

Scope of Study

Stream Flow in Connecticut

Background

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) estimates Connecticut has about 8,000 miles of rivers and streams. Part of DEP's mission is to conserve and improve the state's natural resources and environment, including rivers and streams, for present and future generations.

According to the Department of Public Health (DPH), the state has over 3,200 public water systems. Approximately 84 percent of the state's population (2.8 million people) receives water from one of the 600 community water systems operating throughout the state. Community water systems serve at least 25 people throughout the year and many utilize reservoirs as a primary water source. In addition to drinking water, reservoir water is used for a multitude of other purposes, including providing stream flow water to sustain downstream ecosystems.

At times, the balance between ensuring the state's water supply and maintaining an adequate flow of water (stream flow) from the same water sources such as reservoirs, for a viable river and stream ecosystem may be at odds. The legislature most recently recognized this issue with the passage of P.A. 01-177 and P.A. 02-76. The first act created a state Water Planning Council and required it to examine the state's water policy and management system, including stream flow. The council developed a draft report with its major findings and recommended action steps which was submitted to the legislature in December 2002. The second act made the council a permanent body and requires it to annually submit its findings to the legislature.

Area of Focus

The study will determine if the state has a coherent and comprehensive policy, planning process, and management structure governing minimum stream flow. The study will also determine whether such policy achieves a responsible balance between protecting present -- and anticipated -- water supply needs and a viable stream and riverbed ecosystem as a natural resource that is largely dependent on the same water source.

Areas of Analysis

- A. Examine the state's current stream flow policy(ies) to determine whether a coherent and comprehensive policy exists. Identifying whether the state has an adequate water supply to support its stream flow policy, and whether the policy balances the need for water as a utility with that of water as a natural resource. The study will also identify and assess any existing standards governing stream flow, as well as consumption requirements on part of water suppliers.

- B. Examine the state's stream flow planning and management structures. Determine if the state adequately plans for stream flow. Assess the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the management structure in place to support and oversee the state's stream flow system, including enforcement of current stream flow regulations. Verify whether proper and accurate stream flow data are collected, analyzed, and reported as part of an overall management system.
- C. Evaluate the state's Water Diversion Act and its relevancy to stream flow. Assess any interrelationship between the water diversion permitting process within DEP and stream flow. Examine whether the state's current water diversion system affects the balance between water as a utility, including drinking water, and water/stream flow as a natural resource for ecological purposes.
- D. Determine and assess the level of interagency communication, cooperation, and coordination among the entities responsible for planning and managing the state's water supply as it relates to stream flow, specifically DEP, DPH, and water suppliers. Examine the degree to which the state considers and balances the overall views and desires of stream flow advocates with those of water suppliers in water policy planning, development, and management.
- E. Evaluate the progress made in implementing the action steps outlined in the Water Planning Council's report recently submitted to the legislature as they relate to stream flow, as well as examining and assessing any other reports regarding stream flow in Connecticut.