

Members of the Highlands Coalition — a collection of New Jersey environmental organizations working together to support the 2004 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act — fear that Gov. Chris Christie is attempting to use his power of appointment to create an anti-Highlands majority on the 15-member Highlands Council. His goal? To obstruct implementation of Highlands-related planning efforts in New Jersey towns until Republicans are able to win control of the Legislature. When that happens, they believe Christie will attempt to overturn the law, which the governor has said is “based on a lie” — that the state would compensate landowners for lost property value. (That’s a claim the Coalition says is untrue.)

Among the Christie appointees the Coalition’s members believe will work against the law: Roxbury Mayor Jim Rilee, Hunterdon County Freeholder Robert Walton and Lopatcong Councilman James Mengucci.

Today, members of the Highlands Coalition explain why the public should join them in opposing Christie’s appointments to the Highlands Council.

Christie, appointees have made their opposition clear

The Highlands Act protects the water supply for 64 percent of New Jersey’s residents. A total of 5.4 million people living in 244 towns, in 16 counties, receive some or all of their water from the New Jersey Highlands.

Statewide public trust is shouldered by the 15-member Highlands Council. When appointed, each member takes an oath to uphold the laws that govern our state, which includes the Highlands Act.

Governor Christie has made his opposition to the Highlands Act clear (see our YouTube video at www.njhighlandscoalition.org). Further, he nominated 10 people to serve on the Highlands Council, several of whom have made their opposition to the Act very clear. In particular, Sam Race, Richard Vohden, Jim Rilee, and Rob Walton have made public statements that reveal their abiding contempt for the Act. One recommended that his town illegally ignore requirements of the Act. If the governor’s full slate of nominees were approved, no one will represent Highlands water users and only one person will



have any expertise in environmental science. The entire proposed slate is white and male.

The Senate Judiciary Committee should only approve nominees who work to fulfill the goals of Highlands Act, which is to protect Highlands water for all of us.

Julia Somers
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NJ HIGHLANDS COALITION

Christie council could render Highlands Act weak, irrelevant

The governor has been clear that not having popular support for a repeal of the Highlands Act, through strategic appointments to the Highlands Council, he hopes to accomplish the same thing. What is at risk if he succeeds? The same risk placed on hens when foxes are appointed as the guardians.



The momentum the Council has until now achieved with municipal conformance could be stalled. Waivers could be granted and approvals given to development projects without the level of diligence that a balanced Council would provide. Highlands Act exemptions and Redevelopment Area

Designations could be rubber-stamped.

By law, the Council must re-examine, modify and adopt a new Highlands Regional Master Plan in 2014. With a Highlands Council that is subverted with Highlands Act opponents, the new Master Plan could be made weak and irrelevant.

New Jersey, as a consequence, would become a less attractive place to live, to do business, to visit, and to play in. The Highlands resources that most of New Jersey had sought to protect will once again be offered for paving over.

Elliott Ruga
SENIOR POLICY ANALYST, NJ HIGHLANDS COALITION

Appointees include too many politicians, too few experts

To protect the New Jersey Highlands region, the New Jersey Legislature passed a new law in 2004 with a detailed set of requirements for membership on the Highlands Council.

In addition to a bipartisan balance of eight elected officials, the law requires the appointment of seven public members to represent a “range of expertise, knowledge, or experience in water quality protection, natural resources protection, environmental protection, agriculture, forestry, land use, or economic development.” This expertise is important, given the Council’s agenda to protect the



water supply for more than half of New Jersey’s residents.

Governor Christie’s recent slate of 10 nominees to the Highlands Council lacks the balance and range of expertise required by law. In addition to avowed opponents of the Highlands Act, the slate includes too many elected officials and not enough public members who can bring the range of experience envisioned in the law.

The Governor should reconsider his nominees. If he does not, the Senate, which must approve the nominees, should not approve the slate. The future of the Highlands — and our water supply — depends on it.

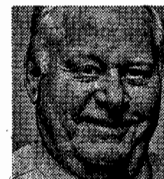
Alison Mitchell
DIRECTOR OF POLICY, NEW JERSEY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Political battles should not overshadow the public interest

The legislative findings section of the Highlands Act closes with the following: “... and that all such aforementioned

measures should be guided ... by an abiding ... commitment to protecting the incomparable water resources and natural beauty of the New Jersey Highlands so as to preserve them intact, in trust, forever for the pleasure, enjoyment, and use of future generations...”

The Legislature recognized that the protection of the resources of the Highlands would require a long-term commitment. Stopping and, ultimately, reversing the assaults on our essential water supplies and open spaces requires wise public administration and continuity over a long period of time; longer than a single governor’s term. That is why the governor’s appointments to the Highlands Council, the body charged with this awe-



some task, are of critical concern.

Appointees should be carefully selected and fully vetted with regard to their character, integrity and technical qualifications but more importantly, to verify that they possess the inclination to act in the public interest, rather than serving short term political or narrow ideological objectives. Those that oppose the Highlands Act have no rightful place on the Council.

David Peifer
HIGHLANDS PROJECT DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONS

Clean Highlands water is essential to N.J. businesses

Water in the Highlands is essentially free. Consumers of water from Highlands sources pay for the costs of storing it, the minimal treatment it gets, and having it delivered to the tap. This provides a tremendous economic advantage for the beverage, pharmaceutical and other industries in New Jersey that rely on a clean and plentiful supply of Highlands water. Anheuser Busch, Merck and Pfizer are just a few examples that come to mind. Without the Highlands Act and the work of the Highlands Council, those taps could run dry, creating another major disincentive for doing business in New Jersey.



In 2003, in its Report to the Governor and Legislature, the Highlands Task Force referred to a recently concluded state study. The study found that if development patterns in the Highlands were allowed to continue, by the year 2050 it would cost an additional \$30 billion to \$50 billion to treat the water that the Highlands watersheds were providing at no cost.

If the governor succeeds in undermining the Highlands Act by appointing anti-Highlands Act activists to the Highlands Council, will he be here to respond to the water-using industries when they scout other states where water is more plentiful and clean?

Erica Van Auken
CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR, NJ HIGHLANDS COALITION