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**Testimony in Support of Bill 6263 –
AAC the Transition from the Ten Mil Program**

**David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
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On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's Connecticut Chapter, I would like to express our support for Bill 6263 – AAC the Transition from the Ten Mil Program.

When first established in 1913, the “ten mill” program was a very innovative initiative to encourage forest land owners to leave their land in a forested state. Unfortunately, the drafters of the original legislation, while recognizing the importance of thinking in long time frames – in this case, 50-year obligation periods - when conserving forest land, did not take into account the rising value of land and other changes that would take place over several decades.

The legislation crafters incorporated significant penalties for withdrawing from the program to ensure that municipalities, who were sacrificing tax revenues, were truly getting the financial and ecological benefits of having the land remain undeveloped.

Most forest and farmland owners now use the “PA 490” program to gain “current use” assessments, which enable them to be taxed based not on what the land would be worth if it was developed, but rather on what it is currently being used for. Landowners get to keep their land as forest or farmland, and towns do not have to provide the services that would be required by residences or businesses. The 490 program is less burdensome on landowners than the older ten-mill program.

As the end of the second of the 50-year ten mill obligation periods nears, we now have 75 landowners, holding 14,000 acres of forestland, facing a very difficult situation. Unless the statute is changed, their tax assessments will drastically rise, forcing them to sell their lands or face drastically higher taxes.

This legislation would 1) capping the property taxes of ten mill landowners at the P.A. 490 rate at their 50-year anniversary in the program; 2) provide ten mill landowners who are willing to place a conservation easement on their properties with the flexibility to keep their lands in ten mill or transition into P.A. 490 without a financial penalty; and 3) maintain the penalties associated with changing use out of forestry to both protect the forest values of the ten mill lands and ensure that towns would benefit financially if the landowners decided to develop. We urge your support for this bill.