UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Region 1
5 Post Office Square, Suite 100
Boston, MA 02109-3912

December 2, 2013

Betsey Wingfield
Bureau Chief
Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106-5127

Dear Ms. Wingfield:

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight for you EPA's recent publication of final ammonia and recreational water quality criteria recommendations, and urge you to consider adoption of these criteria into your water quality standards. These recently published criteria documents reflect once again the Agency's commitment to improving and updating the science bolstering protection of our Nation's water resources. As you know, EPA's water quality standards regulations at 40 CFR 131.11(a)(1) require states to adopt protective criteria that are based on sound scientific rationale. The publication of EPA recommendations under Clean Water Act section 304(a) provides an excellent opportunity for you and your stakeholders to review existing water quality criteria and determine whether those existing criteria are still, in fact, protective and based on sound scientific rationale. I encourage you to consider adoption of these or equivalently protective criteria, and to use your triennial public hearings (required by 40 CFR 131.20(a)) to provide a venue for public feedback on the need to adopt new or modify existing WQS to reflect the latest science.

EPA's CWA section 304(a) criteria recommendations provide scientific recommendations to states and authorized tribes in developing new or revised water quality standards. States and authorized tribes have the discretion to adopt EPA's criteria recommendations; EPA's recommendations modified to reflect site-specific conditions; or criteria based on other scientifically defensible methods.

EPA last issued final ambient water quality criteria recommendations for recreational waters in 1986 and for ammonia in 1999. The new water quality criteria reflect the significant research that has taken place between then and now on these pollutants and the levels that are protective of designated uses.

Recreational Water Quality Criteria

The recreational water quality criteria were developed based on a review of historic studies and more recent scientific information including the National Epidemiological and Environmental Assessment of Recreational water studies at U.S. beaches in 2003,

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2004, 2005, 2007, and 2009. Those studies enrolled 54,250 participants, encompassed nine locations, and collected and analyzed numerous samples from a combination of fresh, marine, tropical, and temperate waters. The resulting criteria have numerous improvements over the 1986 criteria:

- The criteria consist of both a geometric mean and statistical threshold value.
- The criteria now comprise a magnitude, duration, and frequency.
- States may choose from two different sets of recommended criteria values to protect primary contact recreation waters.
- The criteria recommendations for fresh and marine waters are based on the same illness rate.
- The criteria no longer refer to different use intensities.
- States may take advantage of newly-developed rapid test (qPCR) methods in adopting WQS.
- States may now use Beach Action Values in their beach notification programs.

As you know, as a BEACH Act state, Connecticut has specific requirements regarding recreational water criteria. Section 303(i)(1)(B) of the Clean Water Act (as amended by the BEACH Act of 2000) directs each state with coastal recreational waters to adopt and submit to EPA new or revised water quality standards for those waters for all pathogens and pathogen indicators to which the new or revised water quality criteria are applicable. The deadline for state adoption and submittal to EPA of revised WQS is three years from EPA publication of new recommendations. Since EPA published final recreational water quality criteria recommendations in December 2012, states should complete this action by December 2015. EPA's 2012 recommendations apply to all waters designated for primary contact recreation.

You can find more information on the 2012 recreational water quality criteria on EPA's website, at http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/criteria/health/recreation/.

Ammonia Criteria

In updating the 1999 ammonia criteria, EPA conducted an extensive literature review that incorporates new toxicity data from 69 studies, including new data on freshwater mussels and gill-bearing snails, which are both sensitive to ammonia toxicity. In particular, the freshwater mussels are more sensitive to ammonia than the organisms included in the 1999 criteria dataset. You can find more information on the 2013 ammonia water quality criteria on EPA's website, at http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/criteria/aqlife/ammonia/.

Because both these newly published criteria rely on the latest research and science, I encourage you, when re-examining your water quality standards during the next triennial review, to consider adoption of these criteria into your water quality standards. If, after you review your existing water quality standards, you conclude that updates to your ammonia and recreational water quality standards are not necessary to protect the designated uses, I urge you to submit, in your triennial review, your rationale for not making a change.

I hope these new criteria provide you with the information you need to move forward as you consider changes to your water quality standards in the near future. I appreciate your

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commitment to protecting water quality, and look forward to continuing to work collaboratively towards our mutual goals. If you should have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me or Ellen Weitzler for more information.

Sincerely,

Ken Moraff, Director
Office of Ecosystem Protection

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