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**Testimony in Support of House Bill 5820 – An Act Conserving Natural Vegetation
Near Wetlands and Watercourses**

Thank you for accepting this testimony in support of HB 5820, which, in part, allows local wetland agencies to protect vegetative “buffers” around watercourses in the state. I am writing on behalf of Trout Unlimited (“TU”). TU is a national conservation organization whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America’s cold water fisheries and their watersheds. TU has approximately 150,000 volunteers in 450 chapters nationwide and close to 3,600 volunteers in 8 chapters in Connecticut.

TU strongly supports HB 5820 as the most cost-effective and logical mechanism to allow the state to grow intelligently while still protecting its valuable water resources. The bill recognizes the value that vegetation plays in keeping water clean and cold and preserving habitat for countless aquatic and streamside species. The bill is also well balanced in that it maintains the current exemptions in the Inland Wetland and Watercourse Act and allows for and favors the “redevelopment” of properties. In a simple, clear manner, it encourages developers to redevelop already used properties, while protecting undisturbed rivers and the state against harmful sprawl.

Biologically, vegetative buffers are a critical element to stream and wetland health. They keep water shaded and cool and create both instream and streamside habitat. Streamside vegetation stabilizes stream banks and prevents erosion, slows down and filters stormwater from nearby roads and parking lots, and prevents flooding. The top threats to brook trout in the state, a rapidly disappearing species, are urbanization, road sediment and high water temperatures – all threats that proper stream buffers would address. Brook trout are the state’s only native trout and are considered an indicator of excellent water quality.

This bill fills a critical and illogical gap in the Inland Wetland and Watercourses Act in that it clarifies that towns will now be able to protect streamside vegetation, recognizing its value to streams and wetlands along with recognizing it as vital habitat itself.

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