



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Public Hearing – March 12, 2010
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Amey Marrella
Department of Environmental Protection

Raised House Bill 5420, AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSITION FROM THE TEN MILL PROGRAM IN 2011

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill No. 5420, AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSITION FROM THE TEN MILL PROGRAM IN 2011. This bill provides forest landowners currently enrolled in the 10 mill program pursuant to CGS Sections 12-96 through 12-98 an option to convert to the provisions of CGS Section 12-107d without penalty. This opportunity to convert to CGS Section 12-107d without penalty is similar to one provided from October 1, 1972 to October 1, 1973.

The 10 mill program was an innovative idea conceived nearly 100 years ago designed to conserve Connecticut private forest lands and the many public benefits they provide. In 1963, upon determining few properties met the land value qualifications required for 10 mill classification, CGS Sections 12-96 through 12-98 was supplanted with CGS Section 12-107d, commonly known today as PA-490.

While the 10 mil program has been very successful conserving forest lands, its designed revaluation after 50 years from original certification and termination after 100 years of enrollment poses potential unintended consequences. Significant increases in valuation may leave some landowners no choice but to convert part or all of the property to a non-forest use to offset the considerable increased tax burden. At risk are 137 properties totaling 14,050 acres in 34 different communities.

The conservation of forest land and its benefits is a national and global objective. Connecticut's forests provide valuable ecosystem services such as; clean water, clean air, carbon sequestration, cool temperatures, erosion and storm water control, and wildlife habitat. They also offer abundant outdoor recreation opportunities and support a robust forest economy that contributes over \$500 million dollars annually to Connecticut's economy and employs over 3,000 people. Nationally, forest land taxation policies and programs are key strategies for states to keep forests as forest. Landowners who have permanently protected their forest from conversion by transfer to a land preservation organization or placement of a conservation easement through *sale or donation* achieve the intended goals of the 10 mil program and should not be subject to penalties identified in CGS Sections 12-96 through 12-98.

The Department is in favor of broadening the proposed transition period from 10 mill to PA-490 if it is determined the deadline of October 1, 2011 is too narrow to secure ownership change to a land preservation organization or placement of a conservation easement.

In summary, the Department supports this bill, with recommendations, as it reopens a window of opportunity for forest landowners to transition, without penalty, from 10 mill to PA-490, a program which has also shared significant success in preserving forest land for nearly 50 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the DEP's views on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact the Department's legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance, at (860) 424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@CT.gov.