

**Testimony to the Environment Committee delivered by John Larkin
on behalf of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association in support of H.B. 6157**

Dear Co-chairs Meyer, Roy, and Members of the Environment Committee,

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first private, non-profit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895, and we are probably best known today for two things: 1) being Connecticut's leading advocate for science-based, sustainable forestry, and 2) maintaining 825 miles of blue-blazed hiking trails that traverse 88 towns in our great state.

Every year, CFPA publishes a Conservation Agenda with many important conservation programs highlighted. This year, we have focused on our 5 highest priorities, and one of them is to establish a revolving fund that would allow DEP Forestry to retain a portion of the sustainable harvest revenues they generate with the balance going into the General Fund. We expect that the funds in the revolving fund would not support the hiring of staff (although that need is well-documented). Rather, the funds from the revolving fund would be reinvested into necessary forest management planning and implementation activities. This would allow the DEP to generate additional revenues for the state (1) while it enhances the health of our state forests (2) and also creates and maintains forestry-related jobs in Connecticut (3). H.B. 6157 would establish the mechanism for the DEP to achieve this goal.

Today, each time a sustainable harvest occurs on State Forests, revenues are generated (~\$500,000 in 2009). Under the current structure, those revenues go directly into the General Fund and for the DEP to conduct another sustainable harvest, the DEP must wait until funds are appropriated or otherwise allocated to allow DEP Foresters to initiate contracting on the next harvest.

However, if a Timber Harvest Revolving Fund (which might be renamed as the Sustainable Forest Management Revolving Fund) were established, there would be multiple benefits:

- 1) *Revenues would be created for the state and jobs in the private sectors would be created.* The forest products industry in Connecticut employs approximately 3,600 people and contributes \$500 million to the economy. Private certified foresters would be contracted by DEP Forestry to both prepare management plans and implement

sustainable harvests. At a time when expanding the state workforce significantly is unlikely, this will help DEP leverage its sparse staff resources as much as possible. Under this plan, we are not suggesting that these contractors would or should replace Forestry staff at the DEP;

- 2) *Forests would be managed both sustainably and better.* A 2008 Yale Study reported that DEP Forestry could increase sustainable harvests on state lands by up to 300% and maintain that level of harvest for 50 years. DEP Foresters would supervise all harvests to ensure they would be implemented sustainably. Amazingly, only 1/3rd of the State Forests currently have forest management plans and the revenues generated would help these essential plans be put in place and updated for all state forests;
- 3) *Additional forest management would help early detection of invasive pests.* Better forest management would increase the ability for DEP Forestry and private foresters to have more eyes in the field for early detection of invasive pests and invasive plants. Early detection could potentially save taxpayers millions of dollars in eradication costs. As an example, Worcester, MA recently had to pay almost \$20 million to remove trees that were infested by the Asian Longhorned Beetle, a pest which had been present but went undetected for over 10 years; and
- 4) *Wildlife Habitat, Water Quality, Recreation, and Fire Prevention efforts will all benefit.* In general, our State Forests do not currently provide the diversity of wildlife habitats that they might under additional forest management. Also, reducing the understory and overgrowth of the state forests will allow openings that could accommodate recreational trails and/or serve as breaks to reduce wildfires. Better forest management would also have water quality and even stormwater/floodwater retention benefits.

It would only take \$100,000 to capitalize this Revolving Fund and keep it going. With this minimal investment that could come through appropriations, fines/supplemental environmental projects, or other means, DEP Forestry could play a significant role in:

- Generating additional revenues for the state;
- Creating hundreds of new private forestry sector jobs (and protecting many others) as the Revolving Fund is phased-in; and
- Increasing the health of state forests, wildlife, and watersheds.

On behalf of CFPA, I thank you for your support of this important bill.