



Rivers Alliance of Connecticut

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February 20, 2013

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND EXPRESSING CONCERN FOR CUTS IN US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY WATER MONITORING PROGRAMS AND FISH HATCHERIES

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.

Dear Chairmen Sen. Toni Harp and Rep. Toni Walker, and Members of the Committee :

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ): Rivers Alliance directors and staff wish to express their profound dismay at the proposed cuts to CEQ. This small agency provides enormous services to the residents and officials of Connecticut. Two staff members and nine volunteer commissioners review environmental evaluations of large state-funded projects under the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA); publish the Environmental Monitor so that citizens can be informed of CEPA developments; review high-impact applications to the Siting Council; investigate major environmental problems (such as groundwater contamination and illegal timber cutting) and recommend solutions to the legislature and agencies; publish an annual report tracking the state's progress on its environmental goals; and investigate all citizens' questions and complaints relating to environmental protection, most often arriving at speedy and satisfactory solutions.

CEQ is even-handed and vigilant in protecting the rights of all parties. Three years ago, it was extremely influential in resolving a problem that economic-development advocates in the town of Oxford had encountered in seeking to expand its airport. Rivers Alliance was involved in this negotiation because of wetlands impacts, and we were entirely satisfied that CEQ's work protected both the environment and the rights of those seeking to create a large airport and an airport economic zone.

In general, CEQ is invaluable to individual residents, small organizations, such as Rivers Alliance, and agency staff who are not in a position to respond effectively to complaints and

A tax-exempt
organization under
501 (c) (3) of the
Internal Revenue
Code

questions. This is especially true with complex issues involving several bureaus and agencies.

The proposed budget cuts CEQ staffing in half, thereby guaranteeing it will not be able to continue its work effectively. Probably worse, it would eliminate the independence of CEQ by placing it within the Office of Government Accountability (OGA). This relatively new government office includes a number of formerly independent watchdog agencies. Its troubles have been widely reported. My personal experience with the Freedom of Information Commission since it has been under OGA is that the commission is overwhelmed and crippled. This is no time to be putting more entities into OGA.

CEQ manifests all the qualities we admire in a government office: it is super-LEAN, responsive, responsible, fair, frugal, and hard-working. Please ensure its survival.

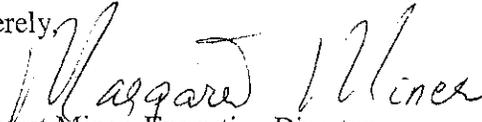
US Geological Survey Water Monitoring Programs: The three USGS budget lines for stream gaging and groundwater monitoring have been collapsed. It appears that in the new budget, the state would lose another gaging station. **The monitoring network has been seriously cut in recent years exactly when we need more water science and data in order to adjust to climate change and extreme storm events. We oppose any cuts.**

Fish Hatcheries: The proposed cuts in the fish hatchery program would probably lead to the elimination of one hatchery (likely either Kensington or Burlington). **Sport fishing brings the state several million dollars revenue annually. We should be enhancing this program.**

This testimony addresses three issues. But our overarching concern is that our chronically underfunded environmental agency will now be even less capable of performing its mission. **Even in this tough economic time, we urge the committee to guarantee a floor of funding for saving the state's important environmental resources for human health and economic sustainability.**

Thank you for your extraordinarily hard work on the state budget. We would be pleased to answer any questions.

Sincerely,


Margaret Miner, Executive Director