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ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
February 23, 2009

TESTIMONY OF
SANDY BRESLIN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
AUDUBON CONNECTICUT

*IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5820, AN ACT CONSERVING
NATURAL VEGETATION NEAR WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES.*

Audubon Connecticut, the state organization of the National Audubon Society with more than 10,000 members statewide, works to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats through education, science and conservation, and legislative advocacy for the benefit of people and the earth's biological diversity. Through our network of community-based nature centers, protected wildlife sanctuaries, and local volunteer Chapters, we seek to connect people with nature and inspire the next generation of conservationists.

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. Audubon Connecticut, the state organization of the National Audubon Society *strongly supports* the intent of S.B. 5820, *AA Conserving Natural Vegetation Near Wetlands and Watercourses* that seeks to protect the waters of our state by maintaining, natural vegetative buffers.

Natural filtration is the simple, affordable, and effective way to protect our waters.

Wetlands and watercourses are among the most productive habitats in our state. Birds and other wildlife flourish in these areas, and so do people who are drawn to waterways and wetlands for recreation, and depend upon clean water for health and survival.

Whether it is a public drinking water reservoir, a trout stream, a community swimming hole, or Long Island Sound, science tells us that maintaining natural vegetative buffers is the best approach to maintaining water quality in our rivers, lakes, streams and estuaries, and to ensuring the long term health of our wetlands. Conserving natural vegetation near wetlands and watercourses is a **no-cost or low-cost way** to reduce non point source pollution (the nation's leading threat to water quality), decrease flooding, control erosion and decrease sediment deposition in our waterways.

Audubon Connecticut supports the **substitute language** being presented to you today by Curt Johnson of the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, and encourages the Committee to adopt these provisions that will:

- **Focus on the practical and the positive** – Rather than ban activity in a certain area, the bill asks landowners and regulators to do the best they can to the extent practicable in a given area
- **Create a common standard** – The bills sets 100 feet or the floodway (whichever is larger) as the area in which impacts must be evaluated and vegetation protected. All but a few towns in the state already have a 100 foot review area.
- **Maintain flexibility** – Existing exemptions for farming, forestry and other statutory exceptions are maintained under this language.

All our rivers flow into the Sound

H.B. 5820 will not only benefit inland waters; its effects will be felt throughout Long Island Sound. In early February, the Environment Committee heard testimony on *H.B. 5471, An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Dredging*. This legislation is seeking \$10 million dollars to dredge harbors and marinas that have filled with sediment, much of which washed into a watercourse upstream and was carried along until it was deposited along the coast of Long Island Sound. **H. B. 5820 would help to control this process of erosion and sedimentation at its source - - before the soil ever enters a waterway.** When it comes to costly dredging, an ounce of prevention upstream pays dividends down the road.

Long Island Sound is arguably our state's greatest natural treasure, yet each summer the western portion of the Sound is overtaken by a condition known as hypoxia. High levels of nitrogen flowing into the Sound promote an overgrowth of algae. When this algae dies, it starts to decay and sinks to the bottom of the Sound robbing the waters of life-giving oxygen along the way. This past summer, the hypoxia in the Dead Zone, as the area is known, was among the worst on record - - a sign that this estuary is in distress. H.B. 5820 would ensure a natural vegetative barrier would be in place to help filter nitrogen-laden run off before it enters our waterways and flows into the Sound.

Audubon Connecticut strongly urges you to support *H.B. 5820, AA Conserving Natural Vegetation Near Wetlands and Watercourses*. At a time when there is a lot of talk about green solutions to familiar problems, this common sense bill would allow natural processes to help protect our wetlands, ensuring clean water for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on this important matter.