

RESOLUTION 2026-15
NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
APPROVAL OF APPLICATIONS UNDER THE HIGHLANDS OPEN SPACE
PARTNERSHIP FUNDING PROGRAM PURSUANT TO ADMINISTRATIVE RULE
N.J.A.C. 7:70-1 et seq.

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act), N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq., created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council or Council); and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act at N.J.S.A. 13:20-2 declares that the New Jersey Highlands is an essential source of drinking water, providing clean and plentiful drinking water for 70% of the State's population and contains exceptional natural resources such as clean air, contiguous forest lands, wetlands, pristine watersheds, and habitat for fauna and flora for the citizens of the State; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act at N.J.S.A. 13:20-2 further declares that “the new regional planning approach and the more stringent environmental regulatory standards should be accompanied, as a matter of wise public policy and fairness to property owners, by a strong and significant commitment by the State to fund the acquisition of exceptional natural resource value lands . . .”; and

WHEREAS, on July 17, 2008, the Highlands Council adopted the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) which became effective on September 8, 2008 and which through RMP Goal 1H calls for the protection of critical resources through land preservation and stewardship of open space throughout the Highlands Region; and

WHEREAS, on April 18, 2016, the Highlands Council adopted a rule (N.J.A.C. 7:70-1 et seq.) establishing the Highlands Open Space Partnership Funding Program (Open Space Program), which provides for a matching grant partnership with eligible state and local governments and charitable conservancies for the acquisition of land for passive recreation and conservation purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council received Notices of Funding Opportunity from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the FY2023 and FY2024 Highlands Conservation Act (HCA) Grant Program in July 2023 and August 2024, respectively, which may provide funding of up to 50% of the costs of qualifying land preservation projects; and

WHEREAS, in September of 2023 for FY2023 and September of 2024 for FY2024, the Highlands Council solicited applications under the Open Space Program for projects that would qualify for funding under the provisions of the HCA Grant Program, with the intent of using qualifying projects as the Highlands Council match for the HCA program; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council received one application in 2023 and four applications in 2024; and one of the 2024 projects is currently advancing; and both the 2023 application and the advancing 2024 project qualify for funding under N.J.A.C. 7:70 and may also qualify for funding under the HCA Grant Program;

WHEREAS, both of these projects request funding under the Open Space Program; and

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WHEREAS, the Highlands Council submitted its application to the USFWS in November 2023 for funding the project located in Mount Olive Township and was subsequently notified that funding in the amount of \$187,800 was being made available by USFWS to complete this project under the HCA Grant Program, subject to meeting all USFWS grant conditions; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council submitted its application to the USFWS in December 2024 for funding the project located in Mendham Township and was subsequently notified that funding in the amount of \$250,000 was being made available by USFWS to complete this project under the HCA Grant Program, subject to meeting all USFWS grant conditions; and

WHEREAS, Highlands Council staff proposes completing these projects using a combination of funding from the HCA Grant Program and contributions from Open Space partners, with no impact on Highlands Council budgets; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council wishes to authorize Highlands Council staff to proceed with the preservation projects under the provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:70 and the HCA Grant Program; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 13:20-5.j, no action authorized by the Highlands Council shall have force or effect until ten (10) days, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays excepted, after a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Council has been delivered to the Governor for review, unless prior to expiration of the review period the Governor shall approve same, in which case the action shall become effective upon such approval.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Highlands Council hereby authorizes the Executive Director to take the steps necessary to proceed with the following preservation projects, leveraging funding from the HCA Grant Program and matching grant funds from Open Space Program partners, subject to those applications satisfying the grant conditions of the HCA Grant Program:

| County | Municipality | Block | Lot |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------|------------|
| Morris | Mount Olive Township | 402 | 1 |
| | | 403 | 2 |
| Morris | Mendham Township | 141 | 43 |

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its regular meeting held on the 21st day of May, 2026.



Carl J. Richko, Chairman

| Vote on the Approval of Resolution | Motion | Second | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent |
|---|---------------|---------------|------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| Councilmember Alstede | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Amoroso | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Basralian | | | | | √ | |
| Councilmember Bush | √ | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Dougherty | | | | | | √ |
| Councilmember James | | | | | | √ |
| Councilmember Kibler | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Koop | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Le Frois | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Marano | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Oswald | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Smith | | √ | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Van Abs | | | √ | | | |
| Councilmember Visioli | | | √ | | | |
| Chairman Richko | | | √ | | | |