

How the Highlands boundary changed

The below map shows the seven New Jersey counties affected by the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act, which was signed by Gov. James E. McGreevey on Aug. 10. Among other things, the legislation carves out a 395,000-acre preservation area where major construction projects are all but forbidden. The administration repeatedly has said the map's boundaries were based solely on science. But by comparing the final Highlands map with an earlier draft, The Star-Ledger identified a dozen instances in which the preservation zone's boundaries were moved, often allowing major developments to go forward.

By Steve Chambers and Hassan Hodges

Map key

Removed from
Highlands
preservation



Preserved



The 12 circles show where once-protected areas changed significantly, clearing the way for possible large-scale developments.

Proposed developments

COUNTIES

Municipalities

5 MILES

Byram: This Sussex County township wanted to concentrate commercial development on 60 acres along Route 206, but the draft map would have prevented those plans. On May 19 — three weeks before the bill passed — the state Planning Commission approved a growth center for the property, prompting an automatic map change.

Hopatcong: A line change will allow Village Grande, a 715-unit senior development, to be built on a 300-acre forested and hilly tract. Mayor Richard Hodson said he lobbied to have the line changed. Developer D.R. Horton of Texas donated \$25,000 to the state Democratic Party around the time the map was being drawn, according to campaign records. State officials say the line was changed because forests didn't buffer important water supplies and that a road fronting the development was a more appropriate boundary.

