



Environmentalists jab at DEP with billboard

By [Brendan Kuty/NJ.com](http://Brendan.Kuty/NJ.com)

updated December 19, 2012 at 6:43 PM



An environmentalist group put a face familiar to the state DEP, the ousted former Highlands Council director, on a billboard outside the state agency's Trenton office. Courtesy of New Jersey Highlands Coalition

[TRENTON](#) — Zing!

While the sign on the billboard outside the state Department of Environmental Protection building on East State Street is new, the message — and the woman delivering it — are anything but to the agency. And that's just how Julia Somers likes it.

On the billboard, a smiling Eileen Swan holds a cup of water. Above her head: "Got Water? Thank the Pinelands and Highlands."

It's a thinly-veiled jab at Gov. Chris Christie, who many conservationists believe has directed his administration to soften regional strategies to guard the drinking water reserves relied upon by 6.4 million New Jerseyans.

Somers is the executive of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition, which paid for the billboard with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance. She said Swan was the ideal candidate for the message.

Swan, the former Highlands Council executive director, was ousted last March when Christie filled the board with anti-Highlands Act members.

"If it had been anywhere else, maybe it doesn't make as much sense," Somers said. "But most of the people at the Department of Environmental Protection know who Eileen Swan is."

Swan, now a New Jersey Conservation Foundation policy manager, said she was at first skittish about appearing on the billboard. But that feeling quickly faded, she said.

"I understood the message the Highlands and the Pinelands coalitions were trying to convey, and it's one that I still work on and agree with," Swan said.