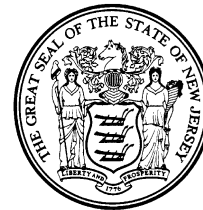


News From NJ Senate Democrats



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SENATOR SMITH HAILS HIGHLANDS BILL SIGNING

Senate Environment Committee Chair / Bill Sponsor Says 'It's a Great Day for the Environment'

WANAQUE RESERVOIR - Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee and the prime sponsor of a bill to restrict development in the New Jersey Highlands to protect the source of drinking water for more than 4.5 million people, issued the following statement regarding the signing of the bill into law today:

"This truly is an historic day for New Jersey's environment, because efforts to protect the drinking water for more than half the population are finally being codified into law.

"The push to protect New Jersey's Highlands region was unprecedented in its thoroughness, with input coming from a wide range of interested parties to produce a fair, balanced approach to conserve clean drinking water in the Garden State for generations of New Jerseyans to come.

"During the legislative process for the Highlands bill, we took the debate to the people, by holding public meetings in the regions of the State that need to be the stewards of water protection, because without the support and consent of a majority of the Highlands' residents, none of this would be possible.

"I'd like to again extend my public gratitude to the bill's co-sponsors, Senator Bob Martin and Assemblymen John McKeon and Louis Manzo, as well as the members of the Senate Environment Committee and the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee, who deliberated over this very complex initiative for several months of hearings and testimony. The input of committee members and the commitment of the bill sponsors were vital in keeping intact the goals of preserving watershed lands without penalizing residents in the region.

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"I'd also like to thank Governor McGreevey for making the Highlands bill a priority of his administration. His environmental legacy will be recorded with the likes of other great preservationists, such as former Governor Brendan Byrne in his efforts to protect the Pinelands, former Governor Christie Whitman, who pushed for the Green Acres Open Space Protection initiative, and former Governor Tom Kean, who worked to protect New Jersey's environmentally fragile wetlands.

"For some, the fight to protect the New Jersey Highlands has gone on for decades. 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."

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