2026 Legislative Priorities

Protecting Our Inland Waters and Long Island Sound

Connecticut's wetlands and watercourses connect our communities to drinking water, healthy fisheries, thriving coastal waters, and resilient ecosystems. In 2026, Rivers Alliance will focus on three priority issues that address some of the most significant and growing threats to our waters: **protecting our wild edges for healthier waters, ensuring that regulations going forward for subsurface sewage address pollution concerns, and impacts of wake-surfing on our lakes and ponds**.

Protecting Wild Edges for Healthier Waters

The issue:
Protecting the natural vegetation along our waterways – aka vegetated riparian buffers – is a top priority for Rivers Alliance. Wild edges are the naturally vegetated lands along rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. These areas are increasingly fragmented or lost due to development, clearing, mowing, and shoreline hardening because Connecticut currently does not have explicit protections for this important resource.

Why it matters:
Wild edges are among the most effective and affordable tools for protecting water quality and aquatic ecosystems. They filter polluted runoff before it reaches waterways, stabilize banks and shorelines, reduce flooding and erosion, and provide shade that keeps waters cool for fish and other aquatic life. These natural areas also serve as vital corridors for wildlife and help ecosystems adapt to high intensity-short duration precipitation events by absorbing heavier rainfall and rising waters.

What we're advocating for:
Recognition, protection, and restoration of our wild edges as an essential nature-based solution for clean water, healthy habitats, and climate resilience.

Managing Impacts from Wake-Enhancing Boats

The issue:
Motor boats operating in wake-enhancing mode are designed to generate large, powerful waves for recreational surfing and are increasingly used on Connecticut's lakes and rivers.

Why it matters:
Artificially large wakes can accelerate shoreline erosion, damage near-shore habitat, disturb aquatic vegetation, and resuspend sediments that harm water quality. These impacts threaten fish and wildlife, undermine shoreline protection efforts, and reduce the long-term health of lakes and rivers. Balancing recreational use with ecological protection is essential to maintaining vibrant and resilient waterways.

What we're advocating for:
Thoughtful management of wake-enhancing activities to protect shorelines, aquatic habitats, and the shared public use of Connecticut's waters.

Reducing Pollution from Subsurface Sewage Systems

The issue:
Many homes and businesses in Connecticut rely on subsurface sewage disposal systems. Aging, failing, or poorly located systems can release nitrogen and other pollutants into groundwater, rivers, lakes, and Long Island Sound. A jurisdiction shift from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to the Department of Public Health (DPH) has brought uncertainty to control of nitrogen as DPH develops regulations.

Why it matters:
Excess nitrogen fuels harmful algal blooms, degrades freshwater and coastal habitats, and contributes to oxygen-depleted conditions in Long Island Sound. Subsurface sewage pollution can also threaten drinking water supplies and public health. Addressing this source of pollution is critical to protecting both inland waters and coastal ecosystems, particularly in communities without centralized sewer systems.

What we're advocating for:
Strong, science-based approaches to reduce pollution from septic systems while supporting homeowners and communities in protecting local water resources. Additionally, ensuring that there is some predictability and process improvements to ensure that progress can be made on the development of affordable housing.

Other Issues We're Watching and Supporting

- **Water use by data centers**, to ensure growth does not further strain local water resources and impact affordability.
- **Water utility mergers and water affordability**, with a focus on local control, strong oversight, and sustainable infrastructure investment.
- **Funding and staffing for DEEP water programs**, which are essential for enforcement, support for our local communities and watershed groups, and planning
- **Persistent and emerging contaminants** such as pesticides, PFAS, and 1,4-dioxane
- **Clean energy policies**, to ensure climate solutions also protect our waters
- **Defending foundational environmental laws**, to prevent backsliding on water protections

Our Commitment

Rivers Alliance supports science-based, equitable solutions that protect water quality, uphold the public trust in water, and strengthen the resilience of Connecticut's rivers, lakes, and Long Island Sound for generations to come.

About Rivers Alliance of Connecticut

Water is our most valuable natural resource. It is essential to life, health and prosperity and is a public trust resource. For these reasons, Rivers Alliance was formed in 1992 by Connecticut's river and watershed organizations to fight for sound water policies at the state and federal levels, to provide education on water resources, and to advocate for any person or group striving to protect water. We are the go-to organization for information on the state of our water. Currently, our water resources are under considerable threat from climate change, so the work of protecting water is as essential as ever. Promoting environmental justice is also central to our work as our vulnerable communities are most imperiled by the impacts of climate change.

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