

**RESOLUTION 2025-  
NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
APPROVAL OF FY2026 REGIONAL MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION FUND  
FOR TOURISM EXPANSION GRANTS**

**WHEREAS**, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act), N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq., has created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council); and

**WHEREAS**, the Highlands Council is tasked with implementing the Highlands Act; and

**WHEREAS**, section 6.g of the Highlands Act authorizes the Highlands Council to enter into any and all agreements or contracts to effectuate the purposes of the Highlands Act; and

**WHEREAS**, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) was enacted to manage and protect the resources of the Highlands Region which is a diverse landscape with both rural and developed areas of varying densities; and

**WHEREAS**, the long-term viability of the Region and its more than 800,000 residents is dependent upon a sustainable and healthy economy; and

**WHEREAS**, the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) provides a number of goals, policies, and objectives related to economic sustainability, and in 2022 the Highlands Council released the New Jersey Highlands Region Economic Sustainability Plan (Plan) to further refine those established goals, policies, and objectives and provide a framework for ensuring the economic future of the Highlands Region; and

**WHEREAS**, the Plan analyzed economic conditions and set forth a series of goals and strategies designed to strengthen the Region's economy and also includes recommended actions for implementation to achieve long-term economic sustainability in the New Jersey Highlands; and

**WHEREAS**, several proposed actions discussed in the Plan focus on the potential for increased tourism in Highlands towns and counties. The Highlands Council is currently in the midst of a branding and marketing initiative to establish a recognizable identity for the entire Highlands Region. The creation of this identity is expected to support increased tourism of many types including but not limited to agritourism, ecotourism, and heritage tourism; and

**WHEREAS**, with these goals in mind and utilizing funding from the RMP Implementation Fund, the Highlands Council is offering grants to government entities, nonprofit organizations, and/or destination marketing organizations (DMOs) for implementation initiatives that serve to enhance and increase tourism in the Highlands; and

**WHEREAS**, eligible projects include any initiative that will support and advance tourism in the Highlands Region, including marketing, advertising, events, web-based projects, and other creative proposals to grow the tourism industry. Projects may be focused on agritourism, ecotourism, and heritage tourism, a mix of any of these, or other innovative regional tourism projects; and

**WHEREAS**, the maximum award amount is \$100,000 per year for county applicants and collaborative partnerships and up to \$35,000 for individual applicants, renewable for future years, subject to funding availability; and

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**WHEREAS**, projects will be reviewed annually to ascertain status, effectiveness, overall implementation, and management of the grant award at which time the Budget and Finance Committee may authorize an additional year of grant funding not to exceed the annual award amount provided herein; and

**WHEREAS**, the grant application was released to the public on January 21, 2025, and there are three grant applications currently under consideration. Grant applications are being accepted on a rolling basis until September 2, 2025; and

**WHEREAS**, staff reviewed the applications to determine the extent of the applicants' expertise in tourism activities as well as past success and overall suitability to provide the services contemplated in the grant application; and

**WHEREAS**, Highlands Council staff recommends that the Highlands Council authorizes entering into grant agreements with the following applicants:

<b>Awardee</b>	<b>Amount</b>
New York–New Jersey Trail Conference	\$35,000.00
Hackettstown Business Improvement District	\$23,424.00
Town of Clinton	\$9,450.00
<b>Total FY 2026 Tourism Expansion Grant Program</b>	<b>\$67,874.00</b>

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Highlands Council that the Executive Director, or their designee, is hereby authorized to enter into Tourism Expansion Grant Agreements with: 1) New York–New Jersey Trail Conference; 2) Hackettstown Business Improvement District; and 3) Town of Clinton, for the amounts provided above for a period of one year, subject to annual renewal by the Budget and Finance Committee.

**CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its regular meeting held on the 17th day of July 2025.

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Carl J. Richko, Chairman

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<b>Vote on the Approval of This Resolution</b>	<b>Motion</b>		<b>Second</b>		<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>Abstain</b>		<b>Absent</b>
Councilmember Alstede											
Councilmember Bush											
Councilmember Dougherty											
Councilmember Dressler											
Councilmember Francis											
Councilmember James											
Councilmember Kibler											
Councilmember Van Abs											
Councilmember Visioli											
Chairman Richko											