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NEWS RELEASE

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Watershed Association & Local Groups: Hopewell Township Committee Needs to Protect Forests

September 27, 2011 (Hopewell, NJ) - "Protect Hopewell's forests" was the message delivered by representatives from several community groups to the Hopewell Township Committee on Monday night. The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, central New Jersey's first environmental group, and representatives of several local community groups voiced their strong support for a woodlands protection ordinance, drafted by the township's Environmental Commission earlier this year, and called for its adoption.

The ordinance would protect Hopewell's forests from indiscriminate clear-cutting and require a plan and environmental review when removal of an acre or more of woodland is desired. Well-managed forests benefit the entire community by contributing to clean air and water and maintaining highly desirable natural spaces.

"Our forests are a critical natural resource that must be protected," said Jennifer Coffey, policy director at the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. "Hopewell Township is the only township out of 26 municipalities in the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed that does not provide some kind of protection for their forests."

Pat Sziber, former Environmental Commission member and executive director of Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, echoed Ms. Coffey's sentiments and noted that work has been going on for nine years, adding that "it is time."

New Jersey Sierra Club's Luran Lynch cited the abundant benefits to the community. "Protecting woodlands will serve to ameliorate flooding, retain wildlife habitat and reduce erosion ... the proposed woodlands ordinance will go a long way towards preserving the township's bucolic nature," she said. Ms. Lynch also noted that protecting trees protects water quality, which is particularly important in Hopewell where many residents are dependent on groundwater as a drinking water source.

Representatives of Trout Unlimited and the Sourland Planning Council commented that their organizations fully support the ordinance for the positive effects it will have on the community, such as protecting clean water and healthy habitats.

Township Committeewoman Vanessa Sandom, the committee's representative on the township Environmental Commission, reported that the woodlands protection ordinance would be introduced for adoption by the Township Committee "in the next few meetings." She noted that changes to the ordinance had recently been made during a joint meeting between the township's Agriculture and Open Space Committees.

"This is good news," said Ms. Coffey of the Watershed Association. "This ordinance is prudent and will bring great benefit to the citizens of Hopewell Township. We are confident that Hopewell will do the best thing for the community and adopt the woodlands protection ordinance by the end of this year."

Interviews with Policy Director Jennifer Coffey are available upon request. Contact Communications Director Gwen McNamara at gmcnamara@thewatershed.org or (609) 737-3735 x16.

About the Watershed Association

The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association is central New Jersey's first environmental group protecting clean water and the environment through conservation, advocacy, science and education. To learn more visit www.thewatershed.org.