



Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council

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Press Release

For Immediate Release
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August 31, 2006

New Data Shows On-going Risk to Highlands Forests and Farmland

Chester, NJ- New data developed by the Highlands Council shows that forests and agricultural lands in the Highlands continued to be lost during the most recent study period for which statistics are available.

Between 1986 and 2002, the region lost over 15,000 acres of forest lands and almost 28,000 acres of farmland. For the period since 1995, the acres lost total 9,700 of forests and 10,500 acres of farmland, reflecting the continued pressures of development. These open space losses directly mirror increases in developed land. This data underscores the need for the Council to advance suitable protection strategies in the draft Regional Master Plan that the Council intends to release to the public in October.

The Council released this data today as part of its ongoing development of cutting-edge scientific data for use in developing its Regional Master Plan. In furtherance of Plan development, the Council will be holding four work sessions in September, one on each of the four Thursdays of the month. During these work sessions, Council members will be considering policy recommendations based on the extensive scientific data developed and refined by the Council. Since June, the Council has released 21 sets of data analyses and reports all of which provide information about the Highlands region at a level of detail never before available.

The Council's first work session on September 7th will focus on four policy areas: significant natural areas, stream corridors, open waters, and wastewater treatment infrastructure. The work session which will begin at 10:00 am at the Council's office in Chester is open to the public. The data reports and meeting information are available on the Council's web site www.highlands.state.nj.us.

In August 2004, the New Jersey Legislature enacted the Highland Water Protection and Planning Act in order to protect over 850,000 acres which supply drinking water for more than sixty-five percent of New Jersey's residents. The Highlands Act created the Highlands Council as a regional planning entity charged with protecting the water resources and natural beauty of the New Jersey Highlands while allowing for planned, sustainable development and redevelopment of the region. The fifteen Council members include a broad and representative range of elected officials from Highlands municipalities and counties, as well as individuals with diverse backgrounds and area perspectives.

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