



State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council
100 North Road (Route 513)
Chester, New Jersey 07930-2322
(908) 879-6737
(908) 879-4205 (fax)
www.highlands.state.nj.us



CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

JIM RILEE
Chairman

KIM GUADAGNO
Lt. Governor

MARGARET NORDSTROM
Executive Director

HIGHLANDS REGIONAL MASTER PLAN MONITORING PROGRAM LAND USE STAKEHOLDER MEETING

DATE: November 13, 2014
TIME: 10:00AM – 11:30AM
LOCATION: County College of Morris
Davidson Rooms
214 Center Grove Road
Randolph, NJ

ATTENDEES:

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Wilma	Frey	NJ Conservation Foundation
Marion	Harris	MC Trust for Historic Preservation
Barbara	Heskins Davis	The Land Conservancy of NJ
Melanie	McDermott	Sustainable Jersey
Elliott	Ruga	Highlands Coalition
Julia	Somers	Highlands Coalition
George	Stafford	Highlands Coalition
Erica	Van Auken	Highlands Coalition
Carl	Richko	NJ Highlands Council – Member
Richard	Vohden	NJ Highlands Council – Member
Margaret	Nordstrom	NJ Highlands Council - Staff
Judy	Thornton	NJ Highlands Council - Staff
Corey	Piasecki	NJ Highlands Council - Staff
Christine	Ross	NJ Highlands Council - Staff
Courtenay	Mercer	Regional Plan Association
Ellis	Calvin	Regional Plan Association
Janani	Shankaran	Regional Plan Association

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MEETING PURPOSE:

To provide an overview of the Highlands Regional Master Plan Monitoring Program and process; brainstorm topics and data availability for ongoing monitoring; identify potential technical advisory committee members; and discuss next steps.

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Overview of Monitoring Program Process
- 3) Discussion Items:
 - a) Thoughts on opportunities for improvement to the RMP.
 - b) How can outreach and education from the Highlands Council be improved?
 - c) What RMP topics/information are most appropriate for ongoing monitoring?
 - d) Do you have access to and/or relevant information about data that can be used for the ongoing monitoring of the RMP?
- 4) Identification of Potential TAC Members
- 5) Wrap up/Next Steps

MEETING SUMMARY:

The meeting opened with welcome remarks by Courtenay Mercer, NJ Director at Regional Plan Association (RPA), the project consultant. Attendees introduced themselves. Ms. Mercer provided background on the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) Monitoring Program and process. Key points included:

- The RMP is continually updated as new factual information is made available, but the Monitoring Program evaluates progress toward achieving the goals of the RMP by identifying and measuring indicators and milestones.
- Stakeholder meetings are being conducted now to identify potential indicators and data sources that may not be readily available. Public outreach stakeholder meetings to follow.
- Two technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings will take place, one in early 2015 and the second after initial research and analysis has been completed.
- The process will result in the Monitoring Program Recommendations Report (MPRR) and a science and research agenda.

Participants then engaged in discussion, facilitated by Ms. Mercer, about opportunities for improvement within the Highlands RMP.

Participants identified energy, air quality, and linear development as areas of focus that could be made more robust. With regard to linear development, participants

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commented about the consequences of energy-related infrastructure – such as transmission lines and related access roads – on forests and open space. Utility companies are permitted to develop infrastructure through preserved land and farmland. In environmental impact statements, NJDEP only evaluates the impacts on the area of disturbance, yet these projects have larger, more regional impacts on the environment, including on migration patterns and hydrology. Further, multiple projects have cumulative adverse effects on the environment. Because these large projects can be divided into smaller ones, the sum of environmental impacts of smaller projects is measured to be less than the project as a whole. In the end, this will increase the cost of maintaining a good water supply. The current PennEast Pipeline and Pilgrim Oil utility projects make these issues even more pertinent.

Ms. Mercer then asked participants about road linear development in the Highlands. Participants remarked that a proposed extension of Route 24 was withdrawn, likely due to forest preservation issues. Utility companies require roadways to access their infrastructure. In some cases, companies will use narrow, overgrown paths to access utilities, disrupting forest contiguity.

To better understand how the RMP and monitoring program should address air quality, Ms. Mercer remarked that air quality often falls under the purview of transportation due to the available data. Participants replied that in the Highlands, air quality was historically related to development and activities in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and not necessarily to transportation.

With regard to opportunities for improvement within the RMP, participants referenced scenic resources, a topic which is discussed in the RMP, but is not a required element of plan conformance. Further, the RMP lacks sufficient recognition of the value of cultural resources. The National and State Historic Registers are not sufficiently comprehensive. The plan conformance process should require municipalities to inventory historical, cultural and scenic resources. Further, all technical documents should have glossaries that define these terms.

Ms. Mercer remarked that the science and research agenda could include a recommendation regarding a more robust cultural resources inventory within the entirety of the Highlands region. Potential funding sources include the NJ Historic Trust, general planning grant funds, and Highlands Council planning grant funds.

Ms. Mercer then asked participants about energy within the RMP. Participants conveyed that the RMP does not contain policies to address energy issues, including

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consumption, resiliency and clean energy. However, there is data available to track these issues.

Participants then engaged in discussion regarding large forest preservation. Forests are critical to carbon sequestration. Disturbed forests are more likely to grow invasives, while undisturbed forests can regrow native species. The Open Space Institute completed a GIS analysis about resilient landscape preservation that could contain useful data and resources for the monitoring program.

Ms. Mercer asked participants whether there are opportunities for enhanced education and outreach by the Highlands Council and the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Participants remarked that the Highlands Council staff should continue face-to-face visits with community leaders. Council staff agreed that this is an important and effective component of engagement. Participants conveyed interest in learning more about the specific milestones municipalities have achieved in the plan conformance process. Staff explained that this information is available in the monthly online executive director's report and online; further, the Highlands Council staff office can provide municipal-specific information over the phone to interested parties. Ms. Mercer suggested that in the long term, there can be a more interactive portal on the website that demonstrates municipal progress within the plan conformance process.

Ms. Mercer then asked participants to speak about indicators and data sources. Responses are conveyed below:

- Participants reiterated the value of the research and analysis produced by the Open Space Institute.
- The Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University completed a three-year water resources study in the Delaware Watershed, containing information on chemical and biological indicators.
- Progress on municipal commitments should be tracked – for example, have the Highlands municipalities that have committed to creating stream restoration plans, forest restoration plans, and other plans actually followed through?
- There should be an economic value attached to water. New Jersey has the fourth lowest cost of water in the nation, because the state's utilities spend less money treating it. The public should be aware of the economic value of water.
- The project team should look into the NJ Pinelands Commission long-term economic monitoring program to provide some guidance on economic indicators. Ms. Mercer commented that the project team will be completing an analysis of regional environmental-oriented plans (including within the

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Pinelands) to gauge how other councils and commissions have addressed long-term monitoring.

Ms. Mercer and the Highlands Council staff then clarified the purpose and process of the monitoring program. Given that RMP implementation is in its infancy stages, the current effort will establish a baseline for long-term monitoring and future assessments. The process is data-driven, so even if data is not available now, stakeholders should nevertheless offer suggestions on what could be tracked in the future.

Participants continued to discuss indicators, data sources and other resources:

- USGS has a complete data collection for water deficits that is based on HUC 14 watersheds.
- Citizen science monitoring is a resourceful way to collect data. There are a number of water and stream indicators that are amenable to citizen monitoring by environmental groups, colleges and schools. Further, NJDEP is finally recognizing the results of these initiatives as factual and reliable.
- The Nature Conservancy and William Penn Foundation have valuable data and resources.
- The Land Conservancy may have data on habitat restoration.
- The Council could partner with Sustainable Jersey to develop energy programming.
- The NJ Conservation Foundation's Garden State Greenways Plan is a valuable resource, containing information on the region's trails, parks, farmland, and open spaces.
- The program should measure endangered plants as an indicator of ecosystem health.
- There should be greater collaboration between New Jersey and New York on water issues. Because there is not a similar New York regional entity to oversee these issues, it is difficult to engage in a cross-jurisdictional conversation.
- The program should assess change in affordable housing units, including how many units have been built and where.
- Under historic resources, ridgeline protection should be measured and monitored.
- With regard to natural resources, the relationship between ecological benefits and climate change should be emphasized.
- Morris County Tourism Bureau recently released a report that may have useful data.

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Ms. Mercer remarked that an automatic reporting process should be established, such that the Council does not have to chase data for future monitoring. Ms. Mercer also explained that much of the research and analysis is dependent on NJDEP's release of new land use land cover data.

As the meeting concluded, Ms. Mercer remarked that participants are encouraged to send further feedback on indicators and data via email and through the online comment portal. Participants are also encouraged to identify potential TAC members. The TACs will meet in two series, the first set of meetings in January 2015 and the second pending release of NJDEP land use land cover data and associated project team analysis. Interested stakeholders should send resumes.

Over the next few weeks, Highlands Council staff and the project team will be conducting additional stakeholder meetings, meeting with county and municipal staff, and holding public workshops.

Next Steps/Action Items

- Participants should submit via email: additional feedback on indicators, additional feedback on data sources, and TAC member suggestions.
- The project team and Highlands Council staff will follow up with individual participants regarding indicators and data sources.