

# Florio at wetlands to decry Bush plan

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CRANFORD — Standing before a red maple forest that no longer would fully qualify as wetlands under President Bush's new guidelines, Governor Florio blasted the proposal as "a nightmare" that could jeopardize New Jersey's freshwater supply.

"Some people in Washington say you can call a wetland something else and it makes it something else. That isn't really very smart," Florio said of the proposed regulations, which would revise the definition of freshwater wetlands and open to development millions of acres across the country.

Glancing at a grove of trees in Lenape Park with their brilliant fall foliage, Florio said: "Under the proposal, half of this would be wetlands, half would not. The decisions being made are arbitrary. Here you can see the system is just insane."

Across New Jersey, officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection and Energy estimate that 150,000 acres of

freshwater wetlands — up to half the state's supply — would lose protection from development under the proposal.

At his appearance in the Union County park, Florio was joined by DEPE Commissioner Scott Weiner, county officials, representatives of environmental groups, and students from Orange Avenue School. He used the occasion to unveil his written objections, which he forwarded to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has extended the deadline for comment by 60 days, from Oct. 15 to Dec. 14.

But builders and real estate agents applaud the federal plan, saying that current rules are too strict and that an overly broad definition of wetlands has impeded economic progress and driven up housing costs.

"We believe the changes need to be made because a lot of areas in New Jersey are classified as wetlands that shouldn't be wetlands," Kelly Astarita of the N.J. Association of Realtors said in a recent interview. "A lot of land is wrongly classified."