

Riparian Buffers Working Group – November 5, 2025 – Summary for Buffers Briefing

The [Vegetated Riparian Buffers Working Group](#) page now exists and is being populated regularly.

The November 5th meeting focused on **legal frameworks and ecological benefits** for establishing riparian buffer protections in Connecticut.

Legal and Regulatory Framework – Janet Brooks

- Gave a brief legal history and cited the [Riverbend case](#) as the primary obstacle that must be overcome in order to incorporate riparian buffer protections into existing statutes.
- Presented draft framework language allowing agencies to impose conditions on permits for vegetative cover along watercourses, even without direct evidence of adverse impact.
- Gave an overview of opinions sought from land use attorneys in the brief time she had to compile information for the meeting on whether IWWA or Zoning statutes are more suitable for riparian buffer protections. She reached out to two attorneys: one that represents developers and one that represents both developers and municipalities and gave her own opinion as well. The consensus was:
 - Wetlands laws are interpreted more flexibly in favor of environmental protection, while zoning laws are more rigid and can lead to litigation.
 - Overlapping jurisdictions between wetlands and zoning commissions could complicate permitting and slow down affordable housing projects.

Administrative and Implementation Perspectives – Denise Savageau

- Emphasized that the Inland Wetlands Act is the most appropriate vehicle for riparian buffer implementation, given wetlands agencies' site-specific expertise.
- Integrating buffers into zoning regulations could create unnecessary complications, including access issues for certain properties.
- Consensus continues to build around using existing wetlands frameworks as the foundation for buffer protection rather than developing a new zoning-based approach.
- In the discussion following the presentations, the language in PA 21-29 was brought up as a potential way forward for zoning strategies.

(10) In any municipality that is contiguous to or on a navigable waterway draining to Long Island Sound, (A) be made with reasonable consideration for the restoration and protection of the ecosystem and habitat of Long Island Sound; (B) be designed to reduce hypoxia, pathogens, toxic contaminants and floatable debris on Long Island Sound; and (C) provide that such municipality's zoning commission consider the environmental impact on Long Island Sound coastal resources, as defined in section 22a-93, of any proposal for development.

Ecological and Technical Insights – Bill Lucey

- Presentation underscored the ecological importance of riparian buffers in improving water quality, moderating temperature, filtering pollutants, and stabilizing streambanks.
- UConn CLEAR tools were highlighted for vegetated riparian areas as a key indicator for water quality outcomes.
- Field examples showed the effectiveness of riparian restoration projects, such as stream fencing for livestock exclusion and natural vegetation regrowth, leading to improved stream health and fish habitat.
- The group also discussed thermal pollution and impervious surface impacts, noting the role of vegetative buffers in mitigating both.

Next Steps

- Rep Mushinsky has asked folks to submit potential language so that we can have language ready for the legislative session.
- DEEP asked that their legal staff be brought in to provide their perspective.