

New Jersey Highlands Council **Letter 75**

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Attributes

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Web Response

Highlands agriculture indicators in the RMP are too limited. Should include: Number of ag development review using NJDA rules; new conservation plans; land values esp. changes since 2009 using Dual Appraisal; number of Ag Retention and Farmland Preservation Plans required of conforming municipalities; Highlands towns with conforming cluster option ordinances; change in value added operations since 2008; Right to Farm complaints; number of counties and towns with Ag Planning Incentive Grants: value of Highlands ag products; farm sales Ag Census 2012 vs 2007; number of farms making direct sales to public 2012 vs 2007; farmland sales; noncontiguous clustering attempted by town; number of opportunities to recapture land value equity; coordination of established ag agencies with Highlands Council and staff; economic effects of Highlands ag besides sales , ag tourism, sales tax collected, money spent by visitors to farm markets, ag tourism venues; ecological benefits of land kept undeveloped quantified, more than sales of products; number of new farm housing units built; ag employment including labor intensive organic farms; tree farms preserved as "farms" with easements purchased, not fee simple sale; number of Highlands counties and towns with open space tax programs, amount available for use in preserving land in Highlands. Ag agencies in NJ have this info available in many cases. In others data would have to be generated.

The RMP Goals and Policies for Highlands forest protection are very inadequate starting with the limited indicators being used (tract size, adjacency). For starters indicators that should be used:

Number of Woodland Management Plans for Highlands forested properties approved by the State Forester, number of acres managed under them; number of Forest Stewardship Plans developed or in progress for Highlands forests; number of wildlife management plans required of conforming municipalities; list of NJ Fish and Wildlife Deer Management Zones covering Highlands forests; deer management bag limits for each such zone; change in populations of wildlife not using core habitat, using edges, cleared areas (early successional vegetation); number of plans being implemented required by the RMP and acres covered by such as Forest Management Plans, Forest Mitigation Plans, Community Forest Management Plans.

Given the importance of Highlands forestland to water protection, forest condition, health must be assessed and monitored: effects of insects and diseases; destruction of woodlands by several large storms since 2008; status of invasion by exotic vegetation. Health forests protect water, not ones weakened by these factors. NJ Forest Service must have this data for state lands. Reservoir lands have had Woodland Management Plans for decades with professional foresters protecting and enhancing their health.

Respondent

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