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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 16, 2012

Highlands Council Continues Progress on Plan Conformance

39 towns and 9 Highlands centers have been approved

CHESTER, N.J. — The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council announced today the approval of a Petition for Plan Conformance from the Borough of Ogdensburg in Sussex County. Along with two other petitions approved in January from Montville Township in Morris County and Lopatcong Township in Warren County, this brings the total number of approved Petitions to 39. Overall, 60 towns have submitted Petitions to conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan to date, resulting in a 97-percent conformance in the Preservation Area (401,903 acres) and 33 -percent conformance in the Planning Area lands (147,755 acres).

The Petition from Ogdensburg includes 197 acres of Ogdensburg's Preservation Area and the Petition from Montville includes 3,440 acres of Montville's Preservation Area. Lopatcong's Amended Petition included the designation of a Highlands Center to facilitate the development of Lopatcong's industrial zone. To date, the Highlands Council has designated 9 Highlands Centers to fulfill the Regional Master Plan's commitment to plan for sustainable economic development and redevelopment in or adjacent to areas already developed and with the infrastructure capacity for growth. The designation of Highlands Centers provides a focus for economic development opportunities and simultaneously discourages growth and sprawl in sensitive areas designated for environmental protection and agricultural viability.

“A key responsibility of the Highlands Council is to balance preservation activities with the economic health of Highlands communities,” said Highlands Council Chairman, Jim Rilee. “Highlands Centers are an excellent example of achieving this goal and we look forward to working with these municipalities as they develop their plans.”

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With regard to conformance in the Planning Area it is notable that 34 of the 83 municipalities with lands in the Planning Area (41%) have chosen to conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan. Nine of the 36 municipalities that are located *entirely* within the Planning Area have chosen to conform (25%), and 25 of the 47 municipalities that have land in both the Preservation Area and Planning Area have chosen to conform (53%). Conformance in the Planning Area has also increased thanks to the Mayor and members of the Hopatcong Borough Council who recently voted to include the over 5,000 acres of the Borough's Planning Area in their Petition for Plan Conformance.

“We are grateful for the trust demonstrated by these communities that are voluntarily coming forward to conform in the Planning Area where it is not mandatory,” said Eileen Swan, Executive Director of the Highlands Council. “These decisions reflect a clear understanding of how the Regional Master Plan is designed to benefit communities, helping them develop a road map to a sustainable future that protects both natural resources and local economies.”