



HB 5334 – AN ACT CONCERNING RIPARIAN AREAS

A Guide for Supporters

HB 5334 reflects what science and common sense have long told us: healthy, vegetated riparian buffers are essential to clean water, flood resilience, cold water habitat, and drinking water protection.

This bill is the product of a legislative working group composed of a broad and diverse range of stakeholders — including representatives from both sides of the aisle, the agricultural community, environmental organizations, local land use commissioners, state agencies, marine trades, fisheries interests, and water utilities.

How to Use These Talking Points

Legislators respond best to:

- Your lived experience
- Your professional expertise
- Your local perspective
- Why this matters in your town or watershed

Use the sections below as inspiration. Combine pieces. Add your own story. Speak in your own voice.

Why This Bill Is Worth Celebrating

- The bill makes protection of vegetation along watercourses explicit in statute.
- Commissioners have shared that current law is not clear enough about their authority to protect vegetated riparian buffers. This bill removes that ambiguity and makes legislative intent clear.

You could frame it like this in your own words: “For too long, protecting vegetation along our waterways has required interpretation. This bill makes it explicit that vegetated riparian buffers are integral to water protection.”

Or, if you serve on a commission or work in land use: “Clear statutory language helps local commissions make consistent, defensible decisions.”

Protection Applies to All Water Bodies

Under this bill, protection for vegetation would apply along all watercourses. This is important because:

- Water is connected.
- Upstream impacts affect downstream lakes, rivers, and drinking water supplies.
- Lakes and ponds face nutrient loading, warming waters, and harmful algal blooms.
- Vegetated buffers are one of the most cost-effective tools available.

Possible angles to personalize:

- If you live near a lake experiencing blooms
- If your town has flooding issues
- If you rely on well water
- If your community has invested in water quality improvements

You could say: “Protecting vegetation along all watercourses is essential because water does not stop at municipal boundaries. What happens upstream inevitably affects communities downstream.”

Resiliency, Drinking Water, and Cold Water Habitat

The bill requires consideration of impacts on:

- Public drinking water
- Cold water habitat
- Resilience to severe storms and extreme weather such as increased water temperatures and drought extremes

You might frame this as:

- Bringing the statute into alignment with current science
- Recognizing climate realities
- Protecting trout streams and sensitive species
- Safeguarding municipal and private drinking water

Example: “As extreme storms and droughts become more common, protecting natural riparian buffers is one of the smartest investments we can make in resilience.”

Restoring the Proper Burden of Proof

The Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act was originally intended to place the burden on the applicant to demonstrate that a proposed activity would not harm wetlands or watercourses.

Over time, that clarity eroded.

This bill reestablishes that the applicant carries the responsibility. Not the commissions.

You might say: “Public natural resources deserve protection. It is reasonable that those proposing to alter them demonstrate that their activities will not cause harm.”

Amendments to Agricultural Exemption Go Too Far

HB 5334 is a strong bill overall. However, Section 4 (the agricultural exemption) goes too far and removes the only clear guardrails within the existing farming exemption which is the prohibition on filling wetlands and watercourses without a permit.

Supporters may wish to say:

“I urge the committee to refine Section 4 to ensure that existing wetland and watercourse protections are not weakened.”

Additional Themes You May Wish to Emphasize

Depending on your background, you may want to speak to:

- Cost effectiveness compared to engineered stormwater fixes
- Protection of property values and property loss from erosion
- Fiscal responsibility
- Fisheries and recreation
- Municipal infrastructure damage from flooding
- The importance of clear guidance for local officials

Choose what feels authentic to you.

How to Structure Your Testimony

A simple format works well:

1. Who you are (town, organization, role, or simply “resident”)
2. Why this issue matters to you
3. One or two key points about the bill
4. A clear request to support HB 5334

How to Submit Testimony

- Go to the [Environment Committee Written Testimony Submission page](#)
- Enter your name (title and organization are optional.)
- If you want your testimony to appear as anonymous, click the "Submit Anonymously" in the top, left hand corner.
- Select the Public Hearing date and time (in this case, 3/4)
- Click on "Support" "Oppose" or "General" depending on your testimony.
- Select HB 5334 from the list of bill numbers.
- You can either type your testimony in on this page or upload a file.
- Click the acknowledgement that testimony is provided publicly.
- Click on the "I am not a robot" box.
- Click on "Submit Testimony."