

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL 388
AAC CONNECTICUT'S ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE**

**David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
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I am here today on behalf of The Nature Conservancy's 28,000 members in Connecticut to express our strong support for Bill 388 – AAC Connecticut's Economic and Environmental Future. The title and substance of this bill reflect the fact that our environmental health and economic well-being are inextricably intertwined.

An increasing number of people are aware that healthy and attractive landscapes, clean rivers, and well-cared-for parks are crucial for attracting businesses and residents. Not as many people, however, seem to remember that environmental initiatives create a wide variety of good jobs. This legislation recognizes and fosters that job creation.

Sections 1 and 2 of this bill would increase General Obligation and Revenue bonding for the state's Clean Water Fund. This program is our most important for ensuring that we maintain the progress we have made in cleaning up the water in our rivers and Long Island Sound. It also creates significant construction, engineering, and other jobs - 3,000 annually at 2008 and 2009 funding levels.

Sections 3 – 9 of this bill would create critical new voluntary funding sources for DEP conservation programs, but as importantly would correct problems created by last year's budget legislation. That legislation eliminated most dedicated funds and revenues from DEP's budget. As long as General Fund support for the agency is not reduced, that elimination of special funds is appropriate in many cases.

Several DEP conservation-related fees, however, are for discretionary programs - citizens will only participate if they know that their fees are dedicated to those programs. People purchase Long Island Sound, Wildlife, or Greenways license plates because they know the funds are dedicated to those DEP programs; the same is true for Duck Stamps and the Wildlife Tax Checkoff program.

Similarly, the State Parks Enterprise Accounts were established to enable Park Managers who conduct special programs to know that their extra efforts and costs are compensated by directing the fees charged for the programs into the special accounts. These managers are most likely not going to conduct these programs if the resulting revenues go to the General Fund.

If the Environmental Conservation Fund is completely eliminated, and there is no mechanism to direct various conservation-related revenues towards conservation programs, the General Fund and DEP will lose significant revenues. Furthermore, in the

past, when General Fund support for the agency has been reduced, the Conservation side of DEP has been hurt disproportionately since it does not benefit from the federal requirements and funding that mandate certain staffing levels for the Environmental Quality side. This problem would be exacerbated if the Conservation Fund was not able to receive certain directed revenues.

Section 12 of this bill is essential for providing adequate management of our State Forest lands, and it will create forestry jobs. The State Lands Management staff in the DEP's Forestry Division has suffered a 50% decrease in staffing levels over the past several years. Since each of the State Lands Managers raises *far more* in General Fund revenues, from carefully-supervised sales of State Forest timber, than it costs to employ them, **these staff reductions make no sense fiscally, and have lost the state considerable revenues.** The reductions also greatly hinder the agency's abilities to accomplish critical ecological objectives through the management of our State Forests, and are severely hindering the agency from pursuing third-party certification of our State Forests.

Maintaining a statewide or regional mix of forest reserve areas amidst other forests which are logged in a well-planned and sustainable manner will provide the healthiest assemblage of various species and age classes in our woodlands. Such an assemblage will provide the broadest diversity of habitats for wildlife and the best resilience against pests, diseases and storm events.