

Office of the Governor

News Releases

[Previous Screen](#)

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

Contact: Micah Rasmussen
609-777-2600

RELEASE: August 10, 2004

Governor McGreevey Enacts Historic Highlands Legislation, Protects Drinking Water for 5.4 Million New Jersey Residents

Highlands Act Continues New Jersey's Legacy of Environmental Protection

(WANAQUE) — Governor James E. McGreevey today signed historic legislation that preserves nearly 400,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land in New Jersey's Highlands region and protects the source of clean drinking water for 5.4 million New Jersey residents.

"The Highlands region has long been one of the missing jewels in this country's and our state's preservation efforts," McGreevey said. "No longer. By signing the Highlands Act today, we are keeping our commitment to New Jersey families and ensuring clean drinking water for our children. Today is the crowning moment in our efforts to protect the environment. Today is a wonderful day for New Jersey, a wonderful day for our environment and our children, and a wonderful day for the future of this great state."

The Governor signed the landmark Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act during a noon news conference at the Wanaque Reservoir Dam in Wanaque. He was joined by: former governors Brendan T. Byrne and James J. Florio; the bill's sponsors Sen. Bob Smith, Sen. Robert J. Martin, and Assemblyman John F. McKeon; Passaic County Freeholder and Highlands Task Force Member Lois Cuccinello; Lebanon Township Mayor and Highlands Task Force Member Eileen Swan, and 13-year-old Catherine Cacciola of Girl Scout Troop 404 in Paramus.

The event was also attended by numerous local officials, area scouting groups and various other environmental advocates.

The Highlands Act is the toughest of its kind in the nation and carries on the legacy of environmental protection that is the hallmark of New Jersey, from preserving the Pinelands, to protecting wetlands to saving open space.

"This is one of the most significant pieces of environmental legislation ever passed," said Byrne. "It makes giant steps to preserve open spaces in a critical area of New Jersey".

Florio echoed Byrne.

"The Highlands Act represents the most significant advancement of natural resource protection in New Jersey since passage of the Pinelands Act 25 years ago," said Florio, Chairman of the New Jersey Pinelands Commission. "Like the Pinelands law, this measure will ensure clean, abundant water and protect the ecology of a unique and vulnerable natural area. I commend Governor McGreevey for taking a tough stand to ensure the passage of this landmark legislation. This is truly a legacy accomplishment for the Governor."

Smith, co-sponsor of the Act, said he has long recognized the need to protect the Highlands.

"For some, the fight to protect the New Jersey Highlands has gone on for decades," said Smith, Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. "For others, it has only felt like it took that long, despite objections by opponents that it was 'rushed through the legislative process.' In any event, through careful deliberation and measured response, we've come up with a bill that will be celebrated in New Jersey as one of the biggest environmental accomplishments in decades."

McKeon agreed.

"It is rewarding to witness the enthusiasm of New Jerseyans in protecting this important forested region and preserving its vital natural resources," said McKeon. "This landmark legislation is our chance to preserve New Jersey's greatest source of drinking water for future generations. I am proud that we have not let this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity pass us by."

Sixty-four percent of New Jersey residents, about 5.4 million people, receive their water from the Highlands. Those residents live in 292 municipalities, in 16 counties. And they include 900,000 people in urban areas such as Newark and Jersey City.

The New Jersey Highlands is a 1,000 square mile area in the Northwest part of the State, stretching from Phillipsburg in the Southwest to Ringwood in the Northeast. It lies within portions of seven counties (Hunterdon, Somerset, Sussex, Warren, Morris, Passaic and Bergen) and 87 municipalities.

Between 1995 and 2000, sprawl consumed 25,000 acres of forests and farmland in the Highlands. Population growth is increasing in the Highlands at a rate nearly 50 percent faster than the statewide rate.

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act designates a preservation area of 400,000 acres where development will be significantly curtailed. The Act heightens environmental standards to protect this area, which includes the region's most

environmentally sensitive land, and establishes the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council. The Council will work with local officials to prepare a master plan for the entire Highlands region, including both the preservation and planning areas, within the next 18 months.

Information about the Highlands Act and answers to frequently asked questions is available at <http://www.nj.gov/dep/highlands/>, a new website unveiled by the Department of Environmental Protection today.

Under Governor McGreevey, New Jersey has protected more than 580 miles of waterways, saved 66,429 acres of open space and preserved more than 40,000 acres of farmland.

State of New Jersey Governor's Office

statewide: njhome | my new jersey | people | business | government | departments | search
Copyright © State of New Jersey, 2002