

March 16, 2009

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

Proposed Bill	Support/ Oppose
H.B. 6551: AN ACT CONCERNING STATE FORESTRY PROGRAMS	Support
S.B. 793: AN ACT CONCERNING STEAP GRANTS AND THE CONVERSION OF PRIME FARMLAND TO NONAGRICULTURAL USE.	Support

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.

I want to thank the Committee for raising S.B. 793, An Act Concerning STEAP Grants and the Conversion of Prime Farmland to Nonagricultural Use. We join with the Working Lands Alliance and other farmland protection advocates to support this important fix to the STEAP program.

The bill that we strongly support and upon which I will focus the majority of my testimony today is H.B. 6551, an Act Concerning State Forestry Programs. The multiple objectives of this bill are to increase revenues to the state, increase forestry-related jobs, enhance wildlife habitat, and enhance forest health.

There are three primary ways in which this bill would increase revenues for the state. First, it would allow the CT DEP to raise the base price of firewood from the current level of \$10 to \$25 per cord of wood (seasoned firewood in Connecticut is selling between \$220 to \$300 a cord, depending on the type of wood and area of the state). This provision was meant to apply only to wood bought for personal use and not to commercial sales of firewood. To make this clear, we would support amended language such as "The commissioner shall charge no less than [ten] twenty five dollars per cord for any such wood or timber sold as fuel for personal use (five cords or fewer)."

Second, this bill would flip the existing formula and allow the first \$600,000 of timber harvest revenues to go to the DEP Conservation Fund instead of to the General Fund. These revenues would be used to hire additional forestry personnel and allow the DEP to supervise more timber harvests and create more revenue. Currently, 5 DEP Foresters are able to supervise the harvest of ~3 million board feet annually bringing in ~\$500,000 in revenues depending upon the fluctuations in the prices of wood. We suggest that an increase in 8 FTE's above current staff levels implemented over the next 2 years (2 Foresters and 6 Forest Technicians in total) would allow DEP to supervise the harvest of 9 - 10 million board feet and bring in timber sale revenues of over \$1 million.

Of course, this increase in staff to increase timber harvests is proposed with sustainability in mind. Indeed, an October, 2008 Yale School of Forestry Study – “Estimating the Sustainable Yield of the State of Connecticut Division of Forestry’s Commercially Suitable Timberland” – suggests that annual harvest levels on state lands could be 9-10 million board feet for the next 50 years AND be ecologically sustainable.

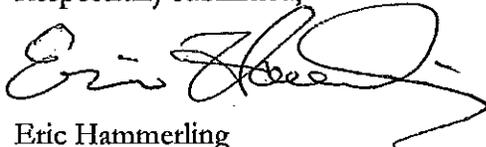
Third, the increase in harvests would also positively affect jobs. Based upon a study by Davies & Co. on creating jobs in Massachusetts by increasing harvests, job growth should be considerable. Because logging is also connected to trucking, sawing/splitting, grading, and processing into wood products, the total number of jobs created or sustained by cutting at the 10 million board feet/year level should be somewhere between 140 and 280 jobs (Source: http://www.daviesand.com/Perspectives/Forest_Products/Jobs/index.html).

From a forestry perspective, Connecticut Forests have been under-managed for several decades. This has led to even-aged stands with limited tree species diversity in many areas. Increasing age and species diversity through increased but sustainable harvests makes our forests more resistant to forest pest outbreaks, better able to respond to natural disasters (fire, hurricanes, floods, etc.), and more suitable as wildlife habitats for a larger suite of species.

Lastly, I'd like to note that another benefit of managing forests sustainably is the potential for maximizing carbon sequestration. As market-based efforts such as the Chicago Climate Exchange and others begin assigning carbon credits internationally for well-managed forests, Connecticut would be well-positioned as a leader to assess, monitor, and potentially trade this valuable commodity of the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Eric Hammerling
Executive Director