



ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
February 9, 2011

TESTIMONY OF
SANDY BRESLIN, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
AUDUBON CONNECTICUT

***IN SUPPORT OF: S.B. 832, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
INLAND WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES.***

Audubon Connecticut, the state organization of the National Audubon Society *strongly supports* the intent of *S.B. 832, AAC the Protection of Inland Wetlands and Watercourses*, which seeks to protect the waters of our state by maintaining, natural vegetated buffers.

Natural filtration is the simple, affordable, and effective way to protect our waters.

Wetlands and watercourses are among the most productive habitats in our state. Birds and other wildlife flourish in these areas. So do people who are drawn to waterways and wetlands for recreation, and who depend upon clean water for health and survival.

Whether it is a public drinking water reservoir, a trout stream, a community swimming hole, or Long Island Sound, science tells us that maintaining natural vegetative buffers is the best approach to maintaining water quality in our rivers, lakes, streams and estuaries, and to ensuring the long term health of our wetlands. Conserving natural vegetation near wetlands and watercourses is a **no-cost or low-cost way** to reduce non point source pollution (the nation's leading threat to water quality), decrease flooding, control erosion and decrease sediment deposition in our waterways.

We suggest that the language of S.B. 832 be revised to:

- **Create a common standard** – Set 100 feet or the floodway (whichever is larger) as the area in which vegetation is protected. All but a few towns in the state already have a 100 foot review area.
- **Maintain flexibility** – Include exemptions for uses such as farming, forestry and other existing statutory exceptions.

All of Connecticut's watercourses flow into Long Island Sound

S.B. 832 will not only benefit inland waters; its effects will be felt throughout Long Island Sound. Today, the Environment Committee is also hearing testimony on *S.B. 835 AAC the Structures and Dredging Permit Process*. Connecticut harbors and marinas are filled with sediment, much of which washed into a watercourse upstream and was carried along until it was deposited along the coast of the Sound. S.B. 832 would help to control the process of erosion and sedimentation at its source - - before the soil enters a waterway. **When it comes to costly dredging, an ounce of prevention upstream pays dividends down the road.**

Long Island Sound is arguably our state's greatest natural treasure, yet each summer the western portion of the Sound is overtaken by a condition known as hypoxia. High levels of nitrogen flowing into the Sound promote an overgrowth of algae. When this algae dies, it starts to decay and sinks to the bottom of the Sound robbing the waters of life-giving oxygen along the way. S.B. 832 would ensure a natural vegetative barrier that would help filter nitrogen-laden run off before it enters our waterways and flows into the Sound.

Audubon Connecticut *strongly urges* the Environment Committee to support *S.B. 832, AA Protecting Inland Wetlands and Watercourses*. At a time when there is a lot of interest in low-cost and green solutions to familiar problems, this commonsense legislation would allow natural processes to help protect our wetlands, ensuring clean water for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

Audubon Connecticut, the state organization of the National Audubon Society with more than 10,000 members statewide, works to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats through education, science and conservation, and legislative advocacy for the benefit of people and the earth's biological diversity. Through our network of community-based nature centers, protected wildlife sanctuaries, and local volunteer Chapters, we seek to connect people with nature and inspire the next generation of conservationists.