

Testimony before House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Committee regarding S. 96

First I want to offer my condolences to the Committee members for the loss of your colleague. Robert Forguites represented the Springfield area, which is home to the Black River. As a river steward for the Connecticut River Conservancy and as a volunteer for Trout Unlimited, I have done a lot of river related work in his district. I've worked in partnership with the Black River Action Team, farmers, towns, and others in that watershed planting trees along eroding river banks and removing old dams that clog our rivers with sediment. I do this work all over the eastern part of our State, from the Northeast Kingdom down to the Massachusetts border. Since Tropical Storm Irene, the Connecticut River Conservancy and our partners have planted nearly 30,000 trees along our rivers and removed 8 deadbeat dams here in Vermont.

That's my job; all winter I write grants to get funding for clean water projects and then I spend the field season (May through October) out there implementing these projects. But since Irene, I've had to spend more time up here in Montpelier testifying. I've been before this Committee now numerous times since 2015; first in support of Act 64, and most recently in support of long-term funding to help implement clean water projects. But obviously I'm better at removing dams and planting trees than I am at convincing the Legislature that we need a stable source of permanent funding for clean water.

Since 2015 the term "All In For Clean Water" has been throw around and somebody even made stickers for us all to wear. If everybody was truly "All In" we wouldn't be here today. Act 64 established the Clean Water Fund to address pollution, TMDL's and to help implement the projects already identified by the Agency of Natural Resources for each watershed around the State. The Governor's budget proposed adding \$8 million to this existing structure in long-term funding via the Estate tax. Unfortunately, the House passed budget does not include \$8 million (or even \$1 million) for clean water. We are hopeful that this choice was made because the Legislature plans to identify a stable ongoing source of clean water funding; preferably one that isn't tied to S. 96 – a bill that wastes taxpayers money by creating these new regional entities and new programs that will not result in any meaningful improvements over the existing structure within the Agency of Natural Resources. We can fine tune the current system, but there is absolutely no good reason to blow it up and start over.

I don't know who drafted S. 96 but I can guarantee you they aren't responsible for implementing clean water projects. They have never been the project manager for a riparian buffer planting along Otter Creek or the Middlebury River; they have never been in charge of a dam removal in the Northeast Kingdom like I have; they have never implemented stormwater projects in the Winooski River watershed; and they obviously have never sat down at a farmer's kitchen table to discuss the delicate balance between doing the right thing for clean water and going bankrupt, having to sell all the cows, and allowing the land to be developed.

On Tuesday I spent the day at a Watersheds United Vermont annual meeting. To say that the organizations in the room were disappointed or frustrated with S. 96 would be a colossal understatement. If I can be completely honest with this Committee, pissed off would be a more accurate term. We have spent the past 3 years doing what Act 64 asked us to do to improve water quality and yet we find ourselves back here for a third year in a row advocating for long-term funding. Even worse we are now discussing a bill which will result in fewer clean water projects being implemented in the Northeast Kingdom, and in Bennington, and in Springfield, and in every Vermont tributary of the Connecticut River that I work in.

The bottom line is S. 96 is a bad bill. We don't need to establish new "clean water service providers" and we don't need to completely revamp the water quality grant programs. We simply need a stable source for long-term funding that is equitably distributed throughout the entire state.

Finally, on a strictly personal note, this weekend is opening day for trout fishing. I will be joining 100 others in Middlebury for the 11th Annual Otter Creek Classic fishing tournament. We will be fishing Otter Creek, the Middlebury and New Haven rivers, Furnace Brook and many other streams in hopes of catching (and releasing) a wild trout or two. Trout need clean water, not more bureaucracy and no funding. Whether you fish, swim, paddle or none of the above Vermonters want and deserve clean water. Unfortunately S. 96 won't help get us there.

Thank you!

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