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## THONET ASSOCIATES' ENVIRONMENTAL TIMES

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### NJ Highlands Plan Conformance

On August 10, 2004, the *Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act* became law and four years later, on July 17, 2008, the Highlands Council adopted the *Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP)*.

The RMP is an environmentally-based plan that provides New Jersey's Highlands municipalities with goals, policies, objectives and resource data to assist them in revising community master plans and regulatory/implementation programs to ensure long term availability of clean ground and surface waters, along with the preservation and protection of other important resources within their communities.

The RMP also provides municipalities with significant financial incentives and municipally-beneficial programs to encourage participation in the RMP's *Plan Conformance* process. Conformance with the RMP is required only in designated *Preservation Areas* but the benefits of conformance are available to any municipality within NJ Highlands' *Planning and/or Preservation Areas*.

Thonet Associates' review of RMP and the Highlands Council's *Plan Conformance Guidelines* reveals that the RMP and the proposed *Plan Conformance* process share many similarities with the environmentally-based community planning process recommended by Thonet Associates to New Jersey municipalities for over 20 years.

Thonet Associates' unique approach to community planning, known as *Planning for and with Natural Systems – The Four Step Approach*, was first employed in the late 1980s in developing the Master Plan, Wastewater Management Plan and associated Land Development Regulations for Lafayette Township in Sussex County.

Lafayette Township's environmentally-based Master Plan subsequently received an award from the New Jersey State League of Municipalities for its unique contribution to environmental planning in the State of New Jersey. Thonet Associates' *Four Step Approach* to community planning was then introduced to New Jersey's entire environmental community at the 1993 *New Jersey Environmental Congress* sponsored by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC).

Today, the firm looks forward to using its many years of experience in environmentally-based community planning, together with its knowledge of the RMP and the *Plan Conformance* process, to assist Highlands municipalities in revising master plans and land development regulations to achieve *Plan Conformance*. Thonet Associates also hopes to use this experience to assist Highlands Planning and Land Use Boards in fulfilling responsibilities relating to the review of site plan and subdivision applications.

Thonet Associates applauds the Highlands Council for successfully completing the RMP and encourages all Highlands municipalities to seek *Plan Conformance* at the earliest opportunity. For more information regarding Thonet Associates' environmental planning services for New Jersey municipalities, please visit our website at [www.thonetassociates.com](http://www.thonetassociates.com).