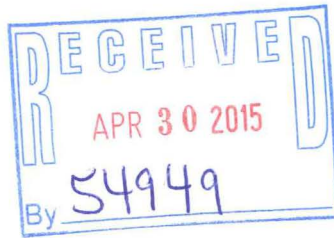




"BECAUSE AGRICULTURE MATTERS"



168 West State Street
Trenton, New Jersey 08608

Phone: 609-393-7163
Fax: 609-393-7072

April 30, 2015

Jim Rilee, Chairman
NJ Highlands Council
100 North Rd
Chester, NJ 07930-2322
By email: Margaret.nordstrom@highlands.state.nj.us

Dear Jim,

We are submitting our list of Indicators to monitor the success of the 2008 Regional Master Plan (RMP) along with recommendations for issues we believe are also crucial to increasing effectiveness of the Plan. The latter will be entered on your web portal as well in hopes of having them discussed and included in the RMP re-examination process.

The 2008 RMP was woefully limited in the number of indicators suggested to monitor progress with Highlands agriculture. Our expanded list will help you assemble a more complete picture of how things stand within our community after seven years under the RMP.

Achieving fair equity compensation for the land values they have lost remains the most crucial issue for our members. It is hoped that these expanded indicators as well as the Fiscal Impact Assessment report will accurately reveal the significant change in land values that being included in the Highlands mapping and regulation has caused.

Please note that Farm Bureau along with many other organizations concerned with Highlands natural resource management has signed on in support of the issues and indicators submitted by the combined professional forestry community. The RMP must be revised, we believe, to protect the water resources through responsible active forest management.

You have our total support for this process. We are ready to participate in any way that we can be of service.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryck A. Suydam'.

Ryck Suydam, President, NJ Farm Bureau

Cc: Margaret Nordstrom, Executive Director, NJ Highlands Council
Monique Purcell, NJ Department of Agriculture
Peter Furey, Executive Director, NJ Farm Bureau



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INDICATORS THAT THE HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MUST MONITOR

The New Jersey Farm Bureau believes that there are eight areas for which indicators must be developed so that the success of the RMP can be measured:

- Agriculture: development and viability
- Landowner equity compensation
- Land use and plan conformance
- TDR, clustering etc
- Land conservation
- Forest resources
- Wildlife habitat
- Economic development

Such measured results, both positive and negative, will show clearly areas where the 2008 RMP has been a success or needs to be improved to better meet all of its protection and planning objectives.

Recognizing that not all these indicators can be developed, **the most critical ones for Farm Bureau are starred **, less but still critical *, and the rest necessary when possible.**

Following the indicators in each section we make recommendations for Highlands Council (HLC) action that we believe will be critical in improving the performance and equity of the RMP. These will be put on the RMP web portal as well. We look forward to discussing these suggestions at the appropriate TAC meetings.

For agriculture: development and viability

**Number of new direct marketing and/or agri-tourism ventures developed on Highlands farms since 2008.

**Number of enterprises developed to add value to Highlands farm products.

**Number of agricultural development projects (housing, buildings, markets etc) proposed using the Agriculture Development rules (N.J.A.C. 2:92) since 2008.

**Number of agricultural development projects (housing, buildings, markets etc) developed using the Agriculture Development rules (N.J.A.C. 2:92) since 2008.

**Number of municipal Agriculture Retention and Farmland Preservation plans required for Highlands plan conformance developed and implemented.

*Number and nature of Right to Farm complaints since 2008 (CADB and SADC data).

*Market value of crops 2007 vs. 2012 (Ag 2012 Census).

*Economic value of agri-tourism and direct marketing to towns and counties beyond value of products sold.

Acres of farmland 2008 vs. 2012; cropland harvested, pastured, woodland/wetlands.

Comparison of acres/numbers of major commodities 2008-2012.

Size of Highland farms 2008 vs. 2012.

Number of Highlands towns that permit flexible nonfarm use of existing unused farm buildings.

Number of new farm conservation plans developed.(NRCS and Soil Conservation District data).

Recommendations

*Create and consult on a regular basis a broadly based Highlands Agriculture Advisory Committee modeled after the Pinelands Agriculture Advisory Committee..

Schedule regular consultations with agricultural agency experts (NJDA, CADBs, county Boards of Agriculture, county soil conservation districts) about how to enhance a "positive business environment for farming " as the Highlands Act requires.

For land owner equity compensation

*Number of landowners paid for the ecological services their preserved property will produce for the public (dollars calculated like similar formula in the Pinelands found on the SADC website).

*Numbers of exemptions 1 and 2 granted and locations: county, town. Number on active farms.

*Number of landowners permitted to subdivide their land in order to qualify for Exemptions 1 or 2 (relief valve for lost equity. Separate lot must be 10 acres or larger to qualify with no development on it.)

Recommendations

**Analyze the loss of equity caused by using the unscientifically derived nitrate dilution model to set septic densities in Preservation and Planning Area communities. Compare to numbers derived from more scientifically supportable numbers in the formula.

Implement the forest easement purchase program enabled by RMP Policy 1A4 (p. 139) so that forest land owners have a way to recoup their equity.

For land use and plan conformance

**Number of Highlands towns that have developed the Agriculture Retention and Farmland Preservation Plans required for their Plan Conformance.

**Number of Highlands towns that have implemented the Agriculture Retention and Farmland Preservation Plans required for their Plan Conformance.

Number of Highlands towns that have Right to Farm ordinances in accordance with the SADC model Right to Farm ordinance.

Recommendations

**Calculate lot sizes using different, more credible numbers in the nitrate dilution model formula. Reconsider numbers used to arrive at 1/25 acres and 1/88 acre lot sizes.

**Determine the number of other states that use the nitrate dilution model method to regulate growth in unsewered areas or for any other reason such as protection of groundwater.

**Analyze any follow-up studies done in NJ to prove that use of the nitrate dilution model applied to new construction actually has a significant effect on septic performance of nitrate dilution for groundwater.

**Require as part of Plan Conformance Highlands towns to enable nodes of agricultural or agri-tourism development by identifying them in their Master Plan and including them in a sewer service area and areas served by infrastructure

For TDR, cluster, noncontiguous clustering (equity protection tools)

**Number of towns in the areas identified in the RMP as suitable for Receiving Zones that have considered TDR; number that received grants to do a Feasibility Study. Number of TDR programs resulting.

Number and nature of funding sources for the Highlands Bank's new land conservation easement purchase program.

Recommendations

**Revisit and re-justify calculations that resulted in opening HDC price of \$16,000. Include development community in assessment of feasibility.

* Highlands towns seeking Plan Conformance must be required to encourage and permit clustering on either contiguous or noncontiguous land parcels through specific Land Development Ordinance language.

Investigate reasons why landowners, municipal officials, and developers shy away from TDR programs for the Highlands.

For land conservation

**Change in farmland (raw land) values since 2004, 2008; Dual Appraisal values compared.

**Number of Highlands counties and towns that collect open space taxes; amount of money now available for land conservation.

Per acre value of deed restricted land in the Preservation Area, the Planning Area (the after value).

Ratio of Highlands applicants for farmland preservation to actual funding by country, municipality or state.

Number of counties that have such small farms on average that most do not qualify for the benefits of the Highlands Agricultural Resource Priority Area (in smaller than 250 acre blocks).

Number of Highlands landowners with more than 50 acres that are applying for land conservation. Reasons why not.

Recommendations

*Align mapping of Highlands Ag Resource areas (ARAs) with municipal and county Planning Incentive (PIG) Grant plan mapping to make easement purchase resources extend further.

*Implement RMP Policy 1A4 (p. 139) to enable forest land owners a way to preserve their farms while remaining on the land.

For Forest Resources

Information from Woodland Management Plans developed for eligibility for Farmland Assessment tax relief and approved by the NJ State Forester.

**Number of acres managed

Number of plans

Acres being harvested for lumber

Acres being harvested for firewood

*Acres where invasive species are being removed

Acres where trees are being planted

*Information from forest managers of Highlands watershed (water company) lands about their forest resource management actions

* Acres of forest land preserved since 2008 through Green Acres, farmland preservation.

Acres preserved mapped in the Forest Priority Area.

Acres preserved in the Highlands mapped by the county Agriculture Development Area (ADA) mapping.

Recommendations

**Update US Forest Service assessment of Highlands forest health, their ability to provide ecological services including: effects of recent storms, number of acres affected by insect damage, erosion, takeover by invasive species cover. (Use GIS power to identify vegetation in detail.)

** Implement the land equity tool enabled by the RMP (Policy 1A4 p. 139): easement purchase based on ecological values, not development values. As a model use formula developed to compensate Pinelands landowners – see SADC website. Keep forest land in private ownership, require management or stewardship plan.

For wildlife habitat

**Number of conforming highlands communities that have a wildlife management plan including deer population reduction as part of their Natural Resource Management Plans required for conformance. Number of such plans completed and being implemented.

*With data from NJ Fish and Wildlife Deer Management Program:

*2008-2014 deer population in each Deer Management Zone in the Highlands; reduction? Increase?

*Deer harvest numbers from 2008 through 2014.

Change in number of Community Deer Management programs, municipal and county hunts, change in deer population as a result.

*Number of Highlands towns that prohibit firearm discharge, hunting.

Number of Highlands communities that conduct a deer hunt during the season,

Number of Highlands communities with a deer management plan especially for municipally owned properties.

Number of Highlands towns coordinating wildlife management with adjacent towns and the sta

Changes in the numbers and species of birds counted in Christmas counts 2008-2014 in both Preservation Area and Planning Area.

"Core" forests

**Changes in the numbers of birds dependent upon early successional forests, edge forests counted in Christmas counts 2008-2014.

Changes in acreage of habitat other than core forests: changes in populations of wildlife dependent upon edge not core.

For economic development

**Number of Farm Credit loans since 2008 for business development, expansion etc.

**Number of established industries or businesses lost to other locations since 2008; number of jobs lost.

*Number of county economic development plans that include agricultural businesses, and include as members farm operators, agricultural agencies/organizations.

*Number of county or municipal workforce development programs that include farm labor needs.

Recommendations

Municipal and county Plan Conformance must include development and implementation of economic development plans, or master plan elements that include agricultural businesses.