



State of New Jersey

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Highlands Council funded plans will protect and improve water quality in more than 30 watersheds

CHESTER, N.J. — At its most recent meeting, the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council voted to approved funding for two watershed-based planning projects that will set the stage for additional funding and implementation of water quality improvement projects throughout the Highlands region. A third project had to be held for a future vote, due to the lack of a sufficient number of eligible voting Council members.

“The primary reason that the Highlands Council exists is to protect water quality and quantity,” explains Ben Spinelli, Highlands Council Executive Director. “The recent storms provide a perfect example of why this type of planning is important. Improperly managed stormwater is a significant contributor to water quality degradation. In addition to the devastating infrastructure damage that was very visible in Warren County, there was less visible water quality damage, most of which is much more difficult, if not impossible, to repair. Effective watershed management can dramatically reduce the negative impacts from severe storm events like this, which are only going to increase.”

Although municipal and county governments are the primary recipients of Highlands Council grant funding, as a regional planning agency the Council also funds projects that have a wider scope. In January, the Highlands Council released a request for proposals to develop Watershed Restoration and Protection Plans (WRPPs) for one or more subwatersheds in the Highlands region. The RFP specified that the plans must include the EPA’s “9 Minimum Elements of Successful Watershed Plans” – a component that makes the plans eligible for additional federal planning and implementation funding administered through the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Water Quality Restoration Grant program. Local governments, universities and colleges, and nonprofit organizations are among the eligible applicants in the Water Quality Restoration Grants program.

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The total budget for all three watershed plans is approximately \$747,477, allocated as follows:

Pohatcong Township Watersheds

Engineering and Land Planning, Inc. along with subconsultant Stroud Water Research Center

- Will focus on three watersheds: Lopatcong Creek, Pohatcong Creek, and Musconetcong River.
- Budget: \$41,000

Warren County and Morris County Locations

Princeton Hydro, LLC.

- Focus areas: Mountain Lake community in Liberty Township in Warren County; 4 lakes in Roxbury Township in Morris County; and eight lakes in Jefferson Township in Morris County.
- Budget: \$334,915

North Branch Raritan River, South Branch Raritan River, and Lamington River

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program along with subconsultants, Raritan Headwaters Association and New Jersey Water Supply Authority

- Focus area will include 24 watersheds across 21 municipalities
- Budget: \$371,562

** This project was held from voting until a future Council meeting.*

In total, the three projects cover whole or partially 34 watersheds and 25 municipalities in the Highlands Region. In addition to providing a roadmap to protect and/or improve water quality, the completed WRPPs can be used in the development of Watershed Improvement Plans required by the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit regulations.

“It’s wonderful that so many communities in the Highlands will be able to benefit from these plans when they are completed,” notes Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. “We’ve had great success working with municipal and other partners developing watershed plans for specific areas in the region. We hope to do even more beyond the three projects approved at this meeting.”

Also, at the July Council meeting the Council approved more than \$100,000 in grants to help Highlands municipalities advance local planning priorities.

- **Mendham Township, Morris County: Initial Assessment Grant**

Not to exceed \$15,000

Mendham Township, Morris County will conduct an assessment to identify where its municipal goals align with goals of the Highlands RMP and how the Township might benefit from additional grant funding opportunities available from the Highlands Council.

- **West Milford Township, Passaic County: Stormwater Management**

Not to exceed \$85,250

West Milford has requested funding to supplement NJDEP grant funding to achieve compliance with the recently revised Tier A Municipal Stormwater General Permit. Funding will be used to meet a number of the permit requirements including preparation of Stormwater Pollution Prevention and Stormwater Management Plans, Preparation of a Township Best Management Practices Manual, and Inlet/Catch Basin Labeling among other tasks.

Experts available to comment on the connection between storm damage and proper watershed management.

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Actions taken by the Council at this meeting will take effect following the Governor's review and consideration of the meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of the minutes. Materials related to this meeting including resolutions, presentations, audio, and minutes will be posted at: www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/index.html (click on July 20 meeting).

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands. Actions taken by the Council will take effect following the Governor's review and consideration of meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of meeting minutes.

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