

RESOLUTION 2006-22

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR A DEDICATED SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR LAND CONSERVATION

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (the "Highlands Act") has created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (the "Highlands Council"); and

WHEREAS, Section 2 of the Highlands Act finds that "a new regional planning approach and the more stringent environmental regulatory standards should be accompanied by" ... "a strong and significant commitment by the State to fund the acquisition of exceptional natural resource value lands" as soon as possible; and

WHEREAS, Section 6.n of the Highlands Act empowers the Highlands Council to identify and designate areas in the Highlands Region within which development shall not occur in order to protect water resources and environmentally sensitive lands while recognizing the need for a strong and significant commitment by the State to fund the acquisition of exceptional natural resources; and

WHEREAS, Section 6.o of the Highlands Act authorizes the Highlands Council to identify lands in which the public acquisition, including lesser interests, therein is necessary or desirable in order to ensure preservation thereof; as well as any lands the beneficial use of which are so adversely affected by the restrictions of the Highlands Act as to require a guarantee of just compensation thereof; and

WHEREAS, by Resolution 2005-18, the Highlands Council expressed its support for a dedicated, directed and stable source of land acquisition and stewardship funding and directed the Land Conservation Committee and staff to include in its consideration a Highlands source water protection fee and all potentially feasible proposals; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council acknowledges the actions of Governor Corzine to included in his fiscal year 2007 budget recommendations a surcharge in the amount of 4 cents per 1,000 gallons of water to fund drought mitigation, interconnection, and land acquisition projects; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council acknowledges Senators Smith and Martin who sponsored the introduction of Senate bill S969, known as the "New Jersey Clean Water, Drought Mitigation and Water Resource Security Trust Fund Act", as a means to provide a funding mechanism for water quality and water supply capital projects and watershed land acquisition projects; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council acknowledges the numerous federal, State, county, local and other funding mechanisms already in place to preserve water resource and environmentally sensitive lands through the Garden State Preservation Trust ("GSPT"), including the Green Acres Program and State Agriculture Development Committee Farmland Preservation Program; and

WHEREAS, the GPST Fund, the Green Acres Program, and the Farmland Preservation Program presently provide a significant source of funding for acquisition projects in the Highlands Region but will no longer be able to issue any new bond, note or other obligation after June 30, 2009 unless the Trust Fund is reauthorized; and

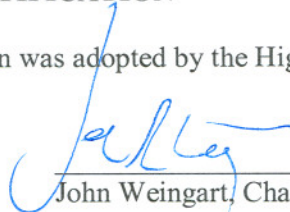
WHEREAS, the Highlands Council shares the conviction of the many individuals and representatives of groups who have repeatedly testified before the Highlands Council that there needs to be a dedicated, directed, and stable funding source sufficient to preserve and steward the lands envisioned to be protected by the Highlands Act.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

1. The Highlands Council hereby support efforts to expeditiously reauthorize the GSPT Fund; and
2. The Highlands Council hereby support efforts to create a statutory funding mechanism for water quality and watershed land acquisition projects; and
3. The Highlands Council hereby authorizes the Highlands Council Chairman and the Executive Director to prepare and submit a letter to the New Jersey Governor and Legislature in support of these initiatives and offering the services of the Council to help evaluate the impacts of any specific proposals on the implementation of the Highlands Act.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its regular meeting held on the 1st day of June, 2006.



John Weingart, Chairman