



Rivers Alliance of Connecticut

BOARD

OFFICERS

Eric Hammerling
President

James Creighton
Vice President

James McInerney
Treasurer

David Bingham
Secretary

DIRECTORS

William Anthony

Eileen Fielding

Megan Hearne

Martin Mador

Dwight Merriam

Marc Taylor

Lynn Werner

Richard Windels

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Margaret Miner

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Rose Guimaraes

PROGRAM

Rose Guimaraes
Amanda Branson

WEBSITE COORDINATOR

Tony Mitchell

A tax-exempt
organization under
501 (c) (3) of the
Internal Revenue
Code

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING February 18, 2009

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 Chairman Meyer, Chairman Roy, and Members of the Committee:

Rivers Alliance is pleased to testify in support of RB 6397, AAC Open Space Preservation, and HB 5264, AAC Protecting Municipally Acquired Open Space. The former gives municipalities a means to raise revenue for environmentally beneficial projects, such as land conservation. This is especially important in the current economic climate. The latter addresses the difficulty municipalities sometimes have in keeping conserved land protected for environmental uses and passive recreation. This difficulty is longstanding and certainly will become more acute. This bill was written in response to an issue in Groton. In Wallingford, Greenway funds are in danger of being diverted to road repair. I am sure you can all think of similar issues in your towns. In my home town, under a previous First Selectman, riverside land donated as a park for residents became a parking place for brush and stumps. This saved the town a lot of money.

We would be happy to work with the committee on making these proposed bills as effective and helpful as possible.

We submitted testimony to the Appropriations Committee with respect to HB 6371, AAC Funding for the Department of Environmental Protection. Our main points were that *DEP must be supported at a sustainable level*. We like the new approach to funding in the governor's budget, but any significant reduction in overall operating monies will negatively affect DEP's ability to do its work protecting the health and natural resources of the citizens of this state.

We are deeply concerned by the elimination of CEQ. This agency

- Reviews state-funded projects for consistency with environmental standards and implementation of mitigation plans.
- Publishes the Environmental Monitor, mandated by statute to provide public notice of state projects and opportunity for public comment.
- Serves as an ombudsman for all who are struggling with an environmental problem. This includes private citizens, groups, municipalities, legislators, and others. Typically CEQ negotiates a solution or at least clarifies what should be done.
- Prepares clear, detailed white papers on broad problems, such as breakdowns in wetlands protection and underfunding of the DEP.
- Proposes and reviews environmental legislation.
- Publishes a widely used, detailed annual report on the state of the environment in Connecticut and whether we are meeting our goals.

Transferring these tasks to the DEP will not save money (someone has to be paid to perform them). Moreover, the entire point of CEQ is its independence from DEP and other state agencies. *CEQ's work in conflict resolution alone saves the state costs of litigation and saves legislators from having to deal with even more pleas from constituents for special help with regulatory problems.*

Finally, it appears that, under this bill, the Conservation Districts are at risk. The Districts are a form of regional assistance, which most of us recognize as advisable these days. They also are slated to take over much of DEP's work with respect to stormwater regulation. So it is important to keep them robust.

Many thanks for your hard work and attention.

Margaret Miner,
Executive Director

