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New Jersey Members of Congress Honored for Leadership in Passage of Highlands Conservation Act

Morristown, NJ – At a luncheon on March 7, 2005, the Highlands Coalition honored Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) and Senators Jon Corzine (D-NJ) and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) for their leadership in the passage of the Highlands Conservation Act, which brings national recognition and federal land conservation funding to the four-state Highlands region of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut. The luncheon also honored Tom Gilbert, the former executive director of the Highlands Coalition, who helped shepherd the Act through Congress.

"With Congress's support and President Bush's signature, the Highlands Conservation Act is a historic victory that will greatly strengthen our efforts to protect the region's critical lands, drinking water supplies for 3.5 million New Jerseyans, and recreational lands for the region's 14 million annual visitors," said Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), the chief author of this legislation. "Our efforts to protect the Highlands would not have gotten 'off the ground' were it not for the help and foresight of Tom Gilbert and the Highlands Coalition."

"Thank you for standing with me and my colleagues in our effort to protect New Jersey's Highlands region," said U.S. Senator Jon S. Corzine (D-NJ). "One of New Jersey's most treasured resources is its precious land and open spaces. Your award reaffirms the work we are doing in the Congress to ensure generation after generation can enjoy and marvel at the Highlands' splendor."

The Highlands Conservation Act, a landmark bill signed by President Bush on November 30, 2004, authorizes \$110 million over 10 years for protection and conservation of lands in the Highlands states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut. Each state will develop its own priority list for land conservation projects. Funding from the Act supports new state ownership or state-held conservation easements in those areas.

"The passage of the Highlands Conservation Act represents perhaps the most important environmental achievement of the last Congress," said Jim Tripp, Chair of the Highlands Coalition. "We are pleased to honor the leadership of U.S. House and Senate sponsors of the bill

and the Coalition's former executive director who played such key roles in obtaining congressional and White House support."

The awards ceremony was held at the Haggerty Center at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum and was attended by representatives from member organizations of the Highlands Coalition, local elected officials and NJ Highlands Council members.

"Passage of the Highlands Conservation Act is an important step in protecting key ecological areas from development and ensuring public access for recreation. We commend the bipartisan political leadership responsible for bringing needed funds to these critical areas," said Andrew Falender, executive director of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC).

"The vision of the Highlands Conservation Act was to replicate the success of Sterling Forest at least one hundred times throughout the Highlands. Congressman Frelinghuysen and Senator Corzine took that vision and made it a reality", said Carol Ash, Vice-Chair of the Highlands Coalition. "We thank the Congressman and the Senator, and we thank our able former Executive Director, Tom Gilbert, who guided us deftly through it".

The Highlands Coalition, established in 1988, seeks to protect and enhance the sustainability of natural and human communities in the Highlands region of PA, NJ, NY and CT. The Coalition is comprised of more than 110 local, state, regional and national conservation organizations. Details on the Coalition's work can be found at www.highlandscoalition.org.

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