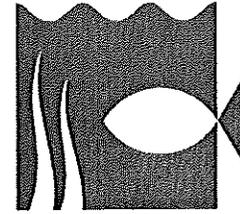


**Connecticut Fund
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**Testimony of Connecticut Fund for the Environment
Before the Environment Committee**

***In support of Raised Bill No. 832, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF INLAND
WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES***

Submitted by Jessica Morowitz, Legal Fellow
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Connecticut Fund for the Environment ("CFE") is Connecticut's non-profit environmental advocate with over 6,500 members statewide. For over thirty years, CFE has fought to protect and preserve Connecticut's health and environment.

CFE asks the Environment Committee to favorably report Raised Bill No. 832, An Act Concerning the Protection of Inland Wetlands and Watercourses, out of the Committee. While there are improvements that need to be made to Raised Bill No. 832, CFE sees it as an important first step toward achieving meaningful protection of natural vegetation along wetlands and watercourses. CFE welcomes the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with key members of the legislature and the development community to discuss creative approaches to protecting these critical areas while at the same time not hindering economic growth.

Mandatory protection of natural vegetation in the first one hundred feet around wetlands and watercourses is necessary to preserve water quality in Connecticut. While Raised Bill No. 832 starts down this path, we encourage this committee to modify it to be more protective. The bill states that "a municipal inland wetland agency *may* prohibit the destruction of natural vegetation" whereas the bill should use stronger, mandatory language such as "shall." In addition, the bill does not set one hundred feet as the minimum area to be protected, but rather the maximum. It provides that if a municipality is already regulating the area around wetlands and watercourses to a distance of less than one hundred feet, the area currently being regulated by the municipal inland wetland agency will remain in effect and the one hundred foot area does not apply. Without establishing one hundred feet as the minimum area to be protected, Raised Bill No. 832 does not provide strong enough protection of these areas. We are aware, however, that a one hundred foot minimum area may not be feasible in all locations, such as highly urbanized areas and areas where transit-oriented development projects are planned. Therefore, we are open to discussing creative solutions that support smart, focused growth and redevelopment. In addition, CFE recognizes that certain exemptions related to agriculture, forestry and water company uses need to remain in place and be clarified if necessary.

In exchange for such strong, mandatory protections, CFE would like to enter into conversations with the leadership and ranking members of the Planning and Development

Committee as well as leaders from the development community to discuss ways to approach this issue without hurting development. CFE would like to explore solutions which ensure that a property's development potential or lot yield under existing local zoning is not compromised.

Protecting these areas is critically important. Scientific research confirms that naturally vegetated corridors along wetlands and watercourses perform several valuable functions that help maintain environmental health and our quality of life. In addition, protecting these areas is a cost-effective approach to several environmental problems. Natural vegetation around wetlands and watercourses helps to protect water quality by removing sediments, nutrients and other contaminants as well as reducing the impact of nonpoint source pollution, including excess nitrogen. Not only does this help protect drinking water, it also helps to reduce the need for and the costs associated with the treatment of drinking water. Also, protecting these areas helps to control flooding, erosion and sedimentation by slowing flows and decreasing the volume of runoff. This helps to mitigate the harms associated with flooding and erosion, such as potential property damage, and reduce the need for stormwater infrastructure and other engineered solutions. Again, this makes the protection of these areas cost-effective. Moreover, these areas provide valuable recreation and tourism opportunities as well as habitat for wildlife. Other states such as Massachusetts and Vermont have recognized the importance of protecting these critical areas, and Connecticut should do the same.

CFE sees Raised Bill No. 832, An Act Concerning the Protection of Inland Wetlands and Watercourses as an important first step towards achieving meaningful protection of these critical areas. For the above reasons, CFE asks the Committee to vote favorably on this bill and thanks the Committee for its time and attention to this matter.