



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 7174**  
AAC RIPARIAN BUFFERS AND ASSOCIATED ENVIRONMENTAL PROVISIONS  
March 17, 2025

**To:** Honorable Co-Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Parker, and Distinguished Members of the Environment Committee

**From:** Connor Yakaitis, Deputy Director, CT League of Conservation Voters

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in strong support of Raised Bill No. 7174**, which would strengthen Connecticut's critical Inland Wetlands Protection Act by incorporating riparian buffers into state law. The Connecticut League of Conservation Voters (CTLCV) is a statewide environmental nonprofit dedicated to advocating for sound environmental policies that protect our state's natural resources and communities. HB 7174 represents a critical step in closing a significant gap in our environmental regulations and aligning Connecticut with the rest of New England in protecting these vital ecosystems.

Riparian buffers are the vegetated areas adjacent to wetlands and watercourses (defined in the legislation as not less than 100 feet), serving as natural barriers that protect water quality, reduce erosion, and mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events. These buffers play a crucial role in filtering pollutants, stabilizing streambanks, and providing essential habitat for wildlife. Despite their well-documented benefits, Connecticut remains the only New England state without explicit legal protections for riparian buffers. HB 7174 rectifies this omission by ensuring that these natural defenses are preserved and managed appropriately.

HB 7174 finally recognizes and codifies the value of riparian buffers in our environmental laws. It provides a nature-based solution that is cheaper than manufactured mitigation initiatives. Protecting these buffers is a proven, cost-effective strategy to:

- **Reduce flooding and protect communities** - The devastating floods that impacted the Naugatuck Valley in August highlight the urgent need for natural flood mitigation measures. Riparian buffers absorb excess rainwater, slow runoff, and reduce flood risks for surrounding communities.
- **Improve and protect water quality** – By filtering out pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, and sediment before they enter rivers and streams, riparian buffers help maintain clean drinking water and healthy aquatic ecosystems.

- **Balance environmental protection with property rights –** Establishing clear riparian buffer protections ensures responsible land use that benefits both property owners and the broader public, preventing costly environmental degradation while respecting private land ownership.

Natural buffers are the simplest and most efficient tool we have to achieve these goals. Unlike expensive engineered solutions, riparian buffers provide flood protection, water filtration, and habitat conservation at little to no cost. Investing in their protection now will save communities and the state from costly damage and remediation efforts in the future.

HB 7174 is a long-overdue measure that aligns Connecticut with best practices already in place across New England. By integrating riparian buffers into the Inland Wetlands Protection Act, **we will be taking a proactive approach to climate resilience, water quality protection, and sustainable land management.**

We also understand that some of the specific language may need some adjustments and hope the Environment Committee will work closely with water advocates to iron out the details. However, we cannot continue to leave riparian buffers out of the protections of the Inland Wetlands Act.

It is worth noting that the EPA now is attempting to further gut our nation's clean water safeguards. This attack comes on top of the 2023 Supreme Court ruling that severely undermined the Clean Water Act.

We urge the Environment Committee and the General Assembly to support this bill to safeguard Connecticut's environment and public health for generations to come.

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