



## What opponents fail to say about development rights in the Highlands

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By **Letters to the Editor/Hunterdon County Democrat**

### To the Editor:

Opponents of the 2004 Highlands Act continue to generate controversy by demanding compensation based on unfounded claims of diminished land values.

Opponents fail to mention the state and local preservation dollars available for the purchase of properties or development rights in the Highlands. Since 2000, the state has contributed \$520 million to county, municipal and non-profit preservation purchases in the Highlands. About \$50 million has been allocated for Highlands open space and farmland preservation for fiscal year 2011.

The Highlands Council recently launched a transfer of development rights program in which landowners continue to own, use, and can sell their land. To date, \$2.6 million has been spent to preserve 300 acres in the Highlands preservation area at an average of \$8,967 an acre. Applications representing 1,700 acres are currently under consideration.

Landowners who claim they are owed compensation for reduced land values caused by the act also fail to mention that state preservation purchase agreements use appraisals based on zoning and regulations that were in place prior to the Highlands Act.

Every legal challenge to the act claiming unjust compensation has been denied. However, New Jersey taxpayers continue to support land preservation on generous terms in return for something of value, in this case, a plentiful water supply.

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