



CONNECTICUT RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

The River Connects Us

deKoven House; 27 Washington Street; Middletown, CT 06457

February 23, 2011

Gary LeBeau, Chairman and Jeffrey Berger, Chairman
Commerce Committee
Room 110, Capitol Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Comments from CRWC on
Bill No. 1020, AN ACT CONCERNING WATER RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Dear Chairman Berger and Chairman LeBeau,

On behalf of the Connecticut River Watershed Council, I am here today to ask that you reject Bill 1020.

The Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWC) is a nonprofit organization established in 1952 to advocate for the sustainable use of the Connecticut River throughout the entire four-state watershed that is home to more than 2.5 million people. We work to conserve, protect and restore water quality and quantity, habitat and recreational access within the Connecticut River watershed. We have more than 1,000 supporters in CT. We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments on proposed Bill 1020. Our main concerns are that proposed Bill 1020 represents a costly setback for the proposed streamflow regulations process, devalues the CT DEP's role, potentially provides further loopholes and divorces natural resource protection from economic interests.

As the Lower River Steward, I work on issues concerning the stretch of river from the MA border to the River's mouth, where it provides 70% of all the freshwater entering Long Island Sound. The Connecticut River Watershed is the largest watershed that would be impacted by the proposed streamflow standards, and of all the issues that I might take on as River Steward, the proposed streamflow regulations are considered a critical priority as they would directly impact our organizational mission.

To be very frank, this bill surprised us and we are deeply concerned by its undermining of a five year process that has involved significant investment as well as flexibility on the part of CT DEP, river advocates, water utilities and multiple, diverse stakeholders. We greatly appreciate the years of work that have been put into getting us to our current point and find this bill one more inappropriate stalling measure that would amount to considerable wasted resources. We are eager to help move beyond this distraction so that we can continue to work with other stakeholders toward fair and balanced standards that are truly protective of *all* rivers and streams in Connecticut.

As an advocacy organization that sees great value in the applied knowledge of scientific data as a foundation for solid decision-making, we truly appreciate the CT DEP's leadership and expertise regarding natural flow patterns as well as the relationship between flow and a healthy riverine ecosystem. We see the Department of Public Health, the Department of Economic and Community Development, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Public Utility Control as stakeholders who can provide

HEADQUARTERS: (413) 772-2020
FAX: (413) 772-2090

UPPER VALLEY: (802) 869-2792
E-MAIL: crwc@ctriver.org

LOWER VALLEY: (860) 704-0057
WEB: www.ctriver.org

valuable input as to what is meant by striving to achieve an appropriate balance with human needs, but we feel this relationship should remain consultative and that it is appropriate for the CT DEP to retain its leadership role on these science-based regulations.

We feel the great aspect of the proposed streamflow regulations is the requirement that they apply to all rivers and streams in CT. Furthermore, we feel that the CT DEP and streamflow advocates have already made significant concessions as far as which diversions would require compliance and that the timeline for classification and implementation as already written is generous and allows for the cost of compliance to be both spread out over time and seemingly reasonable compared to rate increases already being sought. The newly added Section 1(b) of the regulations outlines a process that appears cumbersome enough to slow the whole process down to the point where we are concerned about the ability of such a process to protect rivers from exploitative alterations or diversions. We are also interested in what is meant by the establishing of "priorities for compliance with flow regulations," as this language seems to leave the door open for many more exemptions. Finally, we are concerned that Section 1(b)'s increased and heavy emphasis on exclusions from compliance based on economic development seems to push the regulations into unbalanced territory and provides language in deference to economic interests vague enough to form the basis of virtually any anticipated argument for noncompliance.

As a membership-based nonprofit, we certainly understand the tangible stresses of recession and recognize the prudence of sound fiscal management during hard times and periods of abundance. We also prioritize working with diverse and often nontraditional stakeholders toward shared goals. We strive for a balanced view and are not anti-development, but we are keenly interested in questioning or mitigating inappropriate development, especially when it threatens to abuse the precious water resources we work so hard to protect. We do not believe economic and environmental sustainability to be mutually exclusive, as proposed Bill 1020 seems to suggest. Because we know the value of the Connecticut River and understand the value of all rivers and streams in the state, we see the proposed streamflow standards as not only securing vital environmental protections for our water resources but providing for tangible economic benefit for communities throughout the state. Healthy rivers secure high property values, benefit businesses, attract tourism and provide diverse recreational opportunities. When the Watershed Council started in 1952, the Connecticut River was called America's 'best landscaped sewer.' Today recreational paddling is on the rise and anglers come from out of state to fish in our waters. We publish a list of *Marinas, Outfitters & Guides*, and in CT at least four canoe and kayak rentals, one fly-fishing guide, three riverboat cruises and 30 marinas, with at least one "Green Marina" are listed. We recognize that we still have work to do, and as low flow is a serious form of pollution in rivers and streams, we believe that protective standards would be a critical step to even more vibrant river communities.

We feel these standards have been needed for decades and that Connecticut's beautiful water resources combined with competition over usage and concerns about global environmental change's impact on water resources necessitate holistic and sustainable long-term water resource management. We are committed to working with others to see this issue through to the adoption of fair and balanced streamflow regulations as one giant step in responsible and strategic management of these most precious and life sustaining assets. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jacqueline Talbot



Lower River Steward
Connecticut River Watershed Council