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March 07, 2011; Public Hearing - Environment Committee
Testimony submitted on my own behalf in support of Raised Bill No. 6263, *AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSITION FROM THE TEN MILL PROGRAM.*

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, and Members of the Environment Committee:
I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 6263, *AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSITION FROM THE TEN MILL PROGRAM.* My name is Allen Herkimer and I live in Cornwall Bridge. I am a stockholder and 3rd generation resident of Dark Entry Forest, Inc.(DEF), a 765-acre wildlife and forestry preserve. DEF is located in Cornwall and is totally situated within the Housatonic River watershed in the northwestern corner of Litchfield County. For 23 years, I have been the natural resource manager for DEF. In 1900 my grandfather, Dr. William C. Clarke, began to form a large contiguous parcel of forest and farmland by acquiring adjoining properties. His vision was for the protection, in perpetuity, of this large open space parcel.

Along with other Ten Mill property owners, the stewardship of our large undeveloped parcels provide invaluable benefits to citizens, wildlife, municipalities, regions and to sustainable forestry practices. For decades, DEF has allowed a segment of the Blue Trail hiking system to go through our property. Our forest adjoins other large unfragmented parcels, forming an extensive biodiverse wildlife corridor. Never take for granted the ability of these lands to filter and recharge our aquifers. DEF also allows scientific disciplines access to the property to conduct studies, including wildlife inventories and habitat assessments.

DEF is coming to the close of its first 50-year commitment in the Ten Mill program, a brilliant example of innovative legislation far ahead of its time. Current regulations state that our acreage will be revalued at true and actual market prices, versus current use property values, before we move into the second 50-years of the Ten Mill program. I am confident that DEF and its stockholders will be unable to afford the dramatically higher property taxes, the results of which will likely be disastrous for the land that we have now protected for over a century. If passed, Raised Bill No. 6263 will allow us to remain in the Ten Mill program, yet convert to PA 490 valuation and tax structure.

I strongly support the 2011 iteration of this bill, however I also request that additional clarifying language be considered that better defines the parameters of those who wish to remain in the Ten Mill program to the fulfillment of their original 100-year commitment.

Although conservation easements and other similar land protection vehicles are certainly viable alternatives to protect ecologically important parcels, I extend my gratitude for your recognition of those private individuals and private entities who are as determined, as committed, and have demonstrated their successful long-term practices of maintaining large parcels as forever wild.

I would like to thank the members of the Environment Committee for their perseverance in crafting this bill that calls for equal compromises from all affected parties. My special thanks go to Representative Roberta Willis, Senator Andrew Roraback, Department of Environmental Protection's Chris Martin and Eric Hammerling of Connecticut Forest and Park Association for their combined efforts in working on this critical legislation.