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TESTIMONY

DATE: March 16, 2012

PRESENTED TO: Environment Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

PRESENTED BY: Karl J. Wagener
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Raised Bill 349, An Act Concerning Training for Inland Wetlands Agency Members and Agents

The Council strongly recommends a favorable report of this bill.

The General Assembly has considered similar bills in previous years. As I will explain, this is a bill whose time has come. It allows for universal training to be phased in gradually at almost no cost to anyone.

The CEQ has reported previously, based on a detailed statistical analysis, that training is the most important activity that DEEP conducts relative to inland wetlands. DEEP's training programs are highly regarded and they make a difference. The challenge has been to find a way to extend training to more people without putting a financial burden on DEEP or on the towns and without burdening the volunteer members of the municipal commissions. This year we have found the solution.

There are three provisions of this bill that are especially important:

1) First, the bill does not alter existing training provisions: Each municipal wetlands agency must have one member or staff person who has completed DEEP's comprehensive training program (currently three separate segments), and DEEP shall provide one voucher to each town annually. The comprehensive training is an excellent program but can place a burden on the time of a volunteer commission member.

2) Beginning in 2014, each new member of a local commission will be required to complete "Basic Training." DEEP has not yet designated a "Basic Training," but it likely would be Segment One of the existing comprehensive training. Here is the breakthrough that makes this requirement a benefit to commission members, not a burden: **DEEP now offers Segment One as an online course**. You can complete it at your leisure, and DEEP still offers the classroom version for people who prefer that option. The Council recommends allowing each new member one year to com-

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plete the Basic Training course.

3) Agents (usually staff) of local commissions, under current law, have enhanced authorities to approve certain activities administratively if they have completed DEEP's training program. However, the program has no "shelf life." A person might have completed the course 15 years ago. This bill would require agents to complete the annual update course if they wish to maintain their enhanced authorities.

As a way to help ensure that municipal commissions follow through, the bill requires local agencies to post the training status of its members once a year. This should prove to be a minor burden. CEQ research has shown that a few towns never send anyone to training, to the detriment of wetlands and applicants alike. Those towns should be required to disclose that fact. Towns that are up to date on training will be proud to post their status.

The bill also states that, in the event a town needs extra vouchers, the DEEP would provide them from its wetland penalty fund which already is used for training expenses. Statewide, local wetlands commissions and their agents make more than 4,000 decisions per year. According to our calculations, DEEP would needto come up with a few thousand dollars, at most, in any year, which would amount to a dollar or two for each decision. The benefit/cost ratio for this expenditure is astronomically high, in favor of benefits.

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