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TESTIMONY

DATE: March 16, 2007

TO: Government Administration and Elections Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

FROM: Karl Wagener
Executive Director

RE: Committee Bill 5249
An Act Requiring Environmental Impact Statements Prior to the
Conveyance of State Land to a Municipality

The Council strongly recommends adoption of the committee bill with minor improvements.

In a special report on state land management released in December 2005 ("Preserved But Not Protected"), the Council described a deficiency in the surplus lands process and recommended corrective action. Appropriate legislation failed to reach the House floor last year before the session ended, but we are hopeful that action can be taken this year.

The current problem is that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reviews most surplus lands with an eye toward determining whether or not the Department wishes to acquire it. If, as in the majority of cases, the DEP has no interest in acquisition (because, for example, of the parcel's isolation from other state parks and forests), its review of the natural resources simply stops. The problem is that some of these lands should be reviewed further to determine what natural resources are present. If valuable resources are found to be present, the DEP should recommend appropriate action to conserve the important parts of the parcel.

(OVER)

The bill is somewhat misnamed because it does not require an environmental impact statement in any situation. It requires the Commissioner of Environmental Protection to develop a policy for reviewing surplus lands at her option, and it establishes a procedure for notifying the public of land transfers through the Environmental Monitor. The Council on Environmental Quality publishes the Environmental Monitor, and has determined that we could accommodate these notices at no cost.

The State of Connecticut has statutory goals for the conservation of land that it is struggling to meet. It makes no sense for the state to give away or sell undeveloped land that it already owns without taking a good look at it (especially when the DEP might be spending money to conserve the same resources elsewhere.) This bill is a very modest proposal for addressing a true need.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.