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**Testimony of Sally Harold
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Before the Environment Committee**

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In Support of H. B. No. 6441 - AAC the Dam Safety Program.

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's 28,000 members in Connecticut, I am here today to express our support for Bill 6441. This bill proposes transferring the responsibility and costs for inspection of privately-owned dams from the CT DEEP to the dam owners, requiring all dam owners to register their dams with the state and requiring owners of high and significant hazard dams to file Emergency Operation Plans for their dams.

Many dams benefit people by providing impoundments for water supply, electricity generation, and flood control, but the majority of dams in Connecticut no longer serve the purpose for which they were constructed. Where conditions are appropriate, The Nature Conservancy supports dam removal. Dams disrupt natural processes in rivers and prevent aquatic species from moving freely up and downstream. Over time, the presence of dams in our waterways has diminished water quality, altered habitat, affected thermal changes in the water, increased genetic isolation of aquatic species and affected the health of species inhabiting these important natural systems. For riverine migratory species, these unnatural barriers increase predation pressure as well as delays in migration. Dams prevent movement between feeding and breeding zones for fish, both resident and migratory. Selective dam removal, thoughtfully carried out, is one of the most cost-effective fisheries and river restoration methods available. The proposed bill would help to streamline the permitting process for dam removal.

Connecticut has over 5,000 dams and a requirement that every dam be registered. Over 3,000 have been registered and over 1,500 of those are regulated by the state due to the degree of damage that could result if they failed. More than 500 of these dams (about 17%) are classified as Significant Hazard or High Hazard dams meaning their failure could cause loss of life, damage to habitable structures, residences, roadways and railroads, and significant economic loss. Dams are weakened and become prone to failure by flooding, freezing and thawing, and old age. Therefore dams must be inspected at regular intervals, maintained and repaired; alternatively, where possible dam removal should be considered as a viable alternative to continual maintenance. The fairest way to prevent failure is to hold owners of dams responsible for the cost of inspection and accountable when their dams are not maintained in safe condition. Many owners are unaware of their responsibilities and liabilities as a dam owner and even more are unaware of the impact dams have on streams. The approval of Bill 6441 would raise awareness of the responsibilities associated with dam ownership and improve public safety by ensuring that more dams are inspected more frequently.

In order to meet the current schedule of inspections (once every 2 years for high hazard dams), CT DEEP's one dam safety inspector would have to inspect more than 450 dams each year. Since the Dam Safety Program is also responsible for the state's regulatory program and inspection of the 265 state-owned dams, many dams that should be inspected each year are not. The program is currently able to undertake approximately 100 regulatory dam inspections each year. Transferring the responsibility of dam inspections from the state to dam owners and privately-hired engineers will result in dams being inspected according to schedule, (every two years for high hazard, every five years for significant hazard, seven years for moderate hazard and every ten years for low hazard). It's likely that some owners who are obligated to pay an engineer to inspect their dams may decide to pursue removal as a desirable alternative. And those dams that remain in our rivers will be safer.

We are experiencing more severe and frequent storms in Connecticut so regular maintenance and inspection of dams is critical. The Dam Safety Unit of the CT DEEP is concerned with public safety around dams. Dam failures can be deadly and costly. In 1963 the Spaulding Pond dam in Norwich failed causing six deaths and six million dollars in damage. The 1982 failure of the Bushy Hill dam in Deep River caused an estimated \$50 million in damages. Emergency Operating Plans for high and significant hazard dams will serve as a management tool to reduce public risk during storm events. Evacuations of neighborhoods downstream of a high hazard dam will be based on topography and a dam's impoundment size rather than fear alone.