

Rebecca Buck

From: Kathy Urffer <kurffer@ctriver.org>
Sent: Thursday, March 21, 2019 12:28 PM
To: Rebecca Buck; Jane Kitchel; Alice Nitka; Richard Sears; Robert Starr; Richard McCormack; Richard Westman; Tim Ashe
Subject: Please support S.113
Attachments: CRC comments to Senate Natural and Energy on S113_3.14.19.pdf

Dear Chair Kitchel and Committee members,

Please see the attached testimony from Connecticut River Conservancy on S. 113 that was submitted to the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Much of the cost of waste disposal falls on our local municipalities. Please take this small step to help reduce our overall waste stream.

Additionally, I thought you might be interested to know that the NH House passed two separate bills this week to ban single-use plastic bags and straws state-wide in NH. These efforts are moving quickly through the country. Don't let Vermont be left behind.

CRC supports S. 113 and we urge you to support it.

Thank you so much for your service and consideration.

Best,
Kathy

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Kathy Urffer  
River Steward

**Connecticut River Conservancy**, formerly *Connecticut River Watershed Council*  
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Conservancy**



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**Connecticut River Conservancy testimony to Senate Natural Resources and Energy on S. 113  
March 13, 2019  
Kathy Urffer**

Dear Senator Bray and Members of the Committee:

Connecticut River Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 113 which would prohibit food service establishments from providing plastic carryout bags, expanded polystyrene food service products, and plastic straws to customers. It also proposes to require the Agency of Natural Resources to convene a working group to assess the progress of municipal implementation of single-use carryout plastic bag bans. **Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) supports this bill.**

CRC and our members have been working to protect the Connecticut River and its tributaries from the source at the Canadian border to the sea for the past 65 years. For 23 of those years, we have organized the largest river cleanup on the east coast. Each year CRC volunteers go out at the end of September to pick trash out of our waterways and over and over again, plastic is the item most frequently found. Our annual event gives us proof every year that plastic pollution is everywhere in our environment. In 2018 alone our volunteers picked up 48 tons of trash. We've cleaned up over 1,000 tons of garbage since this annual event began, including a great deal of single-use plastics.

Overwrap packaging, drinking straws, grocery bags, polystyrene food packaging – these single-use plastics, often with an average lifespan of minutes, become pollution that fester in our waterways, landfills, and environment for up to 1,000 years. We now understand that polystyrene and plastics will only break apart, into smaller and smaller microplastics that pollute our environment, build up in the food chain find their way into our bodies<sup>1</sup>. Additives in plastics have been associated with human and aquatic species health risks. Plastics have a high sorption capacity and may accumulate persistent organic pollutants like pesticides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

The plastics manufacturing companies are trying to convince our communities into thinking that we somehow “need” the wasteful convenience of single-use plastics and their cheap polystyrene, or that these products are somehow superior to alternatives that can be composted or recycled. This is bunk. Paper and biodegradable alternatives to polystyrene foodservice containers and plastic straws are *absolutely* environmentally preferable simply because they *have the potential* to eventually break-down in the environment and they are not the source of an unending pervasive toxic chemical pollution.

Plastics manufacturers will tell you that the problem comes from those “high leakage” countries in Asia and that they are working on the problem through other means. Frankly, we can only be responsible for our own behaviors and decisions. While there may be issues other places in the world, I live here in Vermont and work to protect our local waterways and the species that inhabit them. I have bent over multiple times to try to pick up a plastic bag stuck in the soil next to the river that disintegrates into shreds of plastic in my hands. I have attempted to pick up plastic straws that have become so brittle

they break apart into tiny pieces. I have attempted to collect the many little shredded pieces of Dunkin Donuts Styrofoam cups. While I laud any effort to help with plastic pollution “over there”, I want to see it dealt with here, in my own backyard, where my children enjoy our natural environment. Let Vermont lead the way!

The plastics industry would have you believe that this is a problem about litter and personal responsibility. While I certainly abhor litter-bugs, the production of the bags and other wasteful single-use plastics *are the problem*. It used to be that manufacturers created durable goods. These single-use plastics are purposefully not durable so that there is a constant repurchasing of more stock. Are we really such suckers to continue to buy crap that is garbage from the outset?

The plastics industry will tell you that single use plastics are recyclable and have value in the waste stream. The single-use plastics addressed in this bill end up in consumers hands and we don't have a reliable way to get these back into a recycling stream. The bags break down too easily to be durable enough to be recycled, they clog recycling machines and they are producing a pervasive source of chemical pollutants in our environment. They are costing our society!

The plastics industry will tell you that these bans affect the poor adversely. This is a patronizing argument. There are only specific cases when someone actually needs a plastic straw. Every individual that goes shopping has the wherewithal to figure out how to get things they bought back to their house and if plastic bags are not handed out willy-nilly, they will still figure out how to do this.

Additionally, testimony that this committee received from the American Chemistry Council misstates conclusions from the California Water Board. The reference in the 208 page document is based on what would be considered an acceptable method for compliance with MS4 permits. I encourage the committee to actually look at this reference<sup>ii</sup>.

Municipalities bear a great deal of the financial burden for waste removal in our communities. Reducing those sources of waste will reduce that financial burden for trash disposal. This is particularly important due to China's new import restrictions on our plastic waste. The cost of plastic waste is outweighing its usefulness.

Towns all over New England are banning single-use plastic bags, straws and polystyrene, and citizens are transitioning easily to functioning without them. Brattleboro, where I live, passed a bag ban in 2017 that went into effect in July of 2018.<sup>iii</sup> There has been no controversy resulting from this ban. The Brattleboro Downtown Business Alliance surveyed the businesses in Brattleboro and there was almost unanimous approval of the bag ban. Ultimately it saves retailers money. The Brattleboro local Hannaford and Market 32 grocery stores have adjusted easily and now provide reusable bags for sale, or a modest 10 cent charge for paper bags to encourage the transition to bringing reusable bags. Communities all over the country have been successfully banning this pollution with no ill effect and documented reductions in cleanup costs, littering and reduction in costs to retailers.

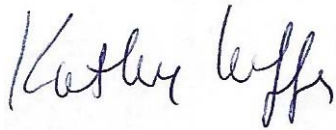
Many of our VT communities have begun working to reduce this plastic pollution. In addition to the successful single-use plastic ban in Brattleboro, CRC is aware of similar efforts in Wilmington, Montpelier, Woodstock, Manchester, Colchester and Middlebury. Instead of having these towns develop separate ordinances, a state-wide ban is the most effective and as indicated by the Vermont Retail and Grocers Association, is preferable.

Anyone over 45 can remember the time when these single-use plastics did not exist and we brought our groceries home in paper bags. Part of the ethos of our New England history is built on our thrifty nature of reducing waste and reusing wisely the resources that we already have. I'm not sure when or how it became fashionable to live in a throw-away society, but the arrogance of that wasteful attitude flies in the face of our longstanding thrifty values. If reusable bags and containers were good enough for my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, they are good enough for me!

Please remember that this bill is not a ban of all sources of plastic. This is a very small step toward reducing our overwhelming waste stream. Please support S. 113 and help rid us of this pervasive plastic pollution.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Urffer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Cc: Senator Balint, Senator Clarkson, Senator Hardy, Senator Lyons, Senator Pollina and Senator Sirotkin

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<sup>i</sup> See: Micro-plastics: Trouble in the Food Chain. United Nations Environment Programme. accessed at: [https://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/early\\_warning/microplastics](https://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/early_warning/microplastics)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/trash\\_control/docs/trash\\_sr\\_040715.pdf](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/trash_control/docs/trash_sr_040715.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> See: <https://vtdigger.org/2018/07/04/brattleboro-adapts-to-plastic-bag-ordinance/> and <https://www.reformer.com/stories/bag-ban-smooth-and-successful,552805>