

Contact: Jeremy Soffin, RPA, 212/253-2727, x303 or Meg Little, ED, 202-572-3387, mlittle@ed.org

Program to Transfer Development Rights Could Save Tens of Thousands of Highlands Acres from Development, New Report Says

Win-Win Scenario Would Dramatically Improve Land Conservation and Spur Smarter Development

Morristown, NJ – A new report released today revealed that a well-designed program to allow developers to pay for the rights to build at greater densities than ordinarily allowed could help pay to save tens of thousands of acres of open space in the New Jersey Highlands region. According to the report, a transfer of development rights (TDR) market-based program could generate from \$250 million to well more than \$1 billion over a multi-year period to invest in open space with little or no public investment.

The report was released at a conference in Morristown hosted by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions and prepared by Regional Plan Association and Environmental Defense, in cooperation with New Jersey Future and Regional Planning Partnership.

“A well-designed transfer development rights program will be a win-win for the New Jersey Highlands,” said James T.B. Tripp, general counsel at Environmental Defense. “It will improve land conservation and spur smarter development.”

“This report makes it clear that TDR can work to benefit municipalities, landowners, conservationists and the Highlands Council,” said Thomas G. Dallessio, New Jersey Director for Regional Plan Association. “Within the right framework, TDR will capture real market values and provide opportunities for creating additional sources of funding to address landowner equity concerns. It can help protect areas with high resource values, especially designated “No build” areas and areas with potential exemptions so that large contiguous areas should be preserved.”

The report recommends a TDR program that transfers development rights from top priority conservation lands to receiving areas in Highland counties that are good candidates to absorb additional density above current zoning, close to infrastructure and are not environmentally sensitive. The report also calls for putting receiving areas in places that have high economic value and are currently zoned for limited development. Given the range of property values across the Highlands, the report suggests that development credits should be issued from a bank.

The report describes a geographic information system (GIS) that can be used to select and visualize appropriate receiving areas. The GIS incorporates an economic model and real estate sales information to project what developers would pay for transfer development rights. The full report is available at: www.rpa.org.

Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. For more information about RPA, please visit our website, www.rpa.org.

Environmental Defense, a leading national nonprofit organization, represents more than 400,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems. www.environmentaldefense.org.