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Highlands Council hires enviro policy expert Lisa Plevin as executive director

New Jersey Highlands Coalition welcomes move

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(Chester Township, NJ) The New Jersey Highlands Council voted today to hire Lisa J. Plevin, to replace Margaret Nordstrom as the regional planning authority's Executive Director. Plevin, a former senior advisor to Senator Frank Lautenberg and former chief of staff of the Region 2 office of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (NJ/NY/PA & the US Virgin Islands), will replace Nordstrom, the Council's former Deputy Director. Nordstrom was promoted to Executive Director upon the retirement of Gene Feyl in 2014. Both were brought in as part of Governor Christie's effort to hamstring the Council following the former Governor's announcement in 2011, that he would diminish the effectiveness of the agency. Governor Phil Murphy, however, in following his transition team's recommendations to "revitalize efforts to protect our largest sources of drinking water including the Highlands", had recently appointed Highlands Council member Carl Richko as Chairman. Richko is a lifelong environmentalist. Lisa Plevin served as deputy director of Murphy's transition team for Energy and the Environment.

"We wholeheartedly support the Highlands Council in selecting Lisa Plevin as its next Executive Director," said Julia Somers, Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. "We had a very good relationship with Lisa when she was chief of staff at the Region 2 office of the USEPA. She understood our challenges and supported us as much as the federal agency could."

"Lisa worked very closely with who is now NJ Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Catherine McCabe when Catherine was the EPA Region2 deputy administrator." Continued Somers, "The Highlands Council and DEP have shared and overlapping jurisdictions in the Highlands. It is so important that the two agencies work as partners to protect the resources of the Highlands and we can expect to see that partnership emerge with the leadership now in place at the 2 agencies.

"With Lisa as the Executive Director, the New Jersey Highlands Coalition looks forward to an unprecedented opportunity to work together with the Council in implementing the goals and objectives of the Highlands Act."

Elliott Ruga, Policy & Communications Director of the Coalition said, "We were very fortunate that under Governor Christie, who bluntly opposed the Highlands Act, that the Highlands Council had someone of as impeccable integrity as Margaret Nordstrom to be Executive Director of the Highlands Council. Although we believe Margaret Nordstrom was constrained by Governor Christie from promoting municipal conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan, and despite policy differences between the former Highlands Council Chairman and the Highlands Coalition, Margaret worked with us where she could and always gave our concerns serious consideration. Margaret also valued and

maintained the Highlands Council staff, which is no doubt eager to reengage municipalities and encourage Plan conformance. We wish Margaret well in her retirement and we very much look forward to working with Lisa Plevin.”

“Lisa Plevin has a keen understanding of the natural resource values of the Highlands,” said Bill Kibler, Policy Director of the Raritan Headwater Association and New Jersey Highlands Coalition Policy Committee Chairman. “She participated in the 1992 US Forest Service study of the Highlands region and the 2002 update, which first recommended the establishment of a regional planning authority in order to protect the vital resources of the New Jersey Highlands. While working for Senator Lautenberg Lisa was instrumental in preserving the 300 acre Crown Towers property in the headwaters of the Raritan River in Mount Olive. Combined with Lisa’s understanding of the need for appropriate regulations—which she implemented on the national level as chief of staff at EPA Region2—with her work on land preservation, helping to establish and maintain the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, Lisa has well balanced experience that will serve her well as Highlands Council Executive Director. I look forward to working with Lisa.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition was formed in 1988 and incorporated in 2005. As the focal point for many organizations and individuals and their interest to protect the Highlands, the Coalition’s advocacy played large role in the passage of the 2004 Highlands Act. With a mission to protect the water and other natural and cultural resources of the New Jersey Highlands region, the Coalition today consists of 100 member organizations.

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