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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – January 31st, 2011**

In Support of Bill 6157 – AAC STATE FORESTRY PROGRAMS

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's 25,000 members in Connecticut, I would like to express our strong support for Bill 6157 – AAC STATE FORESTRY PROGRAMS. This bill would enable the DEP Forestry Division to produce more revenue for the General Fund than it currently generates, and to accomplish important ecological objectives in our State Forests.

The State Lands Management staff in the DEP's Forestry Division has suffered a 50% decrease in staffing levels over the past decade and a half. Since each of the State Lands Managers raises 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.

Factors such as weather and timber prices also affect timber revenues, but as an example of how staffing impacts them; when the DEP added three foresters in 1997 at an annual total cost of \$206,000, revenues increased by \$313,000 annually. Conversely, the Division had two fewer State Lands Managers in 2001-02 than in 1999-00, and as a result raised \$350,000 less from timber sales.

The staff reductions over the past 15 years have also greatly hindered the agency's abilities to accomplish critical ecological objectives through the management of our State Forests.

Our advocacy of this program should not be construed as condoning the wholesale cutting of trees simply to raise more revenues. Revenue should never be the primary motive for any management performed on our public lands.

Our scientists, however, along with many others, have determined that 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. Currently, the trees in our state forest lands do not have a healthy diversity of age classes. Careful timber harvests, conducted according to appropriate management plans, will help establish a healthier forest.

Due to staff losses, the Forestry Division does not have adequate staff to conduct or supervise as many harvests as should be carried out annually. This bill, while not increasing
(over)

agency staff, would provide a means of contracting with private foresters to conduct DEP-supervised harvests, and if not actually increasing revenues to the General Fund, holding that fund harmless.

In order to better implement this concept, we recommend that paragraph (c) (2) be changed to read as follows:

(2) There is established a separate, nonlapsing account within the General Fund to be known as the "timber harvesting revolving account". Proceeds from the harvest of timber FROM STATE FORESTS AND STATE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS shall be deposited in such account. The commissioner SHALL [may] use moneys in such account for the purpose of developing forest management plans to guide the harvest of timber from woodlands and for all reasonable direct expenses relating to the administration and operation of such plans. The commissioner may accept, on behalf of the Department of Environmental Protection, any gifts, donations or bequests for the purposes of depositing such funds into the timber harvesting revolving account. ANY FUNDS RECEIVED FROM THE PROCEEDS OF TIMBER HARVEST IN [T]the account shall not exceed one hundred thousand dollars. Any remaining proceeds FROM SUCH HARVEST shall be deposited in the General Fund.