

Testimony of Thomas Sayers
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Government Administration and Elections Committee Hearing
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In opposition to HB 6375 merging CEQ into the DEP

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and members of the GAE Committee, it has come to my attention that in HB 6375 the Council on Invasive Species has been targeted for elimination in the proposed state budget for next year. Also, next year's funding for the newly created Invasive Plant Program, currently budgeted at \$500,000, will be reduced to zero. These two proposals are seriously flawed and, if passed, would result in incalculable harm to our state's ecosystems and would necessitate the eventual spending of hundreds of thousands of dollars to mitigate the propagation of invasive plant species in our state. Let me explain.

I live in Tolland and have been active for many years doing citizen science projects as my way of helping to protect our environment and its inhabitants. I pay particular attention to bird species in our state that have been designated as threatened, endangered, or are species of special concern and attempt, when possible, to help document their population status through either direct observation, informal census measures, and/or photography.

What has become very striking to me over the last decade or so is the rapid expansion of invasive plant species in our state and the deleterious effects they are having on the biodiversity of our state's ecosystems, particularly those that are aquatic in nature. The expansion of invasive plants such as purple loosestrife, phragmites, barberry, spotted knapweed, milfoil and others have had a very negative impact on the ecosystems in many parts of our state. As they crowd out native plants, the species that require those native plants for food and/or cover are forced into an ever-tightening circle of remaining native plants. This eventually begins to affect the survivability of those species.

One example of many is a globally threatened species called the saltmarsh sparrow. Connecticut has one of the highest densities of breeding saltmarsh

sparrows in the world. As invasive phragmites continues to displace the native spartina grasses in our coastal marshes, the saltmarsh sparrow is becoming increasingly threatened.

In addition to the negative impact that invasives have on our native wildlife, the impact on agricultural activities and recreational activities in our state is also becoming very significant. Associated with that is the rising economic impact of trying to mitigate the expansion of invasives.

One example is Crystal Lake in the town of Ellington. Crystal Lake, which is approximately 230 acres in size, has been invaded by Eurasian milfoil which is increasingly taking over the lake. It has been estimated that the cost of removing the milfoil in a 20 acre section of the lake will be approximately \$250,000 dollars. That is one corner of one lake in one town in the state of Connecticut. Think about it. Addressing this problem is not optional and the town of Ellington has begun efforts to do so.

Another example of the cost of invasive plant control is illustrated by a federal government estimate that the cost to remove phragmites from one acre of marshland is \$3,300. And that's only one acre.

One of the keys to addressing the problem of invasives is early detection. Once they gain a foothold, the cost of mitigation rises exponentially over time. The other key to combating invasives is ongoing research into the most effective biological, chemical, and mechanical means of control.

The elimination of the Invasive Plants Council and the funding for the Invasive Plants Program would seriously hamper the early detection and control efforts that are currently underway to address the problem of invasives. These would be very shortsighted decisions whose initial savings to the state would be dwarfed by the enormous costs incurred in the future. The decision is basically to pay now or pay, pay, pay later. The problem is not going away and the stakes on so many fronts are much too high.

I urge you all to leave the Connecticut Invasive Plant Council intact and retain a reasonable amount of funding for the Connecticut Invasive Plants Program.