



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

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

Public Hearing – March 8, 2013
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Daniel C. Esty
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen

Committee House Bill No. 5816 - AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN EARLIER START TO THE TROUT FISHING SEASON.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Committee House Bill No. 5816 - An Act Establishing an Earlier Start to the Trout Fishing Season. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) offers the following testimony.

DEEP supports in concept advancing the date of opening day of the trout season and we have already initiated doing so as one of several proposed changes to the regulations concerning recreational fishing in the state's inland waters. As such, this proposed statutory change is unnecessary and might actually complicate making future revisions to the date of opening day by regulation if additional adjustments are warranted. We anticipate advancing the date of opening day by one week and we expect that the new date will be in place for the 2014 fishing season.

The traditional opening day of the trout season in our inland waters has for several decades been the third Saturday in April. DEEP's Inland Fisheries Division favors changing opening day to the second Saturday of April, whereas this bill would change opening day to the first Saturday of April. Advancing the season by either one or two weeks would clearly provide greater opportunities for trout anglers, especially in years with favorable weather (e.g., the relatively dry and warm spring of 2012). An earlier opening would likely allow for more youth to take advantage of trout fishing opportunities during their April school vacations. In recent years we have noted that the April vacations of most school districts in Connecticut occur the week prior to opening day. As such, advancing opening day by only one week would greatly benefit our young anglers.

There are a number of constraints and risks associated with moving opening day too early in the season. Our pre-season stocking involves distributing over 350,000 trout into 101 lakes and ponds and 203 rivers and streams throughout Connecticut. The process requires making over 200 distribution loads during a six – seven week period.

One of the biggest challenges to moving opening day forward even one week is that it will be difficult, if not impossible, in some years to stock all of the locations that currently receive trout prior to opening

day. We typically begin stocking trout on or about March 1, and the pre-season stocking continues through opening day. Obviously, moving opening day two weeks earlier as opposed to one week earlier, will greatly increase the likelihood that not all sites will be stocked in time for opening day. The risk will be greater in years that are unusually cold and wet since those conditions would require more frequent cancellations of stocking runs (i.e., the stocking sites cannot be accessed) with limited time to reschedule. Pre-season trout stocking is currently underway, and unlike the mild conditions experienced in 2012, this winter's snow cover has persisted in many parts of the state, complicating trout distribution. While weather in Connecticut is certainly variable from year to year, it would not be possible to stock all waters this year if we had to do so by the first Saturday in April.

Another risk is that trout stocked in rivers and streams (as compared to lakes and ponds) under high flows and cold water conditions are more apt to migrate downstream and away from the stocked areas to areas with little or no angler access. Such conditions are more likely to occur in early March and certainly late February. Stocking sufficiently early to ensure that all trout designated for pre-season stocking were stocked prior to an "advanced" opening day may put more trout out of reach of anglers.

Opening Day is applied to all standard trout waters statewide, and northwestern portions of Connecticut warm up considerably later in some years than do southern and southeastern portions of the state. These geographical differences in weather can affect participation rates, as some anglers are likely not to fish on opening day if conditions are unsuitable (i.e., rivers too high and cold) or uncomfortable (too cold). In fact, the trout season in New York opens on April 1 and license sales and revenue in that state suffer when opening day corresponds with a cold snap. The earlier we advance opening day in Connecticut, the more likely it is that participation and license sales might be negatively affected.

DEEP began to diversify fishing several years ago by providing increased opportunities for year round angling. Most waters not stocked with trout are open year round, and trout fishing is also allowed in numerous trout management areas prior to opening day on a catch and release basis. These opportunities not only keep more Connecticut anglers fishing in Connecticut, but they also attract anglers to our state.

In summary, while DEEP supports the intent of this bill, we find it unnecessary as we are currently in the process of establishing an earlier opening day by regulation. Further, in that the department favors advancing opening day by one week, if this legislation is ultimately approved we would request that it be amended to reflect opening day aligning with the second Saturday in April, not the first Saturday as is currently proposed.

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 860-424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov.