

## Planning and Development Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6830  
**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING FOR MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES OF INLAND WETLANDS AGENCIES.  
**Vote Date:** 2/14/2025  
**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable  
**PH Date:** 2/3/2025  
**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121<sup>st</sup> District.  
Rep. Tom Delnicki, 14<sup>th</sup> District.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

A legislative update focused on improving the qualifications and training of members and staff within inland wetlands agencies. The primary reason for the changes is to ensure that all members and staff of these agencies complete a comprehensive training program on the regulation and management of inland wetlands. The mandate for periodic training every four years, or once per term, ensures that members and staff stay up to date on any changes to laws, regulations, or best practices, helping agencies maintain high standards over time.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**William Hyatt, Vice Chair, Connecticut Fishery Advisory Council:** The FAC advocates for requiring all members and staff of these agencies to complete the training and retake it every four years or per term. Currently, only one member is required to undergo any training. The FAC believes that well-trained agencies are crucial, especially as Connecticut faces increasing environmental challenges and competition for developable land. The proposed bill aligns with similar training requirements for municipal Planning and Zoning commissions and is seen as an important step to ensure that municipal agencies are adequately prepared to protect public interests.

**Paul Aresta, Executive Director, State of Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality:**

Recommend actions to improve state environmental programs, advise other state agencies on the environmental impacts of proposed projects, and investigate citizens' complaints and allegations of violations of environmental laws. Wetlands are very important to various ecosystems and serves many functions such as flood water retention, recharge areas for groundwater and their ability to store and sequester carbon.

**Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, CT DEEP:** The Department supports the intent of the bill, as understanding the technical and programmatic information contained in the Department's training program is essential to supporting informed and consistent decision-making. However, the Department recognizes that these training requirements may have implications for inland wetlands agencies, including the ability to recruit and retain volunteers, that are best addressed by the affected municipalities. Therefore, the Department supports most portions of the bill and has concerns about one subdivision.

**Micheal Glidden, Legislation Liaison, CAZEO:** The CAZEO supports the current statute of requiring one member and the staff member of the agencies to complete the training course. As the education will be a cost to the town, it will be outweighed by the long-term effect of educated staff and commissioner members. Educating the committees will help them make better decisions and reduce or eliminate the chance of unwarranted lawsuits.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Alicia Charamut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance of CT:** The training is designed to ensure that commissioners are well-informed about wetlands protection, enhancing the efficiency of commission meetings and boosting public confidence. Currently, only one member per agency is required to complete the training, a standard established 50 years ago. The bill aims to update this outdated rule, arguing that online access to training eliminates previous barriers and provides a minimal time commitment for volunteers. Additionally, the training program should be regularly updated by DEEP to reflect changes in laws and regulations, which is particularly important given the department's reduced capacity. The bill also recommends that DEEP update the training program by June 1, 2026, and submit it to the legislature for review.

**Rhea Drozdenko, River Steward, Connecticut River Conservancy:** The CRC highlights the importance of IWWCs in protecting wetlands and watercourses and acknowledges the valuable volunteer work of commissioners. The CRC points out that not all commissioners currently have formal training, which can hinder decision-making. The bill would require all commissioners to complete an 8-hour online training program, which is convenient and won't burden them. The CRC urges support to ensure all commissioners are adequately informed to make well-informed decisions.

**John Guskowski, Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association:**

Currently, there are few training requirements for these agencies, despite their significant role in making crucial land-use decisions. CCAPA argues that, like members of other boards, wetlands agency members need a basic understanding of skills like reading site plans and drainage reports, as well as the legal aspects of their roles. The bill would provide equal training requirements for wetlands agencies, aligning them with the training mandated for other land-use boards. While acknowledging the difficulty small towns face in recruiting volunteers, CCAPA emphasizes that the proposed 8-hour online training every four years is minimal. The benefits of this training include improving public trust, reducing legal risks, and ensuring that commissioners are better prepared to carry out their duties. CCAPA urges the passage of the bill to enhance the effectiveness and integrity of local land-use decision-making.

**Joyce Leiz, Executive Director, The Connecticut Audubon Society:** Also believes what Rhea Drizdenko says. She also adds that "CAS supports the maintenance of an updated on-line training program for municipal agencies that implement the provisions of the Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act."

**Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director, Land Conservation Council:** Aligns their concerns with Alicea Charamut of Rivers Alliance of Connecticut. A staggering 65% of wetlands in Connecticut have been lost, expresses deeply for the protection of the remaining wetland resources due to its critical ecological functions.

**Elizabeth Raisbeck, Co-Chair, Groton Conservation Advocates:** Agrees with what Rhea Drozdenko has to say. Extends on how members of these wetland agencies don't have a proper implantation of our state's wetland laws and regulations and how that should change.

**Denise Savageau, Chair, Council on Soil and Water Conservation:** The council and their members have worked with DEEP since 1972 to provide technical assistance and education to DEEP and various other local municipalities. They suggest language change on line 29 "on the Internet web site **and/or through virtual or live trainings as determined by** of the Department of Environmental Protection to members of and staff employed by inland wetland agencies." They suggest changing the training to be offered by other entities including and not limited to "University of Connecticut, the Council on Soil and Water Conservation and local conservation districts, approved by DEEP."

**Janet P. Brooks, Environmental Attorney:** The statement expresses support and opposition to various aspects of a wetlands agency training requirement. She supports mandatory training for all members and staff, as well as setting deadlines for training completion. However, she opposes allowing individuals who were already serving as January 1, 2026, to serve, deliberate and vote for up to 12 months before completing training. She also opposes a similar 12-month grace period for newly seated or hired members and staff. Additionally, the statement supports the development of additional training but recommends that the Commissioner certify other qualified individuals or entities to provide live continuing education. Lastly, she supports the idea of tracking training status, but instead of municipal reporting, recommends that this information be maintained on the DEEP website.

**Thomas Olson, Conservation Commission Member, Town of Groton:** "The complexities of inland wetlands, and the volunteer nature of commissioners, makes the conduct of required training a reasonable requirement for those serving as responsible and knowledgeable members, in order to conduct the public's work in the most effective manner."

**Jim Perras, CEO, Home Builders & Remodelers Association of CT:** Emphasizes the importance of including development professional's perspective in the training curriculum for inland wetlands agencies. This would help create a balanced regulatory approach that protects the environment while avoiding unnecessary delays and obstacles to housing development.

**Cynthia Rabinowitz, Soil and Wetland Scientist, Northwest Conservation District:** Agrees with what Rhea Drozdenko says. She has worked as a professional wetland scientist working in Connecticut for the last 45 years.

**Louise Washer, President, Norwalk River Watershed Association:** This association has the watershed for 6 Connecticut towns; including Norwalk, Wilton, Ridgefield, New Canaan, Weston, and Redding. Also engages over 2,500 community members in its work to protect water quality and wildlife habitats in their watersheds. They have seen, in her 15 years of work, a steady loss of wetlands in the watershed towns due to disregard or ignorance of the municipality's inland wetlands regulations.

**Debra Bolgna**  
**Paul DiGianvittorio**  
**Shirley McCarthy**  
**Michelle Rudy**  
**Alison Zyla**  
**Peter Auster**  
**Juliet Caine**  
**Kathy Czepiel**  
**Barbara Doyle**  
**Adelheid Koepfer**  
**Laura Lynch**  
**Donald Rieger Jr**  
**Wendy Ruggeri**  
**Karen Schnitzer**

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST):** Expresses concerns about DEEP's ability to update and administer the training, given the department's limited resources. They also worry that the extensive training requirements could discourage people from volunteering for local wetlands agencies, as towns already struggle to find volunteers for various boards. Additionally, COST suggests that individuals with expertise in inland wetlands issues, such as attorneys or engineers, should be exempt from the training or able to request a waiver. COST appreciates that the bill includes a provision ensuring that

failure to complete the training will not invalidate an agency's actions, which is important for maintaining local decision-making and project approvals.

***Zackary McKeown, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM):*** CCM supports making the training available online but opposes the mandate for members to complete it once and every four years thereafter. They recommend the training be done only once. CCM argues that additional requirements will make it harder to fill positions on local boards and commissions, and these decisions should be managed by individual municipalities.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in opposition of this bill:

***John Henkel***

#### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

***Richard Newton***

***Francis R. Pickering, Executive Director, Western Connecticut Council of Governments:*** Has multiple recommendations for improving wetlands practices. These include municipal inland wetland enforcement program, municipal wetlands training and professional credentials, municipal inland wetlands administration, state inland wetland program improvements, wetland avoidance strategies, dual purpose commissions and alternative approaches to regulating inland wetlands.

**Reported by: Austin Adil**

**Date: 3/3/2025**