



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Public Hearing – February 9, 2009  
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Gina McCarthy  
Department of Environmental Protection

**Proposed House Bill No. 5108 - An Act Preserving Certain Horse Trails**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised House Bill No. 5108 – AN ACT PRESERVING CERTAIN HORSE TRAILS. We appreciate the Committee's willingness to raise this issue. However, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) believes that the legislative designation of trails to be preserved for equestrian use as set out in the bill is premature at this time.

The Equine Advisory Council (EAC) was established in 2007 to assist DEP in establishing and preserving equestrian trail use throughout. The EAC has agreed to work with DEP in developing a comprehensive Equestrian Trail Plan for Connecticut. The first step in this effort is to develop an existing conditions map that will identify trails on DEP land where equestrian use is allowed and supported. We should await the outcome of this evaluation and planning effort before pursuing legislation.

For instance, the proposed bill includes the Larkin, Air Line, and Hop River State Park Trails which currently allow and support equestrian use. Conversely, the bill identifies the Metacomet, Mattabesett and Monadnock Trail System which is part of Connecticut's Blue Blazed Hiking Trail system; this trail network has been nominated for designation as a National Scenic Trail and such a designation would conflict with preservation of the trail for equestrian use.

In general, it is not prudent to assume all designated hiking trails can, or should, accommodate equestrian traffic. Where a Connecticut Blue Blazed Hiking Trail crosses DEP land, the trail is a designated foot path only, except where DEP blazed and maintained multi-use trails inclusive of equestrian use overlap. The same holds true for the Appalachian Trail system. These trail sections will be evaluated as part of the EAC's planning efforts.

DEP is pleased to be working with the EAC on this planning effort and looks forward to the completion of this project. Should legislation be needed to achieve the intended outcome of this proposed bill both EAC and DEP would surely benefit from the guidance of a completed comprehensive trail plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert La France, Legislative Liaison at 424-3401.

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