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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Table with 2 columns: Public Hearing Subject Matter, Support/Oppose. Row 1: FY 2012-2013 GOVERNOR'S BUDGET: - CT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, - ELIMINATION OF INDEPENDENT COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY. Support/Oppose: - Support, - Oppose.

Co-Chairs Harp, Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Eric Hammerling and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA), the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. CFPA has offered testimony before the Legislature on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation for 115 years.

I am here to testify in strong support of all of the programs of the CT Department of Environmental Protection, but will focus my remarks on the conservation programs that are essential to protect our state's forests, parks, trails, and open spaces AND have the added benefit of generating direct revenues and economic benefits for the state.

Each year, approximately 7.5 million people visit Connecticut's 230,000+ acres of State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas. Over 25,000 camp at least one night on state lands. Over 300,000 go fishing. 38,000 hunt. Over 1.2 million people make trips specifically to view wildlife. The people who are enjoying our recreational amenities are also spending money that benefits our communities in many ways [see attached summary of socioeconomic benefits associated with the management of Connecticut's natural resources].

There are many direct and indirect economic benefits. For example, the fees paid by visitors to State Parks generated about \$6 million in 2010. However, the indirect benefits are likely MUCH larger, and The Connecticut Center of Economic Analysis at UConn is working on a report (with initial findings due next week) that will quantify these larger community benefits.

In State Forests, it is much the same story. State forest managers more than pay for themselves and raise an average of \$500,000 in timber harvest revenues each year. Connecticut timber including that from State Forests is processed into products such as lumber, cabinets, furniture, and flooring, and contributes both \$500 million to the State's annual economy and supports 3,600 jobs.

Clearly, getting outdoors is good for the body, mind, and spirit, but it is also good business. Please continue to invest in our natural assets so they will continue to pay dividends for many generations by attracting people and businesses to our communities.

Testimony in opposition to elimination of the Council on Environmental Quality

While we appreciate the Governor's commitment to efficiency and streamlining in state government, we oppose the elimination of the Council on Environmental Quality as an independent agency. CEQ's independence is the root of its effectiveness and credibility as an environmental watchdog on behalf of the public, as a forum to hear and address citizen's complaints, and as an impartial voice to suggest improvements in DEP program delivery. The ability of CEQ to criticize DEP if necessary may be uncomfortable at times, but it is often this discomfort that compels the DEP to find a solution.

Eliminating the staff of the CEQ and incorporating its functions into the DEP will only insure that this independent voice disappears. DEP staff are already notoriously overburdened with responsibilities and understaffed. Adding another responsibility while removing staff and the independence necessary to do the job simply does not make sense.

The budgetary savings of making this consolidation would be minor, but the environmental risks would be great. We urge you to preserve the CEQ as the independent, effective agency that it has been since the 1970's.

Socioeconomic data associated with CT's Natural Resources

Freshwater and Saltwater Fishing

- Fishing related expenditures by anglers in CT are \$243 million per year
- Fishing expenditures by non-residents fishing in CT are \$45 million per year
- 251,000 state residents take 5.4 million fishing trips per year in CT
- 51,000 non-residents take 457,000 fishing trips per year in CT
- Trout are the most sought after species, attracting over 2 million fishing trips per year. Freshwater bass (1.6 million trips per year) and striped bass (1.1 million trips per year) are the other most popular fisheries.
- Trout fishing alone generates over \$45 million in annual expenditures having a net economic impact of \$67.5 million per year
- Fishing activity generates annual revenue to fund DEP Inland and Marine Fisheries Division programs totaling approximately \$4.0 million per year in license revenue, \$3.4 million per year in Federal Sport Fish Restoration Funds, and a large part of approximately \$6.5 million per year in unrefunded motorboat fuel taxes.
- Recreational For-Hire industry supports 67 jobs and has an annual economic impact of \$6.9 million.
- Recreational Private Boat & Shore industry supports 361 jobs and has an annual economic impact of \$4.5 million.
- Connecticut's commercial fishing industry employs 562 people and generates annual sales totaling approximately \$33 million.

Wildlife

- 38,000 hunters spend over 500,000 days afield in Connecticut annually, with total expenditures exceeding \$68 million.
- Hunting activity generates annual revenue to fund DEP Wildlife Division programs totaling approximately \$2.26 million per year from the sale of licenses, permits and tags, and \$2.2 million in Federal Wildlife Restoration funds.
- The majority (21,000) characterize themselves as big game hunters spending approximately 210,000 days afield, while 15,000 characterize themselves as small game hunters spending approximately 162,000 days afield with the majority of these (10,000) being pheasant hunters. An additional 4,200 characterized themselves as waterfowl hunters, spending over 56,000 days afield.
- Nearly 1.2 million Connecticut residents, including approximately 166,000 six to fifteen year-olds, are engaged in watching wildlife annually, with total expenditures exceeding \$509 million.

Forestry

- Connecticut forests produce 60 – 80 million of board feet of timber annually. Two-thirds is harvested by forest practitioners certified by CTDEP Division of Forestry.
- CT timber is processed into valued added forest products including lumber, custom cabinets, furniture, flooring, doors, etc., contributing \$500 million dollars to Connecticut's annual economy and employing 3,600 people.
- Other forest products coming from Connecticut woodlands annually include 400,000 Christmas trees, 12,000 gallons of maple syrup, 500,000 cords of firewood, and three billion gallons of water consumed by two million Connecticut residents.
- Two million gallons of processed witch hazel, having a wholesale value of \$9 million dollars is produced in CT and sold each year representing virtually 100 percent of the world's supply.
- Connecticut's forests play an integral back drop to the State's \$4.9 billion tourism industry, most notably annual fall foliage visitations. Tourism annually supports an estimated 114,500 state jobs, two billion dollars in wages and generates \$1/2 billion in state and local taxes. Kent, CT was named top fall foliage viewing destination for 2010 by Yankee Magazine.
- Residents and out-of-state visitors enjoy some 8 million recreation days each year in Connecticut's 203,711 acres of state parks and forests generating over 2.5 million dollars in day-use fees. Connecticut state and private campgrounds attract over 900,000 visitors each year. Visitors to these campgrounds spend \$296 million in state.
- The Division of Forestry administers timber sale contracts that contribute approximately \$500,000 to the General Fund annually to support Forestry programs.
- Over \$2 million dollars of federal aid is administered and distributed annually to Connecticut communities for fire prevention, urban forestry projects, forest health, and conservation easement acquisitions.