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### **PlanSmart NJ Calls for Adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan**

Trenton, NJ – PlanSmart NJ supports adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan as the best currently available mechanism for protecting the natural capital of the region while providing targeted growth opportunities and compensation for landowners.

“The Regional Master Plan attempts to implement the concept of Smart Growth and the State Plan policies of centering growth away from areas of environmental sensitivity,” said Dianne Brake, President of PlanSmart NJ. “We have been advocating for regional planning and centered growth for forty years and believe this plan is very much needed.”

The plan will reduce impervious cover by 68%, identifies watersheds that are in water deficit, and shifts development away from environmentally sensitive non-sewered land to sewerred land.

Brake called the re-evaluation of existing zoning critical. “Protecting areas that have high natural capital values through zoning changes and Transfer of Development Rights will be the most important work of the implementation of the Regional Master Plan,” Brake continued. “Zoning defines the land use pattern – sprawl or sustainable – you get what you zone for.”

PlanSmartNJ will be preparing a complementary analysis to the Council's Build-out Report, to support the identification of Highlands Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) receiving areas that are within Highlands Counties but outside the designated Planning Area. These Receiving Areas are a key component in providing opportunities for growth in the region while protecting the significant environmental and water quality attributes of the Highlands. The TDR program will offer landowners the opportunity to preserve their land while receiving compensation for selling their Development Rights to developers to use in towns and other centers in the region.

“However,” Brake asserted, “at the present time there is insufficient funding and staffing to ensure a successful Highlands TDR program. If the Highlands water and other natural resources are to be protected there must be greater financial support for a Highlands TDR Bank.”

*PlanSmart NJ, the state's most respected land use and regional planning organization, is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, having built a reputation for integrity, substance and balance. For four decades, this Trenton-based 501 (c)(3) nonprofit has worked to improve the environment, reduce disparities and improve job, housing and transportation choices for people across New Jersey. (Go to [www.plansmartnj.org](http://www.plansmartnj.org) for more information.)*