



Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.

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TESTIMONY TO THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY, COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS Monday March 16, 2009

The Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc (CACIWC) is pleased to submit testimony today on the following two bills:

S.B. 839 AN ACT CONCERNING MERGERS AND CONSOLIDATIONS OF VARIOUS STATE AGENCIES

H.B. 6375 AN ACT CONCERNING REVIEW AND TERMINATION OF CERTAIN BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS.

CACIWC appreciates the Committee's decision to hold a public hearing today on these bills and recognizes the extreme challenges facing the Connecticut General Assembly in their attempts to respond appropriately to the serious federal and state economic crisis before us. However, CACIWC must register its strong opposition to several proposed consolidations and terminations outlined in these bills.

Section 13 of **S.B. 839** proposes that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) be consolidated within the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the ability of the CEQ to employ an executive director and staff be removed. CACIWC strongly opposes the proposed consolidation which would jeopardize the independence and objectivity of the CEQ. CACIWC also strongly opposes the proposed elimination of CEQ's ability to employ an executive director and staff. A number of detailed reports and other products have been completed by these individuals that have provided important information for CACIWC's membership. For example, CEQ staff have provided information on the discovery of the impending clear cutting of trees along the Housatonic River, a poorly supervised land exchange program, and recognition of an increasing number of encroachments on municipal and land trust properties.

A major finding of importance to municipal commissions resulted from the CEQ special report on inland wetlands programs entitled "Swamped." This report outlines the results of statistical research conducted by CEQ staff that identified the impact of poor compliance with the statutory requirement for wetlands commissions to have at least one member attend the DEP wetlands training program. The research determined that many acres of important Connecticut wetlands are needlessly lost through poor regulatory decisions made without benefit of this training. Recognizing the importance of this report and its many cost effective recommendations, the CACIWC board invited CEQ executive director Karl

Wagener to give the keynote address at its 2008 annual meeting. This report and many other important accomplishments of CEQ would not have been possible without the presence of its own dedicated staff and executive director.

H.B. 6375 proposes termination of an extensive list of government boards, commissions, and committees. CACIWC is strongly opposed to the elimination of the following list of entities whose mandates and efforts have greatly contributed to the preservation of important Connecticut habitats and help sustain the esthetic natural beauty of our great state. Moreover, CACIWC questions the cost benefit of their elimination, since their efforts extend and support the important work of the many municipal wetlands and conservation commissions who form our membership. Elimination of these entities will create an additional burden on these local commissions and their staff. Ironically, elimination of these entities will ultimately result in an increased fiscal burden on the State Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Agriculture, whose staff will be increasingly called upon to respond to issues formerly address by these boards and committees.

Section 1. (2) Connecticut Delegation to the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission, established under section 26-302 of the general statutes;
(5) Face of Connecticut Steering Committee, established under section 22a-27s of the general statutes;
(6) Forest Practices Advisory Board, established under section 23-65g of the general statutes;
(35) Connecticut River Assembly, established under section 25-102dd of the general statutes;
(38) Five Mile River Commission, established under section 15-26a of the general statutes;
(42) Invasive Plants Council, established under section 22a-381 of the general statutes;
Section 2. (a) (19) the Agricultural Lands Preservation Program, established under section 22-26cc of the general statutes;
(19) the estuarine embayment improvement program, established under section 22a-113 to 22a-113c inclusive, of the general statutes;
(d) (4) Connecticut Siting Council, established under section 16-50j of the general statutes;
and, (11) Council on Environmental Quality, established under section 22a-11 of the general statutes.

CACIWC believes that the efforts of these boards, commissions, and committees are crucial to sustaining Connecticut's natural habitats and resources, scenic landscapes, and fragile ecosystems. They serve to ensure proper environmental oversight in many diverse areas. History has shown that lack of oversight has been costly in terms of our economic, environmental, and human health.

CACIWC is a non-profit organization working to protect Connecticut's wetlands and watercourses and other natural resources through information and education of the 2000+ volunteers and staff that carry out the responsibilities of Connecticut's Conservation Commissions and Inland Wetlands Commissions. CACIWC, representing over 200 member commissions, works with municipalities and environmental groups to promote public support for the judicious management and conservation of Connecticut's natural resources. For additional information contact Alan Siniscalchi, President, or visit www.caciwc.org.