

TO: Members of the Environment Committee

FROM: Katchen Coley, Middletown Conservation Commission
Conservation Committee, Middletown Garden Club
Long Hill Estate Parklands Committee
Ct. Land Conservation Council Steering Committee

RE: **Raised Bill 5417**

This is a hybrid bill: I ask you to wholeheartedly support parts of this bill and to equally wholeheartedly reject another part

As someone who has long worked to conserve open spaces in our State, I urge you to approve the **Green Fund** section of this bill. This would enable towns to build up a dedicated fund, through a 1% conveyance tax, that could be an important - and possibly only - source of monies for purchasing conservation areas. In these tough financial times many desirable lands are priced very reasonably, but the towns can not take advantage of the drop in prices because they have run out of money.

A Registry of protected areas. This is another very desirable part of the bill which I hope gains your support. Incredible as it may seem, we have no way to ascertain how many acres are protected and just where they are located. This lack hinders overall wise conservation planning. We know in each local area what we have saved, but we do not have a State-wide inventory!

ATV's on State-protected Lands. This section would require the DEP to turn over "some" of its parks to ATV's by July 1st. I find this insertion into an otherwise pro-conservation bill very questionable. Of course it should stand on its own in a separate bill so that you would have to consider it on its own merits - rather than hoping to escape your consideration by hiding behind the skirts of other beneficial proposals. But the proponents of ATV's have tried that before and rightly did not win your approval. And no wonder: too many caring town and State officials as well as volunteers like me have worked long and hard to set aside forests and grasslands to be preserved for their biodiversity which can be enjoyed by ALL our citizens not just a small segment.. But where many ATV'ers have accessed them illegally, we see serious habitat destruction. Of course, not all ATV riders are irresponsible, but since they are not registered with clearly visible licenses on their vehicles, it is difficult for rangers or police or hikers witnessing their havoc to be able to report them. Apparently many riders get a thrill out of challenging terrain and do not stay on designated trails but prefer to ride off-trail and consequently severely impact the plants, shrubs and even trees. We can not allow that to happen to our State Parks - our legacy that we hope to leave in their natural condition for future Nutmeggers to enjoy. On behalf of the many volunteers I have worked with over the years, I urge you: **remove the ATV section from this bill!**