of updating its Farmland Preservation Plan.

The County's farmland preservation efforts date to 1981 to balance and mitigate impacts of increasing suburbanization at that time. The County is a leader in the State in farmland preservation, having preserved over 34,000 acres of farmland. Agriculture is an important part of the County's economy and is a focus of sustainable economic development planning.

Highlands RMP Analysis

The County's 2008 Farmland Plan includes the components required by the State at that time and is largely consistent with the Highland RMP. Since the Farmland Plan was adopted shortly after the Highlands RMP, the forthcoming update should ensure that the plans are in alignment and that the updates in the 2018 MPRR are considered in the County's Plan.

The County's Plan is consistent with the Highlands Act goals of Preserving Farmland and promoting compatible agricultural, horticultural, recreational, and cultural uses and opportunities within the framework of protecting the Highlands environment.

The following RMP goals are relevant to the Farmland Plan:

- Goal 3A: Protection and enhancement of agricultural resources and the agricultural industry in the Highlands Region.
 - Goal 3B: Protection and enhancement of agricultural sustainability and viability of the agricultural industry within the Highlands Region.
 - Goal 3E: Conforming municipalities and counties include agriculture retention / farmland preservation plan elements in their master plans and development regulations.
 - Goal 6D: Protection and enhancement of agricultural uses and preservation of associated land and water resources in Highlands Areas in the Conservation Zone.
 - Goal 8B: Protection and enhancement of the agriculture industry in the Highlands Region.
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Recommendation

Ensure that the ongoing Farmland Preservation Plan update is consistent with the NJ State Agricultural Development Committee's requirements and the goals and objectives of the Highlands RMP. A focus should be placed on farmland retention and sustainable economic development activities.

- Reevaluate development trends in the context of pressure on farmland.
- Identify opportunities to partner with the Highlands Council to preserve additional land, promote best management practices, market niche crops and agri-tourism, and promote agriculture as an industry in Hunterdon County.
- Ensure that the County's mapping related to agriculture, preserved farms, and soil quality is up to date.
- Work with municipalities in the County and the Highlands to promote value added businesses as part of farming operations to ensure agriculture remains economically viable.

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (2014)

The Hunterdon County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was adopted in December of 2014. The Plan was a product of the combined efforts of the Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders, the CEDS Governing Committee which consisted of public and private stakeholders, the Hunterdon County Planning Board Staff and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. The Action Plan of the CEDS identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats faced by the County, the resulting goals and objectives, and performance measures.

The CEDS identified the County's potential role in collaborating with municipalities to resolve local zoning with Highlands regulations while still maintaining high value job creators, such as advanced manufacturing, which is a small subset of employers that is expected to grow within the County.

The recommendations in the CEDS included:

- Repurposing vacant and underutilized commercial and industrial properties
 - Providing increased variety and density of residential development in appropriate areas to help with affordability
 - Promoting new transportation projects that can enhance transit connections and reduce automobile-dependency,
 - Ensuring adequate infrastructure capacity to support new economic development
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- Focusing development on appropriate areas deemed “centers of development”
- Encouraging collaboration between the County and municipalities
- Enhancing the tourism industry

Highlands RMP Analysis

In broad strokes, the CEDS is consistent with the Highlands RMP and its goals. The Highlands Council encourages inter-governmental collaboration to ensure that each level of decision-making is “on the same page”. The recommendations in the CEDS generally encourage redevelopment and reuse of existing infrastructure, promoting sustainable economic development, housing, and transportation choices, and focusing resources in ways that will promote the economy while not harming the natural environment.

The following RMP goals are relevant to sustainable economic development in the County:

- Goal 8A: Sustainable Economic Development in the Highlands Region.
- Goal 8B: Protection and enhancement of the agriculture industry in the Highlands Region.
- Goal 8C: Expansion of compatible and sustainable tourism and recreation within the Highlands Region.
- Goal 8D: Expansion of innovative technology and entrepreneurial businesses including home office, energy efficiency, and resource conservation enterprises in the Highlands Region.

Recommendations

The CEDS reinforces the importance of County-level economic development initiatives and tools to focus development in appropriate areas. County-wide development of a priority investment framework, hopefully with support from the Highlands Council, will be an important tool for advancing the County’s economic development goals in a manner consistent with the RMP.

The County should continue to advance its sustainable economic development work through the tourism planning initiatives and business attraction and retention efforts. The Hunterdon County EDC will continue to play a key role in promoting the County and opportunities for new businesses and industries.

As recommended as part of the Growth Management Plan and throughout the planning recommendations, the County should work with its municipalities and the Highlands Council (within the Highlands Region) to ensure that zoning and land use policies are compatible with existing infrastructure and broader strategic priorities. The County should encourage and help

facilities redevelopment areas, center designations, and other tools to encourage sustainable development.

HUNTERDON COUNTY TOURISM RESEARCH INITIATIVE (2017-2019)

From 2017 to 2019 Hunterdon County worked with a consultant to prepare a multi-phase tourism study and plan. The County received grant funding from the Highlands Council for the project as part of a sustainable economic development planning initiative.

Phase 1 of the project established the existing conditions and quantified the impacts of tourism in Hunterdon County. The Study estimated that over \$317 million was generated in tourism expenditures in the County in 2016. The economic trends related to tourism were positive and the number of jobs related to the tourism industry has been growing. Tourism in the County tends not to fluctuate wildly with the seasons as is the case in some counties.

Phase 2 of the project focused on understanding visitors to Hunterdon County including demographics, points of origin, purpose of travel, type of travel, spending habits, destinations, satisfaction level with Hunterdon County and other factors.

Phase 3 is a review of the County's tourism market with a "SWOT" analysis that looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the tourism industry. The data and findings from Phases 1 and 2 inform the recommendations. The key takeaways are that the County should adopt a four-part strategy to enhance tourism:

1. Create a strong brand for the region with an integrated marketing campaign. The Hunterdon 579 Trail <http://www.hunterdon579trail.com> brand has been created to highlight the County's farms, farmers markets, wineries, and other attractions.
2. Develop a "high-tech, high-touch" experience for travelers as a dedicated online portal managed by a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).
3. Promote the County through a social media program and advertising strategy.
4. Ensure buy-in and participation from all towns and businesses throughout the County to bring marketing, promotion, and advertising under a single umbrella.

Highlands RMP Analysis

The project was funded through a Highlands Council grant and is consistent with the RMP goal of "expansion of compatible and sustainable tourism and recreation within the Highlands Region."

The Studies highlight the scenic beauty in Hunterdon County, small town charm, historic and cultural sites and events, and agri-tourism. Preservation of these features is consistent with the RMP, as is promoting them through sustainable tourism and economic development planning initiatives.

Recommendations

The recently completed studies include implementation recommendations. The documents were developed in collaboration with the Highlands Council, so continuing to follow-through on implementation actions is aligned with the Highlands. The County may continue to engage with the Highlands on how to implement and expand its tourism programs and promote that segment of the economy in a sustainable manner consistent with the Highlands RMP.

STRATEGIC PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLAN (2018)

The Strategic Park and Open Space Plan was prepared in 2018. The Plan advances the County Division of Parks and Recreation's mission of "preserving open space and natural resources, providing safe parks and facilities, and offering educational and recreational opportunities, all contributing to an enhanced quality of life for present and future generations." The Plan's vision is consistent with one espoused in the County Growth Management Plan "Protection of Hunterdon County's extensive network of natural resources and maintenance of its rural or scenic-rural landscape."

The Plan is organized into three parts: Background Studies, Analysis of Current Operations, Vision, Goals and Policies. The vision for the plan entails preserving the County's dominant and unique regional landscape features, continuing the environmental role of the County Park System, distributing traditional and new recreation facilities throughout the County, and promoting the County Parks as tourist destinations.

The Plan includes recommendations for development a comprehensive county park system that complements other sources of open space including local, state, federal, and privately-owned lands. The plan recommends new strategic acquisitions of 4,400 plus acres of land over the next decade, upgrades to existing facilities, trail and greenway connections throughout the County, and improvements to support new tourism and visitors.

Highlands RMP Analysis

The Plan recognizes the Highlands Council and identifies it as a regional agency that can influence state policy and bring together conservation and stewardship efforts across municipal boundaries. The Plan goal of preserving open space for the purpose of protecting the environment and natural resources is consistent with the Highlands RMP.

The following goals in the RMP are particularly relevant:

- Goal 1H: Protection of critical resources through land preservation and stewardship of open space throughout the Highlands Region.
- Goal 1I: Conforming municipalities and counties include open space preservation and land stewardship programs in their master plans and development regulations.

Furthermore, the Highlands RMP and municipal plan conformance are identified as a tool that can protect sensitive areas (wetlands, riparian zones, etc.) and contribute to creating networks of preserved open space.

The Plan includes 10 priorities, some of which are directly related to the Highlands RMP. For example, Priority 2 is "Creation of a continuous greenway along the Musconetcong and Sourland Mountains, the prominent landscape features framing the Country's northern and southern borders." This priority is consistent with the Highlands RMP natural resources goal of "protection of large areas of contiguous forested lands."

Recommendations

The recently adopted Plan is consistent with the Highlands RMP and reflects the County's current goals and objectives. The Plan should be used to inform the updates of other planning documents where overlap may occur.

Continued related planning work could focus on Highlands Scenic Resource identification and inventory. As a later phase, scenic resource protection and marketing plans could be developed.

The County should continue to work on implementing the Plan and explore partnerships with the Highlands Council to facilitate actions in the Highlands Region.

LAND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

The County's Land Development Standards (LDS) were last amended in 2000, which predates the Highlands Planning Act and the adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The County is in the process of reviewing and updating the LDS.

Recommendation

The review should include adding definitions and standards associated with the Highlands and bringing the LDS into conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The following revisions to the LDS are recommended:

- Add the following to Section 200 "Definitions"
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- Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (“Highlands Act” N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq.)
 - Highlands Council
 - Highlands Planning Area
 - Highlands Preservation Area
 - “Highlands Council Call-Up of Local Government Unit Approvals”
 - Pursuant to the Highlands Act (N.J.S.A. 13:20-17.a(1)), the Highlands Council may review, within 15 days after Hunterdon County Planning Board approval, conditional approval, or disapproval, any application for development in the preservation area.
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Section 3: Hunterdon County Highlands Goals, Objectives, and Implementation

Hunterdon County is committed to building a positive working relationship with the Highlands Council. The Plan Conformance process is an important step in what is intended to be a mutually beneficial engagement. Throughout all its initiatives, the County is taking efforts to promote economic development. The County has budgetary challenges, high cost of living, and has been impacted by changing development patterns and demands over the last decade.

A successful partnership with the Highlands Council will provide the County with tools to continue promoting responsible and sustainable economic development by adapting existing infrastructure, focusing on redevelopment, and attracting new businesses, residents, talent, and visitors. At the same time, the County is committed to preserving the sensitive Highlands watershed and other crucial environmental features. The County's open space and farmland preservation efforts are robust and will continue to expand within the Highlands Region in partnership with the Council.

The following goals and objectives summarize the County's purpose for pursuing Plan Conformance and the implementation activities provide an outlined for next steps in the process.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Continue to foster a collaborative relationship with the Highlands Council for the mutual benefit of the County, its municipalities, and the Council.
 - Develop a platform to guide investment decisions in a strategic manner that considers principles of sustainable economic development, infrastructure capacity, and environmental resources.
 - Preserve and protect the sensitive natural resources that contribute to Hunterdon County's beauty, way of life, and the unique character of the Highlands Region.
 - Provide a wider array of housing and job opportunities in Hunterdon County within the framework of the Highlands Plan.
 - Consider reasonable modifications to the Highlands approval process for public infrastructure projects.
 - Revisit the potential of Transfer of Development Rights or other programs to ensure landowner value and equity are protected.
 - Align the County's planning documents with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
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IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

The following implementation activities are meant to be a comprehensive list of potential actions the County can undertake in partnership with the Highlands. A more focused implementation agenda will follow that prioritizes a combination of key short-term activities to build momentum and the most important medium- and long-term activities. The implementation activities are roughly grouped by the eight practice areas in the Highlands RMP.

Natural Resources

- Use existing Woodland Conservation Plan as a base to develop specific plans and action items to promote forest stewardship and reforestation and protect and enhance forests in the Highlands Region.
- The County can incorporate specific policies related to protection of steep slopes and work with its municipalities to assemble a clearinghouse of adopted steep slope protection ordinances and best practices.
- Clearinghouse for geotechnical investigation reports. Require submission of any geotechnical investigations to the County. If in the Highlands Region, the reports will be provided to the Highlands Council as well.

Water Resources

- Complete Municipal Wastewater Management Plans – Highlands (Non-Conforming Municipalities only)

Agricultural Resources

- Farmland Preservation & Agricultural Retention Plan – Develop a plan for farmland preservation and for improving the viability of the agriculture industry, including but not limited to integrated pest management, value added facilities, agritourism, and marketing.
 - Niche products, direct farm marketing, interaction with local restaurants, “farm to table” / “Hunterdon Fresh” as branding and marketing
 - Medical cannabis and industrial hemp, depending on local legislation.
 - Value added facilities – processing, storage, etc.
 - Seasonal events
 - Wineries, farm breweries, distilleries and other auxiliary businesses
 - Family nights
 - Special events

Historic, Cultural, Archaeological, and Scenic Resources

- Scenic Byways - The Delaware River Scenic Byway runs along the Delaware River in Mercer and Hunterdon Counties ending at Frenchtown just south of the Highlands Region.
 - As part of the County's tourism planning efforts, there may be an opportunity to extend it north into the Highlands Region.
 - Evaluate whether there are additional scenic roadways that should be identified within the Highlands Region.
- Historic Preservation Planning and Cultural Resource Inventory – Update the existing document with a comprehensive review and an eye to preservation and sustainable economic development and tourism.
 - Prepare / update historical sites survey, as needed.
 - Update Historic Preservation Plan
 - Create clearinghouse of municipal surveys and planning documents at the County level that can be shared with Highlands and elsewhere.
- Trails and Recreation Planning – Continue implementation efforts for projects outlined in the County Strategic Park and Open Space Plan.
- Scenic Resource Management Planning
 - Establish criteria / nomination process for designating regionally significant Scenic Resources in collaboration with the Highlands Council.
 - Develop branding and marketing efforts to encourage visitors, sustainable use of natural areas. This ties into tourism and marketing efforts outlined by the County's Tourism Research Initiative.
 - Management and preservation of scenic resources
 - Review relevant Municipal inventories and ordinances.
 - Are there relevant land use controls needed to protect scenic resources?

Transportation

- Update the County's Transportation Plan to reflect changes over the last decade, include conformance with the Highlands RMP, and evaluate
 - Ensure that the County's infrastructure investment and planning accounts for the impacts on development potential, is aligned with the County's sustainable economic development goals, and is consistent with the goals, objectives, and priorities of the Highlands RMP to the extent feasible.
 - Explore ways to streamline approvals for County infrastructure maintenance and improvement projects in the Highlands. There are concerns from a County engineering
-

standpoint about the cost impacts of extensive permitting process, best management practices, and the like on the repair and upkeep of existing roads. Often there is no right-of-way available in which to install stormwater BMP infrastructure. Land acquisition along roads is not financially feasible. As a result, road maintenance and improvements are deferred or simply not scheduled. How can the Highlands and the County work together to establish a system within the broader permitting framework that the County must go through to reduce these burdens? This concern applies to **existing** infrastructure, not new extensions or improvements.

Community Character

- Update the Growth Management Plan as Hunterdon County's Master Plan Land Use Element to guide land use and decision making throughout the County and in alignment with the Highlands RMP within the Highlands Region.
 - Develop an investment framework with a focus on strategic investment in preservation and growth in appropriate locations. Bring together the work done on Economic Development Initiatives and Strategic Parks and Open Space Plan with other data, scoring, and evaluation metrics. [Use the framework as a tool to attract investment and for proactive collaboration with municipalities on sensible land use policies within the Highlands framework.
 - Continue to take a holistic approach to investment in new preservation efforts. Both open space and recreation and farmland preservation. Funding should be targeted in the areas with most valuable resources and areas where there is no infrastructure or development potential.
 - Highlands Council has identified the development of a "Smart Growth Capability Map" as an important task. The County can take the lead on developing its own framework in collaboration with the Highlands Council.
 - Develop quantifiable scoring metrics to rank development sites and public investments. These may include accessibility to utilities, existing population densities, proximity to transportation networks, absence of environmentally sensitive features, etc.
 - Focus resources on redevelopment within sites served by existing infrastructure and along highway corridors. Consideration of Highlands Center designations that look at corridors and interchanges as the boundaries, including those that may cross municipal lines.
 - Freight
 - Industry Nodes
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- TOD Centers (Transit Areas)
- Highlands Redevelopment Area Planning – Work with municipalities and the Highlands Council to identify Highlands Redevelopment Areas as targets for investment and growth opportunities.

Landowner Equity

- Explore potential County-wide TDR program in collaboration with municipalities in the Highlands. It will be essential to review the full implications of infrastructure capacity, property tax implications, school district impacts (look at regional school districts), affordable housing obligations, and political buy-in.
 - Demographic / Market / Financial analyses to determine feasibility.
 - Explore options outside the Highlands for TDR receiving areas

Sustainable Economic Development

- Support HCEDC site clearinghouse and tools used for business attraction and retention. Work with the Highlands Council to identify key redevelopment opportunities.

Administration and Cooperation

- Develop a strong working relationship with the Highlands Council.
 - Review opportunities for the County to take a role in administering Highlands Act exemptions for its infrastructure projects.
 - Coordinate inter-municipal efforts in key locations throughout the Highland Region.
 - Support municipal Plan Conformance and Highlands Planning projects.
 - County establish clearinghouse for ordinances and plans adopted by each municipality, in and out of Highlands, to enable sharing best practices.
 - Update mapping and underlying data as needed and where appropriate.
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NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Petition for Plan Conformance – Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

APPENDIX E

PUBLIC COMMENTS/HIGHLANDS COUNCIL RESPONSES

Petition for Plan Conformance
County of Hunterdon

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Petition for Plan Conformance – Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED

Written comments regarding Hunterdon County’s Petition for Plan Conformance were accepted by the Highlands Council through the close of the Public Comment period on April 29, 2021. Comments were provided by the following individual:

1. Jean Public

The comments are summarized below with Highlands Council responses provided for each.

PUBLIC COMMENT/RESPONSE SUMMARY

1. **Comment:** One comment suggested that Hunterdon County should use the opportunity of plan conformance to pursue conservation opportunities, reduce overcrowding, and uphold the rights of communities to chart their own destinies.

Response: Highlands Council acknowledges the comment.