



House of Representatives

File No. 585

General Assembly

February Session, 2026

(Reprint of File No. 382)

Substitute House Bill No. 5333
As Amended by House Amendment
Schedule "A"

Approved by the Legislative Commissioner
April 10, 2026

**AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF STRIPED BASS
FISHING IN THE STATE, A WORKING GROUP CONCERNING THE
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROGRAM AND PROCEDURES
CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FISH PASSAGES.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) Notwithstanding any
2 provision of title 26 of the general statutes, any person who violates any
3 regulation concerning the taking of striped bass, whether in the marine
4 or inland waters of the state, shall have committed an infraction and
5 shall pay a fine of one hundred fifty dollars for a first offense, three
6 hundred fifty dollars for a second offense and five hundred dollars for
7 a third or any such subsequent offense, by mail, or plead not guilty in
8 accordance with the provisions of section 51-164n of the general statutes,
9 provided for any infraction imposed pursuant to this section that occurs
10 in the towns of Derby, Shelton, Orange, Milford or Stratford, the amount
11 of such fine shall be paid to the respective municipality where the
12 infraction occurred if a municipal law enforcement officer issued such

13 infraction.

14 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) Notwithstanding any
15 provision of title 26 of the general statutes, for the period commencing
16 December first of each year and ending March thirty-first of the
17 following year, all fishing for striped bass shall be catch and release. For
18 the purposes of this section, "catch and release" means the immediate
19 return of a caught fish, without avoidable injury, to the waters from
20 which such fish was taken.

21 Sec. 3. Subsection (b) of section 26-107f of the general statutes is
22 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
23 *1, 2026*):

24 (b) The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall
25 establish a conservation program for species not traditionally harvested,
26 which shall include, but not be limited to, provisions for the following:
27 [Resource] Facilitation of the implementation of the most recent
28 federally approved state of Connecticut wildlife action plan, resource
29 inventory, habitat conservation, wildlife health, monitoring of
30 environmental and climate change impacts, conservation of endangered
31 and threatened species, conservation of biodiversity, wildlife recreation
32 management, wildlife conservation education, private landowner
33 assistance, urban wildlife conservation, problem animal management
34 and scientific research, planning, administration and development.

35 Sec. 4. Section 26-107h of the general statutes is repealed and the
36 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2026*):

37 [On or before February first, annually, the Commissioner of Energy
38 and Environmental Protection shall submit to the joint standing
39 committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters
40 relating to the environment a report on the progress of the program
41 established under section 26-107f, the purposes for which any funds
42 allocated to said program were expended and the future of the
43 program.]

44 (a) There is established a working group within the legislature to
45 identify how the conservation program established in section 26-107f, as
46 amended by this act, should be funded and implemented.

47 (b) Not later than thirty days after the effective date of this section,
48 the cochairpersons of the joint standing committee of the General
49 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment, in
50 consultation with the ranking members of said committee, and the
51 Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall jointly
52 select two cochairpersons for such working group. Not later than forty-
53 five days after the effective date of this section, the cochairpersons of
54 such working group shall select the membership of such working
55 group, which shall include, but not be limited to: (1) One representative
56 of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the
57 Department of Transportation and the Office of Policy and
58 Management, (2) three representatives of conservation advocacy
59 organizations that work on wildlife-related issues, one of whom shall
60 have fisheries aquatic expertise and one of whom shall have avian
61 expertise, (3) one representative of a land conservation organization, (4)
62 two members of the faculty of a state college or university, as
63 recommended by the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental
64 Protection, (5) one representative from a council of governments, (6) a
65 representative of the water utilities, (7) a representative of an
66 organization that represents recreational businesses in the state, (8) a
67 representative of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, or its designee, and (9)
68 a certified forester in this state.

69 (c) The cochairpersons of such working group shall convene such
70 working group not later than sixty days after the effective date of this
71 section. The administrative staff of the joint standing committee of the
72 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the
73 environment shall serve as administrative staff of the working group.
74 Not later than January 15, 2027, the working group shall submit a report
75 on its findings and recommendations, including any proposed
76 legislative proposals, to the joint standing committee of the General
77 Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment, in

78 accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a. The working group
79 shall terminate on the date that it submits such report or January 15,
80 2027, whichever is later.

81 Sec. 5. Section 26-107i of the general statutes is repealed and the
82 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2026*):

83 The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection may
84 establish a program for the sale of wildlife stamps, prints, posters,
85 calendars, publications or other items. Any revenue received from the
86 sale of such goods or materials and any funds donated to the state for
87 the purpose of the program established under section 26-107f, as
88 amended by this act, shall be deposited in the General Fund and
89 allocated to the program established under section 26-107f, as amended
90 by this act.

91 Sec. 6. Section 26-136 of the general statutes is repealed and the
92 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

93 [(a) Upon petition of ten or more persons owning property above any
94 dam or artificial obstruction existing on October 1, 1982, built upon any
95 stream, the commissioner shall determine whether such dam or artificial
96 obstruction shall be provided by the person, firm, corporation or
97 municipality or political subdivision thereof, owning or controlling the
98 dam or obstruction with a suitable fishway for the passage of fish. Upon
99 receipt of an application for a permit to construct, rebuild or
100 substantially repair a dam or artificial obstruction built upon any
101 stream, the commissioner shall require the dam or artificial obstruction
102 be provided with a fishway if such a facility is necessary to protect
103 fisheries resources by providing access to natural spawning or nursery
104 areas or to protect the public interest by preventing the loss of a fishery
105 from the area of the dam or artificial obstruction. For the purposes of
106 this section, "rebuild" or "substantially repair" means any action altering
107 the structure of the dam or artificial obstruction, changing the use of the
108 dam or artificial obstruction or impeding the available free passage of
109 fish.

110 (b) Within thirty days from the receipt of such petition or application,
111 the commissioner shall set a time and place for a hearing thereon, if in
112 the opinion of the commissioner a hearing is reasonable or necessary.

113 (c) Upon determination that a fishway is necessary, the commissioner
114 shall issue an order to the person, firm, corporation or municipality or
115 political subdivision thereof owning or controlling the dam or
116 obstruction to construct a fishway in the form, material, capacity, at such
117 location and within such time as the commissioner establishes. The
118 commissioner shall cause a copy of the order to be served on the person,
119 firm, corporation or municipality or political subdivision thereof. Such
120 fishway shall be constructed and maintained subject to the approval of
121 the commissioner, and shall be kept open and free for the passage of
122 such fish in such manner and during such period as the commissioner
123 requires. If no such period is specified by the commissioner, it shall be
124 kept open and free from April first to November first in each year.]

125 (a) Any person may submit a petition to the Commissioner of Energy
126 and Environmental Protection for a safe, timely and effective fish
127 passage for any hydroelectric dam that is not subject to the jurisdiction
128 of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Upon the submittal of
129 such a petition, the commissioner shall determine whether there is a
130 safe, timely and effective fish passage for migratory fish at all life stages
131 upstream and downstream of such dam and associated reservoir. For
132 purposes of this section, a fish passage is deemed safe, timely and
133 effective if it meets or exceeds the Connecticut River Migratory Fish
134 Restoration Cooperative's fish passage standards developed by the
135 Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission.

136 (b) If the commissioner determines that there is not a safe, timely and
137 effective fish passage, the commissioner shall prescribe, by order, issued
138 to the person, firm, corporation or municipality, or political subdivision
139 thereof, that owns or controls such dam, the conditions to ensure such a
140 safe, timely and effective fish passage both upstream of such reservoir
141 and downstream of such dam. Such conditions may include, but shall
142 not be limited to, requirements to (1) construct, rebuild and operate

143 fishways, (2) remove any artificial obstructions, and (3) maintain
144 minimum water flows. If the commissioner determines that any existing
145 fish passage structures are ineffective or harmful to aquatic life, the
146 commissioner shall include conditions to remediate such harm,
147 including, but not limited to, removal or reconstruction of the fish
148 passage structures.

149 (c) Not later than one hundred eighty days after submittal of any such
150 petition, the commissioner shall publish notice of the commissioner's
151 tentative determination as to whether there is a safe, timely and effective
152 fish passage. If the commissioner determines that there is not a safe,
153 timely and effective fish passage, the commissioner shall publish a draft
154 order in the commissioner's notice of tentative determination. Such
155 notice shall be published on the Department of Energy and
156 Environmental Protection's Internet web site. The commissioner shall
157 provide a public comment period on such tentative determination of not
158 less than thirty days following publication of such tentative
159 determination and the Department of Energy and Environmental
160 Protection shall hold a public hearing before making any final
161 determination on such petition. The person, firm, corporation or
162 municipality, or political subdivision thereof, that owns or controls any
163 dam that is the subject of such a public hearing shall be deemed to be a
164 party to such hearing.

165 (d) For any dam or artificial obstruction not subject to the provisions
166 of subsection (a) of this section, the commissioner shall, upon petition of
167 ten or more persons that own property above any such dam or artificial
168 obstruction existing on October 1, 1982, built upon any stream,
169 determine whether such dam or artificial obstruction shall be provided,
170 by the person, firm, corporation or municipality, or political subdivision
171 thereof, that owns or controls such dam or obstruction, with a suitable
172 fishway for the passage of fish.

173 (e) Upon receipt of any application for a permit to construct, rebuild
174 or substantially repair a dam or artificial obstruction built upon any
175 stream, as described in subsection (d) of this section, the commissioner

176 shall require such dam or artificial obstruction be provided with a
 177 fishway if such a facility is necessary to protect fisheries resources by
 178 providing access to natural spawning or nursery areas or to protect the
 179 public interest by preventing the loss of a fishery from the area of the
 180 dam or artificial obstruction. For the purposes of this subsection,
 181 "rebuild" or "substantially repair" means any action altering the
 182 structure of the dam or artificial obstruction, changing the use of the
 183 dam or artificial obstruction or impeding the available free passage of
 184 fish.

185 (f) Not later than thirty days after receipt of such a petition, as
 186 described in subsection (d) of this section, or an application, as described
 187 in subsection (e) of this section, the commissioner shall set a time and
 188 place for a hearing on such petition or application, as applicable, if, in
 189 the opinion of the commissioner, a hearing is reasonable or necessary.

190 (g) Upon a determination that a fishway is necessary pursuant to
 191 subsection (d) or (e) of this section, as applicable, the commissioner shall
 192 issue an order to the person, firm, corporation or municipality, or
 193 political subdivision thereof, that owns or controls such dam or
 194 obstruction to construct a fishway in the form, material, capacity, at such
 195 location and within such time as the commissioner establishes. The
 196 commissioner shall cause a copy of such order to be served on such
 197 person, firm, corporation or municipality, or political subdivision
 198 thereof. Such fishway shall be constructed and maintained subject to the
 199 approval of the commissioner, and shall be kept open and free for the
 200 passage of such fish in such manner and during such period as the
 201 commissioner requires. If no such period is specified by the
 202 commissioner, such fishway shall be kept open and free from April first
 203 to November first in each year.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 3	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	26-107f(b)

Sec. 4	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	26-107h
Sec. 5	<i>October 1, 2026</i>	26-107i
Sec. 6	<i>from passage</i>	26-136

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Resources of the General Fund	GF - Potential Revenue Gain	Minimal	Minimal

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$
Derby, Shelton, Orange, Milford, Stratford	Potential Revenue Gain	Minimal	Minimal

Explanation

The bill prohibits striped bass fishing in the state between December 1 and March 31 annually and establishes graduated penalties for violating any regulation regarding striped bass taking. The bill imposes a fine of \$150 for a first offense, \$350 for a second offense, and \$500 for subsequent offenses

The bill requires that revenue from these violations will go to the state unless the infraction occurs in certain towns. This results in a potential revenue gain to the state and to the towns of Derby, Shelton, Orange, Milford, or Stratford beginning in FY 27.

Additionally, the bill establishes the non-harvested species conservation program working group and does not result in a fiscal impact as the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has the expertise necessary to staff the working group. The bill clarifies how donations to the non-harvested program must be deposited and allocated and does not result in a fiscal impact.

Lastly, the bill makes procedural changes regarding petitioning DEEP to require a safe, timely, and effective fish passage to be installed at any hydroelectric dam that is not subject to federal regulation. This is not anticipated to result in a cost to the state as DEEP has the staff and expertise necessary to complete the requirements contained within the bill.

House "A" strikes the underlying bill and its associated fiscal impact resulting in the impact described above.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to the number of infractions.

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 5333 (as amended by House "A")******AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF STRIPED BASS FISHING IN THE STATE.*****SUMMARY**

This bill makes numerous changes in laws related to wildlife in Connecticut.

Specifically, the bill limits striped bass fishing to catch and release between December 1 and March 31 annually. It also makes it an infraction to violate any regulation on striped bass taking (killing, fishing, or other means of trapping) and imposes fines for violations.

The bill also changes the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) traditionally non-harvested species conservation program by:

1. expanding it to (a) implement the state's most recent federally approved wildlife action plan (see BACKGROUND) and (b) include provisions on wildlife health, monitoring climate change, and biodiversity conservation (§ 3);
2. eliminating a requirement for the DEEP commissioner to annually report to the Environment Committee on the program and instead creating a working group to determine how the program should be funded and implemented; and
3. requiring any money donated to the state for the program to be deposited into the General Fund and allocated to the program, as existing law requires for any revenue from DEEP's program to sell wildlife stamps and other artwork of publications (§ 5).

Lastly, the bill allows any person to petition the DEEP commissioner to require a safe, timely, and effective fish passage be installed at any hydroelectric dam that is not subject to federal regulations. The bill sets a process the DEEP commissioner must follow if she receives a petition and actions she must take if she determines a dam does not have an adequate fish passage.

*House Amendment "A" limits striped bass fishing to catch and release rather than banning it during the specified time period and requires that fines for striped bass fishing violations be paid only to specific municipalities rather than any municipality where a violation occurs. It also adds the provisions on (1) the traditionally non-harvested wildlife conservation program and (2) fish passages.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026, except the provisions on striped bass fishing infractions and fish passages are effective upon passage, and the provision creating the working group is effective July 1, 2026.

§§ 1 & 2 — STRIPED BASS FISHING

The bill makes it an infraction to violate any regulation on striped bass taking, including the bill's new provision limiting striped bass fishing to catch and release between December 1 and March 31 annually. The bill imposes a fine of (1) \$150 for a first offense, (2) \$350 for a second offense, and (3) \$500 for subsequent offenses.

People fined for these violations must generally follow the law's procedure for infractions (for example, they can pay the fine by mail without making a court appearance). However, if a municipal law enforcement officer issues an infraction in Derby, Milford, Orange, Shelton, or Stratford, the fine must be paid to the municipality where the infraction occurred.

§ 4 — TRADITIONALLY NON-HARVESTED SPECIES CONSERVATION PROGRAM WORKING GROUP

The bill requires the Environment Committee's co-chairpersons, in consultation with the committee's ranking members and the DEEP commissioner, to jointly select, by July 31, 2026, two co-chairpersons for

the conservation program working group.

By August 15, 2026, the working group's co-chairpersons must select the group's members, which must include at least the following 14 people:

1. one representative each from DEEP, the Department of Transportation, and the Office of Policy and Management;
2. three representatives of conservation advocacy organizations that work on wildlife-related issues, one of whom must have fisheries aquatic expertise and one of whom must have avian expertise;
3. one representative of a land conservation organization;
4. two state college or university faculty members, as recommended by the DEEP commissioner;
5. one representative from a council of governments;
6. one water utilities representative;
7. one representative of an organization representing Connecticut recreational businesses;
8. one representative of the Connecticut Farm Bureau or its designee; and
9. one Connecticut-certified forester.

The bill requires the working group's co-chairpersons to hold the group's first meeting by August 30, 2026, and the group must report its findings and recommendations, including any proposals for legislation, to the Environment Committee by January 15, 2027. The group ends on this date or when it submits its report, whichever is later. Under the bill, the Environment Committee's administrative staff must serve in that capacity for the working group.

§ 6 — FISH PASSAGES

The bill allows any person to petition the DEEP commissioner to require a safe, timely, and effective fish passage be installed at any hydroelectric dam that is not subject to federal regulation. (Currently, three such dams exist in the state.) Under the bill, a fish passage is considered safe, timely, and effective if it meets or exceeds the Connecticut River Migratory Fish Restoration Cooperative's existing standards.

Within 180 days after receiving a petition, the commissioner must (1) determine if a safe, timely, and effective passage exists upstream and downstream of the dam and associated reservoir for migratory fish at all life stages and (2) publish notice of her tentative determination and a draft order for any action to ensure an adequate passage, if applicable (see below), on DEEP's website. The commissioner must allow at least 30 days for public comment on the tentative determination, and DEEP must hold a public hearing before making a final determination on the petition. Under the bill, the entity that owns or controls the applicable dam is deemed a party to the hearing.

If the DEEP commissioner determines a dam does not have an adequate fish passage, she must issue an order to the entity that owns or controls the dam prescribing conditions to ensure a safe, timely, and effective fish passage both upstream of the reservoir and downstream of the dam. The order may require, among other things, (1) constructing, rebuilding, and operating fishways; (2) removing any artificial obstructions; and (3) maintaining minimum water flows. If the commissioner determines an existing fish passage structure is ineffective or harmful to aquatic life, she must also include conditions for remediating the harm, including removing or reconstructing the structure.

The bill also makes technical changes.

BACKGROUND

Wildlife Action Plan

States must submit wildlife action plans to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in order to receive certain federal grant funding for wildlife programs. States must review and revise these plans every 10 years and submit them for federal approval. Connecticut’s most recent wildlife action plan was approved in 2025 and, among other things, identifies species and habitats in need of conservation and priority conservation issues and actions for the next 10 years.

Related Bills

HB 5330 (File 191), favorably reported by the Environment Committee, contains similar provisions on DEEP’s traditionally non-harvested wildlife program.

HB 5520 (File 434), favorably reported by the Environment Committee, contains identical provisions on fish passages.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 34 Nay 0 (03/18/2026)