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Highlands Council Adds Another 100,000 Acres West Milford, Rockaway Township, Tewksbury Win Approvals

CHESTER, N.J. – The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council more than doubled the amount of acreage now under the protection of the Highlands Regional Master Plan after unanimously approving petitions for plan conformance from three more municipalities today.

“Today’s approvals bring another 100,000 acres under the umbrella of the Highlands Regional Master Plan,” Highlands Council Acting Chairman Jack Schrier said. “I was especially pleased to see petitions from municipalities in three different counties today. This is a regional approach, but through collaboration, it’s tailored to the local level.”

The municipalities approved today were West Milford in Passaic County, a 51,848-acre township entirely in the Preservation Area; Rockaway Township in Morris County, which is conforming for 17,789 acres in the Preservation Area and 11,582 acres in the Planning Area; and Tewksbury Township in Hunterdon County, which is conforming for 13,469 acres in the Preservation Area and 6,857 acres in the Planning Area.

The Highlands Council previously approved petitions for Plan Conformance from 13 municipalities: Mahwah Township (Bergen County); Bethlehem Township, Califon Borough, the Town of Clinton, Glen Gardner Borough, Hampton Borough, High Bridge Borough and Lebanon Borough (Hunterdon County); Chester Township, Denville Township and Mount Olive Township (Morris County); and Byram Township and Green Township (Sussex County). The Highlands Council also approved a petition from Passaic County.

Today’s approvals bring another 101,545 acres into conformance – 83,106 acres in the Preservation Area, and 18,439 acres in the Planning Area. To date, the Highlands Council has approved petitions from 16 municipalities encompassing 186,394 acres – or 291 square miles – including 153,543 acres in the Preservation Area and 32,851 acres in the Planning Area.

To date, 59 municipalities representing 97 percent of the Preservation Area (401,910 acres) and 34 percent of the Planning Area (148,995 acres) have submitted Plan Conformance documents to the Highlands Council. The total acreage is 550,905 acres, representing 64 percent of the entire Highlands Region. Five counties have submitted Plan Conformance documents as well. The remaining two counties and one municipality with lands in the Preservation Area, as well as 16 other municipalities that have filed a notice expressing an intent to conform to the Regional Master Plan but have yet to file a formal Petition, continue to work with the Highlands Council staff.

“We now have approved petitions for over one-third of the Preservation Area, which is a tremendous start to the Plan Conformance process,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said. “But we’re also seeing more interest from municipalities with lands in the Planning Area. To date, 10 of the 13 municipalities with Planning Area lands have voluntarily opted into conformance, including two municipalities entirely in the Planning Area. We continue to work to ensure protection of New Jersey’s critical water supplies while collaborating with municipalities to plan for a sustainable future. The fact that more municipalities are voluntarily coming into conformance shows that the program is working.”

More information about the municipal petitions approved today can be found on the Highlands Council website:

West Milford Township:

http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/west_milford_twp.html

Tewksbury Township:

<http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/tewksbury.html>

Rockaway Township:

http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/rockaway_twp.html

Today’s actions by the Highlands Council do not take effect until 10 business days after a copy of the minutes of the meeting have been delivered to the Governor to allow time for his review and consideration.