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April 12, 2023

Gabrielle Gallagher, Chief Counsel
New Jersey Highlands Council
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Chester, NJ 07930
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Subject: Letter of Support to Develop Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan for Mountain Lake, Township of Liberty, Warren County, New Jersey

Dear Ms. Gallagher:

On behalf of the members, officers, and trustees of the Mountain Lake Community Association (hereafter, MLCA or Lake Association), I write to express our strong support for Princeton Hydro's request for funding to develop a Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan for Mountain Lake.

The MLCA is poised to serve as a participant with Princeton Hydro on this important project.

Mountain Lake is a cherished natural resource and the gem of our community. Carved out by retreating glaciers 12,000 years ago, Mountain Lake is the largest natural glacial lake in Warren County. It supports a diverse and healthy aquatic ecosystem, as well as swimming, fishing, boating and other recreational uses. A public beach, boat ramp and pavilion provide appealing opportunities to access and enjoy the lake.

Liberty Township is a relatively small municipality, about 12 square miles, almost half of which serves as the watershed for Mountain Lake. The entire 5-square mile watershed of Mountain Lake lies within Liberty Township. The lake is the community's pride and joy, and its protection is the community's most important responsibility.

Recent events have impacted the lake. The first cyanobacteria harmful algae bloom was detected in November 2019. Several others were detected in 2020 and again in late spring of 2021 and 2022. The Lake Association and Liberty Township have responded by stepping up their efforts to protect the lake. A committee was formed in 2020 to oversee a response program and has met regularly since. In 2021, the Lake Association

launched a comprehensive lake monitoring program and hired Princeton Hydro to help set it up, assess the results, and offer recommendations. The 2021 monitoring program also included monthly HAB monitoring undertaken in close collaboration with NJDEP's Bureau of Freshwater Monitoring & Standards. In January 2022, Princeton Hydro produced the report, *Mountain Lake 2021 Water Quality Monitoring Report*, and presented it to the Lake Association. The report includes several recommendations, including the need to undertake a comprehensive Lake and Watershed Plan as an important next step.

The MLCA understands that in order to restore, preserve and protect this waterbody from recent water quality issues a Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan needs to be developed. The challenge involves securing a top-notch firm with lake management expertise to develop the plan, and obtaining the funds to support the work. We are thrilled by the opportunity to meet this challenge by partnering with Princeton Hydro, and drawing upon critical funding support made available by the Highlands Council.

Princeton Hydro has a considerable amount of experience in the development of these Plans and in the monitoring and management of waterways throughout the Highlands. The MLCA recognizes that a well-done, data-based Plan can be used to seek additional funding support, including Water Quality Restoration Grants from NJDEP under the state's 319(h) program, and other potential sources, for prioritized in-lake and watershed-based implementation projects to reduce pollutant loading and improve water quality and ecological conditions. Additionally, much of the data associated with the Plan may prove useful in efforts to address Township-based MS4 permitting requirements via Watershed Improvement Plans.

With a view to lending full support to the project proposal, the MLCA is pleased to offer our participation in the project, as well as a significant commitment of in-kind services and expenditures associated with our robust volunteer lake monitoring program. Our participation will include providing Princeton Hydro with local and historical information on the lake, hosting public meetings with Princeton Hydro and local stakeholders to discuss the project and its associated goals, conducting brief site visits at the lake with Princeton Hydro, and post educational information about the project and final plan on the MLCA website. Since 2021, the MLCA has conducted comprehensive, bi-weekly in-lake monitoring, measuring clarity, pH, and DO and temperature profiles throughout the water column. Additionally, on a monthly basis, total phosphorus samples have been collected from the surface and bottom waters. Using a fluorometer on loan from NJDEP, cyanobacteria levels have been regularly monitored, backed by algae samples collected and provided to NJDEP for analysis. In 2023, the MLCA's program will be bolstered thanks to the acquisition of a YSI multiparameter meter. The rich data set developed by the MLCA for Mountain Lake since 2021, which will continue through 2023-2025, promises to enhance and lend important support to the Watershed Restoration and Protection Planning process undertaken by Princeton Hydro.

The total value of the above-noted in-kind services and expenditures, offered as match, is estimated to be over \$20,000.

The MLCA looks forward to working with Princeton Hydro and our residents/stakeholders on this project to advance our goals of protecting and restoring water quality and ecological value in Mountain Lake and its watershed, and by extension, throughout our section of the Highlands region of New Jersey.

Thank you for this opportunity, and for all you do to protect and enhance the natural resources within the New Jersey Highlands.

Sincerely,



Robert Ballou, President, MLCA

cc: C. Mikolajczyk, CLM., Princeton Hydro