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For Immediate Release

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SUSTAINABLE RARITAN RIVER COLLABORATIVE RECOGNIZES EIGHT STEWARDS OF THE RARITAN RIVER AND BAY

(New Brunswick, N.J.) Eight individuals and organizations received Sustainable Raritan River Awards at the 8th Annual Sustainable Raritan Conference and Awards Ceremony at Rutgers' Douglass Student Center on Friday, June 10, 2016.

"The purpose of these awards is to recognize some of the more creative and impressive accomplishments by genuine leaders throughout the Raritan Watershed," said Michael Catania, Executive Director of Duke Farms Foundation and a member of the Sustainable Raritan Awards Committee.

Each year at its Annual Conference, the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative and the Sustainable Raritan River Initiative give awards to recognize outstanding achievement in efforts to revitalize, restore and protect the Raritan resources and promote the area as a premiere place to live, work and raise a family.

The Sustainable Raritan Awards were established in 2010 to promote innovation and energize local efforts to restore and protect the rivers, streams and habitat of the Raritan River and Bay. There were originally six categories of awards: Government Innovation, Leadership, Public Access, Public Education, Remediation and Redevelopment, and Stewardship. Due to the breadth of nominees, additional awards have been added over the years. The awards have highlighted extraordinary accomplishments and inspired other groups across the watershed to achieve comparable levels of excellence; 2016 was no exception.

Debbie Mans, Baykeeper and Executive Director of the NY/NJ Baykeeper – also a member of the Awards Committee – noted, "Given the level of dedication and range of activities by so many people this past year, it was both a pleasure and a challenge to select winners."

This year's recipients and a description of their achievements are as follows:

Government Innovation Award – Somerset County Green Leadership Hub. The mission of the Green Leadership Hub, which is the first of its kind and a pilot program being undertaken in cooperation with Sustainable Jersey, is to serve as facilitator intermediary, educator and connector for municipalities that are in the process of obtaining or renewing Sustainable Jersey certification. The Hub has already: (1) formed an expert Steering Committee to provide advice to municipal officials and Green Teams; (2) created inventories of resources in the government, corporate and non-profit sectors;

(3) hosted a number of forums and networking events where Green Team members can compare notes and obtain advice from experts; and (4) launched the Hub Assistance Program, which is designed to provide assistance to municipalities with specific questions and tasks.

Leadership Award – Bill Schultz, Raritan Riverkeeper. Bill Schultz provides key leadership along the length of the Raritan River, acting as the “voice” for the waterbody in his role as Raritan Riverkeeper. Mr. Schultz works with multiple communities and stakeholders along the River, providing technical expertise, on-the-ground assistance, and pollution enforcement support.

Raritan Riverkeeper advocates for unrestricted access to the River’s shores for boating, swimming, fishing and other recreational activities; a clean River for the health of the community and surrounding habitats; and for the remediation of Superfund and other toxic sites along the River. Mr. Schultz has been the Raritan Riverkeeper for over a decade.

Leadership Award – Candace Ashmun. Candy Ashmun is widely recognized as, simply, a state treasure. She has provided leadership for the past five decades here in the Raritan watershed, where she resides, as well as statewide, on a wide array of environmental and planning issues. Her leadership in the original creation and early years of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions has helped create several generations of local environmental leaders, while her service on the Pinelands Commission and the State Planning Commission have made New Jersey a national leader in regional planning. And, last but not least, Candy has served as a mentor to the leaders of many statewide and local non-profit organizations. Through all of these actions, Candy has personified the very best of leadership, while creating a genuine legacy which will benefit both the current generation as well as many future generations.

Public Education Award – Dr. Chris Obropta and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program Team. Dr. Chris Obropta and the Water Resources Program Team are responsible for the innovative and ambitious work on the project, “Incorporating Green Infrastructure Resiliency in the Raritan River Basin”. This project is laying the foundation to reduce future flooding impacts from the impervious surfaces in the Raritan River Basin, improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and increase resiliency. The team has created impervious cover assessments, impervious cover reduction action plans, web pages, and completed designs for demonstration projects for 54 municipalities in the Raritan River Basin.

Dr. Obropta and his team have produced an impervious cover reduction “how-to” manual in the form of two e-learning tools and the “Green Infrastructure Guidance Manual for New Jersey”. Finally, the team hosted a conference, *Fixing Flooding: One Community at*

a Time, Innovative Solutions Using Green Infrastructure, this past year in Sayreville, NJ. To learn more, please visit: www.water.rutgers.edu.

Public Education Award – Eric Zwerling, Readington Township Board of Education Member and Chairperson of the Green Committee. As a member of the Readington Township Board of Education and Chairperson of the Green Team, Mr. Eric Zwerling has shown a deep devotion to the environment and sustainability. Mr. Zwerling’s accomplishments include providing leadership and support in drafting the school district’s Energy Conservation Policy and selection of an Energy Efficiency Coordinator to promote environmental education, sustainable practice and energy conservation. Most recently, Mr. Zwerling served as the primary district evaluator on a solar energy project, which will bring solar panels to three of the district’s four school buildings. In Mr. Zwerling’s official duties, he is Director of the Rutgers Noise Technical Assistance Center in the Department of Environmental Sciences.

Sustainability Award – Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association’s Watershed Center for Environmental Advocacy, Science and Education. Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association’s Watershed Center for Environmental Advocacy, Science and Education, completed in 2015, facilitates a new organizational strategy and program to encourage understanding and replication of the “best practices” demonstrated there. The LEED-Platinum Center is located on a previously developed site. The landscape design interprets the ecological resources of the Stony Brook Millstone Watershed focusing on water and native plantings and emphasizes the organization’s informality while providing a gateway to the site. The Center is a fine example of Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association’s leadership role in environmental protection and provides a compelling platform from which the organization can advance its mission.

Stewardship Award – Beth Davisson and Larry Jacobs. Beth Davisson and Larry Jacobs demonstrated vital leadership and dogged determination in the preservation of the 172 acre Lana Lobell Farm in Bedminster Township. This preservation effort took more than ten years of planning and negotiations to complete and included federal, state, county, municipal, and non-profit partners and funding sources. The preservation of Lana Lobell Farm helps secure important local and regional conservation objectives. The project will help protect water quality in the Lamington River, sustain the rural character of western Somerset County, and preserve a working farm that has a significant place in New Jersey’s rich equine history.

Non-Profit Innovation Award – New Jersey Highlands Coalition’s Small Grants Program. The New Jersey Highlands Coalition’s Small Grants Program awards a number of grants to assist grassroots organizations working on projects located within the New Jersey Highlands or associated with protecting New Jersey Highlands environmental, cultural, and historic resources, including within the Raritan River’s

watershed, whose headwaters rise in the New Jersey Highlands. The Highlands Coalition has funded grants every year since its inception in 2007. These grants have successfully supported a variety of organizations throughout the Raritan Highlands region, including in Roxbury, Bedminster, and Mine Hill, among others. This program has been an essential element in the success of many grassroots organizations.

Bill Kibler, Director of Policy for the Raritan Headwaters and a member of the Awards Committee said, "We noted this year that there has been an increase in citizen involvement in projects throughout the watershed, and we received several nominations for these actions, which did not fit neatly into the existing award categories. So, beginning in 2017, we will add a new award category – Citizen Action – in order to encourage and recognize these types of individual commitments to projects such as stream clean ups, water quality monitoring, and similar critical citizen actions."

The Awards Committee for this year's awards included, Michael Catania, Executive Director of the Duke Farms Foundation, William Kibler, Director of Policy for the Raritan Headwaters, and Debbie Mans, Baykeeper and Executive Director of the NY/NJ Baykeeper. All three of the organizations that they represent are members of the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative. Michael and Debbie also serve on the Steering Committee for the Sustainable Raritan River Initiative.

Rutgers University launched the Sustainable Raritan River Initiative in 2009 to bring together concerned scientists, environmentalists, engineers, businesses, community leaders and governmental entities to craft an agenda that meets the goals of the U.S. Clean Water Act to restore and preserve New Jersey's Raritan River, its tributaries and its bay. The Initiative, a joint program of the [Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy](#) and the [School of Environmental and Biological Sciences](#), partners with other Rutgers schools, centers and programs to ensure the best contributions from the sciences, planning and policy.

The Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative is a growing network of over 130 organizations, governmental entities and businesses in the Raritan River region working together to balance social, economic and environmental objectives towards the common goal of restoring the Raritan River, its tributaries and its estuary for current and future generations. Each member organization in the Collaborative contributes to the overall restoration and preservation of the River.

To learn more about the Sustainable Raritan Awards, the Sustainable Raritan River Initiative, or the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative, visit www.raritan.rutgers.edu.

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