

Date: July 22, 2011

To: New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council

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From: Erica Van Auken, Campaign and Grassroots Coordinator, NJ Highlands Coalition

Borough of Wharton Petition of Plan Conformance

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition supports the Borough of Wharton's petition for plan conformance. We encourage the Council to consider all of the voluntary work done by the Borough to conform to the Highlands Act and the Regional Master Plan and to approve their petition.

We support the proposed designated center, but we have concerns with a proposed development site. This site, block 1603 lot 14, would be a development with 73 units (15 affordable), located in the Protection Zone and Existing Community Environmentally Constrained Subzone. This site has numerous environmental constraints including a water availability deficit, critical wildlife habitat, and significant natural areas. In addition to environmental constraints, Wharton states that this lot is currently connected to an existing sewer system, but there is little evidence to support that. Without a current connection, this site is all the more inappropriate for new development.

This is an undeveloped parcel with forest cover, though it is designated as having low forest integrity. We appreciate that the Council has recommended that alternative parcels be identified for preservation to offset any forest loss resulting from this proposed development, but we are concerned that there is little vacant space remaining to preserve. Because of this, if development is started we would like to see stronger preventative measures such as clustering development or a detailed plan of low impact development techniques.

We thank the Highlands Council for this opportunity to submit comments.