

Rothman's Plan For Meadowlands Environmental Park Takes Giant Step Forward

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Study That Congressman Got Congress To Authorize Is Set To Begin

Lyndhurst, NJ - In a landmark event that will ultimately direct the federal, state, and local governments on how best to save the 8,400 undeveloped acres of the Hackensack Meadowlands, Congressman Steve Rothman's (D-NJ9) longtime vision of a Meadowlands Environmental Park came sharply into focus today as the stakeholders gave the go-ahead on the federal-state study he has worked to put in place over the last two years. Rothman gained the official support of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC) when it voted this morning to authorize the \$5.2 million study, which it will conduct with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Today is a landmark day for those of us who have spent many years working toward the dream of having the 8,400 acres of the Hackensack Meadowlands become an environmental park," Rothman said. "I want to congratulate the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Governor McGreevey, Commissioner Susan Bass Levin, and the entire leadership team at the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission for all their hard work in facilitating this federal study. Now this three-year effort can proceed."

"In the meantime, we expect to be able, with a combination of federal, state, and local money, to purchase those acres not presently owned by the Meadowlands Commission or the State within the next handful of years. Beyond that, once the study has been completed, we fully expect to have the considerable sums of money, estimated between \$100-\$200 million, to clean up, and to remediate the landfills and other polluted sites in the 8,400 acres, with monies earmarked for that purpose by the federal government, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the State of New Jersey, conservation trusts, and the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, among many others."

In June 2001, Congressman Rothman, a lifelong resident of Bergen County, got the U.S. House of Representatives to authorize a formal study of how best to purchase, cleanup, and turn the 8,400 acres of undeveloped land in the Hackensack Meadowlands -- just a stone's throw from the Continental Airlines Arena site -- into an environmental park. In July 2001 and then in October 2001, the Congressman also secured \$1.2 million and \$140,000 in federal funding, respectively to permit the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission to acquire and preserve land from willing sellers in the Meadowlands and also to provide money to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for them to serve as an environmental consultant to the U.S. Army Corps in its study. The Senate included these measures in its version of the 2001 budget and the president signed this into law at the end of 2001. More funds for both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's work on the study, as well as for land acquisition, are expected in the coming weeks as Congress completes its work on the Fiscal Year 2003 budget.

For more than a year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission have worked together to set the parameters of the study, including which acres to remediate and to what extent, as well as other issues concerning the design and function of an environmental park. Rothman envisions the environmental park with opportunities for eco-canoe trips, nature walks, bird watching, other appropriate

recreational activities, and an environmental educational center for children.

“These 8,400 undeveloped acres warrant our preservation efforts because they are the largest contiguous parcels of open space remaining in Northeastern New Jersey,” Rothman said. “The Meadowlands Environmental Park will be an oasis for all of us to enjoy educational and recreational activities in what has become the most densely populated region of the most densely populated state in the nation. This park will be a legacy of conservation, in our role as stewards of our land for future generations.”

A century ago, the Meadowlands was a vast piece of open space spanning 21,000 acres. Today, just outside of the Arena and Giants Stadium property, only 8,400 of those acres remain undeveloped, keeping river water from flooding the streets of surrounding communities. That part of the Meadowlands still supports a diverse and growing concentration of migratory birds and is home to 65 species of nesting birds and more than 50 species of fish and shellfish.

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