

## Explanation of HB 5334 as of 3/5/26

The Vegetated Riparian Buffers Working Group was created by Public Act 25-12 in 2025 and began meeting last fall under the leadership of Rep. Mary Mushinsky and Rep. Mark Anderson.

Public Act 25-12 established a legislative working group to identify how protections for vegetated riparian buffers can be added to state laws and regulations. The goals are to improve and protect Connecticut's watercourses, address climate change impacts identified by the Governor's Council on Climate Change, and help meet the health goals for Long Island Sound while still respecting private property rights.

The working group concluded that the best way to protect vegetated buffers is by updating Connecticut's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act (IWWA).

HB 5334 – An Act Concerning Riparian Areas clarifies that IWWA commissions have the authority to regulate riparian buffers.

Key updates include:

- Adding “riparian area” to the definition of regulated activity.
- Allowing commissions to consider impacts on public drinking water supplies, cold-water habitats, and resilience to severe storms and extreme weather.
- Allowing local commissions to consider the effects of removing natural vegetation or increasing impervious surfaces.

One major concern is the proposed language in Section 4, Subdivision 1, related to farm exemptions for roads and buildings. This change is unrelated to riparian buffers and weakens current IWWA protections. It would allow wetlands and watercourses to be filled for farm roads and buildings without engineering or municipal oversight.

For example, a farmer could fill in a watercourse, effectively creating a dam. This could flood upstream properties, reduce downstream water flow, and create dam safety risks. Even installing a culvert could significantly alter natural stream flow, especially during extreme storm events. This exemption would apply statewide, including in drinking water supply watersheds, potentially creating serious risks.

More information:

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