



Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
University of New Hampshire
Nesmith Hall, 131 Main Street
Durham, NH 03824

Sandown Planning Board
PO Box 1756
Sandown, NH 03873

November 16, 2009

Dear Planning Board Members:

The purpose of this letter is to express the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership's (PREP's) support for the adoption of the draft Wetlands and Surface Waters Conservation District Ordinance under your consideration. Our staff has reviewed the draft ordinance and concludes that the protections provided in the ordinance are supported by current scientific understanding of buffer requirements that protect water quality. In addition, the protections provided by the ordinance are consistent with ordinances adopted in many other New Hampshire communities and with standards promoted through the NH Department of Environmental Services model ordinances for wetlands and shoreland protection.

Research from the Center of Watershed Protection indicates that in many cases a 150 foot buffer with minimal disturbance to natural vegetation is required for water quality improvements associated with nutrient and sediment removal. The proposed Sandown ordinance conveys protection to your community's valuable water resources (streams, wetlands, and vernal pools) by limiting disturbance in adjacent buffer areas. Maintaining natural, vegetative buffers around water bodies is an effective and cost-efficient means to retain aquatic functions. Scientific studies have documented the value and importance of protecting smaller streams, in particular, from the impacts of land development and alteration. The proposed ordinance notably conveys protections to all size streams and rivers.

The ordinance gives greatest protection to wetlands that have been assessed and, through an evaluation process, found to provide important community ecosystem services such as flood storage, water quality improvements, wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, and aesthetic value. Protection of water resources watershed-wide becomes increasingly important as our region faces continued development pressures and water quality degradation.

The majority of seacoast watershed communities have adopted ordinances to protect water resources. Ninety-four (94) percent of the communities in the PREP watershed area have a wetlands ordinance in place and 40 percent of the communities have adopted a no disturbance wetland buffer area to protect water resources. Seventy-one (71) percent of the coastal watershed towns have shoreland protection standards protecting surface waters, although buffer widths and stream sizes protected through these ordinances vary by community.

I commend your town for its interest in proactively protecting its resources – through regulatory means such as ordinances and non-regulatory means such as land protection. Adoption of the Wetlands and Surface Waters Conservation District Ordinance is an important way for Sandown to continue to protect its valuable natural resources. If you have any questions about my support for the ordinance, please call me at (603) 862-3948.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Hunter".

Jennifer Hunter, Director

Copy: Mark Traeger, Sandown Conservation Commission