

February 23, 2009

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

Proposed Bills	Support/ Oppose
S.B. 569: An Act Concerning Enhancements to the Inland Wetlands/Watercourses Act	Support
H.B. 5820: An Act Conserving Natural Vegetation Near Wetlands & Watercourses	Support
H.B. 5486: An Act Concerning Hartford's Public Trees and Urban Forest	Support
H.B. 5277: An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Invasive Plant Council	Support
H.B. 5267: An Act Concerning the Use of Funds Under STEAP for Projects that Convert Farmland to Other Uses	Support

Chairmen Roy and Meyer, and Members of the Environment Committee:

My name is Eric Hammerling and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. CFPA has offered testimony before the Legislature on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trails, natural resource protection, and land conservation every year since 1897.

CFPA has worked closely over the past two years with the coalition of organizations that have worked on S.B. 569: An Act Concerning Enhancements to the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act and H.B. 5820: An Act Conserving Natural Vegetation Near Wetlands and Watercourses. We support both measures.

S.B. 569 is a very important proposed bill that would make it clear that an applicant has the burden of proof that their development activity will do no harm to wetlands or watercourses, rather than the current situation which puts the burden on the town's Inland Wetlands Agency to prove that an activity will harm wetlands or watercourses. This has caused towns to spend significant time and money hiring experts and/or fighting lawsuits that challenge their permit denial. This bill would also make it imperative for the inland wetlands commissions to hear all relevant evidence rather than simply relying on the testimony of paid experts. We believe the ongoing implementation of the current system stacks the deck in favor of applicants, and it is time to achieve a balance of power for town wetland agencies.

H.B. 5820 would strengthen an important assumption that the natural vegetation next to wetlands and watercourses has an inherent value. In addition, this bill has been carefully crafted to neither apply to existing structures nor to undermine any existing exemptions for agricultural uses (including forestry) within a 100' riverfront area. Extensive scientific information exists to support the importance of natural vegetation in protecting water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, and reducing flood surges. Indeed, based upon the climate change models that suggest the Northeastern U.S. will be having wetter winters and drier

summers, I can't understand why someone would want to build a new home in an area that soon may be more subject to flooding. I should also note that in Massachusetts, this riverfront area is 200 feet rather than the 100 feet proposed in this bill, and the Massachusetts Rivers Protection Act has been working well since 1996.

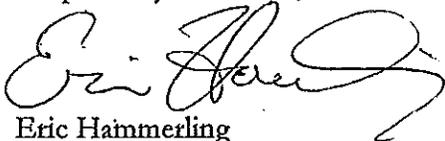
H.B. 5486 is an important bill to help recognize the importance of trees to our urban areas. Trees add value to neighborhoods by providing aesthetics, stormwater runoff absorption, shade, et cetera. In CFPA's quarterly magazine, Connecticut Woodlands, we ran a feature on urban forestry in Hartford from which the following has been excerpted: "Viewed from above, about 26 percent of the total surface area of Hartford is covered by trees. This canopy cover compares favorably with other major cities in the Northeast, including Boston (22 percent), New York (21 percent) and Washington, D.C. (29 percent). Of the remaining surface area, about 16 percent could be planted with trees and so, potentially, be used to increase the city's canopy cover. Hartford's trees store about 143,000 tons of carbon, and continue to remove carbon from the atmosphere at about the rate of 2,440 tons per year. An average car in the U.S. produces about 6 tons of carbon each year, so Hartford's trees could be said to balance the effects of over 400 cars. The city's trees also help reduce energy consumption within the city by about 1,800 megawatt hours per year. Since the average Connecticut household uses about 8.4 megawatt hours per year, this balances the energy impact of over 200 households . . . The air quality benefits provided by the trees in Hartford also include substantial reductions in ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and particulate matter. The survey showed that the trees of Hartford filter out about 37 tons of particulate matter a year. They also remove about 8 tons of carbon monoxide, 7 tons of nitrogen dioxide and 4 tons of sulfur dioxide annually. By shading and cooling our streets, trees also remove or help prevent the formation of about 15 tons of ozone each year . . . The replacement value for these trees in sum total would run about \$590 million."

H.B. 5277 would implement important measures to reduce invasive plant problems and includes common-sense refinements of existing regulations such as exempting "the moving of invasive plants for eradication, research or educational purposes." from the current prohibitions on that action.

H.B. 5267 is a significant bill that would essentially disallow municipalities from using STEAP grants in ways that would convert or result in a loss of farmland. STEAP grants support many levels of municipal development projects, but should no longer be able to convert farmland to other uses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Eric Hammerling
Executive Director