

# Hudson lawmaker: I promise to protect Caven Point | A Q&A with Sen. Brian Stack

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Liberty State Park legislation advances, fight continues

By Star-Ledger Editorial Board

In many ways, the bill Gov. Murphy signed Thursday to establish a Liberty State Park Design Task Force was Jersey politics at its worst – a measure rammed through in barely a fortnight, reeking of hidden agendas, greased by dark money, with no environmental protections and patronage appointees outnumbering those with actual expertise.

Sen. Brian Stack (D-Hudson) heard the blowback and responded, though how earnestly remains to be seen. The veteran lawmaker quickly drafted a 100-word measure that meets the demands of park advocates by protecting the 21-acre wildlife refuge known as Caven Point, and though he didn't move it fast enough for a vote before the Senate adjourned for the summer, he promises to make it his first priority when that body reconvenes in the fall.

The bill affirms the Caven peninsula as an ecosystem for wildlife, a “critical” bird breeding habitat, and as an “urban environmental education resource” that shall be “permanently preserved” as a natural habitat. Clear enough, for now.

Stack shared a few more details in a chat with Dave D'Alessandro of the Star-Ledger Editorial Board Friday.

**Q. About your one-paragraph Caven Point protection bill: How much will it be extended, and when can you debate it?**

A. I believe it will be extended somewhat, but our main thing is to make sure Caven is preserved and protected as it is. I only got something in just to show the advocates that I'm serious about getting it done. I'm hoping to get it on (the board) for the first committee meeting in September and the first voting session. And I expect it to move just as quickly in the Assembly also.

**Q. Can you understand why some advocates are dubious that you'll get this done, since you had a chance to incorporate Caven protection language into the Task Force bill?**

A. It would have been problematic for me to amend the bill and get it in in enough time to have a vote. It would have been a problem for me. But I am absolutely committed to getting this done. I give the advocates and the people my word. I will fight day and night to make sure this bill is enacted, and nothing except what is already in Caven Point's natural habitat will be maintained.

**Q. Where do you anticipate that fight coming from? The governor? Leadership? The golf billionaire lusting for Caven Point, Paul Fireman? All of them?**

A. I believe the governor would be supportive, and I believe I would have support in both the Senate and the Assembly. I don't see that as an issue at all.

**Q. You've been quoted as saying that the park isn't what it should be. What do you envision for it?**

A. I envision much more active recreation, more fields – soccer, football and baseball fields – and give the people what they want and deserve at the park. In many ways, it's a beautiful park, but it can be so much better. But the key is to get that contamination out of the center of the park – those 220 acres, they can be used for families, for kids who want to play baseball or football, make it more of a family environment and give them activities that they don't have now.

**Q. Do you agree that ballfields are preferable to stadiums?**

A. I would rather have ballparks than stadiums also. The stadium concept is just one that was put out there. There's nothing set in stone. I would personally just have open fields and open recreation.

**Q. Do you have a preference for how that initial \$50 million should be spent, because the Task Force bill isn't specific.**

A. That would be entirely on recreation. I don't want that money spent on cleanup – there's plenty of money for cleanup that we can use. But predominantly to fix it up and beautify it.