RESOLUTION 2025-29
NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
APPROVAL OF CONTRACT TO
DEVELOP A CLIMATE CHANGE TECHNICAL REPORT

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 Act recognized that the Highlands region provides clean and plentiful drinking water to approximately 70% of New Jersey's population, including communities outside of the region. In addition to its water resources, the region contains exceptional natural, agricultural, scenic and historic resources. The Highlands Act states that the goals of the Regional Master Plan (RMP) shall be to protect "the incomparable water resources and natural beauty of the New Jersey Highlands so as to preserve them intact, in trust, forever for the pleasure, enjoyment, and use of future generations while also providing every conceivable opportunity for appropriate economic growth and development to advance the quality of life of the residents of the region and the entire State;" and

WHEREAS, over the past 20 years, the Highlands Council has observed that climate change is increasingly threatening the resources the Council is tasked to protect. These threats become particularly acute in relation to water supply and water quality, as projections indicate more severe precipitation events and prolonged droughts. For example, intense storm events and severe precipitation can overwhelm existing stormwater infrastructure, while insufficient and inadequate wastewater management systems may lead to pollution of lakes, streams, and drinking water sources; and

WHEREAS, droughts further stress drinking water availability and can degrade forests, wetlands, and other ecosystems essential to water quality protection. Agricultural resources are also at risk, with changing precipitation and temperature patterns affecting productivity, crop selection, and crop and livestock health. Climate change is expected to lead to longer growing seasons, increased heat stress, and more frequent crop damage due to extreme weather. In addition, drought-induced increases in groundwater withdrawals for irrigation may place further pressure on regional water supplies; and

WHEREAS, critical habitats that support rare, threatened, and endangered species are particularly vulnerable to the effects of changing temperatures and more severe storm events. These intersecting threats underscore the need for a comprehensive technical foundation to guide the Highlands Council's future climate resilience efforts. To better understand and address these emerging risks, the Highlands Council intends to develop a Climate Change Technical Report to inform future resilience planning; and

WHEREAS, the 2018 Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (MPRR) envisioned the development of a Climate Change Technical Report to understand and address climate change impacts. In keeping with the RMP, which guides implementation of the Highlands Act, its Goals, Policies, and Objectives (GPOs) and programs, and in accordance with EO-89 and the MPRR, the Highlands Council is committed to ensuring that climate change is integrated into future planning efforts; and

WHEREAS, to support future amendments to the RMP and inform potential policy or programmatic changes, the Highlands Council issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking qualified teams to develop

a Climate Change Technical Report for the Highlands region. The report will synthesize existing data and projections to assess the impacts that climate change will have on the region's environmental, agricultural, water resources and built environment; and

WHEREAS, the RFP was released to the public on June 13, 2025, and six (6) Teams submitted proposals on or before the deadline of September 10, 2025; and

WHEREAS, following review of the proposals, staff selected four (4) Teams to participate in in-depth interviews to assess their expertise in developing a Climate Change Technical Report to support future resilience planning, as well as their overall suitability to provide the services contemplated in the RFP; and

WHEREAS, Highlands Council staff recommends that Verdantas LLC is best suited to meet the needs articulated by the Highlands Council's RFP; and

WHEREAS, Highlands Council staff further recommends that the Highlands Council authorizes the Executive Director to enter into a contract with the aforementioned Team to prepare a Climate Change Technical Report; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 13:20-5.j, no action authorized by the Highlands Council shall have force or effect until ten (10) days, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays excepted, after a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Council has been delivered to the Governor for review, unless prior to expiration of the review period the Governor shall approve same, in which case the action shall become effective upon such approval.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Highlands Council that the Executive Director, or their designee, is hereby authorized to enter into a contract with Verdantas LLC, for an amount not to exceed $110,000.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its regular meeting held on the 16th day of October 2025.

Carl J. Richko

Carl J. Richko, Chairman

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