

House Republican Press Release

February 3, 2009
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Rep. Miller: With Wetland Losses Costing Municipalities Millions, CT Needs Tougher Controls on Development



Introduces Bill to Tighten Review Process for Projects Affecting Wetlands

With millions of taxpayer dollars being spent to control flooding that could have been avoided if inland wetland areas had not been destroyed to make room for development, state Representative Lawrence G. Miller has introduced legislation that would tighten the review process for new projects affecting wetlands.

The measure (House Bill 5461) would require inland wetlands agencies to consider all relevant evidence before granting permits for projects that would affect inland wetlands and watercourses.

“Even though Connecticut has some of the most stringent inland wetlands regulations in New England, development pressure continues to result in the permanent loss of wetlands. Inland wetlands could be described as the earth’s liver and kidneys. They remove pollutants such as sewage and chemicals used in fertilizers from runoff, and soak up excess water like giant sponges during major rain storms and after snow melts in the spring, helping to prevent rivers and streams from flooding,” said Representative Miller, R-122nd District.

“Cities and towns throughout Connecticut have spent millions of taxpayer dollars to rectify flooding problems caused in large part by the loss of wetlands. Currently, Stratford, Bridgeport, Milford and Fairfield are seeking state grants to pay for projects to correct serious flooding problems that might never have arisen if inland wetland areas had not been destroyed to make way for development projects,” Representative Miller said.

By 1980, Connecticut had lost 74 percent of its inland wetlands and 30 percent of its coastal wetlands. About 90 percent of those losses were attributable to human activity, Representative Miller said.

“The loss of coastal wetlands has made our shoreline communities more vulnerable to flooding as well,” Representative Miller said, noting that 2.7 miles of coastal wetlands can reduce storm surges by about one foot.

Flooding relating to the destruction of inland wetlands also has created problems for sewage treatment plants. Many homeowners whose basements flood after heavy rains have illegally connected sump pumps to sewer lines. The sump pumps add thousands of

gallons of water to sewer lines, overburdening wastewater treatment plants and causing partially treated water to be dumped into rivers and streams, Representative Miller said.

The untreated or partially treated water eventually ends up in Long Island Sound, which can lead to costly fines being imposed on towns by the state Department of Environmental Protection, Representative Miller said.

“Residential sump pumps that are illegally connected to municipal sewer lines contribute to the environmental degradation of Long Island Sound and add to the financial burden on local property taxpayers when DEP hits communities with hefty fines,” Representative Miller said. “For that reason, I have introduced legislation (HB 5932) that would impose a \$500 fine on people who connect a sump pump or gutter and downspout system to a town sewer system.”