



## WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING

While Connecticut is usually blessed with ample rainfall, various factors result in some of our streams having insufficient flows for healthy fish and aquatic habitats, and insufficient water for human use. River advocates have therefore long been proponents of pro-active planning for water use, land use, and water conservation to determine the fairest and most sustainable allocations of water to ensure that different parts of the State have adequate human water supply now and in the future as well as adequate flows in our rivers to enable wildlife to thrive. In 2014 the General Assembly passed legislation charging the State's Water Planning Council with developing a comprehensive water plan to balance the needs of public water supply, economic development, recreation, and ecological health. Last week, the council approved the final draft of the plan for submission to the legislature.

### State Water Plan Overview

Connecticut needs a comprehensive and integrated plan to guide the management of our water resources. In 2014 the legislature passed a bill that directed the Water Planning Council (WPC) to devise such a plan. CDM Smith (the firm contracted to write the plan), the WPC, Steering Committee, and Subcommittees have worked intensely over the past 18 months to develop the document that is now ready for the legislature. The Water Plan in its current form may not be everything we had hoped and dreamed it would be, but significant progress has been made with the time and resources allocated to the process. This Plan is iterative and approval is an important first step in the process. There are very important issues (such as registered diversions and drought management) that have yet to be properly addressed. But this work cannot continue unless we move forward on improving the current plan to the extent possible while keeping a focus on working hard in the next five years to bring the plan around to a TRUE platform for consistent, informed decision making.

### State Water Plan Approval Process

The final document which will be submitted to the legislature is available now on [www.ct.gov/water](http://www.ct.gov/water). The Plan will be submitted to the Environment, Public Health, Planning & Development, and Energy & Technology Committees. If approved in the Committees, the Plan will move on to the General Assembly for approval. If the committees do not recommend approval, the Plan will go back to the WPC for revisions. Resubmission of the plan may happen in the subsequent session. The Plan will be effective when approved by the general assembly. If the plan is not approved by the General Assembly within 24 months of the first submission to the legislature, it will be forwarded to the Governor for adoption or rejection.

### Water: Public Trust Resource

The State comprehensive Water Plan is due to go to the legislature in February. Final edits were to be made by Water Planning Council, but were postponed due to opposition by water utilities and the Department of Public Health to including any reference to water as a public trust resource. This term means that water belongs to the public, is held in trust by the State, and should be managed sustainably and to the benefit of the public. So, the question is: who do they think owns our water?

# LAND CONSERVATION

## **Community Investment Act**

Established in 2005 as a dedicated source of funding outside the budget, the Community Investment Act (CIA) provides consistent support for state land use programs for open space conservation, farmland preservation/dairy production, historic preservation and the development of affordable housing. Through a \$40 surcharge on local land recordings the CIA has funded over 1,400 projects with \$152 million invested, benefiting every community in the State. Yet, year after year, funds in the CIA are subject to diversion into the General Fund to help offset budget deficits.

## **Municipal Open Space Funding Option**

Towns and cities need a sustainable source of funding for local conservation and stewardship efforts that would not impact the municipal mill rate or require additional bonding. The Municipal Open Space Funding Bill would enable, but not require, select towns and cities to establish their own dedicated source of conservation funding by adopting a conveyance fee of up to 1% on the purchase of residential real estate (only charged on amounts over \$150,000).

## **Source Water Protection through Land Protection**

Connecticut is blessed with rich water resources and has taken steps to protect them. Our State has some of the nation's strongest protections for the forests and open space that surround our public drinking water reservoirs and filter the water we drink. But serious threats have arisen in recent years. Connecticut has witnessed a rapid growth in developed land compared to a much slower rate of population growth. In addition, the specific proposal of the City of New Britain to lease over 130 acres of New Britain Water Company land to Tilcon for a quarry operation is evidence that we need to remain ever vigilant about protecting the strong standards that exist.

## **Constitutional Amendment**

This Resolution proposes to amend the State Constitution to require a public hearing and two-thirds vote in the legislature before public lands could be sold, swapped, or given away by the General Assembly. Maine, Massachusetts, and New York constitutions have similar provisions to protect public lands. The resolution, as presented, has been endorsed by over 130 organizations and businesses. If the resolution is passed this year (also passed in 2016), it would go to a public referendum vote in November 2018.

## **Land Conveyance**

Annual Conveyance Bill typically contains a mix of controversial and non-controversial proposals to sell, swap, or give away public lands. Often significant work is required to remove controversial proposals from an amended bill that passes the Government Administration & Election Committee.

## **Restore Bonding for CT Trails & Greenways**

All of the previously allocated bonding for CT Trails & Greenways has now been committed to 41 grants and multiple projects in more than half of all communities across the State. There is a significant backlog of requests for funding of shovel-ready projects designed to create, improve, and maintain Connecticut's recreational trails (hiking, biking, equestrian, water, etc.). A bill to reauthorize \$7 million in bonding is being requested of the Environment Committee.

## **Passport to the Parks**

Thanks to the Passport to the Parks program, there will be no parking fee charged at Connecticut's State Parks starting this January. The Passport is funded by a \$10 fee on vehicle registrations which could generate as much as \$16 million/year for the operations and maintenance of State Parks. However, there were some hiccups in the authorizing language that need to be fixed, and the Passport funds should be protected against raids for other purposes.

## **CLIMATE & CLEAN ENERGY**

A comprehensive clean energy agenda was produced in 2017 and has been updated for the current legislative session. The agenda has been adopted by a diverse coalition of organizations, advocates and business leaders. The agenda includes initiatives in four key areas that would:

**Ensure Accountability in Climate Change Planning**

**Cut Fossil Fuels to Protect Our Climate**

**Protect Investments in Energy Efficiency**

**Increase Renewables to Build a Sustainable Future with Green Jobs**

A detailed document is attached that explains each of the initiatives listed below and provides contacts for additional information.

**Global Warming Solutions Act**

**Planning for Sea Level Rise**

**Fix Ratepayer Impact Statement**

**Energy Efficiency, Clean Energy & RGGI Funds**

**Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard**

**Community Shared Solar**

**Virtual Net Metering**

**Zero Emissions Renewable Energy Credit**

**Offshore Wind Expansion**

**Carbon Pricing**

**Natural Gas Infrastructure**

**Zero Emission Vehicles (Zevs) And Electric Vehicles (Evs)**

# OTHER KEY ISSUES

## **Bottle Deposit**

Increase handling fee for bottle redemption centers to keep program viable, and expand types of containers with deposits. Prevent industry distributors from dismantling the program.

## **Packaging & Producer Responsibility**

2017 legislation supported by DEEP and advocates tried to establish a statutory framework for adding products for recycling or reclamation, rather than legislation for each product separately. The legislature preferred to create a task force charged with making recommendations for product stewardship and producer responsibility. This task force did not fulfil their charge and instead voted to use bottle deposit fees for purposes other than improving the deposit program.

## **Pesticides**

A special report by the Council on Environmental Quality shows a major drop in inspections and enforcement action for pesticide violations. The State should direct some of the \$3 million collected in application and registration fees to beef up the Pesticides Management Program

## **Fracking Waste**

Passage is overdue for a strong statewide ban on import of fracking waste. Approximately thirty towns now have local bans that are stronger than the failed legislation last year. A renewed effort is underway to pass stronger language this year that covers the whole state.

# ADMINISTRATION'S PRIORITIES

An important goal of the Governor's administration is to align climate goals with state's energy plan. Furthermore, our State is being directly impacted by the unparalleled federal assault on our nation's environmental laws protecting natural resources. In response, Connecticut is at the forefront of opposing the latest efforts to open up all our waters to offshore drilling and seismic exploration.

## **Prevent Rollbacks of Environmental Protection**

The effort to weaken environmental protections has centered on making enforcement more difficult under existing laws and regulations, or to eliminate laws altogether. In 2017, there were bills in the State Legislature regarding: 90-day automatic permit approvals; enforcing Consent Orders; tying up permits and regulations with legal challenges; waiving civil penalties for first time violators; and exemptions for new businesses.

## **Planning for Sea Level Rise**

It has been five years since Public Act 13-179 required various State and municipal planning processes to consider the effects of sea level change scenarios that NOAA had published in 2012, and required UConn's Marine Sciences Division to periodically update those scenarios. For the past year, UConn has been analyzing, updating, and applying these scenarios to Long Island Sound. Legislation will be needed to ensure that statutory planning requirements regarding sea level rise reflect the most accurate scientific information possible.