

Date: February 20, 2009



**Housatonic Valley  
Association**

150 Kent Road  
P.O. Box 28  
Cornwall Bridge, CT 06754  
860-672-6678

1383 Pleasant Street  
P.O. Box 251  
South Lee, MA 01330  
413-324-9793

19 Furnace Bank Road  
P.O. Box 318  
Wassalo, NY 12562  
845-789-1381

**To: Members of the Legislative Environment Committee**  
**From: Jenifer Gunther, Water Protection Manager, Housatonic Valley Association**

**Re: Support for HB 5820, AAC Natural Vegetation Near Wetlands and Watercourses**

The Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) is a non-profit representing nearly 4,500 members from throughout the entire Housatonic Watershed including western Connecticut. Our mission is to safeguard the natural character and environmental health of our watershed communities by protecting land and water. We work for healthy rivers and streams, clean drinking water and natural places for our families to enjoy. We appreciate this opportunity to express **strong support for HB 5820.**

*This bill protects Connecticut's drinking water, reduces the risk and enormous expense of flooding, provides the most cost effective quality protection for our rivers and wetlands, and provides critical and irreplaceable habitat protection for wildlife like the state's nesting bald eagles and returning mink populations. Furthermore, this bill does all of these things merely by increasing the level of scrutiny within a minimum area near rivers and wetlands – 100 feet or the FEMA Regulatory 100 Year Floodway – an area already regulated by three-quarters of Connecticut's communities. This bill provides consistency to these review areas, minimizes disturbance to natural vegetation within these areas and extends this review to all communities. Inland Wetland Commissions that choose to review a larger area may continue to do so. The bill codifies what many communities are already doing, and maintains all of the exemptions of the existing Wetlands Protect Act. Bill 5820 is a simple, cost effective way to improve water quality across Connecticut.*

According to the U.S. Census, Connecticut's population has increased by more than 100,000 people since 2000, or an additional 18 people per square mile. As development increases, so does the incremental loss of naturally vegetated wetland and riverfront lands. Science demonstrates repeatedly that the most cost effective way to protect water quality is to maintain natural vegetation around rivers and wetlands to buffer incoming pollutants and prevent erosion. Today, hundreds of river segments are listed as impaired by the Clean Water Act's Section 303d list, many linked directly to polluted runoff.

Development around wetlands and rivers also exacerbates storm conditions. Flood plains that are built upon will flood during storm events, causing billions of dollars in damage and repairs annually. Can our state really afford these affects in a time like this?

Vegetated buffers not only provide critical habitat and reduce flooding, they filter stormwater and other pollutants, protect public drinking supplies, prevent erosion, and save the state money.