

New Jersey Highlands Council **Letter 99**

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Attributes

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Web Response

RE: Ag resources: The Council must create and consult on a regular basis a broadly based Highlands Ag Advisory Committee modeled after the Pinelands Ag Advisory Committee to assist in policy and other decisions re Highlands agriculture. It must schedule regular consultation with ag agency experts (NJDA, NRCS, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, CADBs, county Boards of Agriculture and soil conservation districts) to work with the Council to enhance the "positive business environment" for farming the Highlands Act requires. RE: TDR: The Council must revisit & re-justify calculations that set the opening HDC price of \$16,000/credit, including the developers in the effort. In municipal Plan Conformance, towns must be required to encourage & permit clustering on contiguous and noncontiguous parcels through specific Plan Development ordinance language. The Council must investigate reasons why landowners, municipal officials, and developers shy away from TDR programs for the Highlands towns.

RE: Land owner equity: The Council must analyze the loss of equity caused by using the unscientifically credible nitrate dilution model method decreed by dEP to set septic densities in unsewered areas of the Highlands. Then compare to numbers derived from more supportable numbers. The Council must provide more ways to obtain equity for forest landowners by implementing RMP Polity 14A (p. 139) so as to leave them with ownership of their land. RE: Plan Conformance: The Council must align mapping of the Highlands Ag REsource Areas with municipal and county farmland preservation Planning Incentive Grants to extend easement purchase resources further. The Council must implement RMP Policy 1A4 (p. 139) and encourage conforming towns to develop financial resources to do this in addition to buying development easements from farmland and open space fee simple.

RE: sustainable economic development: The Council must make sure municipal and county economic development agencies and plans include agricultural businesses and ag labor needs, ensuring that such boards/plans include representative farmers and farm agency personnel. Viable agriculture could be an economic engine for a community. Include also agri-tourism venues with supporting zoning etc. Re:Protection of Highlands natural resources: The Council must reassess whether forest resource policies are scientifically valid ways to protect & enhance the resource, ask the US Forest Service to update its earlier assessment of Highlands forest health, and ability to provide forest protection and ecological services. Many acres have had their value and functions diminished by storms, insect damage, erosion, takeover by invasive plant species, and deer depredation, thus reducing the forest resource's ability to protect the water resources.

The Council must incorporate state and private data on wildlife populations (deer, bird species) from Deer Management Zone harvest totals and bird species counts such as the Xmas Counts and World Series of Birding to be fully informed about what the RMP is doing to increase or diminish these resources.

Respondent

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<b>Organization</b>	NJ Farm Bureau
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