New Jersey Highlands 
Quick Facts

- Total area: 859,267 acres (approximately 1,343 square miles).
- Provides drinking water to more than 300 municipalities that are home to 70% of New Jersey’s population.
- 88 municipalities (within 7 counties) have lands within the New Jersey Highlands Region.
- The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, passed in 2004, divided region into a “Preservation Area” and “Planning Area.”
- Development is more strictly regulated in the Preservation Area than the Planning Area.
- Implementation of the NJ Highlands Act is guided by the Highlands Regional Master Plan, adopted in 2008.
- Part of the four-state federal Highlands Region, which also includes Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut.

The New Jersey Highlands
Water Protection and Planning Council

The New Jersey Highlands Region (orange outline on the map below) covers less than 15% of the state, but provides drinking water for 70% of its residents. Recognizing the significance and value of this Region and a desire to ensure protection of both the natural resources and the economic viability of communities within the Region, the State Legislature of New Jersey passed the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) in 2004.

The Highlands Act advocated for a regional approach to land use planning, requiring stringent resource protection policies while acknowledging that development, redevelopment, and economic growth in certain appropriate areas of the Region were also in the best interests of the state.

The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) is a regional planning entity established in the Highlands Act and charged with its implementation. The Highlands Council is a 15-member appointed body assisted in its duties by a professional staff of planning, science and GIS experts.

The Highlands Council works in partnership with municipalities and counties in the Region to encourage a comprehensive regional planning approach to implementation of the Highlands Act. Implementation is guided by the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP), adopted by the Council in 2008. The Highlands Council Plan Conformance process provides municipalities and counties with a framework for this implementation. Municipalities and counties participating in the Plan Conformance process have access to planning and environmental science expertise, technical support, and materials for use in updating local regulatory and planning documents to ensure alignment with the Highlands Act and RMP. Grant funding is available to support the reasonable expenses associated with this work.