



February 5, 2013

The Honorable David Boutin, Chair
Public and Municipal Affairs Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 102-A
Concord, NH 03301

RE: SB 375, an act establishing a committee to study the creation of a flood mitigation fund for private property owners

Dear Chair Boutin and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB375. This bill would establish a committee to study the creation of a flood mitigation fund for private property owners. The Department of Environmental Services (DES), the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Safety (DOS), (through its Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM)) support this bill.

In recent years, New Hampshire has seen an increase in severe weather events, including rainfall and temperature extremes. In fact, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, between the years of 1953 through 2002 (50 years) there were 14 declared disasters in New Hampshire, while from 2003 through 2012 (10 years) there were 15 declared disasters. Many times, homeowners located in floodplains are forced to stay in homes that continually experience repetitive destruction from flooding. The safety risks and cost for the property owners, as well as federal, state and local government agencies, inherent in responding to these emergencies could, in some cases, outweigh the benefit. The alternative would be to provide assistance to property owners seeking to move out of the floodplain.

While flood inundation is a risk for homeowners in floodplains, it is important to note that historical efforts to straighten our rivers in New Hampshire, combined with our natural terrain, create additional challenges for managing flood hazards than may be found in many other states. As a consequence, the foothills and mountains of the northern and western portions of our state lead to streams and rivers that have an increased ability to erode their banks and change their courses. Past practices of straightening naturally meandering rivers further increase flow forces and the rates of change of our rivers. In these communities, homeowners have not only found themselves at risk of flooding, but also in the path of moving rivers. The existence of these sites poses public safety risks to homeowners and local first responders, particularly during the height of a flood event.

As examples, DES, DOT and HSEM have been working to assist homeowners in these situations during recent flooding events on the Baker River in Warren and on brooks in the villages of East Westmoreland and Surry. These agencies also worked with homeowners facing similar issues in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene in the North Country, and on the Mad River in Farmington.

DES, DOT and HSEM believe that it is critical for the state to consider the amount of federal and state resources expended on stream stabilization projects and damage to private property, and the time and effort required of local communities, first responders and state agency officials to address these situations. It is also critically important to examine the benefits to the public safety of our citizens that live on rivers and streams that experience frequent flooding.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact either Vicki Quiram, Assistant Commissioner, (vicki.quiram@des.nh.gov, 271-8806) or Perry Plummer (Perry.Plummer@dos.nh.gov, 271-2231), Chris Clement (cclement@dot.state.nh.us, 271-1484) or Tom Burack (thomas.burack@des.nh.gov, 271-3449).

Sincerely,



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| Thomas S. Burack Commissioner Dept. of Environmental Svcs. | Christopher D. Clement, Sr. Commissioner Dept. of Transportation | Perry E. Plummer Director Homeland Security & Emergency Mgt. |
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CC: Sponsors of SB 375
Commissioner Chris Clement, Director Perry Plummer