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TESTIMONY

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

February 9, 2010

To Chairmen Ed Meyer, Richard Roy, and Members of the Committee:

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship. Our 450 members include almost all of the state's river and watershed conservation groups, representing many thousand Connecticut residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the bills before you today. This testimony addresses three of these bills, in their order on the agenda.

SB 832 AAC The Protection of Inland Wetlands and Watercourses.

We at Rivers Alliance of CT thank the committee for its dedication to supporting legislation to protect vegetated buffers adjacent to wetlands and streams. There no cheaper, more efficient means of safeguarding water quality than an adequate buffer of vegetation (preferably native vegetation). Every year the science on this point gets stronger, and every year we are better able to track the spread of pavement and lawns along our shores. Nevertheless, the opposition so far has prevailed. One underlying problem is the complexity of the local and state authorities who have jurisdiction over water and land-use. Another enduring problem is opposition from property-development interests. Any limit on clearing or building is greeted with suspicion and other negative reactions. Rivers Alliance, CT Fund for the Environment, and others are exploring the possibility of assuring that riverside protection will not reduce the number of units allowed on a property. If nothing else, we hope that this discussion will help to overcome the wrong impression that housing interests and environmental interests are always opposed. Many water advocates are also advocates for affordable housing in their towns (I, personally, have been out on this limb). We support smart growth and LEED standards. This implies support for construction and structures, just particularly designed and built to meet contemporary needs. Here in Connecticut, incorporating natural resources, such as sunlight and geothermal energy, into our building plans is widely accepted. Similarly, incorporating natural vegetation into our landscaping to protect water quality should be standard practice. Rivers Alliance looks forward to working with all concerned parties to polish and pass this bill.

SB 835 AAC The Structures and Dredging Permit Process.

We support full appeal rights on the decisions of state agencies. But is it not possible for an applicant to submit a petition with 25 names to get a public hearing on a DEP permit? I did not realize that this right was restricted to non-applicants. However, if a change in the language is needed, I believe that members of the public should have the same right as this bill proposes to give to applicants: a letter request should be sufficient to trigger a public hearing.

SB 57 AAC Expanding the Beverage Container Redemption Bill

Rivers Alliance has always testified in favor of the bottle bill, and we support the present expansion. I live on a street much used by runners, with road races every Saturday. Many fewer bottles are now tossed into the wet fields and swampy areas alongside the road. (Or else they are quickly picked up.)

Again, thank you for your hard work.

Margaret Miner,
Executive Director

