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# Frelinghuysen's Highlands bill to go before House of Reps., would extend North Jersey conservation efforts

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A federal bill that would extend funding for land conservation efforts in the Highlands Region is on its way to the floor of the House of Representatives.

On Monday, the federal House Natural Resources Committee unanimously approved a bill that would prolong the Highlands Conservation Act through 2021 for congressional consideration. Sponsored by state Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen, the bill has already helped protect more than 5,500 acres in the four-state region that covers roughly one-ninth of New Jersey.

"This legislation recognizes what many New Jerseyans already know: The Highlands is a critical watershed region which provides drinking water for millions," Frelinghuysen said. "It must be protected."

First developed by Frelinghuysen in 2004, the bill allows $10 million to be spent each year on land conservation projects and open space purchases in the region. It also authorizes $1 million per year for the United States Forest Service to assist in conservation efforts in the zone that harbors the drinking water supply for 11 million people.

"While we have been successful in protecting thousands of acres over the last decade, there is still work to be done," Frelinghuysen said. "It is imperative that we continue to promote work in public-private partnerships with our local and county officials to maximize open space in the Highlands, while ensuring private property rights."

More than $27 million has already been set aside for Highlands Conservation Act projects.

Frelinghuysen's bill, H.R. 894, is co-sponsored by New Jersey Representatives Scott Garrett, Leonard Lance, and Bill Pascrell.

– David M. Zimmer