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Highlands Council Wins Environmental Achievement Award

South Branch Watershed Association names Council in its Annual Awards

CHESTER, N.J. – The New Jersey Highlands Council received the 2007 Environmental Achievement Award from the South Branch Watershed Association during the Association's 48th Annual Dinner Meeting, held Friday, Marcy 28 at the Copper Hill Country Club in Ringoes, NJ.

“It is a great honor for the Highlands Council to receive this award from such an established and respected environmental organization,” said John Weingart, Highlands Council Chairman. “We did our best to design a process for developing the Highlands Regional Management Plan that would be as smart and open to the public as possible, and it is particularly gratifying to see that process recognized by the Watershed Association. We look forward to continuing to benefit from their input as we implement the Highlands Plan.”

William Kibler, the Executive Director of the South Branch Watershed Association, praised the Highlands Council and the staff in their efforts on preparing the Regional Master Plan.

“The Council and staff put tremendous effort into the draft Regional Master Plan, including conducting numerous public hearings and accepting and reviewing an immense volume of public comments,” Kibler said. “The process of developing the draft Regional Master Plan has been an excellent example of open government. The Council and staff have ensured that the public is informed and involved in the process of preparing and revising the Plan.”

Other recipients at the awards ceremony included Commerce Bank, which received the 2007 Corporate Achievement Award honoring outstanding environmental efforts by a corporation, and Aimee Swain and Jackie Parrinello, who received the Hermia Lechner Award for outstanding volunteer service to the SBWA. Michelle Ruggiero of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Agency was the event's guest speaker and addressed the topic, “Know the Bear Facts.”

“The professionalism and enthusiasm of the Council members and staff while dealing with a controversial and very challenging mandate are a great credit to the Highlands Council,” Kibler added. “Their efforts to ‘protect, restore, and enhance the quality and quantity of surface and ground waters,’ in the Highlands will have a great impact on the environment of our watershed for generations.”

“The Highlands Council and staff are grateful for the South Branch Watershed Association’s acknowledgement of the process of creating the Regional Master Plan and the transparency we have provided at every step of the process,” said Eileen Swan, Executive Director of the Highlands Council. “We are in the very busy final phases of adoption for the Regional Master Plan, and it is easy to forget to appreciate all of the work we’ve done. I would like to thank the SBWA for this award and for the opportunity for all of us to look back on what we have achieved. I urge the Council and staff to look forward to the great things we will accomplish in the future.”

About the SWBA:

The South Branch Watershed Association is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting the environment in the watershed of the South Branch Raritan River. For over 40 years, SBWA has been assisting municipalities, schools, community groups, and citizens with protecting natural resources through education and outreach. Programs offered by SBWA include a volunteer stream monitoring program, biannual stream clean-ups, informational workshops, community well testing programs, and in-school in-field environmental education programs. SBWA also serves as a clearinghouse for public information regarding local environmental issues.

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Pictured at the South Branch Watershed Association Annual Awards Dinner on Friday, March 28, are (left to right) William Kibler, Executive Director of the South Branch Watershed Association; Jim Hill, President of the SBWA; John Weingart, Chairman of the New Jersey Highlands Council; and Eileen Swan, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Council.