



**Testimony of Connecticut Fund for the Environment
Before the Environment Committee**

**In support of Raised Bill No. 6441, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DAM SAFETY
PROGRAM**

Submitted by Gwen Macdonald, Director of Habitat Restoration
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Save the Sound, a program of Connecticut Fund for the Environment, ("CFE") is Connecticut's non-profit environmental advocate with over 6,500 members statewide. For over thirty years, CFE has fought to protect, preserve and restore Connecticut's health and environment.

CFE asks the Environment Committee to favorably report Raised Bill No. 6441, An Act Concerning the Dam Safety Program, out of the Committee. CFE sees this bill as an important step to hold owners of dams accountable for the condition of their dams and to provide the Department Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) Dam Safety Program with the tools necessary to enforce existing regulations.

There are approximately 7000 river miles in Connecticut and over 5000 dams. The presence of dams across the New England landscape is part of our history, but in many cases dams no longer serve the purpose for which they were constructed. In these cases, each remnant dam is a barrier to natural riverine habitat connectivity and over time can cause habitat fragmentation, increase water temperature, decrease water quality, and can adversely affect the health of the river system and species in it. Migratory species such as American eel, river herring, American shad, and Atlantic salmon have seen populations decline in part because the species cannot travel between their spawning and feeding habitats. This year the river herring and American eel were nominated as candidates for the federal endangered species list. The listing of key Connecticut fish species on the Endangered Species List is a message we cannot ignore. River restoration through the removal of derelict dams is an effective way to restore habitat for these and other threatened aquatic species. In 2012, over 50 stream miles were reconnected to Long Island Sound through the removal of barriers to fish passage, which has allowed hundreds of the thousands of fish to return to their historic spawning grounds.

In 2008 DEEP's Dam Safety Program inspected 80 dams. Of the 80 dams inspected, 36 percent were in need of repairs significant enough to require a permit and 100 percent were in need of maintenance. In order to comply with current regulation, Dam Safety would need to inspect approximately 450 dams annually. With current staffing, it is impossible for Dam Safety to both inspect the required number of dams and to take action against dam owners who do not

properly maintain their dams. These derelict dams pose a hazard to riverine wildlife and to human communities downstream, should the dam breach catastrophically. Transferring the burden of dam inspections from the state to the dam owner will not only allow the existing Dam Safety staff to better enforce maintenance orders, it will allow dam owners to properly evaluate the cost/benefit of keeping a dam on their property.

With the frequency and intensity of severe storms on the rise, inspecting and enforcing maintenance actions on dams is all the more critical. Towns throughout Connecticut are identifying ways to make their communities more resilient to future storms and sea level rise. One way to reduce risk to coastal communities is to remove derelict dams. Section 6 of this bill proposes new language under Sec 22a-411 of the statute that would allow the commissioner to issue a general permit for “dam removal that improves fish passage or provides other ecological benefits.” This will reduce the time and cost of permitting to the dam owner, which may lead to more dams being removed from the landscape for fewer dollars in fewer years. We believe fewer dams on rivers will lead to healthier streams and safer coastal communities.

CFE sees Raised Bill No. 6441, An Act Concerning the Dam Safety Program, as important to strengthening the enforcement capabilities of the Dam Safety Program so they may better defend the public safety of Connecticut residents and the environment. Holding dam owners responsible for inspecting their dam is a cost-effective way to evaluate potential hazards on private property and raise awareness about maintenance and removal options. We look forward to working with DEEP and the Environment Committee to make this a reality.