



# State of New Jersey

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## HIGHLANDS REGIONAL MASTER PLAN MONITORING PROGRAM WATER RESOURCES STAKEHOLDER MEETING

**DATE:** November 13, 2014  
**TIME:** 1:00PM - 2:30PM  
**LOCATION:** County College of Morris  
Davidson Rooms  
214 Center Grove Road  
Randolph, NJ

### ATTENDEES:

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Dan	Bello	NJ State Parks Service
Wilma	Frey	Highlands Coalition
Hazel	England	Great Swamp Watershed Association
Bill	Kibler	Raritan Headwaters Association
Sara	Malone	Sustainable Raritan River Initiative
David	Pringle	Cleanwater
Elliott	Ruga	Highlands Coalition
Julia	Somers	Highlands Coalition
George	Stafford	Highlands Coalition
Erica	VanAuken	Highlands Coalition
Paul	Zarrillo	Greenwood Lake Commission
Michael	Sebetich	NJ Highlands Council – Member
Margaret	Nordstrom	NJ Highlands Council – Staff
Christine	Danis	NJ Highlands Council – Staff
Jim	Hutzelmann	NJ Highlands Council – Staff
Corey	Piasecki	NJ Highlands Council – Staff
Christine	Ross	NJ Highlands Council – Staff
Rob	Freudenberg	Regional Plan Association
Ellis	Calvin	Regional Plan Association

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## MEETING PURPOSE:

To provide an overview of the Highlands Regional Master Plan Monitoring Program and process; brainstorm topics and data availability for ongoing monitoring; identify potential technical advisory committee members; and discuss next steps.

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Overview of Monitoring Program Process
- 3) Discussion Items:
  - a) Thoughts on opportunities for improvement to the RMP.
  - b) How can outreach and education from the Highlands Council be improved?
  - c) What RMP topics/information are most appropriate for ongoing monitoring?
  - d) Do you have access to and/or relevant information about data that can be used for the ongoing monitoring of the RMP?
- 4) Identification of Potential TAC Members
- 5) Wrap up/Next Steps

## MEETING SUMMARY:

The meeting opened with welcome remarks by Rob Freudenberg, Director of Energy and Environment at Regional Plan Association (RPA), the project consultant. Attendees introduced themselves. Mr. Freudenberg provided background on the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) Monitoring Program and process. Key points included:

- The RMP is continually updated as new factual information is made available, but the Monitoring Program evaluates progress toward achieving the goals of the RMP by identifying and measuring indicators and milestones.
- Stakeholder meetings are being conducted now to identify potential indicators and data sources that may not be readily available. Public outreach stakeholder meetings to follow.
- Two technical advisory committee (TAC) meetings will take place, one in early 2015 and the second after initial research and analysis has been completed.
- The process will result in the Monitoring Program Recommendations Report (MPRR) and a science and research agenda.

Participants then engaged in discussion, facilitated by Mr. Freudenberg, about opportunities for improvement within the Highlands RMP and opportunities to enhance outreach by the Highlands Council.

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Participants expressed concern that it would be difficult to gauge the impacts of the RMP when it has not been fully implemented. Highlands Council staff remarked that approximately two-thirds of municipalities filed a notice of intention to conform. However, the conformance process is difficult to define. For some communities, it is an endlessly iterative process. The impact of the RMP must be differentiated from the impact of the 2004 Highlands Act. Council staff explained that the monitoring program will nevertheless establish the mechanisms to collect data and build the baseline for future monitoring.

In response to a question about existing data to track the impact of the Act on water quality, Council staff explained that surface water quality and groundwater quality are difficult to monitor. Surface and ground water diversions have been reduced due to slowing development. Some places have residential monitoring systems. Analysis has been completed using septic density data. Tracking true changes in water quality; however, requires a long timeframe (20 to 30 years).

Participants then raised concerns that the RMP does not sufficiently address the impacts of linear development on the environment. The Tennessee Gas pipeline, for example, has had an adverse impact on water. Participants also expressed concern regarding bi-state coordination. In the case of the Ramapo River, NJ will bear the environmental and water consequences of a proposed casino in New York. Congressional action would be required to ensure bi-state collaboration.

Participants recommended that the monitoring program measure the impacts of climate change. Further, resiliency should be a larger component of the program and the RMP.

Mr. Freudenberg then asked participants about their thoughts on how the Highlands Council can improve education and outreach. Participants conveyed that the Council should provide more regular updates regarding water use and conservation. Municipal elected officials and staff lack information about what is and is not permitted in the region, suggesting that there could be enhanced information-sharing between Council staff and local representatives. Highlands Council staff remarked that there should be additional ongoing outreach to municipalities, counties and the general public; and agreed with participants on the importance of face-to-face visits by Highlands Council staff to the communities. Participants asked whether the Council can work with the NJ Environmental Infrastructure Trust (NJEIT) to develop a loan program to fix failing septic systems or replace with sewer infrastructure. Council staff replied that it is a

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complicated proposition, as the NJEIT funds go through municipalities, not to landowners.

Participants relayed frustrations with the management of Belcher Creek and Greenwood Lake. Those with experience in studying the conditions of area waterways remarked that the onus of educating local residents rests on the towns. While Highlands Council staff can support and influence that process, towns need to take the initiative. Other participants were concerned with a complete lack of resources to even print educational brochures.

Mr. Freudenberg asked participants to speak about indicators, data and resources. Takeaways are highlighted below:

- Septic density and management should be monitored. Challenges of this, however, include data acquisition, as well as how to address such a sensitive topic. Municipalities working with the Highlands Council on septic density and management are required to report their data. This topic can also be monitored as part of a public health initiative.
- Septic system failures are easier to track. One source of data is the county block and lot modifications to septic systems.
- Surface and ground water quality must be distinguished in the monitoring process.
- Source water protection should be monitored.
- Land use land cover data can be used as a proxy for water quality; measure where redevelopment impacts water quality.

Participants from the Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA) remarked that the organization has data that could be contributed to the monitoring process. The long term goal of the RHA effort is to establish a monitoring site in every HUC 14 watershed. Long-term data is available on biological and water quality variables; NJDEP uses this data for regulatory purposes. While NJDEP has fewer monitoring sites and check them only every five years, RHA monitors annually, and annual data is more valuable because it is possible to gauge the impacts of droughts and recovery periods. RHA also has groundwater data. While an agreement restricts sharing of raw data, an aggregate analysis could be made available. Highlands Council staff remarked that they previously worked with anonymized data at the 2000' x 2000' grid level.

Participants also conveyed the following with regard to indicators and data:

- NJDEP completed a mercury study on fish in the lakes.
- Reservoirs and feeder streams should be monitored.

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- Expand the components of special environmental zones.
- The Council should consider reevaluating the watershed moratorium offset program, as it could be made more efficient, redirected to areas with the most need, and possibly used for relevant capital projects.

As the meeting concluded, Mr. Freudenberg remarked that participants are encouraged to send further feedback on indicators and data via email and through the online comment portal. Participants are also encouraged to identify potential TAC members. The TACs will meet in two series of meetings, the first set of meetings in January 2015 and the second pending release of NJDEP land use land cover data and associated project team analysis. Interested stakeholders should send resumes.

Over the next few weeks, Highlands Council staff and the project team will be conducting additional stakeholder meetings, meeting with county and municipal staff, and holding public workshops.

### Next Steps/Action Items

- Participants should submit via email: additional feedback on indicators, additional feedback on data sources, and TAC member suggestions.
- The project team and Highlands Council staff will follow up with individual participants regarding indicators and data sources.