

New Jersey Highlands

NJ's major water source, with extensive diverse natural habitat. This region is a vital open space reserve complementing the densely developed population centers of Philadelphia, northern New Jersey, New York City and eastern Connecticut. Overall, the region provides a host of natural functions necessary for sustaining the developed northeastern United States.

Background

The New Jersey Highlands planning region, defined by the [Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act](#), 2004 is part of a larger geophysical region ranging from Pennsylvania through New Jersey, New York and Connecticut.

One of these important natural functions is providing drinking water to the residents of the Highlands themselves and to a broad area of intensely developed land outside of the Highlands region. While the Highlands region makes up only about 17 percent of New Jersey's land area, 64% of New Jersey's residents rely on the Highlands for their drinking water drawn primarily from surface and groundwater.

The New Jersey Highlands planning region includes all or parts of 88 municipalities and seven counties that contain a wealth of natural resources including:

- Large contiguous expanses of forests
- Wetlands and wetlands complexes;
- Grassland species habitats;
- Federally and State listed threatened, endangered, and declining species of plants and animals;
- Historic sites and areas;
- Recreational resources, including state, county and local parks, the Appalachian and Highlands Millennium Trails, trout fishing areas, and areas for hiking, hunting, birding, cross country skiing and other outdoor recreational activities;
- More than 100,000 acres of active farmland; and
- Spectacular scenic qualities.

To protect the vital natural values and functions present in the Highlands region essential functions for future generations, the New Jersey State Legislature passed the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act in 2004.

The [Highlands Council](#) a 15-member appointed body tasked with the implementation of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act. This landmark legislation designates a special Highlands planning region and calls for comprehensive regional planning over the entire 859,358 acre area.

Information Sources

- [Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act](#) (2004) N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq. protects drinking water for over 5.4 million people and helps preserve New Jersey's dwindling open space.
- The [Highlands Council](#), is tasked with the implementation of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and reviews plans to make sure they are compatible with the 2008 Highlands Regional Master Plan
- The 2008 [Highlands Regional Master Plan \(RMP\)](#) provides guidance for implementation of Act. Conformance with RMP is mandatory in Preservation Area and voluntary in Planning Area.
- The [New Jersey Highlands Coalition](#) represents a diverse network of organizations — small and large, local, regional, statewide and national — and individuals whose mission is to enhance and restore the New Jersey Highlands and to preserve the quality and quantity of drinking water both for the 850,000 people in the Highlands as well as the more than five million people in surrounding areas who depend on Highlands water.