

March 6, 2009

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

Proposed Bill	Support/ Oppose
H.B. 6553: An Act Concerning Sunday Hunting	Oppose

Chairmen Roy, 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, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation every year since 1897.

CFPA opposes proposed bill H.B. 6553, but before giving our rationale I want to state a few things clearly:

- 1) **CFPA does not oppose hunting.** Indeed, hunting is encouraged on many of the conservation easements we manage. We support hunting as both a cultural practice and a wildlife management tool. CFPA also works productively with hunting advocates and organizations on the CT DEP's Conservation Advisory Council;
- 2) **CFPA supports private landowner rights regarding hunting.** As you are aware, over half of the 825-mile Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System crosses private lands, and our volunteers manage those trails based upon longstanding agreements with individual landowners. Several private landowners that allow trails to cross their properties also allow hunting, we support the landowners' interest in the use of their land, and in several areas we do special postings to warn hikers on appropriate precautions to take during hunting seasons; and
- 3) **CFPA understands that in some areas of the state we have too many deer.** You have likely heard about Lyme disease and traffic accidents, but these deer can also be a significant problem from the forestry perspective. As an example, over-browsing by deer can limit oak regeneration quite significantly. This reduces productive wildlife habitat for a whole suite of mast-dependent species.

That being said, we oppose this proposed bill for several reasons:

- 1) **Six days should be enough.** There are good reasons why Connecticut and Massachusetts do not currently allow Sunday hunting. Hikers, bikers, runners, bird-watchers, dog-walkers, and other passive recreationalists (who are the overwhelming majority of users of trails on public and private lands) currently enjoy one day a week during

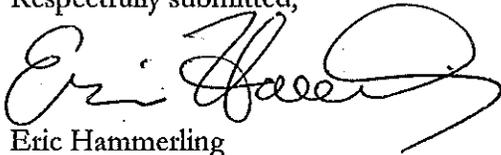
hunting season where they don't have to worry about potential conflicts with hunters. We are not saying that hunters do not take great safety precautions, but it is clear that hunter-recreationalist conflicts on Sundays would not occur unless the Legislature opens up this can of worms;

2) **This is not the best way to reduce deer populations.** We have spoken with the CT DEP about ways to reduce deer populations without expanding hunting to Sundays. We have been told that the current hunting seasons and the focus on certain problem areas could be better organized to be more efficient at taking deer, and that it shouldn't be necessary to have Sunday hunting to accomplish wildlife management goals. We would be pleased to work with the DEP and Conservation Advisory Council to help make this happen; and

3) **Monitoring and enforcing landowner permissions are problematic.** Although landowner permission would certainly be essential under this proposed bill, the CT DEP is underfunded and its enforcement presence is diminished. It would require additional resources for DEP enforcement agents to check whether hunters have appropriate landowner permission whether or not the hunters are complying with the law. It is also quite difficult, at times, for hunters and DEP enforcement officials to know exactly which property they are on, and when boundaries have been crossed. This can be a recipe for confusion and unnecessary hunting violations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Hammerling", written in a cursive style.

Eric Hammerling
Executive Director