

CONNECTICUT  
Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5334  
Environment Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director  
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Co-Chairs Lopes and Parker, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Bumgardner, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan, and members of the Environment Committee:

*The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~117 land trusts. CLCC is a 501(c)(3) organization operating statewide. Our mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.*

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in strong support of **House Bill No. 5334, An Act Concerning Riparian Areas**.

HB7174 proposes critical protections for riparian buffers—naturalized, vegetated areas that run alongside rivers, streams, wetlands, and other aquatic systems. These vegetated areas play a fundamental role in maintaining healthy watersheds and providing a range of ecological benefits. As cost-effective, nature-based solutions, natural riparian buffers help filter pollutants from runoff, reduce erosion and sedimentation, provide essential wildlife habitat, sequester and store carbon, protect biodiversity, and mitigate the impacts of flooding.

Despite their well-documented environmental and economic benefits, Connecticut remains the only New England state without explicit protections for riparian buffers. HB5334 addresses this gap by incorporating riparian buffers into the state's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act, designating them as regulated areas under the jurisdiction of municipal inland wetlands and watercourse commissions.

The bill recognizes the role of vegetated buffers in water quality and resilience, which is especially critical in the face of increasing extreme weather events, including severe flooding, which are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change. At the same time, federal rollbacks of wetlands and environmental protections make it even more imperative for Connecticut to take proactive steps at the state level.

Other noteworthy provisions of the bill extend protection for vegetation along all watercourses, recognizing the interconnectedness of waterbodies, and restore the burden of proof on the applicant, rather than the municipal commission, to demonstrate that a proposed activity would not harm wetlands or watercourses.

With respect to suggestions to improve the bill, CLCC aligns our testimony with that of the Rivers Alliance of CT, including concerns raised regarding Section 4, which expands the agricultural exemption to include direct filling of wetlands and watercourses. CLCC concurs that Section 4 should be rewritten to ensure that existing wetland and watercourse protections are not weakened or undermined.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your leadership on these important issues. I would be happy to answer any questions.

