



## State of New Jersey

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## Highlands Council to Protect 13 Priority Preservation Properties

*Projects will result in the permanent protection of 677 acres*

CHESTER, N.J. — At its January 17 meeting, the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) approved \$2.6 million in funding to complete several preservation projects through its Open Space Partnership Funding Program (OSP). Once completed, the projects will result in the permanent protection of 677 acres, with a total value of \$5.8 million, in the New Jersey Highlands.

“Preservation is the only way to ensure *permanent* protection of vital natural resources,” says Highlands Council Chairman Carl Richko. “The Highlands Council is pleased to be able to provide this funding to our county, municipal and nonprofit partners to help them complete projects that they have prioritized for their communities.”

In total, 13 properties across Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset and Warren Counties will be preserved stemming from eight applicants to the Highlands OSP. Launched in 2016, the OSP is a matching grant program in which the Highlands Council provides grant awards of up to 50% of the total purchase price of a property. Eligible applicants include Highlands county or municipal governments, state agencies, and nonprofits focused on land preservation. Projects approved at this meeting include a combination of farmland preservation and open space acquisitions. The Highlands Council match for these projects is being provided primarily through recently awarded funds from the Federal Highlands Conservation Act, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All projects approved at last week’s meeting are anticipated to close within 18 to 24 months.

Project details (applicant to Highlands OSP in *italics*):

- 28 acres of farmland in Bethlehem Township adjacent to existing municipal lands. *Bethlehem Township*.

- 6 preservation projects totaling 300 acres in Warren County, including multiple areas that enhance connectivity to the Morris Canal Greenway. *Warren County*.
- 52 acres of mixed farm and forested land in Bedminster, which will have public access opportunities. *Lamington Conservancy*.
- 44 acres of sensitive forest and wetlands in West Milford adjacent to the existing West Brook Preserve maintained by The Land Conservancy of New Jersey. *The Land Conservancy of New Jersey*.
- 76 acres of agricultural lands situated between in Bethlehem, Glen Gardner, and Hampton Borough. *Hunterdon County*.
- 97 acres of forested lands in Bethlehem Township, much of which is Open Water Protection Area. *Hunterdon Land Trust*.
- 63 acres of forested lands in Tewksbury Township that will have public trails. *Tewksbury Land Trust*.
- 17 acres of forested land in Mendham Township adjacent to existing municipal open space. *New Jersey Conservation Foundation*.

“The range of projects being protected really represents the diversity of the Highlands region,” says Highlands Council Executive Director Lisa Plevin. “From farmland, to forests, to county, municipal and nonprofit open spaces – all these projects contribute to the unique character of the Highlands. We’re very pleased that we’ve been able to leverage our funding to support such a wide array of great preservation efforts.”

Of the 677 acres being preserved, 639 are mapped by the Highlands Council in a “Preservation Priority Area,” meaning they are among the most sensitive in the New Jersey Highlands and should be protected from development. These properties also include:

- 590 acres of Critical Habitat
- 379 acres of Agricultural lands
- 314 acres of Open Waters and buffer areas
- 285 acres of Forested lands
- 96 acres of Wetlands
- 71 acres of Vernal Pool buffer areas

Actions taken by the Council at this meeting will take effect following the Governor’s review and consideration of the meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of the minutes. Materials related to this meeting including resolutions, presentations, audio and minutes will be posted at: [www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2019\\_calendar.html](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2019_calendar.html) (click on January 17 meeting).

*The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at [www.nj.gov/njhighlands](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands).*

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