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November 16, 2009

Kenneth Sweet, Chair
Sandown Planning Board
PO Box 1756
Sandown, NH 03873

Dear Mr. Sweet and Planning Board Members:

I am writing to express the Rockingham Planning Commission's support for the draft Wetlands and Surface Waters Conservation District Ordinance that the Board is considering to propose for action at the coming March Town Meeting.

Julie LaBranche, senior planner in our office, has assisted the Conservation Commission in developing the draft. Her work with the Town has been as part of our overall effort to support innovative planning approaches consistent with the Innovative Land Use Planning Techniques handbook published by the New Hampshire regional planning commissions and NHDES in 2008.

The approach taken in the draft ordinance represents a good blending of standard minimum buffers necessary for small less significant wetlands, and larger buffers applicable to wetlands that have been identified as especially important and ecologically significant. Furthermore, the ordinance builds upon the CTAP-funded work the Town completed in 2008 with Mark West to inventory and evaluate your wetlands.

The buffer protections provided in the ordinance are well supported by current scientific understanding of setback requirements that protect water quality and have become commonplace in the RPC region. Your ordinance improves upon existing models by varying the size of the buffer with the quality of the wetland and by tying the ordinance directly to the wetlands evaluation study completed by the Town.

I would note that you may want to consider enlarging the buffer around the most significant wetlands, especially those with the most direct connection to the Exeter River. Research from the Center of Watershed Protection indicates that in many cases buffers of 150 feet or more are necessary for water quality improvements associated with nutrient and sediment removal. As you may know, such improvements are going to become increasingly important in this watershed which has already been found to have a significant nitrogen loading problem.

I commend Sandown for its work in developing and considering adoption of the Wetlands and Surface Waters Conservation District. If we can be of further assistance as you continue to work on the draft, please contact Julie LaBranche at the office, or your RPC Commissioners Mark Traeger and Donna Green.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cliff Sinnott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "S".

Cliff Sinnott
Executive Director

cc: Mark Traeger, RPC Commissioner
Donna Green, RPC Commissioner
Julie LaBranche, Senior Planner