

February 9, 2009

Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Proposed Bill 5108: AN ACT PRESERVING CERTAIN HORSE TRAILS.

Honorable Members of the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association and our partners at the Appalachian Mountain Club and Housatonic Valley Association, **I am testifying today in opposition to proposed bill 5108, An Act Preserving Certain Horse Trails.**

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association, established in 1895, is the oldest conservation organization in Connecticut and we are known for our focus on trail recreation, sustainable forestry, conservation education, and operations of our State's Parks and Forests.

One of the recognized crown jewels of outdoor recreation in Connecticut is the 825-mile long Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. What many people don't know, even those who may walk on portions of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails every day, is that these trails are maintained by CFPA volunteers. What is also poorly understood is that these trails cross a patchwork of state, municipal, and private lands which have been knit together since 1929.

So why shouldn't these Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails simply become horse trails? There are several reasons:

1) the Legislature has already spoken quite clearly on its intentions for this trail system years ago by stating "Those portions of the Connecticut blue-blazed trail system which cross state property are hereby designated as state hiking trails" (Section 23-10a of the Connecticut General Statutes).

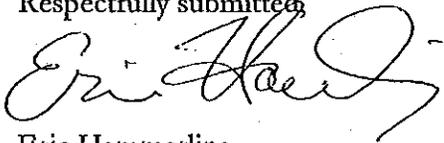
2) this proposed bill stretches beyond the authority of the Legislature. As an example, the Metacomet, Mattabesett and Monadnock Trail System (#3 horse trail proposed in the bill) poses two major problems. First of all, the Monadnock Trail is located in Massachusetts. Second, only 13% of the Metacomet and Mattabesett Trails are located on State land. The remaining 87% of these trails in Connecticut run through a mix of private, municipal, non-profit, and water utility lands who host the trail on their lands because it is a well-maintained hiking trail. Is the Legislature going to dictate to these private landowners what uses they need to allow on their land?

3) the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails generally aren't designed for horse usage. Many of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails are situated on steep slopes and cliff edges and in densely wooded areas that pose serious hazards to those not traveling on foot. CFPA volunteers design and construct bridges, install waterbars and other erosion control measures, and trim vegetation with foot traffic in mind. In many areas, equestrian use may cause erosion or trail damage, or create hazardous and unsafe conditions for hikers.

Although we are strongly opposed to this proposed bill, I should note that CFPA does not oppose equestrian trails absolutely. Indeed, there are a few equestrian trails that coincide with a small portion of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System on woods roads in state forests and parks. CFPA would only support equestrian uses of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails in areas where 1) the host landowner has granted permission and 2) CFPA has determined that the design of the trail is conducive to equestrian uses (e.g., a former logging road). None of that careful analysis would be done as a result of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Hammerling". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "E".

Eric Hammerling
Executive Director