

March 12, 2010 Environment Committee Public Hearing

Testimony of Bob Andrews, Preston, CT

Co-chairmen Roy and Meyer, members of the committee. My name is Bob Andrews. I'm from Preston, CT. I'm here to testify on S.B. 116 and H.B. 5417. I'm the chairman of the CT Forestlands Council Recreation Committee and a volunteer trail maintainer for CT Forest and Park Association.

Senate Bill 116 would decrease the camping fees in state parks and forests from 200% of April 2009 fees to 120% of April 2009 fees. Without this bill, the state would see a decrease in total revenue from camping fees as many if not most campers would opt for one of the private campgrounds that abut or are very close to our state parks and forests. I know, because I spend May to October of every year camping full time. The loss of fee income would be a disaster for the state and the funds that provide much of the operations and maintenance of our state forestlands.

One important change that should be made to this bill is to include the parking and admission fees. People are unlikely to go to the beach or picnic in the park if the fees are doubled. At a time people are considering "staycations" and local forms of recreation, we should not be limiting access to the wealthy. Picnicking and beach visits are among the few inexpensive forms of outdoor recreation we have. A 20% increase would be seen as reasonable by most park and forest visitors and would likely result in a net increase of revenue from previous seasons.

Bill 5417 is an important step in open space preservation. However, sections 3 and 4, which set a July 1, 2010 deadline for DEP to make properties available for ATV use and commence development of trails and sets aside ATV registration fees for the purpose of establishing trails, should be deleted. While I strongly support the idea of establishing ATV trails on state land, this is a very wrong-headed approach. Creating a deadline date without addressing other ATV issues would be counter-productive. ATV trails need to be professionally designed and planned to avoid deterioration of the trails and environmental damage to the surrounding area. CT, through the DEP Recreational Trails Program, should request that the National Off Highway Vehicle Conservation Council and local ATV organizations submit grant proposals to DEP for site selection and trail design. Construction, maintenance, registration, and enforcement issues and costs must be addressed.

Trail work on hiking, biking, and horse trails is done primarily by volunteers with hand tools. Building and maintaining ATV trails will require use of heavy equipment and heavy equipment operators. So when we plan for ATV trails; we need to consider a very different meaning of the word "trail" and what it means to plan for the reality of that difference.

The creation of a safe, manageable, affordable and sustainable state ATV program should not be undertaken by grafting the unworkable proposed language of sections 3 and 4 onto this important legislative effort for open space preservation.

Thank you for you time.