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For Immediate Release

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SUSTAINABLE RARITAN RIVER AWARDS ANNOUNCED AT 9TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

(New Brunswick, N.J.) Eight individuals and organizations received Sustainable Raritan River Awards at the 9th Annual Sustainable Raritan Conference and Awards Ceremony at Rutgers' Douglass Student Center on Friday, June 9, 2017. The annual awards 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.

"As in previous years, we were very impressed with both the range and sophistication of activities and projects which are underway on the Raritan Watershed. This year's awardees represent an extremely thoughtful group of individuals and organizations who are truly making a significant difference" stated Michael Catania of Duke Farms, one of the judges for these awards.

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; in 2017 a new award for Citizen Action was added. The awards highlight extraordinary accomplishments and inspire other groups across the watershed to achieve comparable levels of excellence.

"It is great to celebrate our successes in the Raritan River Basin and Bay to improve water quality with these awards," said Debbie Mans, Executive Director, NY/NJ Baykeeper. "All the awardees are real inspirations and remind us that local action matters and can make a big difference to improve our communities and environment."

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

Government Innovation Award – Monmouth County Planning Department/Monmouth High Water Program. The Monmouth County High Water Mark Initiative is a unique public education effort that is raising awareness in Raritan Bayshore communities about flood risk and encouraging smart mitigation actions. To date, 72 signs have been posted in 15 municipalities showing where floodwaters reached during Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy. The Initiative provides participating Community Rating System communities an opportunity to gain points towards lowering their community rating and saving property owners money via lower insurance premiums. Launched in 2015, the Initiative is being led by the Monmouth County Division of Planning and County Office of Emergency Management in partnership with FEMA National Flood Insurance Program, Monmouth University Urban Coast Institute, and New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium.

Leadership Award – Daniel Van Abs, Rutgers University. Dr. Daniel Van Abs is a true leader in protecting the Raritan River. Dan has over 30 years of public and non-profit sector experience developing and implementing successful and award winning programs in watershed protection, water supply management, water quality protection, open space planning, land use management, and wastewater management. During his career at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Dan managed statewide water resources planning. He created the Watershed Protection Unit at the New Jersey Water Supply Authority. As its first director, he created the source water protection program and led the effort to create the comprehensive Raritan Basin Watershed Management Plan in 2002. As Senior Director for Planning & Science with the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council, he was instrumental in creating and implementing the Highlands Regional Master Plan. Throughout his career, Dan has taught, led, and mentored many of those who work to improve conditions in the Raritan Basin and throughout New Jersey today. His contributions to the Raritan Basin are unparalleled.

Leadership Award – Peter Palmer, Freeholder Director, Somerset County. During a 55-year long career dedicated to public service, Peter has served as Mayor of Bernardsville

Borough, Freeholder for Somerset County, Chair of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Agency, President of the New Jersey Association of Counties, and as a member and officer of other public bodies, boards and commissions too numerous to mention. Throughout this time, he has been a stalwart leader who has made a significant difference in the quality of life for citizens of Somerset County, the Raritan River watershed, and the State. Included among his signature accomplishments are: (1) providing assistance to 19 of the 21 municipalities in Somerset County for their participation in and certification by Sustainable Jersey; (2) preserving of significant amounts of open space and farmland throughout the county; (3) creating and implementing the Somerset County Economic Development Strategy via a unique partnership between the county and the Somerset County Business Partnership; (4) creating the successful “One-Seat Ride Campaign to allow local commuters to have direct passenger rail access to New York City; (5) supporting Priority Investment in Somerset County Initiative to advance smart planning and preservation; and (6) obtaining the designation of the Somerset County Library System as one of America’s Four Star library systems.

Public Access Award – City of Perth Amboy. Perth Amboy is committed to making the entirety of its three-mile shoreline publically accessible. The City is currently investing in the remediation and redevelopment of a former scrap metal yard and historic fill site into new park spaces along the Raritan River. The vision is to link this to existing waterfront open space, walkways, and municipal fishing piers. The City also sponsors kayaking events and high school sailing activities.

Public Education Award – Sandra Meola, Communications and Outreach Director, NY-NJ Baykeeper. As part of her responsibilities for Baykeeper’s outreach program, Sandra manages the Plastics Reduction Campaign. She developed the sampling protocol for this effort, conducted sampling throughout the Estuary, partnered with Rutgers to conduct lab analysis of the samples, and then wrote and released the first NY-NJ Harbor Estuary Plastic Collection Report. This report helped to draw public attention to the fact that, at any given time, there are up to 165 million pieces of plastic floating around the Estuary, which creates a plastic smog that threatens water quality and wildlife and slowly works its way up the food chain. Sandra’s work on this issue has greatly increased community awareness not only about the problem of plastic pollution, but also how individuals contribute to the problem by

littering and by using single use plastics and products that contain microbeads, and how they can change their own behavior to lessen their impact on the environment.

Stewardship Award - AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassadors. This award is presented to AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassadors Carmela Buono, Anna Marshall, and Katee Meckeler for their work on a riparian restoration project that targeted six different areas for tree planting. The Ambassadors picked up tree saplings, sorted them, and took the lead in organizing two planting sites each. They recruited, organized, and trained numerous volunteers from local partner organizations and communities. Collectively, 700 trees were planted. Their effort inaugurates a legacy project intended to be continued by future Watershed Ambassadors in the Raritan basin. The passion, enthusiasm, and initiative demonstrated by Carmela, Anna, and Katee reflect great credit on themselves, the AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassadors program, and the communities they serve.

Non-Profit Innovation Award – coLAB-Arts. The mission of coLAB-Arts, a New Brunswick-based and artist-driven organization, is to “create more livable, sustainable and exciting communities through art.” It does this by engaging “artists, social advocates and communities to create transformative new work.” This mission has been well realized to the benefit of the Raritan River and watershed. In 2016, coLAB-Arts engaged a special focus on re-connecting central New Jersey residents to the River and the lower Raritan watershed through several events, including “A Watershed Moment”, an immersive dance and musical performance piece; and second, “Squaring the Circle”, a commissioned piece of new choreography developed as part of the Motion New Dance Work residency of Monteleone Dance with the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership. These works served as wonderful tools to convey the wide variety of ecological issues facing the river. This unique and effective approach to watershed protection represents an innovative use of the performing arts as an effective means of promoting social change and ecological enhancement.

Citizen Action Award – Andy Still. If anyone embodies the idea that one person can make a difference, it is Andy Still. Andy has participated in dozens of Raritan River clean-ups, resulting in tons of garbage removed from the watershed. Andy has volunteered numerous hours to assist with the Rutgers Raritan River Migratory Fish Passage Study. Andy shares his

personal reflections and passions for the River via social media, inspiring us all to do our part to make the Raritan River fishable and swimmable.

“It’s amazing and humbling to see the diversity of great work happening throughout the Raritan Basin,” noted Bill Kibler, Director of Policy at Raritan Headwaters. “I can hardly wait to read the nominations for the tenth annual conference next year!”

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 NY/NJ Baykeeper. All three of the organizations that they represent are members of the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative, 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.

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.

Award nominations are accepted throughout the year. To learn more about the Awards, the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative, or Rutgers’ Sustainable Raritan River Initiative, visit www.raritan.rutgers.edu.

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