

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Signs Environmental Protection Legislation

Gov. Christie Whitman today signed legislation to help ensure that New Jersey's water supply remains clean and pristine. The legislation makes available \$100 million in loans through the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust for clean water and drinking water projects. The Governor also signed legislation appropriating \$15 million for land acquisition along the Passaic River floodway.

"The legislation that I am signing today, along with the open space proposal that will go before the voters in November, are examples of the kind of intelligent environmental planning needed to ensure a healthy future for the residents of this state," said the Governor. "We are all working toward common goals - keeping our rivers and streams clean, ensuring that our drinking water is safe and preserving the fields and farms of our Garden State."

Gov. Whitman has called for the preservation of 1 million acres of farmland and open space in New Jersey over the next four years. The Governor has proposed dedicating \$98 million in existing revenues annually over the next ten years to support preservation efforts. The proposal will go before the voters for approval in November. The Governor urged voters to support the proposal and ensure a legacy of green pastures and farmland for generations to come.

The legislative package signed by the Governor included A-1953, A-2089, A-2090, A-2091, A-2092. The bills authorize a series of low interest loans from the Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Infrastructure Trust (NJEIT) for several water protection projects. The bills take full advantage of appropriated federal and state funds for water protection, and ensure an increased quality of life for the citizens of New Jersey.

The NJEIT, formerly the Wastewater Treatment Trust, was expanded in 1997 to provide loans for not only wastewater treatment system upgrades, but also for drinking water projects and storm water projects.

The Governor signed A-1953, which appropriates \$15 million from the 1995 New Jersey Inland Blue Acres Fund to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to purchase property along the Passaic River floodway and its tributaries for recreation and conservation purposes. The properties that the bill would affect are those which have been damaged by, or which may be prone to damage by, storms or storm-related flooding, or that may buffer or protect other lands from such damage.

"This property has been repeatedly damaged due to flooding. Now, instead of costly rebuilding after each storm, only to have to rebuild again, this land will be used for the more suitable purposes of recreation and conservation," said the Governor.

Eligible properties are in Fairfield, Essex County; East Hanover, Lincoln Park, Montville, Pequannock and Riverdale in Morris County and in Little Falls, Pompton Lakes and Wayne in Passaic County. The Inland Blue Acres Fund was established under the Green Acres, Farmland and Historic Preservation and Blue Acres Bond Act of 1995.

A-1953 was sponsored by Assembly Members Gerald H. Zecker (R-Essex/Passaic) and Carol J. Murphy (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic) and Senators Robert J. Martin (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic) and Norman M. Robertson (R-Essex/Passaic).

The Governor also signed the following pieces of legislation:

A-2089, which authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to loan \$67,350,000 million for clean water, and \$28,350,000 for safe drinking projects. A-2089 also dedicates a \$200,000 zero interest loan for a project in the Borough of Atlantic Highlands. The loans are derived from a revolving loan fund

comprised of federal and state monies. The bill ensures greater drinking water safety and establishes the "Drinking Water State Revolving Fund". This bill was sponsored by Assembly Members John Kelly (R-Bergen/Essex/Passaic) and Joel Weingarten (R-Essex/Union) and Senators Leonard Connors (R-Atlantic/Burlington/Ocean) and Norman Robertson (R-Essex/Passaic).

A-2090, sponsored by Assembly Member Peter Biondi (R-Morris/Somerset) and Senators Henry McNamara (R-Bergen/Passaic) and Walter Kavanaugh (R-Morris/Somerset), authorizes the Environmental Infrastructure Trust to issue up to \$100 million in low interest loans for clean water and clean drinking water projects. The bill also approves a supplemental loan to the Borough of Atlantic Highlands.

A-2091, which appropriates \$50 million from the Water Supply Fund to establish a reserve fund for water supply projects. This bill was sponsored by Assembly Members John Gibson (R-Cape May/Atlantic/Cumberland) and Ken LeFevre (R-Atlantic), and Senators Diane Allen (R-Burlington/Camden) and Robert Singer (R-Burlington/Monmouth/Ocean).

A-2092, which supplements the Environmental Infrastructure Trust's financial package for FY'99. The bill appropriates \$5 million to the Environmental Infrastructure Trust from the "Stormwater Management and Combined Sewer Overflow Abatement Fund". The funding will be used to establish a reserve for storm water supply and other clean water projects. A-2092 was sponsored by Assembly Members Steve Corodemus (R-Monmouth) and Tom Smith (R-Monmouth) and Senators Andrew Ciesla (R-Monmouth/Ocean) and Joseph Palaia (R-Monmouth).

"These four pieces of legislation will make the funds available to finance improvements in our water treatment systems - including funds to expand drinking water and storm water projects," said the Governor. "By funding these projects, we are ensuring the high quality of our drinking water and helping to keep our rivers and streams clean."

"This is another milestone in our on-going efforts to improve water resource management in New Jersey," said Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Shinn. "Rehabilitating old sewer lines, extending new water lines to areas in need, and acquiring flood-prone properties are all major goals of this administration that will improve the quality of life for many New Jerseyans."