



## State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council

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### **Highlands Council Focuses on Forests**

Chester, NJ- The New Jersey Highlands Council is expected to vote tomorrow on a resolution recommending that the DEP adopt an alternate method to identify upland forest areas in the Highlands.

“Protecting forests is an extremely important part of the Council’s work to protect the Highlands’ water supply, and we want to insure that the methods used to identify them are as comprehensive as possible,” said Council Chairman John Weingart. “The identification method we are proposing will give the DEP a set of tools that are both comprehensive and practical to use in their identification of upland forests.”

The Highlands Council’s proposed forest identification system details a number of steps including review and interpretation of aerial photographs, grid mapping, and field verification when determined to be necessary. The limit of forest is initially identified using aerial photographs available from the DEP. If sporadic forest coverage is identified, a half acre grid block is overlain on the aerial. A grid block containing 33% or more forest cover would be included as forest unless demonstrated otherwise through field verification. The proposed field procedure, which augments the DEP’s 16-point system, was validated through field trials conducted by the Highlands Council staff and New Jersey State Forester.

“The alternate methodology was developed by Highlands Council and DEP staff and the New Jersey State Forester,” said Weingart. “The Council also received valuable comments from experts on the Council’s Technical Advisory Committee on Sustainable Forestry and the public via our website. We are pleased with the levels of collaboration and transparency throughout the process.”

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