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November 30, 2004

Adam Zellner, Executive Director
NJ Department of Community Affairs
Office of Smart Growth
PO Box 204
Trenton, NJ 08625-0204

RE: Sourland Mountain – Special Resource Area Designation

Dear Mr. Zellner:

The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association supports the efforts of the Sourland Planning Council to secure a *Special Resource Area Designation* for the Sourland Mountains, as part of the Cross Acceptance Review Process for the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. “A Special Resource Area is an area or region with unique characteristics or resources of statewide importance which are essential to the sustained well being and function of its own region and other regions or systems—environmental, economic, and social—and to the quality of life for future generations.” (2001 State Plan)

Most of the Sourlands region is already identified on the State Plan Policy Map as Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA5) and Rural/ Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA 4-B). This area is also largely surrounded by the Rural Planning Area (PA4), and the SRA designation would provide additional protections to this region.

The Sourland Regional Planning Council has obtained endorsements from officials with several municipalities and three counties who also sanction this Special Resource Area (SRA) Designation.

As outlined in the Sourlands SRA Petition, this area deserves to be designated as a Special Resource Area for the following main reasons:

- Under a Smart Growth Grant from the State of New Jersey, Department of Community Affairs, Office of Smart Growth, a *Natural Resource Inventory for the Sourland Mountain Region* and *Groundwater Resource Evaluation of the Sourland Mountain Region, New Jersey*, have been prepared which highlight many critical features of the Sourlands, some of which are summarized below.

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- The Sourlands are the largest contiguous forested area in central New Jersey, containing three county parks used primarily for hiking and passive recreation.
- Impressive boulder fields of weathered diabase rock, unique to this area cover the landscape. These boulders serve as staunch protectors for rare and delicate plants and animals that live deep within these important forests, including: trout lilies, wood anemones, ginseng, bobcat, wood turtle, barred owl, bobolink, Cooper's hawk, grasshopper sparrow, savannah sparrow, upland sandpiper, and even the scarlet tanager. Over 90% of the Sourland Mountains are designated as suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species.
- The diabase rocks results in perched wetland areas that provide vernal pool habitats for threatened species of salamanders.
- Through time, these boulder fields have also protected the mountain and these habitats from the increasing pressures from development. The early Dutch settlers referred to the region as "*sauer landt*" because the region was clearly not suited for farming. Similarly, the region is clearly not suited for development for the same reasons: *steep slopes, rocky outcrops and shallow depths to rock, severe limitations for well recharge, and septic percolation.*
- The Sourlands region contains a sensitive, sole-source aquifer and an essential source of clean drinking water. However, with a recharge rate of only 3 inches per year, water supplies are limited, percolation efficiencies are restricted, and dilution rates for septic systems are constrained.
- The Sourland Mountain Region is also an area rich in history with several landmarks placed on the National Register of Historic Places; including farms of the Lenape Indians; and vital landmarks of the *Crossroads of the American Revolution*; as well as historic districts.

The Sourlands would benefit from recognition as a Special Resource Area (SRA), by providing access to greater public and private funding, and the designation would support preservation efforts and conservation minded local planning decisions.

Public support for protection of the Sourlands is very high, and this is a momentous opportunity for the Department of Community Affairs to control sprawl while protecting a unique and critical resource for the future. Our organization stands ready to assist in any way possible. Please contact me if you have further questions. Thank you again for your interest and valuable time.

Very Truly Yours,

Noelle Mackay,
Deputy Director

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