



## Coalition Partners

Aquidneck Land Trust  
Audubon Society of Rhode Island  
Clean Water Action  
Conservation Law Foundation  
Environment Council of Rhode Island  
Environment Rhode Island  
Grow Smart Rhode Island  
Narragansett Bay Estuary Program  
Narrow River Preservation Association  
Rhode Island Land Trust Council  
Rhode Island Natural History Survey  
Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter  
Save The Bay  
The Nature Conservancy  
Trust for Public Land  
Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association

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## The Coalition for Water Security Supports the Water Use and Efficiency Act (S732A)

Thank you Madame Chair and members of the Committee for this opportunity to express our strong support for the Water Use and Efficiency Act as a key strategy to address the critical water issues facing our state. The Coalition for Water Security is a coalition of economic and environmental policy organizations across the state.

The Coalition appreciates that even in these tough economic times, the General Assembly recognizes the importance of water to Rhode Island's economic future. It is critically important that we move now to put in place measures to promote water conservation so we will have the water we need for future economic development and our quality of life.

This Committee and the General Assembly have been working on the problems with water management policy in our state for three years – since 2006 when Amgen called attention to their difficulties in being guaranteed sufficient water for their operations. We thank you for your long standing focus on this important issue.

Chairwoman Sosnowski along with Sen. Lenihan led the joint committee to study water use in Kent County. The committee heard testimony about the problems of summertime water use doubling and tripling in some communities at the same time that our water supplies are at their natural lowest levels. The committee also heard about what other communities and states have done to achieve conservation goals and manage their supplies.

The attention of the General Assembly has already spurred action by our state agencies on many of the problems identified. The Water Resources Board has begun a focused project to manage the water resources in the Hunt watershed. The agencies on the Water Resources Board are developing an MOU to promote coordination. And the Department of Environmental Management has developed a clear, predictable methodology to help inform decisions about how much water from our rivers and streams is available to be used.

The bill before you now includes just the priority policies that must be put in place by the General Assembly for Rhode Island to move forward with water management. The Coalition has been working with the water suppliers on Executive Committee of the RI Water Works Association as well as with the Water Resources Board to develop this consolidated legislation, and we all agree that it is critical to pass this bill this year.

In water, the connections between environmental protection and economic competitiveness are tightly linked. This bill achieves four critical goals:

**1) Promote efficiency and conservation.** The fastest, cheapest and most environmentally sound source of new water comes from using our existing water more efficiently. The Water Use and Efficiency Act will make conservation and efficiency a priority for every water supplier. It calls upon the Water Resources Board to establish demand management standards for water suppliers to adopt. It directs the Public Utilities Commission to allow water rates to promote conservation and provide a basic residential rate designed to make a basic level of water affordable.

The bill also allows water suppliers to invest in infrastructure repair and replacement, and provides for revenue stabilization, allowing water suppliers to remain fiscally stable when revenues decline due to conservation. Municipal water suppliers will be organized as enterprise funds which eliminates the effect of water supply costs on property taxes.

With these provisions, water suppliers will be able to rein in wasteful summer time water use, creating new supply for the state.

**2) Capitalize on the competitive edge that Rhode Island's water could provide.** Long term planning for water use will allow Rhode Island to efficiently and equitably manage water, ensuring that water is available for economic development opportunities. We all remember in 2006 when Bristol Myers Squibb selected Quonset as one of their four final locations for a new plant. Many factors affected their decision to select Fort Devens, MA for the new plant, but it is very possible that the uncertain water supply from the Hunt-Annaquatucket-Pettaquamscutt aquifer was a factor in this decision. This bill integrates land use and water resource planning – the statewide planning program will incorporate water availability data and water supply system management plans into the state guide plan and local community comprehensive plans.

**3) Ensure availability of water for protecting natural resources.** By making our water supply more efficient through conservation, we can ensure that we provide adequate water for our rivers and streams. The Coalition fully supports the Department of Environmental Management's work to develop a methodology for determining how much water can be safely withdrawn from our rivers and streams. We are also very pleased that the RI Water Resources Board has made establishing water allocation in the Hunt-Annaquatucket-Pettaquamscutt watershed a priority and are working with them on this pilot effort.

**4) Improve structure and operation of the Water Resources Board.** The bill improves the functioning of the Water Resources Board by requiring appointees to the Board represent specific expertise and a surface water supply, a ground water supply, and a large water user. The bill also gives voting rights to all Board members and increases the number of members needed for a quorum from seven to nine.

The Coalition for Water Security appreciates all of your work in tackling this critical, complicated issue in the middle of the intense deliberations about Rhode Island's major budget challenges. If Rhode Island is to bounce back effectively from our current downturn and capitalize on our vast untapped potential, we will need your continued vision and tenacity. We strongly urge you to support this bill.