

# Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6809  
AN ACT CONCERNING FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR CERTAIN  
**Title:** STREAMSIDE BUFFERS.  
**Vote Date:** March 24, 2023  
**Vote Action:** JFS to the floor  
**PH Date:** 3/10/2023  
**File No.:**

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## SPONSORS

Environment Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

For water quality and pollution control incentivize the retention of vegetation along the state's streams and rivers.

## JFS Language:

Added provisions requiring certain training for inland wetland commission members and staff.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

### Timothy Abbott, Regional Conservation Director, Housatonic Valley Association:

Mr. Abbott submitted testimony that the HVA fully supports the bill that would allow the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to use available storm water infrastructure funding to purchase conservate easements.

**Elissa Johnson:**

Ms. Johnson testified in support but would like to see the language amended to include riparian corridors along watercourses to include lakes. Currently a local association -The Friends of Ball Pond- is proposing building an impervious walkway in the riparian area along the northern edge of the lake. We need to incentivize protecting and restoring buffers along all our bodies of water.

**Louise Washer, President, Norwalk River Watershed Association:**

Ms. Washer testified that without a change in state policy, riparian buffers will continue to disappear losing the most environmentally friendly way to protect water quality. Connecticut has the least protective buffer standards in the New England states.

**Paul Aresta, Executive Director, Council on Environmental Quality:**

Mr. Aresta testified that this bill would provide the mechanism for establishing conservation easements along streams and rivers and require these easements remain in a vegetated condition. We recommend the definition of "vegetated condition" not restrict the removal and or control of invasive plants within the designated conservation easement.

**Raul de Brigard:**

Mr. de Brigard testified that based on his experience as a member of the Connecticut River Gateway the present language of the bill should include buffers for lakes. Many Connecticut lakes suffer from the worst effects of runoffs damaging water quality and spurring the growth of weeds. He stated that he was pleased that the bill as drafted is respectful to the property rights of those next to streams and rivers.

**Bill Lucey, Soundkeeper, Save the Sound:**

Mr. Lucey expressed strong support for incentivizing landowners to maintain buffers along state waterways through state funding. Robust riparian buffers along channels and shorelines are the easiest method for protecting streams and lakes from pollution. I have measures riparian setbacks for the US Forest Service, and they typically require setbacks ranging from 100-300" depending on management goals.

**Jane Brawerman, Executive Director, CT River Coastal Conservation District:**

Ms. Brawerman testified that through her work she is aware of the widespread degradation of stream health due to land use and development. Streamside buffers are a low-cost nature-based solution to protect rivers by stabilizing streambanks preventing erosion.

**Rhea Drozdenko, River Steward, Connecticut River Conservancy:**

Ms. Drozdenko testified on the importance of protecting existing buffers is more cost effective and impactful than restoring lost ones. Riparian buffers act as filters from stormwater runoff transporting pollutants from roads, farmland and sidewalks into our river system.

**Francis Pickering, Executive Director, Western Connecticut Council of Governments.**

Mr. Pickering testified that the bill does not go far enough, and Connecticut needs to get in line with best practices and adopt minimum setbacks. Riparian buffers are the last line of defense to flooding. We need to be up to the standards of Vermont which has setbacks of 100 feet from rivers and 50 feet from streams.

**Denise Savageau, President, CT Association of Conservation Districts:**

Ms. Savageau testified that conservation districts have been developing watershed management plans across Connecticut with funding provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services. Having state funding available will allow organizations to better leverage federal conservation dollars.

**Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns:**

Ms. Gara testified that COST supports providing incentives to landowner to encourage them to maintain vegetation buffers protecting the quality of water resources in our communities.

**Lori Brown, Executive Director, CT League of Conservation Voters:**

Ms. Brown testified that when passed this bill will enable funding to address pollution from stormwater runoff. Connecticut has the least protective buffer standards among all of the New England States. Riparian buffers are a simple and effective nature-based solution.

**Alicea Charamut, Executive Director, River Alliance of Connecticut:**

Ms. Charamut testified about the harmful algal blooms in our drinking water supply watersheds and how riparian buffers are the most cost-effective and efficient solution to reducing key nutrients that cause HAB's.

**Nathan Frohling, Director of External Affairs, The Nature Conservancy:**

Mr. Frohling submitted testimony on the health of Long Island sound and the 2015 revision of a study of the sound and how Connecticut committed to increase the area of natural vegetation withing 300 feet of any stream or lake.

**William Hyatt, Vice-Chair, Connecticut Fisheries Advisory Council:**

Mr. Hyatt testified that wild trout populations are an indicator of the health of our streams and our populations have been steadily declining over the last 25 years. Stream buffers will stem this decline, the larger the buffer the better. To provide for more efficient long-term monitoring and enforcement we encourage the ownership of conservation easements to be transferred from state to local municipalities or land trusts.

**Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, National Audubon Society:**

Mr. LaFrance testified in support of the bill and would suggest that Connecticut consult Vermont's program. We have offered some JFS language in our testimony.

**Margaret Miner, Environmental Consultant:**

Ms. Miner testified how vegetated buffers are the best possible and most cost-effective protectors of water quality by processing stormwater runoff.

**The following also submitted testimony in support of the bill:**

Abe Amato MD  
Patrick Comins, Executive Director, Connecticut Audubon Society  
Thomas Fowler, Retired Engineer  
Oliver Gaffney

Elizabeth Kiernan  
Roger Kuhns, State Coordinator, ST Citizens Climate Lobby  
Melissa Leonard  
Dorothy McIver  
Amy Blaymore Patterson, Executive Director, CT Land Conservation Council  
Susan Olson  
Susan Rudolph  
Joan Seguin  
Sam Slater  
Rebecca Taddei  
Laura Wagner  
Stetlana Wasserman

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed

**Reported by: Pamela Bianca**

**Date: March 27, 2023**