



Save the Sound

HB 6441: Safe Dams for Connecticut's Rivers



The Problem

Connecticut's landscape is dotted with approximately 5,500 dams, the majority of which are located on private property. Connecticut currently has only one full-time dam inspector—not nearly sufficient to ensure that the dams are sound. Unsafe dams can put downstream residents and property at risk, and expose landowners to liability should the dam fail. Many such landowners are unaware that they are responsible for the maintenance of their dams, and thus do not take action to get them inspected or repaired.

The Solution

We support policy changes that will improve public safety, create ecological benefits, and generate jobs by making it easier to get dams inspected regularly.

House Bill 6441, An Act Concerning the Dam Safety Program, would allow landowners to have dams on their property inspected by qualified private sector engineers. Such a policy change is a simple measure that will have multiple benefits:

- It will protect the public from the hazards of dam failure because there will be enough inspectors to catch developing problems. It will also help protect landowners from liability. We anticipate that publicity around a new law would help in spreading the word to landowners that they are responsible for upkeep of any dams on their property.
- Permitting qualified private sector engineers to conduct inspections will have the economic benefit of creating steady jobs in engineering.
- In addition, there is a significant ecological benefit: Massachusetts, which adopted a similar program several years ago, has found that increased frequency of inspections has led more landowners to remove their dams. Removing unnecessary dams restores natural flow to rivers, prevents the buildup of toxic sediments, and allows fish access to their upstream spawning grounds.

A similar bill, HB 5130, was proposed in the 2012 Connecticut General Assembly. We strongly supported its concepts and were participating in fruitful discussions with the Environment Committee and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to perfect technical issues related to registration of dams and to fee structures, but unfortunately time ran out before a final version could be passed. We look forward to building on last year's conversations to see the bill over the finish line this time.