

Congress Passes Legislation to Protect Water Sources in Highlands

By RAYMOND HERNANDEZ

WASHINGTON, Nov. 19 — Congress has approved legislation that sets aside about \$110 million to protect a vast stretch of wilderness that provides drinking water to 11 million people in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, lawmakers announced Friday.

The measure would provide more than \$10 million a year over the next 10 years to protect the Highlands, a region stretching across two million acres from western Connecticut across New York's Lower Hudson Valley and northern New Jersey into east central Pennsylvania.

The legislation establishes a Highland Stewardship Area that will be

administered by the secretaries of the Agriculture and the Interior Departments. All four states will be able to draw from the \$10 million that the federal government sets aside to help them buy land.

But before being able to tap any money, the governors of each state would have to submit preservation plans to the federal government. In addition, the bill provides another \$10 million for planning over 10 years, according to lawmakers.

The legislation will now be sent to the president, who is expected to approve it.

The region is made of a series of ridges and valleys that are part of the Appalachians, and it is dotted

with forest and farmland that provide a habitat for a wide array of plant and animal species.

The region also includes recreational destinations like the Morristown National Historical Park, the Walkkill River National Wildlife Refuge and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, along with military sites like the Picatinny Arsenal and the United States Military Academy at West Point.

In the House, the legislation was championed by Representative Rodney P. Frelinghuysen, a New Jersey Republican who sits on the powerful Appropriations Committee. In the Senate, the bill's main supporters included Charles E. Schumer and Hil-

lary Rodham Clinton, Democrats from New York, as well as Jon S. Corzine and Frank R. Lautenberg, Democrats from New Jersey.

In announcing passage of the legislation, Mr. Schumer said, "With the pressure of sprawl constantly increasing and threatening our open spaces, we need to take steps to make sure that the clean air, water and environment that New Yorkers enjoy today survive for future generations."

Mrs. Clinton offered similar praise. "This is vital to our efforts to preserve our precious open space in the New York metropolitan region and the Lower Hudson Valley," she said.