

# *News From New Jersey Democrats*



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## **SMITH AND McKEON ANNOUNCE BOUNDARIES FOR HIGHLANDS PRESERVATION AREA**

**TRENTON** - Senator Bob Smith and Assemblyman John F. McKeon, the two prime sponsors of legislation to protect and preserve the New Jersey Highlands -- a vital water supply for more than half of New Jersey's population -- today announced the release of boundaries for the Highlands preservation area.

"When we're talking about preserving a core area in the Highlands, I think it's important for people to see just what area is being affected," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset and Chair of the Senate Environment Committee. "Obviously, we could not close off the entire 800,000 acre region to development, especially in a State like New Jersey that is so densely populated, but we chose the most critical areas to preserve the health and safety of our State's pristine water resources to be included in the Highlands core."

"Now, residents can see more clearly that we're not trying to prevent development in the entire Highlands region, just steer unhealthy development away from the most sensitive areas," said Assemblyman McKeon, D-Essex, and Chair of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee. "I defy anyone to disagree that the core areas we have targeted for preservation are critical to the future of New Jersey's drinking water supply."

Through the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (S-1 / A-2635), the core area, consisting of 395,000 of the 800,000 acres that make up the New Jersey Highlands region, will be protected from major development to ensure the quality of the water supply from the Highlands.

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Of the 395,000 acres that make up the core area, 171,000 acres -- or 43 percent --

already received environmental protection while 79,000 acres -- 20 percent -- have already been developed, leaving 145,000 acres -- or 37 percent -- of undeveloped, unprotected land.

"By releasing the boundaries to the public, we hope to elicit ideas on how best to go about protecting those 145,000 acres, while being sensitive to the needs of property owners," said Assemblyman McKeon. "This may be our last opportunity to preserve the incredible natural resource that millions depend upon for their drinking water. We want to do it right."

The release today of the core area boundaries is part of the ongoing effort in the New Jersey Legislature to preserve and protect valuable watershed land in the New Jersey Highlands. More than 4 million people receive drinking water from the Highlands region, and Senator Smith said that it is imperative in the long-term to ensure that the water resources in the region remain pristine and contaminant-free.

"Whenever you advocate restricting development in an area, you have to back that up with credible evidence that the restriction will serve the greater good," said Senator Smith. "I think in this case, we're asking for less than 400,000 acres to benefit more than 4 million people. When you look at the numbers, the scales tip greatly in favor of preservation over development for the core Highlands area."

Since March, Senator Smith and Assemblyman McKeon have held four joint public meetings of the Senate Environment Committee and the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee -- three of which were held in the Highlands region -- to gather public comment over the legislation. The two legislators said that they hope to be able to release the bill from committees at the next and final hearing, held in Trenton on April 22nd, Earth Day.

Senator Smith and Assemblyman McKeon added that they will entertain suggestions for any necessary technical changes to the boundaries from the public for 30 days following the final Highlands hearing on April 22nd. Recommendations for changes to the boundaries should be e-mailed to [SenBSmith@njleg.org](mailto:SenBSmith@njleg.org) or [AsmMcKeon@njleg.org](mailto:AsmMcKeon@njleg.org). A map of the area also will be available on [www.senatorbobsmith.org](http://www.senatorbobsmith.org), later today, to give interested parties a better idea of the area being preserved.

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SEE ATTACHED BACKGROUND SHEET ON PRESERVATION EFFORT OF THE NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS