

PRESS RELEASE

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Connecticut Environmental Community Celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act

Connecticut's environmental community gathered at Dinosaur State Park on Thursday, December 1, 2022, in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act. The ceremony included the presentation of the Governor Lamont's proclamation, naming 2022 as the Year of Inland Wetlands and Watercourses in Connecticut, by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) representative Graham Stevens, Chief of the Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse. Commissioner John Betkoski, PURA served as the Master of Ceremonies for the event. Betkoski and Stevens also serve together on Connecticut's Water Planning Council.

The celebration marked the final event in a year-long series of programs coordinated by the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts and Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, in conjunction with the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions, CT DEEP, and the State Water Plan Outreach and Education Committee. Following the ceremony, Kip Kolesinskas, professional soil scientist, led a wetland walk highlighting the importance of wetland soils. Kolesinskas served as the State Soil Scientist in Connecticut for USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and was involved early on in training local land use officials.

"When Connecticut adopted this ground-breaking legislation, Congress was just working to finalize the federal Clean Water Act. Over the fifty years that the Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act has been in place, those that work and volunteer to implement its framework have protected countless acres of wetlands and vital watercourses that provide us with cleaner water, protect critical habitats, and ensure vital ecosystem benefits can occur. As we face growing challenges with climate change and its effects, these protections will continue serve the people of Connecticut well" stated Tracy R. Babbidge, Deputy Commissioner of Environmental Quality for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

“This year, the Water Planning Council selected Inland Wetlands and Watercourses as a theme for our State Water Plan year-long education and outreach program” noted Betkoski. “The role of wetlands in water resource planning cannot be overstated. I helped kick-off a year-long celebration in February for World Wetland Day and was happy to be part of this celebration today.”

The Connecticut Inland Wetland and Watercourses Act was passed by the CT General Assembly in 1972. The landmark legislation was one of the first bills championed by the newly formed Department for Environmental Protection (now DEEP). Unique to Connecticut, the Act defined inland wetlands by soil type and included alluvial and flood plain soils in the definition. It also defined watercourses and set precedent for clearly recognizing the relationship between land use and water resource protection and management. The Act created a regularly framework and created local inland wetland commissions to implement the program at the municipal level.

"We take it for granted now, but it was a groundbreaking public policy statement 50 years ago for state legislators to declare that the wetlands and watercourses of Connecticut are an 'indispensable and irreplaceable but fragile natural resource with which the citizens of the state have been endowed.' Of course, they were right, and the residents of Connecticut have been reaping the benefits of this environmentally conscious decision ever since," said state Senator Christine Cohen (D-Guilford), who is Senate Chair of the legislature's Environment Committee.

In October, the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions dedicated its annual meeting to the IWWA and joined in the celebration at Dinosaur State Park. “As we continue to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act (IWWA), CACIWC again extends its appreciation to the thousands of volunteer inland wetlands and conservation commissioners and staff who have dedicated their time and efforts to protect our wetlands and watercourse habitats throughout the past five decades” stated Alan J. Siniscalchi, President Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc. (CACIWC)

“Upon passage of the IWWA, local soil and water conservation districts, working in coordination with USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, began providing technical assistance and training to local inland wetland commissions and this continues today.” stated Denise Savageau, President of CACD. “The conservation districts understand soils and watersheds. They provide an invaluable service to local land use commissions working to protect inland wetlands and watercourses.”

The Governor’s Council on Climate Change Working and Natural Lands Work Group documented the importance of inland wetlands and watercourses in climate change mitigation and resiliency in its 2020 report. These water resources provide critical ecosystem services related to water quality, flood control, drought mitigation, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration/storage.

“The IWWA is not just about inland wetlands but also is about watercourses” reminds Alicea Charamut, Executive Director for Rivers Alliance of Connecticut. “As we celebrate this important legislation, we look are also looking forward, especially as we face challenges of climate change, to ensure that we have clean abundant water in our rivers and streams for fish and faucet. We will need to be pro-active in protection of our water resources.”

The event was hosted by the following organizations:

CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation - Rivers Alliance of CT - CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions - CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection - Audubon Connecticut - CT Land Conservation Council - CT League of Conservation Voters – CT Forest and Park Association – CT River Coastal Conservation District, Eastern CT Conservation District – North Central Conservation District – Northwest Conservation District – Southwest Conservation District - River Advocates of South Central CT

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