



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
COUNCIL ON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION**

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**Environment Committee Public Hearing
February 23, 2009**

**SUPPORT FOR
HOUSE BILL 5820 AN ACT CONCERNING PRESERVATION OF NATURAL VEGETATION
VITAL TO STATE WATER QUALITY**

The Council on Soil and Water Conservation (Council) strongly supports House Bill 5820, An Act Concerning Preservation of Natural Vegetation Vital to State Water Quality, and urges the Environment Committee's support.

Nonpoint source pollution (NPS) in the form of dirty storm water containing sediment and other pollutants is NOW the major factor contributing to the degradation of water quality in wetlands, watercourses and Long Island Sound, and a primary threat to Connecticut's drinking water supplies.

HB 5820 recognizes the overwhelming scientific evidence that vegetated riparian areas (areas around wetlands and watercourses) can significantly reduce NPS from reaching the state's water resources. HB 5820 also recognizes the futility of trying to prevent further degradation of water quality and changes to the physical characteristics of wetlands and watercourses without protecting the vegetation around them.

HB 5820 provides this protection by creating a presumption that removal of vegetation in riparian areas will physically impact the wetland or watercourse, and by providing municipalities with the legal tools to protect riparian vegetation to the maximum extent possible.

Studies have demonstrated that riparian buffers are a relatively low cost, easily enforceable, and effective means of delivering valuable ecological services - such as protection of public and private surface drinking water supply, ground water for the recharge of aquifers and wetlands, fisheries and wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and aesthetic enhancement of communities and recreation areas.

These ecological services can increase state revenues by enhancing the desirability of communities and recreational areas, and limiting the unforeseen growth in state expenditures resulting from increased flooding and declining water tables that put increased strain on public water systems. The economic benefits of the ecological services provided by Connecticut's rivers and wetlands are worth many billions of dollars annually. HB 5820 provides a minimum level of protection for these assets that will help to ensure that the expansion of residential and commercial development does not negate the benefits of economic growth.

The Council urges the Environment Committee's support for HB 5820.

The Council's mission is to advise and assist the Commissioner of Environmental Protection in conserving and protecting the land, water and other natural resources of the State in order to preserve and enhance quality of life for present and future generations.

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Thank you.