



ENVIRONMENTAL FEDERATION NEWS

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ACT NOW TO SAVE THE NJ HIGHLANDS & HALF OF NJ'S DRINKING WATER

*When the well is dry...
We know the worth of water.
-Ben Franklin*

The NJ Highlands, consisting of 800,000 acres of

largely contiguous forest stretching from Northwest Bergen County to Northern Hunterdon County, is under assault from over development and sprawl. Over 5,000 acres of the NJ Highlands are lost to sprawling development every year. Build out could be reached in 20 to 30 years—a development pace that is 50% greater than the state average.

More than 5 million people in over 30 of New Jersey's 40 legislative districts receive at least some of their water from the NJ Highlands. Nearly 150 threatened or endangered species call it their home. NJ's 3 largest industries—food processing, tourism, and pharmaceuticals—including M&M's, Valium, Viagra, Haagen-Dazs, Progresso Soup, Budweiser, Michelob, and Goya Beans need clean Highlands water to manufacture their product. The Highlands also hosts more ecotourists each year than Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Parks combined.

It is absolutely critical that we enhance protection for the NJ Highlands before it is too late. Governor McGreevey, Senators Smith (D-Middlesex) and Martin (R-Morris), Assemblyman McKeon (D-Essex) and several other legislators, most notably Senate President Codey, have teamed up to do just that through the "The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act" (S1/A2635).

For the past few months environmental groups, including NJEF, Environmental Defense, NJ Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG), Sierra Club, NJ Audubon, NJ Conservation Foundation, Highlands Coalition, Passaic River Coalition, Skylands Clean, Delaware Riverkeeper, Pinelands Preservation Alliance, Association of NJ Environmental Commissions (ANJEC), Appalachian Mountain Club, and NY-NJ Trails Conference have orchestrated a massive campaign to pass Highlands legislation. Tens of thousands of emails, faxes, phone calls, and letters from individuals and organizations have poured into legislative offices across New Jersey.

Its passage would be the greatest environmental accomplishment in New Jersey history. It will:

- Permanently protect 395,000 acres (the "preservation area") through a variety of strategies;
- Create a regional planning council, with a majority being elected officials from the Highlands, that develops a comprehensive plan for the entire NJ Highlands with authority within the "preservation area" and an advisory role outside of it;
- Enhance NJDEP's regulatory programs that protect water quality and natural resources;
- Prohibit mandatory growth areas;
- Provide additional benefits to municipalities whose master plans are consistent with the regional plan, such as: watershed offset aid and property tax relief; a state legal shield to support municipal planning decisions; assist planning and economic development consistent with natural resources capacity constraints and enhanced tourism and recreational opportunities;
- Create the strongest landowner equity protection of any NJ land preservation initiative to date;
- Exempt single family homes, redevelopment, additions, decks, plowing, driveways, etc.;
- Provide additional funding and preservation rounds for Highlands farms, using a ranking system that reflects the goals of preserving drinking water quantity and quality; and
- Establish affordable housing obligations consistent with the regional planning and preservation goals.

This bill does not include any type of moratorium on development and significant compromises have already been made. While additional amendments are likely, they must not undermine the very premise of the bill—preservation of this unique and vital natural treasure.

To ensure this critical legislation is signed into law by June 30th, NJ legislators must hear from you too.



See page 4 to take action!

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