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September 25, 2002

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Measure OKs Funds Seven Times the Current Level for Land Acquisition and Remediation

Washington, DC - As part of his ongoing effort to utilize all of the available federal resources to preserve and restore the 8,400 undeveloped acres of the Hackensack Meadowlands, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) today secured a House panel's approval of language he authored, which increases the authorized level of funding for wetlands acquisition and remediation in the Meadowlands to \$35 million, seven times its current level. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passed the Water Resources Development Act of 2002 (WRDA), which includes language authorizing Congress to approve funds to help the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continue its efforts to acquire Meadowlands open space from willing sellers at fair market value as well as to remediate the wetlands.

"Today's approval of this authorization measure, with a funding level that is seven times the current level, signifies that my fellow House colleagues are getting the message loud and clear that protecting and restoring the Meadowlands is an environmental priority for the people of Northeastern New Jersey," said Rothman. "I am extremely pleased that we are moving forward with our plans for an environmental park in the Meadowlands with bipartisan support of government officials on the federal, state, and local levels."

Under the measure, the U.S. Army Corps in conjunction with the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, would be authorized to develop and carry out an Environmental Improvement Program in which they could acquire land. Additionally, the Army Corps would focus on remediating three specific sites within the Meadowlands: the Kearny Marsh, Oritani Marsh, and land surrounding Secaucus High School. Furthermore, the measure authorizes funds for water quality monitoring, tide gate improvement and construction to control flooding, and the research and development of a water quality improvement program. Once authorization receives final passage, Congress still must appropriate the funding.

Rothman, a lifelong resident of Bergen County, has made the preservation of the 8,400 undeveloped acres of the Hackensack Meadowlands -- separate from the Arena/Giants Stadium property -- a top priority. He has been the leader of the effort to spare the presently undeveloped land from development with the intention of turning it into an environmental park with opportunities for eco-canoe trips, nature walks, bird watching, other appropriate recreational activities, and an environmental educational center for children.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, Rothman has secured other sources of funding for the Meadowlands Environmental Park. Earlier this year, the House approved a spending bill that includes \$180,000 for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to act as an environmental consultant to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is conducting a study on how best to save the Meadowlands. Rothman secured additional funds last year for Fish and Wildlife and also helped pass separate legislation called for the Army Corp to study the area. Additionally, Rothman

secured \$1.2 million for land acquisition in the Meadowlands from willing sellers at fair market value, and is working to obtain millions more this year.

"With each measure that passes, we are one step closer to realizing our dream of an environmental park in the Meadowlands for this and future generations," Rothman said. "For the people of Northeastern New Jersey, such a goal is worthy of our highest and best efforts. We can change our destiny; how we live; how others regard us; and how we regard ourselves. We are already on our way to making this magnificent vision understood and appreciated as being eminently worthwhile and very much achievable."

The Water Resources Development Act of 2002 next moves to the House floor where the full chamber will vote on it. The Senate needs to consider its own version of the measure. Congress last approved a WRDA bill that included language pertaining to the Meadowlands in 1992 when it authorized \$5 million.

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