

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To direct restoration and protection efforts of the 5-State Connecticut River Watershed region, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. SANDERS, Ms. WARREN, and Mr. WELCH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To direct restoration and protection efforts of the 5-State Connecticut River Watershed region, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Connecticut River Wa-
5 tershed Partnership Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

8 (1) ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY.—

9 The term “environmental justice community” means

1 a community with significant representation of com-
2 munities of color, low-income communities, or Tribal
3 and Indigenous communities, that experiences, or is
4 at risk of experiencing, higher or more adverse
5 human health or environmental effects.

6 (2) FOUNDATION.—The term “Foundation”
7 means the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

8 (3) GRANT PROGRAM.—The term “grant pro-
9 gram” means the voluntary Connecticut River Wa-
10 tershed Partnership grant program established
11 under section 4(b).

12 (4) PROGRAM.—The term “program” means
13 the nonregulatory Connecticut River Watershed
14 Partnership program established under section 3(a).

15 (5) RESTORATION AND PROTECTION.—The
16 term “restoration and protection” means the con-
17 servation, stewardship, and enhancement of land and
18 water for fish, wildlife, and people—

19 (A) to preserve and improve ecosystems
20 and ecological processes on which fish, wildlife,
21 and people depend; and

22 (B) for use and enjoyment by the public.

23 (6) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
24 the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Di-

1 rector of the United States Fish and Wildlife Serv-
2 ice.

3 (7) TRIBES.—The term “Tribes” means Native
4 American groups that descend from peoples indige-
5 nous to the Watershed, without regard to whether
6 the groups are—

7 (A) recognized by the Federal Government
8 or a Watershed State; or

9 (B) non-enfranchised.

10 (8) WATERSHED.—The term “Watershed”
11 means the 5-State watershed region, including the
12 Connecticut River and its tributaries and all of the
13 land area in portions of the Watershed States whose
14 surface water drains into the Connecticut River.

15 (9) WATERSHED STATE.—The term “Water-
16 shed State” means each of the States of Con-
17 necticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire,
18 and Vermont.

19 **SEC. 3. CONNECTICUT RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP**
20 **PROGRAM.**

21 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days after
22 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
23 tablish a nonregulatory program, to be known as the
24 “Connecticut River Watershed Partnership program”.

1 (b) DUTIES.—In carrying out the program, the Sec-
2 retary shall draw on existing and new approved plans for
3 the Watershed, or portions of the Watershed, and work
4 in consultation with applicable management entities, in-
5 cluding representatives of the Connecticut River Water-
6 shed Partnership, the Connecticut River Joint Commis-
7 sions, the Connecticut River Migratory Fish Restoration
8 Cooperative, the Federal Government, and other State and
9 local governments, Tribal governments or organizations,
10 and regional and nonprofit organizations, as appropriate,
11 to identify, prioritize, and implement restoration and pro-
12 tection activities within the Watershed through the adop-
13 tion of an inclusive Watershed-wide strategy and frame-
14 work.

15 (c) CONSULTATION.—In establishing the program,
16 the Secretary shall consult, as appropriate, with—

17 (1) the heads of Federal agencies, including—

18 (A) the Administrator of the Environ-
19 mental Protection Agency;

20 (B) the Administrator of the National Oce-
21 anic and Atmospheric Administration;

22 (C) the Chief of the Natural Resources
23 Conservation Service;

24 (D) the Director of the National Park
25 Service;

1 (E) the Chief of Engineers of the Corps of
2 Engineers;

3 (F) the Secretary of Transportation;

4 (G) the Secretary of Commerce; and

5 (H) the head of any other applicable Fed-
6 eral agency, as determined by the Secretary;

7 (2) the Governors of the Watershed States;

8 (3) Tribal governments or organizations, includ-
9 ing Tribes;

10 (4) the Connecticut River Watershed Partner-
11 ship;

12 (5) the Connecticut River Joint Commissions;

13 (6) the Connecticut River Migratory Fish Res-
14 toration Cooperative;

15 (7) other public and quasi-public agencies and
16 organizations with authority for the planning and
17 implementation of conservation strategies in or af-
18 fecting the Watershed; and

19 (8) stakeholders from impacted environmental
20 justice communities.

21 (d) PURPOSES.—The purposes of the program are—

22 (1) to coordinate and collaborate on restoration
23 and protection activities among Federal, Tribal,
24 State, local, and regional entities and conservation
25 partners throughout the Watershed; and

1 (2) to carry out coordinated restoration and
2 protection activities in, and provide technical assist-
3 ance throughout, the Watershed—

4 (A) to restore, recover, and manage for
5 sustainable fish, wildlife, and plant populations;

6 (B) to sustain and enhance fish and wild-
7 life habitat restoration, stewardship, and pro-
8 tection activities;

9 (C) to improve and maintain water quality
10 to support fish, wildlife, and fish and wildlife
11 habitat, including to improve opportunities for
12 public access and recreation in the Watershed
13 consistent with the ecological needs of fish and
14 wildlife habitat;

15 (D) to advance the use of nature-based so-
16 lutions to maximize the resilience of commu-
17 nities, natural systems, and habitats under
18 changing sea levels, storm risks, and watershed
19 conditions;

20 (E) to support farmland conservation and
21 food equity, including habitat protection, cli-
22 mate resilience, and carbon sequestration on
23 working farms and forests;

24 (F) to engage the public, particularly envi-
25 ronmental justice communities, through out-

1 reach, education, and community involvement to
2 increase capacity and support for coordinated
3 restoration and protection activities in the Wa-
4 tershed;

5 (G) to identify, affirm, and promote the
6 practice and awareness of traditional Tribal
7 river and Watershed-related cultural practices
8 and traditional ecological knowledge;

9 (H) to improve access to open space and
10 trails by enhancing trails in the Watershed and
11 on-street active transportation, such as bike
12 lanes, sidewalks, public transportation, and bike
13 share;

14 (I) to sustain and enhance water manage-
15 ment for volume and flood damage mitigation
16 improvements to benefit fish and wildlife habi-
17 tat;

18 (J) to support land and water conservation
19 and management activities necessary to fulfill
20 the Watershed-wide strategy adopted under
21 subsection (b);

22 (K) to monitor environmental quality to
23 assess progress towards the purposes of the
24 program;

1 (L) to facilitate strategic planning to maxi-
2 mize the resilience of natural systems and habi-
3 tats under changing watershed conditions;

4 (M) to improve fish and wildlife habitats,
5 including opportunities for personal recreation,
6 hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing along riv-
7 ers, particularly in environmental justice com-
8 munities;

9 (N) to increase scientific capacity to sup-
10 port the planning, monitoring, and research ac-
11 tivities necessary to carry out coordinated res-
12 toration and protection activities; and

13 (O) to provide technical assistance to carry
14 out restoration and protection activities in the
15 Watershed.

16 **SEC. 4. CONNECTICUT RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP**
17 **GRANT PROGRAM.**

18 (a) DEFINITION OF ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—In this sec-
19 tion, the term “eligible entity” means—

- 20 (1) a State, Tribal, or local government;
21 (2) a nonprofit organization; and
22 (3) an institution of higher education (as de-
23 fined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act
24 of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a))).

1 (b) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days after
2 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
3 tablish a voluntary grant and technical assistance pro-
4 gram, to be known as the “Connecticut River Watershed
5 Partnership grant program”, to provide competitive
6 matching grants to eligible entities to carry out restoration
7 and protection activities for the Watershed.

8 (c) CRITERIA.—The Secretary, in consultation with
9 the agencies, organizations, and other individuals and en-
10 tities referred to in section 3(c), shall develop criteria for
11 the grant program to ensure—

12 (1) the equitable distribution of funds; and

13 (2) that projects funded under the grant pro-
14 gram accomplish 1 or more of the purposes de-
15 scribed in section 3(d).

16 (d) COST SHARING.—

17 (1) FEDERAL SHARE.—

18 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in
19 subparagraph (B), the Federal share of the cost
20 of a project funded under the grant program
21 shall not exceed 75 percent of the total cost of
22 the project, as determined by the Secretary.

23 (B) ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMU-
24 NITIES.—

1 (i) IN GENERAL.—Subject to clause
2 (ii), the Federal share of the cost of a
3 project funded under the grant program
4 that serves an environmental justice com-
5 munity shall be 90 percent of the total cost
6 of the project, as determined by the Sec-
7 retary.

8 (ii) WAIVER.—The Secretary may in-
9 crease the Federal share under clause (i)
10 to 100 percent of the total cost of the
11 project if the Secretary determines that the
12 grant recipient is unable to pay, or would
13 experience significant financial hardship if
14 required to pay, the non-Federal share.

15 (2) NON-FEDERAL SHARE.—The non-Federal
16 share of the cost of a project funded under the grant
17 program may be provided in cash or in the form of
18 an in-kind contribution of services, materials, or
19 land value.

20 (e) ADMINISTRATION.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter
22 into an agreement to manage the grant program
23 with the Foundation or a similar organization that
24 offers grant management services.

1 (2) FUNDING.—If the Secretary enters into an
2 agreement under paragraph (1), the Foundation or
3 similar organization selected shall—

4 (A) for each fiscal year in which the grant
5 program is carried out, receive amounts made
6 available to carry out this section for that fiscal
7 year in an advance payment of the entire
8 amounts on October 1 of that fiscal year, or as
9 soon as practicable thereafter;

10 (B) invest and reinvest those amounts for
11 the benefit of the grant program; and

12 (C) otherwise administer the grant pro-
13 gram to support partnerships between the pub-
14 lic and private sectors in accordance with this
15 Act.

16 (3) REQUIREMENTS.—If the Secretary enters
17 into an agreement with the Foundation under para-
18 graph (1), any amounts received by the Foundation
19 under this section shall be subject to the National
20 Fish and Wildlife Foundation Establishment Act (16
21 U.S.C. 3701 et seq.), excluding section 10(a) of that
22 Act (16 U.S.C. 3709(a)).

23 **SEC. 5. ANNUAL REPORTS.**

24 Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment
25 of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary shall

1 submit to Congress a report on the implementation of this
2 Act, including a description of each project that has re-
3 ceived funding under the grant program in the preceding
4 fiscal year.

5 **SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—There are authorized to be appro-
7 priated to the Secretary to carry out this Act such sums
8 as are necessary for each of fiscal years 2026 through
9 2030.

10 (b) USE FOR GRANT PROGRAM.—Of the amounts
11 made available to carry out this Act for each fiscal year,
12 the Secretary shall use not less than 75 percent to carry
13 out the grant program and to provide, or provide for, tech-
14 nical assistance under that grant program.

15 (c) SUPPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLANT.—Amounts made
16 available to carry out this Act shall supplement, and not
17 supplant, funding for other activities carried out by the
18 Secretary in the Watershed.