



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Barbara C. Wagner
Chair

M. Howard Beach

Janet P. Brooks

Bruce R. Fernandez

Karyl Lee Hall

John M. Mandycyk

Richard Sherman

Ryan Suerth

Norman VanCor

Karl J. Wagener
Executive Director

TESTIMONY

DATE: March 12, 2010

PRESENTED TO: Environment Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

PRESENTED BY: Karl J. Wagener
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Raised Bill No. 5417, AAC Open Space and the Creation of
Trails for All-Terrain Vehicles

The Council on Environmental Quality recommends adoption of Section One of Raised Bill 5417. Section One will require the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to develop a complete inventory or registry of protected lands in this state, something we have never had.

Section One is more important than it might seem at first glance. **Nobody knows how much preserved land we have in Connecticut.** You might recall seeing figures in each issue of *Environmental Quality in Connecticut* on the acreage of preserved open space held by municipalities and nonprofit organizations. You can disregard those figures. The CEQ will not be reporting any such open space numbers in this year's report. We discovered that those numbers (which are the same numbers reported to this committee by the DEP in January of this year) are way off – probably by tens of thousands of acres.

We discovered the large discrepancy a few months ago when we examined closely some of the newer data that has been made available from the DEP's Protected Open Space Mapping (POSM) project. The POSM project is excellent, and accounts for a lot of municipal and nonprofit open space that had never appeared before on any state maps or other records. However, the POSM project has two problems:

1. POSM is dormant. With no staff available to continue work on the project, POSM is stuck at about 66 percent complete.

2. POSM is static. The POSM data is a snapshot – an old snapshot. The data for some of the towns were collected nearly ten years ago. IF the project is ever completed, it will be a record of the state as it was three, six, ten or more years ago, de-

pending on what part of the state you are looking at.

The proposed solution is to create a dynamic registry, where going forward each town and land trust would submit a record of each acquisition.

This registry would also include preserved farmland. The Department of Agriculture has accurate records of the land preserved through its Purchase of Development Rights program, but numerous towns, including Wethersfield and Glastonbury, have preserved farms at their own expense, and this information is not submitted to any state data base.

The Council thinks the submission program could be voluntary, and that the vast majority of municipalities and land trusts would eagerly report each new acquisition of land and easements, especially if they could then see how the acquisition fits into the big picture.

There are two reasons to create this registry:

1. Connecticut's citizens really should know how close they are to their goal of protecting 20 percent of Connecticut's land area, and
2. Connecticut needs to adopt a more strategic approach to land conservation, especially with regard to habitat conservation. When the state or any other party identifies a species or an ecosystem that is need of conservation assistance, it should be able to review available species data (whether it is from the DEP, university sites, or electronic citizen-science databases such as eBird), aerial photographs, **and a visual record of the preservation status of the land in the target areas.** The registry, as envisioned, would allow a conservation organization, including the DEP, to gain access to all of this necessary data, and to map a strategy for conserving the un-protected but critical properties.