



For Immediate Release

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To Address Flooding, Water Pollution & Support Ecotourism, PA House Energy & Environment Committee Holds Hearing on New Streamside Buffers Legislation

Harrisburg, PA: Monday, October 2nd, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives heard from a panel of experts regarding new legislation ([H.B. 1275](#)) that would ensure better protections for streamside forested buffers. The proposed “Riparian Buffers Protection Act”, put forth by Representative Joe Webster (Montgomery County), would require a minimum of 100 feet of undeveloped, vegetated, forested riparian buffers on both sides of all yet to be developed sections of waterway in the Commonwealth. Additional protections are provided for waterways that are identified as anti-degradation waters or Exceptional Value (EV), High Quality (HQ); listed by the state as impaired and failing to meet legal water quality standards; and for wetlands and ephemeral vernal pools. According to witnesses that testified, forested stream buffer areas, often referred to as 'riparian buffer zones', serve as critical areas for absorbing flood waters and protecting communities from flood damages, preventing and reducing streambank erosion, filtering pollutants from waterway and drinking water sources, and providing habitat for Pennsylvania's native species.

According to opening witness **Maya K. van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper and leader of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network:** “In Pennsylvania, there is no science-based, statewide requirement to proactively protect or restore buffers at a basic level. As a result, one-third of Pennsylvania’s streams have lost their healthy buffer zone to development or some other land transformation. Recognizing the tremendous value of buffers, the state has established programs for replanting 95,000 acres of forested buffers across the state by the year 2025. It is absurd that the state is spending time and money to plant and restore buffers while at the same time allowing them to be destroyed by developers.”

"All of us are impacted in some way by flooding or other water issues," **Representative Webster** said, "and HB 1275 brings major flood control benefits as well as smarter building and development. We have an opportunity to prevent some of the soil erosion that impacts agriculture and give a boost to PA's outdoor recreation economy. We can improve water quality and lower water bill costs. At its foundation, this is

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legislation that highlights the cost of doing nothing vs the benefits of doing something to protect our communities, our properties, and our businesses from natural weather occurrences and their impact on daily life."

The science is clear. There are no other pollution protection strategies that are more beneficial than forested buffers. At the same time, forested buffers help protect people from flooding, because they reduce the volume and peak height of floods for downstream communities while also ensuring development is not so close to streams and rivers that people are there to be harmed.

"From Pittsburgh's Three Rivers to the Delaware River and all the creeks and streams crisscrossing the state in between, Pennsylvanians love our great waterways and the streambanks lining them," noted **David Masur, Executive Director, PennEnvironment**, "Pennsylvanians want to protect these incredible natural resources now, for their kids, and for future generations. Unfortunately, far too many of our forested riverfronts and stream banks are endangered by encroaching development and other threats."

In addition to Delaware Riverkeeper Maya van Rossum, witnesses included scientists from the Stroud Water Research Center and the Academy of Natural Sciences, as well as representatives from Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Trout Unlimited and Biltbold Building Company.

"A forested stream corridor is more resilient in the face of changing rainfall patterns and land use, enabling the stream channel to adapt and respond to changing conditions. While the total percentage of forest in the overall watershed has been widely recognized as a good predictor of stream health, the Stroud Center's work indicates that the percentage of stream length with a 100-foot-wide forested buffer is almost as effective at predicting stream health. That relationship is a powerful statement about the importance of forested buffers in the landscape. The science of rivers and streams suggests that forests, and riparian forests in particular, will play a critical role in insuring the resilience of the Commonwealth's water resources to landscape and climate related changes," said **Matt Ehrhart, Director of Watershed Restoration at Stroud Water Research Center**.

[The bill](#), with 26 sponsors in the PA House of Representatives, was heard today before the PA House Environmental Resources & Energy Committee and assigned to the PA Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee.

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