

## What do Land Use Commissioners Think?

At the 2025 Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions Environmental Conference, Rivers Alliance led a session titled “Updates on Approaches to Protection of Riparian Areas.” This conference is held annually and is a day-long event with keynote speakers, workshops, and exhibits for commissioners, staff and other members to learn and discuss community conservation issues with state and national experts, recognize their peers, and network with other commissioners.

Approximately 100 people attended the session. We used an interactive Slido survey to gather real-time feedback from participants. What follows are the survey questions and the aggregated results. However, some explanation and context are necessary, as several results appeared contradictory at first glance. These contradictions were clarified during discussion with the audience.

### Survey Questions

1. Do you think your commission currently has the authority and tools necessary to protect natural vegetated areas along waterways? (Multiple choice: Yes / No / Not sure)
2. What’s the biggest challenge your agency faces in protecting vegetation in riparian areas? (Word cloud)
3. Protection of vegetation in riparian areas should be addressed primarily through: (Multiple choice: IWWA / P&Z / Hybrid)
4. Which tools would be most helpful in implementing protections for natural vegetation in riparian areas?  
*(Ranked choice: five tools listed — note: one option included a typo; “clean” should read “clear.”)*
5. If the Working Group could deliver one thing to make your job easier, what would it be? (Word cloud)

### Results & Context

#### Question 1

A slight majority responded yes, indicating they believe their commission already has the authority and tools needed to protect riparian vegetation. This result was somewhat unexpected.

#### Question 2

When asked about their biggest challenges, the terms “authority” and “ambiguity” rose to the top of the word cloud—seemingly contradicting the answers to Question 1.

During discussion, we asked individuals who answered “yes” to Question 1 but listed “authority” or “ambiguity” as their biggest challenge to explain. Their responses were consistent:

*They personally feel confident that commissions have the authority, but other members of their commission do not believe the authority is explicit enough. This internal uncertainty creates risk aversion, inconsistent decisions, and difficulty implementing protections.*

This nuance is essential to interpreting the results correctly.

#### **Additional note on Question 2:**

Because the session was held at the end of the day, participants were feeling a bit silly, and a running joke emerged around the name “Bob,” which appears prominently in the word cloud. This carried into responses for Question 5 as well.

### **Question 3**

A slight majority felt that riparian vegetation protection should fall primarily under IWWA, with a hybrid approach ranked second and Planning & Zoning third.

Despite this outcome, the room engaged in a lively and substantive discussion about the advantages of handling buffer protections through Planning & Zoning.

### **Question 4**

When ranking tools to support buffer protections, the top choice—by a clear margin—was: Clear, unambiguous statutory authorization.

This reinforces the themes of uncertainty and inconsistency that surfaced earlier.

### **Question 5**

When asked what one thing the Working Group could deliver to make their jobs easier, the most common responses were: Guidance, Clarity, Training, and increased DEEP Staffing. These align with the broader themes of the session: clearer authority, better support, and consistent statewide implementation.

And once again—thanks to the ongoing joke—“Bob” also appeared as both a “challenge” and a “solution.”

**Do you think that your commission currently has the authority and tools necessary to protect natural vegetated areas along our waterways?**

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Yes



No



Not Sure



What's the biggest challenge your agency faces in efforts to protect vegetation in riparian areas?

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**Protection of vegetation in riparian areas should be addressed primarily through:**

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Inland Wetland and Watercourses Agencies



Planning and Zoning

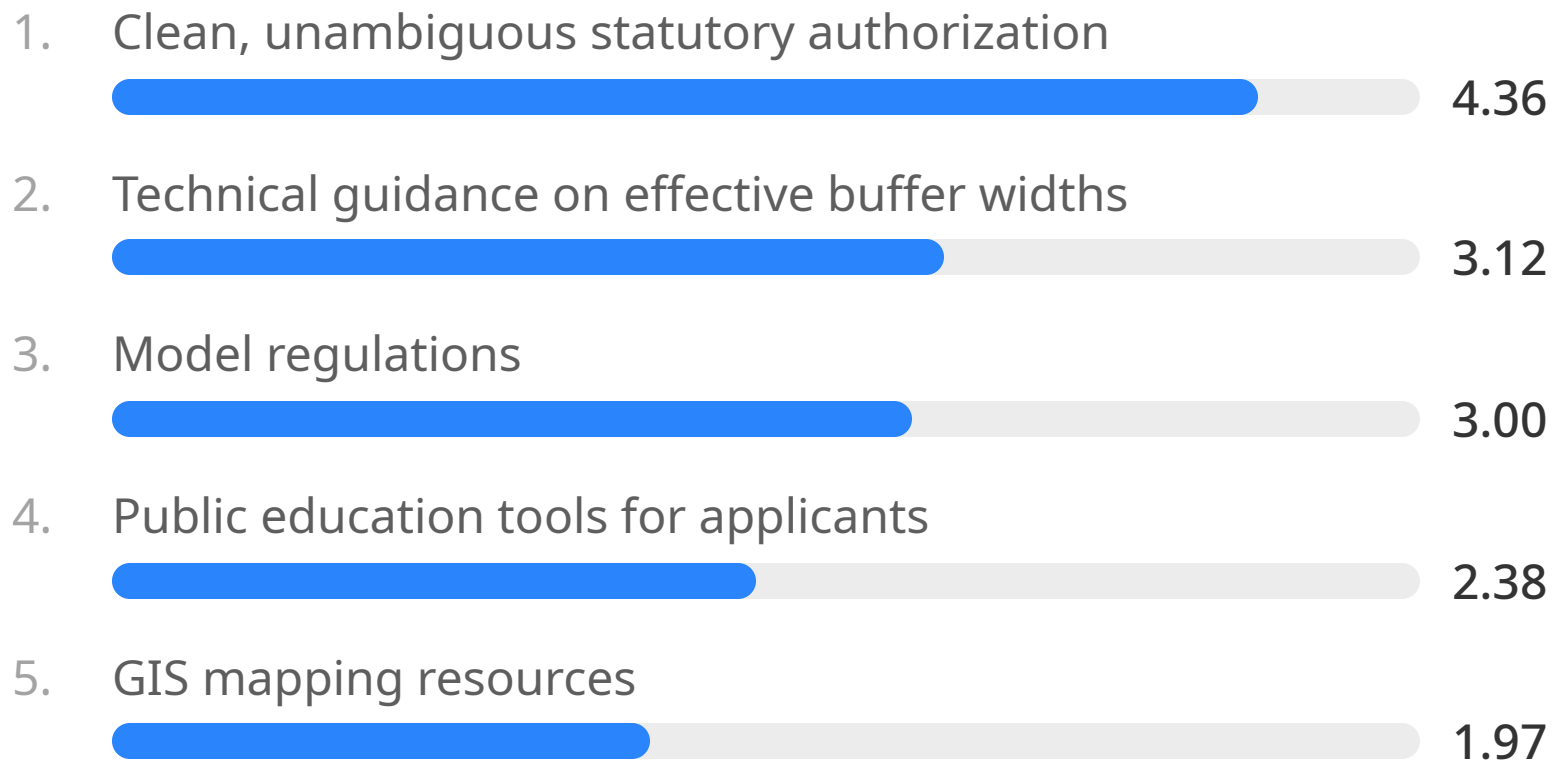


A hybrid, coordinated approach



**Which tools would be most helpful in implementing protections for natural vegetation in riparian areas? Please rank the choices with 1 being the most helpful.**

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If the working group could deliver one thing to make your job easier, what would it be?

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