



NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COALITION

ACTION ALERT

Tell Governor Corzine to Veto the Minutes of the Highlands Council's vote to adopt a Highlands Regional Master Plan that fails to met the mandates of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act

By a 9-5 vote, the Highlands Council approved a resolution to adopt the Regional Master Plan at the July 17th meeting in Morristown. More than three-quarters of the speakers from the public sought necessary strengthening amendments which would have protected water supplies and ensuring that existing conditions are not degraded below an acceptable public health and safety standard. All of these critical amendments failed to be approved, while 3 clarifying and detail specific amendments were approved. The minutes of the July 17th meeting must be approved by the Governor before Plan implementation can begin.

The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act was passed to accomplish the singular goal of protecting the water resources of the NJ Highlands. **The current Plan will fail to achieve this goal unless it prohibits development in areas that will put our water supply at risk.**

What can you do? Contact Governor Corzine and tell him to send the Highlands Council back to the table and have the Council fix the areas of the plan that will threaten public health by endangering both the quantity and quality of drinking water supplies that serve over 5.4 million New Jersey residents and our state's 3 largest industries.

Tell Governor Corzine to fulfill his public trust responsibility as guardian of New Jersey's natural resources, which are legally held in trust for the people of the state, that you demand a plan that will live up to the Highlands Act, that won't put at risk our water supply, and that will prohibit development in environmentally sensitive areas, on prime agricultural soils and in areas of chronic water shortage.

Let Governor Corzine know that the Plan's concept of equity, which only recognizes landowners, is wrong-headed and a key statement that sets the theme for a weak plan. It should recognize everyone who lives, works or plays in the Highlands, its visitors, and all the people and businesses that rely upon its clean water supply—both in and out of the Highlands, as legitimate stakeholders in the Highlands' resources.

Let Governor Corzine know that the following provisions of the Highlands Regional Master Plan are not consistent with the 2004 Highlands Act:

- The exacerbation of existing ground water deficits by allowing new water uses in sub-watersheds determined by the Highlands Council to be experiencing deficit water supply conditions.
- The allowance for clustered residential developments to release up to 10 mg/L of nitrate pollutants into the ground adjacent to drinking water wells serving the clustered development, far in excess of NJDEP's statewide standard for nitrate pollutants of 2 mg/L. In addition, these dangerous thresholds may quickly be exceeded by agricultural uses and pollutants adjacent to the cluster. The residents who depend upon these groundwater sources will be placed at risk, as will groundwater quality downstream.

- Permitting designated Highlands Redevelopment Areas to encroach on undisturbed C1 and C2 stream buffers in the Preservation Area.

To contact Governor Corzine:

- Fill out an on-line form at <http://www.state.nj.us/governor/govmail.html>
- Call the Governor's Office at 609-292-6000
- Send a letter to:

Honorable Jon S. Corzine
Governor, State of New Jersey
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Suggested language to include in your message to Governor Corzine:

- Allowing development in water deficit areas puts our water supply unnecessarily at risk when the focus should be on protecting our streams, reservoirs and drinking water. Required mitigation plans are theoretical at best—they are unproven at the scope proposed. There is too much at stake to pursue this dangerous, speculative policy.
- Requiring residential, clustered development on farms will forever reduce the land available for farming in New Jersey and permanently reduce the available fresh produce from New Jersey's farms. It will forever change the unique character of the Highlands and the agricultural lifestyle that the Highlands Act mandates the Council to protect. It will pockmark the landscape with remote hamlets located far from amenities and transportation hubs, encourage automobile dependency at ever increasing fuel costs and additionally load our aquifers, lakes and streams—the sources of our drinking water, with septic system pollutants.
- Allowing both non-conforming and conforming municipalities to petition for adjustments to the Land Use Capability Zones will discredit and undermine the Council's own science. It will discourage conformance to the Regional Master Plan. Allowing petitions to redraw Zones to accommodate development driven requests will reduce the protections the Zones are meant to establish.
- Allowing disturbances within the 300' buffer to Highlands Open Waters does not protect our waterways. Without a clear statement that restoration of existing disturbances is a required goal of conformance, policies of flexible buffers and no required restoration will further deterioration of water quality in the Highlands.
- The Regional Master Plan currently addresses only the equity concerns of landowners. This is a huge injustice to the rest of the population both within and outside of the Highlands who rely upon its resources. These resources are held in the public trust, for residents and businesses throughout our entire state. It is the sole foundation upon which a regional master plan can succeed. The fundamental fact that clean and plentiful drinking water drives our state's economy must be recognized and addressed.
- A strong Highlands Regional Master Plan which is protective of the region's water, forest and wildlife is essential to the current and future fiscal health of the Garden State.

For more information contact elliott@njhighlandscoalition.org or visit our website at www.njhighlandscoalition.org