



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Executive Director

TESTIMONY

DATE: February 14, 2011

PRESENTED TO: Planning and Development Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

PRESENTED BY: Karl J. Wagener
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Proposed House Bill 5097, AAC Statutory Training
Requirements of Inland Wetlands Commission Members

The Council on Environmental Quality recommends adoption of a bill to improve municipal inland wetlands agencies' compliance with existing training requirements. Although Proposed Bill 5097 has its origin in a CEQ special report from 2008, the Council is now urging you to amend this bill before approving it.

Background: With the use of statistical analysis, the Council found that the only factor that explains the differences in performance among municipal wetlands agencies is whether or not an agency is trained or untrained. The results are available on our website in the special report entitled *Swamped*. The CEQ recommended the content of Bill 5097 in 2009 as a no-cost way to improve wetlands conservation by motivating more towns to attend training; it is of no cost to municipalities because the DEP is required by statute to provide a free seat at training to each municipality every year.

Since that time, the Council has refined its work. In October 2010, the Council hosted a roundtable in which municipalities, the Homebuilders Association of Connecticut, the DEP, consultants, the Attorney General's office, and numerous other organizations participated. The recommendations of that roundtable are also on our website. There was complete consensus on this point: the existing statutory requirement for training is inadequate. CGS Section 22a-42(d) requires one member or staff person of each local agency to be someone who has completed the DEP training program. If that one person completed training twelve years ago, the agency is still in compliance. Despite the bar being set far too low, many municipalities do not comply with this minimal requirement. The Council has postponed recommending some improvements proposed by the roundtable because they would cost money. However, there is one thing you could do this year to get progress underway: require the DEP to keep accurate records of the training status of municipal wetlands agencies. You might assume this is done already, but it is not.

Recommendation: Add the following sentence to CGS Section 22a-42(d): The commissioner shall maintain and publish on the department's website the training status of each municipal inland wetlands agency.