



# House of Representatives

General Assembly

**File No. 436**

February Session, 2026

Substitute House Bill No. 5523

*House of Representatives, April 7, 2026*

The Committee on Environment reported through REP. PARKER of the 101st Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

## **AN ACT CONCERNING A TRIBAL WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL.**

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

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) There is established a  
2 Connecticut Tribal Wildlife and Fisheries Advisory Council. Said  
3 advisory council consists of the following members who voluntarily  
4 agree to serve on such advisory council: (1) Two members from and  
5 selected by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, (2) two members  
6 from and selected by the Mohegan Tribe, (3) two members from each of  
7 the following tribes, as selected by each respective tribe: (A) The Eastern  
8 Pequot Tribe, (B) the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe, and (C) the  
9 Schaghticoke Tribe, (4) the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental  
10 Protection, or the commissioner's designee, (5) one member each from  
11 the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Wildlife  
12 Division, Fisheries Division and Forestry Division, as appointed by the  
13 Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, (6) one  
14 member from the Department of Agriculture, (7) one member from the

15 Bureau of Aquaculture of the Department of Agriculture, (8) one  
16 member from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, (9) one  
17 member from Connecticut Sea Grant, (10) one member from the Native  
18 American and Indigenous Studies Department at The University of  
19 Connecticut, and (11) the chairpersons and ranking members of the joint  
20 standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of  
21 matters relating to the environment, or their designees.

22 (b) The tribal members of the advisory council shall develop written  
23 procedures for meetings, at such members' discretion, which shall be  
24 distributed to all members of the advisory council. Nontribal members  
25 of such advisory council shall attend meetings on a quarterly basis, at  
26 the invitation of the tribal members.

27 (c) Such advisory council shall: (1) Make recommendations to the  
28 Department of Energy and Environmental Protection on how state  
29 conservation plans and policies can integrate tribal ecological  
30 knowledge and stewardship practices, and (2) promote the sustainable  
31 use of natural resources consistent with state conservation goals.

32 (d) Nothing in this section shall be construed to apply to lands held  
33 in federal trust for any tribe or to reservation lands, which remain under  
34 tribal jurisdiction.

35 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) (a) The Commissioner of  
36 Energy and Environmental Protection shall provide, at no cost, hunting  
37 and fishing permits to any enrolled member of a federally or state-  
38 recognized tribe identified in subsection (b) of section 47-59a of the  
39 general statutes for lawful activities conducted off reservation lands.

40 (b) Any activities conducted pursuant to this section shall remain  
41 subject to state conservation goals, seasons and species protections.

42 (c) The commissioner shall also provide access to conservation  
43 education, hunter safety and firearms safety programs to such tribal  
44 members.

45 Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2026*) The Commissioner of

46 Agriculture shall prioritize tribal meat, fish and aquaculture processing  
47 facilities for technical assistance, United States Department of  
48 Agriculture certification support and eligibility for state or federal  
49 infrastructure funding programs. Such prioritization shall support tribal  
50 food sovereignty, local food systems and community-based economic  
51 development.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 2	October 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 3	October 1, 2026	New section

**ENV**      *Joint Favorable Subst.*

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 - Revenue Loss	See Below	See Below

Note: GF=General Fund

**Municipal Impact:** None

**Explanation**

The bill makes various changes related to tribal wildlife and fishery programs.

**Section 1** establishes the Connecticut Tribal Wildlife and Fisheries Advisory Council. This does not result in a cost to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) as DEEP has the staff and expertise necessary to meet the requirements of the bill.

**Section 2** requires the DEEP commissioner to give free hunting and fishing permits to any enrolled member of a federally- or state-recognized tribe. This results in a revenue loss to the resources of the General Fund. The scope of the revenue loss is indeterminate as it is unknown how many free permits will be issued and correspondingly how many fewer hunting and fishing (paid) permits will be purchased. License and permit fee range from approximately \$11 to \$65 dollars<sup>1</sup>.

**Section 3** requires the Department of Agriculture (DoAg) to prioritize

<sup>1</sup><https://portal.ct.gov/deep/hunting/2026-connecticut-hunting-and-trapping-guide/hunting-and-trapping-licenses>

tribal meat, fish, and aquaculture facilities for technical assistance and various other federal support. This does not result in a cost to the state.

***The Out Years***

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to the number of free permits and licenses issued and the corresponding revenue loss.

**OLR Bill Analysis**

**sHB 5523**

***AN ACT CONCERNING A TRIBAL WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL.***

**SUMMARY**

This bill creates the Connecticut Tribal Wildlife and Fisheries Advisory Council to (1) make recommendations to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) on how state conservation plans and policies can integrate tribal ecological knowledge and stewardship practices and (2) promote sustainable natural resource use consistent with state conservation goals. (The advisory council's work does not apply to lands held in federal trust for a tribe or to reservation lands, which remain under tribal jurisdiction.)

The bill also requires the DEEP commissioner to give free hunting and fishing permits to any enrolled member of a federally- or state-recognized tribe for lawful activities conducted off reservation lands. The bill specifies that any activities conducted are subject to state conservation goals, seasons, and species protections. It also requires the commissioner to give tribal members access to conservation education and hunter and firearms safety programs.

Lastly, the bill requires the Department of Agriculture commissioner to prioritize tribal meat, fish, and aquaculture processing facilities for technical assistance, U.S. Department of Agriculture certification support, and eligibility for state or federal infrastructure funding programs. This prioritization must support tribal food sovereignty, local food systems, and community-based economic development.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2026

**CONNECTICUT TRIBAL WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Under the bill, the advisory council includes the following 23 members:

1. two members each from and selected by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, Mohegan Tribe, Eastern Pequot Tribe, Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe, and Schaghticoke Tribe;
2. the DEEP commissioner or her designee;
3. one member each from DEEP's wildlife, fisheries, and forestry divisions, appointed by the DEEP commissioner;
4. one member from the Department of Agriculture (DoAg);
5. one member from DoAg's Bureau of Aquaculture;
6. one member from the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station;
7. one member from Connecticut Sea Grant;
8. one member from the University of Connecticut Native American and Indigenous Studies Department; and
9. the Environment Committee's chairpersons and ranking members or their designees.

The bill requires the advisory council's tribal members to develop and distribute to all other members written meeting procedures. Meetings must be held at the tribal members' discretion, and nontribal members must attend quarterly, at the tribal members' invitation.

### **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 24 Nay 10 (03/18/2026)