



Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.

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TESTIMONY TO THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING Monday March 8, 2010

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

S.B. 123 AN ACT CONCERNING PRESERVING NATURAL VEGETATION NEAR WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES.

S.B. 205 AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCEMENTS TO THE INLAND WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES ACT.

H.B. 5320 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ENFORCEMENT OF PROHIBITED ACTIONS CONCERNING CERTAIN INVASIVE PLANTS.

CACIWC appreciates the Committee's decision to hold a public hearing today on these bills and offers the following comments to assist the committee in their deliberations:

S.B. 123 AN ACT CONCERNING PRESERVING NATURAL VEGETATION NEAR WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES

The Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc (CACIWC) strongly supports efforts to preserve natural vegetation found at the perimeter of wetlands and watercourses. A growing body of scientific evidence supports the essential role that these natural plant communities provide in stabilizing land, preserving soil function and permeability, along with maintaining balanced hydrologic inputs to the wetlands and watercourses. By providing shade to the adjacent watercourses, these communities help modulate water temperature, and serve to preserve populations of trout, salmon and other important aquatic life. These riparian ecosystems are themselves a source of rich biodiversity and serve as an important rest area of numerous migrating species.

Rivers are second only to our coastline as Connecticut's most valuable natural features. The billions of federal and state dollars already spent to clean up our major rivers and Long Island Sound provide testimony to our historic commitment to preserving these important resources. The continued presence of existing vegetative buffers serves as a natural filter to intercept and transform non-point source pollutants before these substances are able to contaminate aquatic environments. These riverside vegetative communities and wetland systems also provide natural flood control, helping to preserve our homes, businesses, and other infrastructure. Moreover, these existing vegetative buffers provide an often unappreciated, but important, aesthetic quality to our streams and riverbanks that help define the unique characteristics of our great state.

The CACIWC Board of Directors understands that the Environment Committee will be considering a major substitute language change to the proposed bill, as drafted. During the last few sessions, the CACIWC Board has reviewed numerous draft language options proposed for the versions of this bill. While most of the proposals contained language that would enhance efforts to preserve natural vegetation communities, some language may have inadvertently placed unnecessary burdens on our member commissions and staff.

We, therefore, propose that an Inland Wetlands and Watercourse Act advisory committee be formed to review any substitute language in the final proposed bill. The committee should consist of representatives of: CACIWC and its members, the DEP Inland Water Resources Division, environmental groups involved in drafting language, along with representatives of the regulated community such as the Connecticut Business and Industry Association. Recommendations should also be made for development of expanded DEP training programs to prepare municipal commissions and staff to implement proposed changes.

S.B. 205 AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCEMENTS TO THE INLAND WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES ACT.

The CACIWC Board has also reviewed several draft language options proposed for the previous and current versions of this bill. CACIWC supports the goal and intended purpose of this bill to augment the scope of evidence considered by inland wetlands agencies in evaluating permit applications, but questions whether the proposed language is necessary to achieve this goal. The CACIWC Board understands that the Environment Committee will be also considering substitute language change to this proposed bill, in the area of promoting increased training of municipal wetlands commissions and agents. CACIWC strongly supports increased municipal training and further suggests that the aforementioned wetlands act advisory committee be charged with examining language proposed for this bill

H.B. 5320 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ENFORCEMENT OF PROHIBITED ACTIONS CONCERNING CERTAIN INVASIVE PLANTS.

A major focus of CACIWC's education and outreach efforts has been promoting the identification and control of invasive plants by municipal conservation commissions and their agents and partners. Additional efforts to control invasive plant species are needed to reverse their continued adverse impact on native plant species and Connecticut's natural biodiversity. CACIWC strongly supports HB 5320 as it will expand the pool of law enforcement officers authorized to enforce invasive plant laws and regulations.

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.