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TESTIMONY: ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
February 10, 2009

Proposed S.B. No. 586 AAC COLLINSVILLE HYDRO-ELECTRIC FACILITY

Proposed S.B. No. 596 AAC THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF UTILITIES

Proposed S.B. No. 670 AN ACT PROMOTING HYDROELECTRIC POWER FOR MANUFACTURING.

Proposed H.B. No. 6000 AN ACT CREATING GREEN JOBS

Rivers Alliance is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship.

Dear Chairmen Nardello and Fonfara and Members of the Committee:

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Margaret Miner

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Rose Guimaraes

PROGRAM

Rose Guimaraes
Amanda Branson

WEBSITE COORDINATOR

Tony Mitchell

AAC COLLINSVILLE HYDRO-ELECTRIC FACILITY. Rivers Alliance was founded in Collinsville, and hydropower policy is central to our mission. We were original members of the Clean Energy Fund Advisory Board in order, in particular, to have an advisory role with respect to hydropower and water cooling. So we have a special interest in this proposed legislation.

Since the 1990s, we have been in discussion with various stakeholders concerning the Collinsville dams. These stakeholders included the Farmington River Watershed Association, which is unable to be present today. The Executive Director is in Washington, DC, securing money to pursue a Wild and Scenic designation for the Lower Farmington, where these dams are located. (The Upper Farmington has already obtained this designation.) We also have spoken over the years with the previous holder of the FERC license, Duncan Broatch, and with DEP Fisheries. Last year, we sponsored a major conference on hydropower in conjunction with many partners, including the Clean Energy Fund.

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The traditional position of river advocates has been to oppose hydropower, because dams are highly damaging to river ecology and river life. In recent years, the obvious need for more emission-free power generation led American Rivers and Green Mountain Energy to establish the Low-Impact Hydropower Institute (LIHI), which certifies high-quality hydro projects as truly green. The general position of Rivers Alliance is that we support projects that have LIHI certification and oppose those that do not meet this standard. *Our particular position with respect to the dams in Collinsville is that the large, upper dam has the potential to be a model hydro facility. In exchange, we believe the small, lower dam should probably be removed or breached. The DEP has found that the lower dam has the potential for removal.*

A design of this sort would create additional clean energy and improve river conditions. The Farmington is the most fished river in the state, a great public resource. It is a lot to ask to sever this large river twice to produce a minimal amount of energy (1.3 MW for the upper dam, 1.1 MW for the lower dam). Not only does this project make use of a public trust resource, these dams are owned by the public, and very possibly the public (ratepayers) will be donating financing through the Clean Energy Fund. So our wish is that this will be a model project that will maximize clean energy and upgrade river health.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF UTILITIES. Much of our policy work involves dealing with utilities with respect to environmental impacts. These discussions range from contentious to cordial. This committee is certainly extremely familiar with the issues. The intent of this bill is not clear, but if there is an area in which utilities are not being held responsible for negative environmental impacts and are not responsive to calls to improve, we would certainly want to work with you to remedy this problem.

PROMOTING HYDROELECTRIC POWER FOR MANUFACTURING.

This bill appears to be aimed at a particular facility. We recommend caution. Very often small hydro is not good hydro, doing major ecosystem damage with minimal energy production.

AN ACT CREATING GREEN JOBS. Rivers Alliance strongly believes that investment in green jobs is essential to protection of high-quality natural resources. The first step should be protecting the jobs we have already created, for example construction jobs installing solar panels. In the light of Gov. Rell's Executive Order 23, I hope that the legislature and the executive can work together to develop the comprehensive, effective initiative contemplated in this legislation. We would be pleased to cooperate in any way that would be helpful.

Thank you for your admirable efforts.

Margaret Miner, Executive Director

