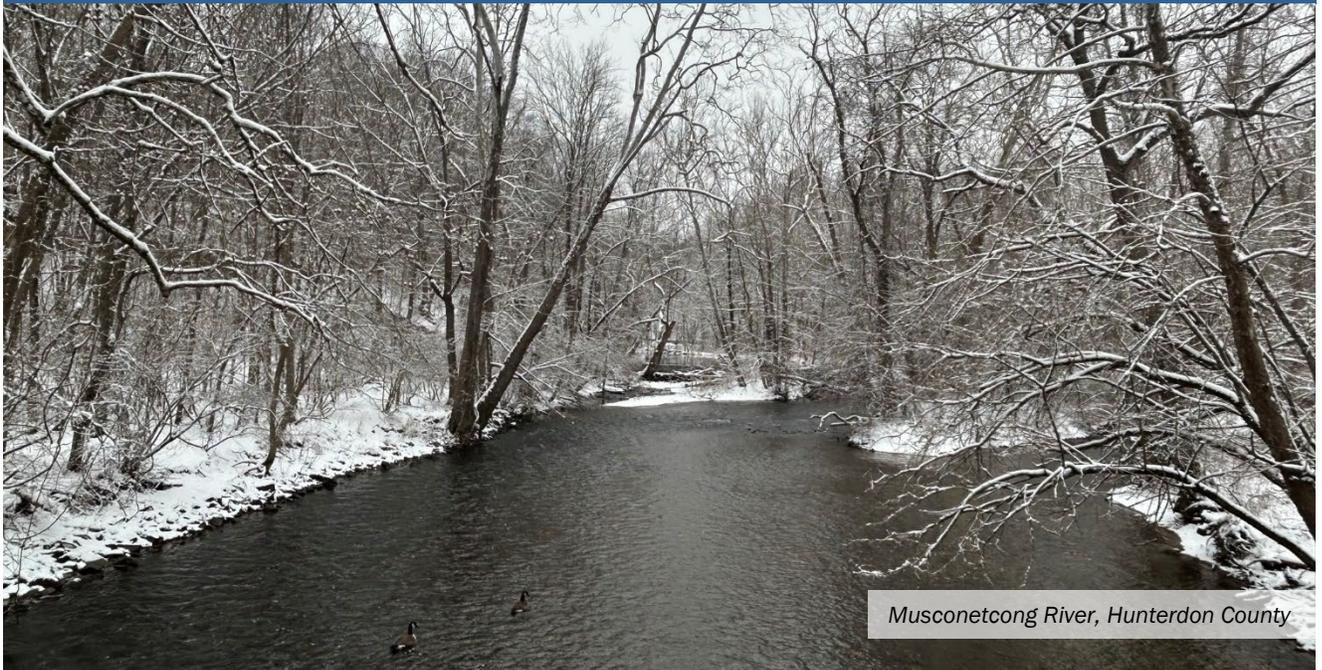


Highlands Council Monthly Report

February 2023

Released March 6, 2023



Musconetcong River, Hunterdon County

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Highlands Council Monthly Report

Summary of Activities | February 1-28, 2023

Executive Director Priority Highlights

- **Land Preservation Funding.** As discussed in last month's report, the Highlands Council is seeking a portion of the Corporation Business Tax (CBT) be directly allocated to the Highlands Council for preservation efforts. In February, a letter was sent to the state legislature and the heads of several state agencies and departments making them aware of this request. The letter and attachments highlighted the fact that the Highlands Council land preservation programs are currently unfunded and the CBT funding formula, which is specified within the Preserve New Jersey Act, is overdue for review.
- **Inland Flood Protection Rules.** The Highlands Council provided comments on the proposed Inland Flood Protection Rule changes. The comments submitted expressed general support of the rule proposal changes, emphasizing several key provisions and suggesting specific enhancements. These measures are designed to lower the risk to people and property that result from riverine flooding that will likely increase as a result of climate-change-induced extreme precipitation events. It is important that our planning reflect these risks going forward and that the DEP rules assist with implementing that planning.
- **Stormwater Requirement Changes.** Last year NJDEP announced changes to the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit requirements in an effort to better address local flooding and nutrient loading in waterways due to stormwater runoff, and to more closely align state standards with federal requirements. All Highlands municipalities must meet these new requirements, and for many the changes are significant. The NJDEP is offering a [grant program](#) to support the changes. The Highlands Council **will supplement this support** by providing both financial and advisory assistance to any of the 88 municipalities in the Highlands, and especially the 30 municipalities who are transitioning from "Tier B" requirements to "Tier A." Municipalities are encouraged to reach out to their [Highlands Council staff liaison](#) for more information.
- **Combating Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).** Our staff met with Montclair University in February to learn more about their work studying HABs and their origins. The science staff will be participating in a Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) monitoring program in cooperation with Montclair University. They will be performing field testing at three water bodies in the region. HABs are an ongoing issue in the Highlands and this work will produce valuable data for use in combating or preventing future HAB events, which have had a significant impact on Highlands lakes and ponds.

Municipal and County RMP Implementation

Updates about Highlands Council-funded projects.

- **Alpha Borough, Warren County**
 - The Public Comment period for the Amended Petition for Plan Conformance closed on February 11, with 22 comments received. A summary of comments and responses will be included in the final Consistency Review and Recommendations Report. The report will be available in advance of the public hearing for the petition, which will take place at an upcoming Highlands Council meeting.
- **Hope Township, Warren County**
 - Submitted a Scope of Work (SOW) to complete a Municipal Zoning Analysis. The SOW was approved by staff.
- **Hunterdon County**
 - Submitted a draft of the Growth Management Plan for review and comment by staff. The County is now advancing to the next step of plan development.
- **Rockaway Township, Morris County**
 - An Assessment of the Lakes and Watersheds of Rockaway Township, prepared by Princeton Hydro, was completed and approved by Council staff.
- **Morris County**
 - Submitted a grant proposal for analysis and design work that will support an aeration project on Lake Hopatcong. Staff is reviewing the proposal.
- **Mount Olive Township, Morris County**
 - Completed partial deliverables related to a Stream and Lake Management Plan, which is part of a larger Budd Lake Municipal Beach Improvements Plan project.
- **Mountain Lakes Borough, Morris County**
 - Submitted a Scope of Work (SOW) to complete an Initial Assessment, which includes four tasks: Initial Highlands Review, Future Development Opportunities, Natural/Cultural Resources Overview, and Final Initial Assessment Report. The SOW was approved by staff.
- **Vernon Township, Sussex County**
 - Submitted a Scope of Work (SOW) to complete a Lake/Watershed management plan. The SOW for Phase I of the project was reviewed and approved by staff.
 - Submitted a draft Water Use and Conservation Management Plan (WUCMP), which is being reviewed by staff.
- **Washington Township, Warren County**
 - Completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan and Farmland Preservation Plan, which were both reviewed and approved by Highlands Council staff.

Project Reviews

The Highlands Council does not issue permits but is statutorily required to review certain proposed projects in the region for consistency with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP).

- **Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) Amendment Review: Lincoln Logistics.** Lincoln Logistics Franklin has requested an amendment to the Upper Delaware WQMP to accommodate a proposed industrial development in Franklin Township, Warren County consisting of three warehouse buildings and an onsite subsurface sewage disposal system. *Highlands Council staff review for consistency with the RMP: pending.*
- **Highlands Preservation Area Approval Review – General Permit #1 (w/ NJDEP): Waterloo Road Amphibian Crossing project, Byram Township, Sussex County.** The NJDEP Division of Fish & Wildlife is proposing construction of an amphibian passage system along a section of Waterloo Road and surrounding lands (Allamuchy Mountain State Park and Waterloo Village). The roughly quarter-mile stretch of road is the site of the largest documented springtime migration of salamanders and frogs across a roadway in New Jersey. This project is guided by two of the NJDEP Fish and Wildlife’s foremost management plans and offers a long-term solution to the vehicle-caused mortality threatening a significant population of amphibians. *Highlands Council staff review finding: consistent with the RMP.*
- **Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) Amendment Review: Vanderhoof Warehouse.** A site-specific amendment to the Northeast WQMP has been requested for a proposed warehouse in Denville. The property consists of approximately 19.01 acres and is currently a wooded lot. The estimated 1,300 gpd will be treated via the Rockaway Valley Regional Sewerage Authority. *Highlands Council staff review for consistency with the RMP: pending.*
- **Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) Amendment Request Withdrawal: Old Sparta Road Acquisition Project.** The Highlands Council was notified that a request for a site-specific amendment to the Sussex County WQMP and the Sussex County Wastewater Management Plan (WMP) for the proposed development of 195 3-bedroom residential units within 39 buildings, a pool and clubhouse in Stanhope Borough has been withdrawn. The original request was received in 2019.

GIS Updates

- **New Data Layers.** New Jersey Legislative Districts with current office holders can now be found in the Administrative layer group of the [Highlands Interactive Map](#). The data is sourced from the New Jersey Geographic Information Network (NJGIN) Open Data portal. Regular users of the Interactive Map will need to clear browser cache to view new data layer. Questions can be addressed to GIS.Mailbox@highlands.nj.gov.

Science Initiatives

- **Examining HABs.** In February, Highlands Council staff met with Dr. Meiyin Wu, Director of the New Jersey Center for Water Science and Technology (NJCWST) at Montclair State University about Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) and the work being done by Montclair State to study them. A small group of Council staff, led by the science team, will be participating as a Citizen Science Team on NJCWST's Traveling HAB Lab project.
- **Support for Morristown Green Acres Grant.** The Highlands Council provided a letter of support to Morristown for a Green Acres grant application seeking funding to provide hydro-raking at Burnham Park Lower Pond to enhance and preserve its natural habitat.
- **Science Staff Update.** Sarah Friend joined the science staff in February. She has an extensive background in environmental research and joins the Highlands Council most recently from NJDEP Fish and Wildlife.

Contract Projects

- **Deadline Extended and Q&As posted: Watershed Request for Proposals (RFP).** The deadline for responses had been [extended](#) to Monday, April 17. Staff received several questions regarding this RFP and responses have been posted to the Highlands Council website.
- **Deadline Extended: Affordable Housing Request for Qualifications (RFQ).** Affordable Housing RFQ deadline has been [extended](#) to Friday, March 17.
- **Interactive ERI Enhancements.** The [Highlands Region Interactive ERI](#) will be updated to incorporate features suggested by beta testers and other users.

Open Space and Highlands Development Credit (HDC) Program Updates

- **Land Preservation Funding.** The Highlands Council reached out to the state legislature and the heads of several state agencies and departments regarding the resolution passed in January requesting a portion of the Corporation Business Tax (CBT) be allocated to the Highlands Council. Highlands Council land preservation programs are currently unfunded and the CBT funding formula, which is specified within the Preserve New Jersey Act, is overdue for review.
- **Grant for Highlands Open Space Plan.** The Highlands Council has submitted an application to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a cooperative agreement grant that will be used to create a comprehensive open space plan for the Highlands region.

Outreach & Education

- **Funding and technical assistance to meet new MS4 requirements.** The Highlands Council reached out to all Highlands municipalities to offer support and funding to help implement the new Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit requirements.

Highlands Council grants can augment NJDEP funding to complete required components of the new MS4 permit requirements and [Highlands Council staff liaisons](#) can offer guidance on how best to approach the changes.

- **Press Release: Grant Funding for Zoning Analysis.** The Highlands Council issued a [press release](#) promoting the availability of grant funding to help municipalities examine local zoning to see where they may be vulnerable to inappropriate development, specifically warehousing. The release prompted interviews with Executive Director Spinelli, and coverage in *The Record*, *The Easton Express*, [local papers](#), and on local radio station WRNJ. *[Subscriptions required for some news links.]*
- **Sharing Grant Opportunities.** The Highlands Council shared information about the New Jersey American Water 2023 Environmental Grant Program with eligible Highlands municipalities.
- **Municipal & County RMP Implementation Meetings.** The Highlands Council met with two towns and two counties in February: Butler Borough, Morris County; Town of Clinton, Hunterdon County; Morris & Somerset County Park Commissions.
- **Inter-Agency Coordination.** In February, the Highlands Council met with SADC (Municipal Average Values), North Jersey Resource Conservation & Development Council, and NJDEP Fish & Wildlife (Sparta Mountain).
- **Events/Sessions Attended.** Staff members attended the following events in February: DEP Extreme Heat Resilience Action Plan which addressed the anticipated climate change induced increase in heat advisory/warning days and the impact on the state's population; NJ PACT REAL Highlands Roundtable Session; Annual Watershed Conference; Rutgers-Green Infrastructure Champions Program Webinar; Highlands County Coalition; Allegheny Society of American Foresters Annual Winter Training Program; Appalachian Mountain Club NJ Work Group - Highlands Regional Study Update; USFWS Monthly HCA Coordinators Meeting; 78/22 Coalition.
- **Constituent Assistance.** The Highlands Council received and responded to 15 inquiries from constituents in February.

Committee Meetings

- The Audit Review committee met in February.

Looking Ahead

- **Public Council Meetings.** The March Highlands Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 16. The April Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 20. All meetings are held at 4 p.m. at the Highlands Council office in Chester, NJ. Complete details are available on the [calendar page](#) of the Highlands Council website.