



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – Wednesday February 22, 2012
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Daniel Esty
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Macky McCleary

Raised House Bill No. 5130 – An Act Concerning the Dam Safety Program

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised House Bill No. 5130 – An Act Concerning the Dam Safety Program. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee's willingness to raise this bill at the request of DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would result in an increase in the number of safe dams in Connecticut.

Dams are an integral part of our State's infrastructure as they provide important agricultural, recreational, environmental and flood control benefits. However, these dams also pose public safety and environmental risks. The precise total number of dams in Connecticut is unknown, although DEEP estimates that there are 5,500 dams on the landscape and of these, approximately 3,000 are regulated by DEEP as having some degree of hazard should they fail. Approximately 72% of dams are privately owned. DEEP is the single largest dam owner in the state and is accountable for the maintenance and repair of approximately 260 state-owned dams.

Under current law, DEEP Dam Safety Section staff is responsible for the inspection of privately-owned and state-owned dams. Current staffing is inadequate to meet the regulatory requirements for periodic state inspection of the approximately 3,000 regulated dams. The Department currently prioritizes inspections of those dams which pose the greatest hazard potential to downstream persons and properties.

There are numerous qualified consulting engineers in Connecticut capable of inspecting privately owned dams at a reasonable cost. A dam owner stewardship and inspection approach is consistent with methods used in other states, such as Massachusetts and New Jersey, and will drastically improve dam safety in Connecticut by requiring dam owners to periodically inspect their dams using qualified consulting civil engineers and to file such reports with DEEP. Such an approach would increase the number of annual dam inspections, minimize the need for state staffing, encourage free market pricing and competition among engineers seeking to perform inspections, and reduce the threat to those living downstream of dams within inundation zones. State follow-up will be needed to verify submitted inspection reports, respond to complaints from the public, undertake emergency inspections, and

meet the inspection requirements of DEEP-owned dams. DEEP Dam Safety Section staff would also undertake the oversight of remedial repairs that would be identified as a result of the increased number of inspections.

In closing, by requiring dam owners to periodically inspect their dams using qualified consulting civil engineers, DEEP staff resources will be available to effectively implement and manage DEEP's dam safety program. This in turn will result in the improved management and safety of dams throughout Connecticut promoting public safety for our state's citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact DEEP's legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance at 424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov