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Environmental Challenge Grant -- Hamilton awards \$2,500 to Highlands Coalition to enhance support for its work

Passes on gift received from Rutgers Alumni recognition

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LONG HILL TWP. — The New Jersey Highlands Coalition was awarded a \$2,500 “5-Star Environmental Challenge Grant” in support of a project that will improve the Coalition’s outreach to enhance public support for protection of the Highlands area.

The grant was funded by Len Hamilton of Meyersville, a longtime volunteer in regional environmental groups.

Among his achievements have been holding positions as chair of the Long Hill Township Environmental Commission, as the Long Hill Township representative to Great Swamp Watershed Advisory Committee, as chair of the Ten Towns Committee, as Trustee of the Great Swamp Watershed Association and numerous other activities.

Hamilton, who will retire in June after a 45-year career as a psychology professor at Rutgers University, received this year’s Rutgers Class of 1962 Presidential Public Service Award in recognition of his volunteer work, and decided to reinvest the \$2,500 cash award by creating the matching grant program for the regional groups.

The Coalition was one of five groups invited to submit competitive proposals for \$2,500 plus an additional \$2,500 in matching funds from the organization to pursue meaningful activities that help to protect our natural environment.

The five groups invited to bid are:

- Friends of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, www.friendsofgreatswamp.org;
- Great Swamp Watershed Association, www.greatswamp.org;

- New Jersey Highlands Coalition, www.njhighlandscoalition.org;
- Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, www.anjec.org; and
- Long Hill Township, www.longhillnj.us.

Three proposals were received in addition to the Coalition's proposal:

The Friends of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge submitted a proposal to teach volunteers to identify and remove invasive plant species and replace them with native species in order to restore the native habitat of the Refuge.

The Great Swamp Watershed Association submitted a proposal to develop a protocol to assess E. coli levels as a part of their ongoing program to assess the water quality of the streams in the Great Swamp watershed.

The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions submitted a proposal to launch a field training program for municipal environmental commissioners that would improve their skills to review development projects and produce environmental resource inventories.

"Choosing the winner of the grant competition was no easy task," said Hamilton, "because each of the four proposals was worthy of support with projects that offered both immediate and long-term benefits to the region."

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition edged out the others in part because of the urgency of their mission. The Highlands area supplies two-thirds of the drinking water for New Jersey and pressures for commercial development threaten that resource, Hamilton said.

"Public support for Highlands protection is acutely important," said Hamilton, "because the current political temperament in Trenton is to dismantle the last 30 years of progress in protecting our natural resources."

Each of the three runners-up will receive a \$500 unrestricted gift in appreciation of the work that went into preparing their proposals.

"I would urge residents of the region to reach out to these organizations and support them as part of your annual charitable contributions", said Hamilton, "All four are doing important work to protect our natural resources."