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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Watershed Association Applauds Princeton Ridge Preserve

Supports Action by Princeton Township to Help Protect A Vital Natural Resource

(August 18, 2009) – The following is a statement from **Jim Waltman, Executive Director of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association** – central New Jersey’s first environmental group:

“The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association applauds Princeton Township Committeewoman Liz Lempert for introducing a resolution to endorse the concept of a Princeton Ridge Preserve and the Princeton Township Committee for passing the resolution on August 17.

Celebrating our 60th Anniversary this year, the Watershed Association has worked to protect clean water and a healthy environment in our central New Jersey region through conservation, advocacy, science, and education since 1949. Protection of the Princeton Ridge has been a priority of ours for much of that history.

In 1971, we published a book with the simple title: *Herrontown Woods: A Guide to a Natural Preserve* which described the area’s natural history, ecology, and geology and urged readers to think about the forest there as a natural system, connected to its broader watershed. The resolution adopted by the Township Committee advances that goal.

With its mature forests, abundant wetlands, steep slopes, and boulder fields, the Princeton Ridge is among the most important and sensitive environmental features in central New Jersey. Building on past successful preservation efforts, an exciting opportunity exists to establish a Princeton Ridge Preserve that would better protect these natural features and provide for an extended greenbelt along the Ridge.

The ecological values of the Ridge have been reinforced in the Princeton Community Master Plan and Environmental Resource Inventory since the 1950s and the Princeton Regional Planning Board “down zoned” portions of the Ridge in the 1980s in an effort to protect its sensitive ecology.

Among the many values of the Princeton Ridge are the habitats the area provides to wildlife. According to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Ridge provides habitat for several endangered and threatened species, including the wood turtle, eastern box turtle, Cooper’s hawk, and Barred owl. In addition to these endangered and threatened species, the Ridge provides migration and nesting habitat for a number of migratory birds that require large, unfragmented deep forests to live and breed.

The Ridge's shallow soil depth to diabase bedrock and steep slopes make development on the Ridge difficult and problematic for residents living down slope. Serious flooding has impacted many of these residents who blame developments on the Ridge.

The mature woods on the Ridge provide an island of natural habitat in Princeton that has an added cooling benefit during hot summer months when compared to temperatures associated with the equivalent acreage of concrete.

In the 1957 Oswald and Elizabeth Veblen donated land in the northeast section of the Ridge to Mercer County to create Herrontown Woods, a preserve that has subsequently grown to 142 acres. In 1967, Princeton Township purchase lands on the other side of Herrontown Road to create the Autumn Hill Reservation. The Borough participated in the funding of the reserve which today totals 72 acres.

While intensive development pressures continue on the Princeton Ridge, several relatively large undeveloped parcels still exist which, if preserved, would expand the network of preserved lands there.

A larger Princeton Ridge Preserve would permanently protect a continuous greenbelt on the Princeton Ridge and provide unique educational and recreational opportunities to residents and visitors of the region.

The Watershed Association stands ready to help the Township and other public and private partners realize the vision of a Princeton Ridge Preserve.”

About the Watershed Association

The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, a not-for-profit organization, protects the 265-square-mile region drained by the Stony Brook and Millstone River – an area spanning 26 towns and five counties. Founded in 1949, the Watershed Association is central New Jersey's first environmental group protecting clean water and the environment through conservation, advocacy, science and education.

Interviews with Executive Director Jim Waltman available upon request. Contact Gwen McNamara, Communications Manager, at (609) 737-3735 x16 or gmcnamara@thewatershed.org.