

New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council

Highlands Regional Master Plan Update

Monitoring Program Recommendation Report
Technical Advisory Committee Briefing Book

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Abstract

This is a briefing book for technical advisory committee members of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (MPRR). The document provides background on the Highlands RMP, the MPRR process, the project team, and the various technical advisory committees.



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Introduction to the Monitoring Program Recommendation Report & Process

Background

In the early 2000s, the State of New Jersey and committed stakeholders advocated for the protection of the NJ Highlands through growth management. These efforts lead to the landmark 2004 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (the Act). The Act set into motion a comprehensive approach to planning and preservation in the area which covers over 1,300 square miles and includes 88 municipalities that are part of seven counties in northwest New Jersey.

The Act established the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council), a regional entity with state and local participation charged with “carrying out the provisions of the Act, including the development of a Regional Master Plan for the Highlands Region.”¹ The Regional Master Plan (RMP) was prepared in the years following the adoption of the Act and was itself adopted on July 17, 2008. The primary goal of the RMP is “to protect and enhance the significant values of the resources” in the Highlands region by protecting critical environmental areas, protecting water quality, and determining appropriate land use patterns for areas within the Highlands.² It also established a Transfer of Development Rights Program for the region.

The RMP serves to guide the implementation of the Act, but also serves as a critical resource for information about the Highlands Region for its residents, technical experts, local governments, developers and all others interested in the region and how the Act is implemented. The RMP lays out the goals, policies and objectives for Natural Resources; Water Resources and Water Utilities; Agricultural Resources; Historic, Cultural, Archaeological and Scenic Resources; Transportation; and Future Land Use (including guidance for development and redevelopment and encouragement for smart growth). It describes programs for each of the above topic areas as well as for Landowner Equity; Sustainable Economic Development and Air Quality. Finally, the RMP clearly lays out the process for Implementation of the Act by detailing the processes for Regional Master Plan Conformance, Consistency and Coordination; Project Review; Improvement of the Master Plan and Highlands Council Implementation Programs. The elements of Implementation are crucial components that require cooperation from local governments and their residents.

The Highlands Regional Master Plan is continually updated as a result of new or corrected information received from municipalities as part of the Plan Conformance process. Further, the

¹ Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act. 7 June 2004

² NJ Highlands Council website <<http://www.state.nj.us/njhighlands/master>>

Highlands Act requires a substantive review take place every six years. The RMP outlined a Monitoring Program to meet this requirement:

The RMP Monitoring Program and associated Monitoring Review Report will evaluate the progress in achieving the goals of the RMP through implementation of policies and programs. The implementation of a monitoring program will ensure that the RMP remain effective and current.
(Highland Regional Master Plan, p. 416)

The objectives of the Monitoring Program are:

- Identify indicators and milestones that will allow measurement of progress toward goals outlined in the Highlands Act and RMP.
- To the extent practical, measure progress to date.
- Establish process for continued monitoring going forward.

The monitoring program is not intended to amend the RMP, but rather develop the factual foundation on which potential amendments to the RMP may be made.

In accordance with RMP *Policy 10A5*, a Regional Master Plan Monitoring Program briefing document and report that develops indicators and milestones for the evaluation of regional conditions, identifies new or emerging issues, and recommends new or modified RMP priorities, must be created. This document, known as the RMP Monitoring Program Recommendations Report (MPRR), will provide baseline assessment of the effect of the 2008 RMP on the Highlands region.

In further support of the RMP Monitoring Program and in accordance with RMP *Policy 10A5b*, a fiscal impact assessment (FIA) that measures the overall economic health of the Region as compared to the rest of the State is to be conducted. The FIA will include an assessment of the Highlands Act (2004) and RMP (2008) that includes population, real estate, economic growth and municipal finance trends related to the 2004 to 2014 timeframe.

Process

The contracted consultant is working with the Highlands Council, its staff, and State Agency advisors - while receiving input from Highlands focused advocacy organizations and the general public - to update the Regional Master Plan (RMP) through the development of an informative, visually appealing Regional Master Plan Recommendation Report (MPRR) and help to set the science and research agenda of the Highlands Council into the future.

The project team will work over five phases to: RESEARCH data and develop indicators and milestones based on trends of the past (2004-2014), and that reflect emerging trends for the future (2014-2024) in the Highlands region and beyond; CONSULT technical experts and stakeholders within State Agencies and advocacy groups to guide the research and development of indicators and milestones; ENGAGE residents of the Highlands Region and the general public to both educate and gather feedback on the RMP and initiatives of the Highlands Council; help PLAN the future of the Highlands Region through the development of the MPRR which will include indicators and milestones, and relevant information from the concurrent Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) project; and UPDATE the science and research agenda for the RMP that reflects the findings of the project work. We are currently in the RESEARCH, CONSULT and ENGAGE phases of the project.

Technical Advisory Committees

Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) serve to engage those with specific technical content knowledge across the ten topic areas included in the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) and described below. TAC membership will represent academic institutions, business and industry, regulatory agencies, and non-government organizations each providing a unique perspective on their area of expertise. Each TAC will meet two times over the course of the RMP Monitoring Program project. The first meeting, occurring during the research phase (mid to late spring), will review draft indicator findings, discuss data needs, and analysis methodology.

The second meeting will occur after the indicators have been applied to identify key trends in the Region during the 2004 to 2014 period. Based on these findings, the TACs will engage in a dialogue to deliberate milestones and monitoring activities for the 2015-2025 period and suggest research priorities.

Technical Advisory Committee Topics

Agricultural Resources

The Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) recognizes agriculture as a vital component of the economy, culture and landscape of the Highlands Region. The RMP calls for both farmland preservation and retention/enhancement of the agricultural industry of the Highlands Region. The Plan discourages non-agricultural development of agricultural lands, particularly in areas of high-value farmland soils. The RMP prioritizes preservation of farmlands within the Agricultural Resource Area and requires cluster development where preservation cannot be achieved, with a minimum 80% set-aside to be devoted to agricultural use. The Plan emphasizes the need to promote and encourage a positive agricultural business climate and to enhance agricultural viability.

Economic Development

The Highlands RMP recognizes that development, redevelopment, and economic growth in appropriate areas of the Region are in the best interests of all citizens of the State, providing innumerable social, cultural, and economic benefits and opportunities. The long term integrity of the Highlands Region requires economic and fiscal vitality alongside the protection of natural resources. Economic development can be broadly described as maintaining and expanding the existing job and economic base to support overall economic health. It may involve a range of activities and strategies aimed at increasing local economic activity, providing employment opportunities, and supporting both short and long term efforts locally and regionally. Creatively utilizing the unique natural and built resources of the Highlands Region may form the basis for local economic initiatives, such as various types of tourism and localized enterprises. Economic development in the Highlands Region must be sustainable over time and is expected to depend heavily on renewal, revitalization, and improvement of economic output.

Future Land Use

The Highlands RMP establishes a framework for future land use which guides development away from environmentally sensitive lands and agricultural lands. This framework also promotes compact development and redevelopment in or adjacent to existing developed areas where adequate public facilities are available to serve new growth and development, provided that such development and redevelopment is compatible with existing land uses and community character. The Goals and Policies for Future Land Use address the basis for Land Use Capability Map Zones, methods for modifying RMP data layers and maps through RMP Updates, applicable standards for Map Adjustments, local build out analyses, and general guidelines for new land uses including resiliency and infrastructure planning.

Historic, Cultural, Archaeological, and Scenic Resources

The Highlands Region contains important historic, cultural, archaeological, and scenic resources and the Highlands Act includes goals for their protection. These resources provide the public with an understanding of how the land and the people of the Highlands Region have changed over time. They are also important for fostering an appreciation for the events that contributed to the development of the towns, villages, and cities of the Highlands Region.

Historic resources include buildings, structures, districts, areas or sites which are significant to the history or culture of a place or time and connect communities with their pasts. Cultural resources include sites, artifacts, or materials which relate to the people and how they live or lived. Cultural resources also reflect the way in which a community currently lives and the values which are important to it. Scenic resources are sites, landscapes and vistas that are remarkable or distinctive because of geology, topography, vegetation, history, culture, or use of land. In the Highlands Region, topography forming ridgelines and mountainsides, panoramic views, streams and rivers, forests, agricultural landscapes, and leafy suburbs are important scenic resources.

RMP Implementation

Implementation of the goals and objectives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) entails a variety of activities anticipated to occur over an extensive, but indefinite timeframe. The RMP lists numerous specific implementation tasks (mainly denoted as “objectives”), which are intended to address nearly every policy and goal set forth within the document. Most are provided as suggested examples, within lists that are not intended to be all-inclusive. The major implementation categories include:

- RMP Conformance, Consistency, Coordination
 - Plan Conformance
 - RMP Updates & Map Amendments
 - Federal, State, Regional Agency Coordination
 - Local Participation
 - Training, Education & Outreach
- Highlands Project Review
- Highlands Council Implementation Programs
 - Highlands Council
 - Local Governments
 - State Government
 - Federal Government

The RMP Implementation TAC will determine appropriate indicators and milestones associated with implementation tasks; examine and assess the current extent of RMP implementation; provide recommendations concerning the effectiveness of current RMP implementation categories and tasks and any revisions to same to better advance the intents and purposes of the RMP.

Land Owner Equity

The Highlands Act recognizes that implementation of the RMP, which directs and guides future development, inevitably has an impact on reasonable landowner expectations regarding future land use potential. The Act provides several mechanisms that seek to mitigate such impacts, including a TDR Program, land acquisition, exemptions, and waivers.

Natural Resources

The Natural Resources of the Highlands Region join to create a landscape that supports endangered species, scenic vistas, agriculture, small towns, manufacturing and the water supplies for New Jersey's largest metropolitan areas. The Highlands Act was created largely to protect the Region's natural resources and the water supplies that depend upon them. The Highlands RMP is a critical component of this protection effort. The Goals, Policies and Objectives for Natural Resources address a wide variety of natural resources, including forests Highlands Open Waters and Riparian Areas, steep slopes, Critical Habitat, land preservation and stewardship, carbonate rock topography and lake management.

The Natural Resources TAC will consist of a gathering of subject experts in forest resources, Highlands Open Waters and Riparian Areas, critical habitat (which includes wildlife habitat, Significant Natural Areas, and vernal pools), steep slopes, carbonate rock (karst) topography, and lake management. Small group discussion around like topics will enhance the larger group dynamic. Sub groups will be organized as follows:

- Forest Resources/Critical Habitat
- Highlands Open Waters and Riparian Areas
- Geophysical Resources (steep slopes & carbonate rock)

Transportation & Air Quality

The Highlands Region (Highlands) transportation system is a complex network of roads, railways, and bridges that supports various modes of travel including automobile, bus, rail, truck, bicycle, pedestrian, and seven airport facilities. There are four limited-access highways in the Highlands , which include Interstate Routes 78, 287, 80, and 280 and four major commuter rail lines including the Boonton Line, the Main Line and Bergen County Line, the Morris and Essex Line, and the Raritan Valley Line as well as numerous US, State, County, and local roads. Transportation related goals in the RMP include the review of regional transportation projects to promote a sound, balanced transportation system; identification of transportation infrastructure that limits or supports development and redevelopment in the Planning Area; and the promotion of mass transit.

Air quality is directly correlated with on-road mobile sources such as automobiles, buses and trucks; however, air toxics also come from many other sources, including industrial facilities, utilities, commercial businesses, residential activities, and non-road mobile sources. Therefore air quality in the Highlands is influenced by mobile and stationary sources within and outside the Highlands Region. Haze consists of air pollutants from a variety of natural and manmade sources including

windblown dust and soot from wildfires, fireplaces, motor vehicles, electric utility, and industrial fuel burning, and manufacturing operations. Power plants located outside the State also have a great impact on air quality in the Highlands.

Automobiles in New Jersey contribute 40 percent of the airborne pollutants and more than 80 percent of the airborne carcinogens. Since the Highlands is currently an air quality non-attainment area, federal guidelines require that new transportation plans and projects do not further contribute to air quality degradation.

The Transportation and Air Quality TAC will consist of a gathering of subject experts in transportation and transportation related air quality and will determine appropriate indicators and milestones associated with transportation and air quality goals and policies in the Highlands RMP. The TAC will also provide recommendations concerning the effectiveness of the current RMP programs and science agenda towards implementing topic related goals and policies.

Water and Wastewater Utilities

The Highlands RMP includes a variety of measures to ensure that utility development does not exceed the carrying capacity of water resources for both quality and quantity. The RMP's policies ensure that water supply and wastewater utility capacities are made available in ways that provide maximum regional benefit within the constraints of water availability and water quality protection, and are used in ways that provide cost-effective and efficient service. The RMP recognizes the Highlands Act's restrictions on the creation or extension of water/wastewater infrastructure in the Preservation Area and regulates extensions into the Protection and Conservation Zones and the Environmentally-Constrained Sub-Zones of the Planning Area, except where allowed through waivers or for cluster development that meets certain standards.

Water Resources

The protection, enhancement, and restoration of water resources is a fundamental goal of the Highlands Act. A primary mechanism to meet this goal is the RMP assessment of the ground water and surface water resources. Both water quantity and water quality were evaluated.

The Highlands RMP provides a method for identifying the sustainability of available water resources in the Highlands Region, which is used to identify areas where water resources are or are not sufficient to support existing human and ecological uses, and to support future uses. The RMP analysis entails using stream base flows as a surrogate for water availability because the protection of base flow is critical to maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems and protecting water supplies, particularly during periods of drought.

The Highlands RMP also focuses on a variety of measures to protect the quality of those water resources to ensure that human and ecological water uses have water quality appropriate to those uses, and that human water uses do not alter water quality in unacceptable ways.