

# Council on Environmental Quality

## *At a Glance*

**Susan D. Merrow, Chair**

**Karl J. Wagener, Executive Director**

**Established - 1971**

**Statutory authority – Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 22a-11**

**Central office - 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106**

**Number of employees – Two**

**Recurring operating expenses – \$172,725**

**Organizational structure – Nine-member appointed council**

## **Mission and Statutory Authority**

*The Council on Environmental Quality's three main duties are to prepare and submit to the Governor the state's annual report on the status of Connecticut's environment, to advise other state agencies and to receive and investigate citizen complaints. It also has specific responsibilities under the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, or CEPA (Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 22a-1 through 22a-1h), and other statutes. The Council is within the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) for administrative purposes only. Members of the nine-person Council are appointed by the Governor (5, including the Chair), Speaker of the House (2) and President Pro Tempore of the Senate (2). Members serve without compensation.*

## **Public Service / Improvements / Achievements 2015-2016**

The Council submitted *Environmental Quality in Connecticut* – the state's annual report on the condition of its air, water, land and wildlife – to Governor Dannel P. Malloy in April 2016. To help the public make sense of potentially confusing and conflicting technical data on environmental trends, the Council continued its use of easily understood environmental indicators that chart the state's progress annually. Because the report is published online only, the Council is able to publish updates if additional data become available. An update was published in June, for example, to incorporate data on water quality in Long Island Sound and gasoline consumption that were not available in April.

The Council developed new indicators in several categories, with an emphasis on indicators of ecological health. Specifically, the Council identified species of wildlife that are accurate

indicators of the quality of their habitats. The latest report includes a new annual index value for populations of forest birds. The development of such indicators requires considerable care in the selection of species, and the Council was advised by five biologists with expert knowledge of forest birds.

All agencies submit their environmental impact evaluations (EIEs) of proposed projects for the Council's advice. In October 2015, the Council found that the CEPA regulations governing EIEs were severely out of date and recommended that DEEP update them. The complaint that prompted the Council's action was an agency's reliance on an EIE that had been prepared 23 years ago.

The Connecticut Siting Council is required to solicit comments from this Council, which submits comments on proposed projects in cases where the applications do not provide satisfactory information about scenic and ecological resources. In early 2016, the Council began a review of the state's laws and policies that encourage large-scale solar energy facilities to be built on forests and prime farmland, with a goal of determining how they could more effectively be directed toward industrial areas.

Several statutes give additional responsibilities to the Council. It was consulted by DEEP (pursuant to Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 23-8(b)) when the latter was revising the state's land conservation strategy, and the Council provided detailed advice. It advised the Water Planning Council prior to the latter's approval of an environmental consultant to conduct a study of a proposed quarry in a drinking-water supply watershed (pursuant to P.A 16-61).

Connecticut residents are encouraged to bring their environmental concerns and complaints to the Council. At three successive Council meetings in 2015, residents alerted the Council to apparent deficiencies in the regulation of stormwater and surface mining. Specifically, citizens described a sediment-laden stream polluted after the erosion controls at a solar energy facility were overwhelmed, the failure of the state's stormwater general permits to protect archaeological and historic sites as intended, and the absence of state oversight of sand and gravel mining. The Council investigated all three and published a draft report with recommendations. In December 2015 and January 2016, representatives of mining and construction industries, river protection organizations and state agencies were invited to review the draft. Many valuable comments were received, and the Council expects to publish a final report in 2016. Throughout the year, numerous Connecticut residents discussed their environmental concerns with the Council.

All reports are published on the Council's website. By encouraging people to read its reports online, the Council has been able to eliminate printing and thereby conserve money and resources. Residents can receive e-mail notices of all new publications, as well as public meetings, by signing up for free e-alerts through the website.

Twice each month the Council publishes the *Environmental Monitor*, an online publication that replaced the Connecticut Law Journal as the official publication for CEPA notices. All state agencies post their notices that are required by CEPA, as well as notices of proposed land transfers as required by Conn. Gen Statutes Sec. 4b-47, in the *Environmental Monitor*. The *Environmental Monitor* is distributed to all municipal clerks as well as any citizen who

subscribes to e-alerts through the website. This electronic publication saves considerable sums by eliminating printing and mailing costs.

The Council's total expenditures in FY 2016 were within 1.5 percent of FY 2008 expenditures (in nominal dollars not adjusted for inflation).