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Contact: Karl Wagener, Executive Director
860-424-4000
karl.wagener@ct.gov

CONNECTICUT'S WETLANDS: Trends Look Good, But Some Towns Still Do Not Meet Legal Requirements

HARTFORD – Connecticut's inland wetlands appear to be well protected by most cities and towns, but improvements should be made in two specific areas. This was the conclusion of the Council on Environmental Quality when it examined the latest wetlands data at a recent meeting.

Under the state's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act, each city and town has an inland wetlands commission that reviews proposed development activity in or near wetlands and streams, and either approves or denies such applications.

A year ago, the Council published its analysis of municipalities' track record in administering the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act in a special report called [Swamped](#). In December 2009, the Council reviewed the latest data and confirmed that some towns still do not comply with all requirements. Specifically, improvements could be made in compliance in two areas: 1) training of local wetlands commissions, and 2) reporting permit approvals to the DEP.

"Our statistical analysis from 2008 shows that the training of local commission members is the single most important factor in predicting how well a town protects the wetlands within its borders," said Council Chair Barbara Wagner.

"Unfortunately, as many as 30 cities and towns did not have a commission

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member or staff person in 2008 who had completed the DEP's training program. We are not sure what that number is now, which is in itself a problem," Wagner said.

"Also, state law requires the local commissions to forward information to the DEP on permits that they issue," said Wagner. "This is very important information that enables the state to measure the effectiveness of the law and identify potential problems, but regrettably about two dozen towns fail to forward this information."

"We are pleased to see that the DEP has begun to post the reporting activity of the cities and towns on the [DEP's website](#), allowing any concerned citizen to see what towns have been reporting and which ones have not," Wagner said.

To help solve these problems of insufficient training and inadequate reporting, the Council on Environmental Quality will be discussing potential recommendations for legislation at its January meeting. These recommendations are likely to include requiring the DEP to set up simple, on-line reporting for wetlands permits granted, and creating incentives for towns to send members and staff for training.

"Our recommendations definitely will be low-cost or no-cost," Wagner concluded. "All municipal commissions can send a member or staff person to training for free, and on-line reporting will save paper, postage and time."

For more information, look for the Featured Indicator for January on the Council's home page at www.ct.gov/ceq.

The Council is a nine-member board that is independent of the DEP except for purely administrative functions. Established in 1971 alongside the DEP, the CEQ has published dozens of reports on state environmental problems and solutions – including Environmental Quality in Connecticut, the official annual state report on the condition of Connecticut's environment – and has resolved hundreds of citizen complaints. The Council monitors and reports on important state actions that affect the environment, and, pursuant to state law, advises other state agencies on projects and policies.

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