

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

Legislation before the Transportation Committee on March 14, 2011	Support/ Oppose
H.B. 6574: AN ACT INCREASING THE PERMISSIBLE SIZE AND WEIGHT OF ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES AND PROVIDING FUNDS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRAILS ON STATE LAND FOR USE BY SUCH VEHICLES.	Oppose

Members of the Transportation Committee:

My name is Eric Hammerling and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. As you know, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation every year since 1897.

We strongly oppose H.B. 6574 for several reasons:

- 1) This bill would put the siting requirement for ATV trails on the DEP. DEP has asked ATV advocates repeatedly over many years for their specific recommendations on where ATV trails should be considered. Consistently, ATV advocates have neither identified areas to be studied for suitability nor have they put forward substantive proposals. Any new trail or change of use on an existing trail on DEP land is subject to application and review by the Department's trails committee no matter whether the proposed users are hikers, cyclists, equestrians, or OHVs. Potential impacts are weighed and evaluated. Any such trail or change of use must be maintained by the sponsoring organization. Yet for over 10 years, no reasonable OHV proposal has been submitted. No organization that we are aware of has pro-actively raised money to match RTP grants or to purchase options on properties. No public education effort about safe and responsible riding has taken place. Sales of vehicles have continued, yet these same buyers complain that they cannot afford registration fees;
- 2) Section 4(b) of this legislation is quite weak and would certainly not serve as a deterrent to illegal use of ATVs on state land. At the very least, I would strike "knowingly," beef-up the definition of what is meant by "an infraction," and include penalties including vehicle forfeiture for significant infractions;

- 3) Although it is somewhat encouraging that ATV owners would have to register, the registration fee of \$20 collected every 2 years is absurdly low. After funds were siphoned off by the Department of Motor Vehicles for its administrative costs, it is unclear how much funding would actually remain "to establish trails" as called for under the bill. This small registration fee would not significantly offset the many costs associated with evaluating, siting, designing, developing, maintaining, and enforcing ATV trails. The fees collected may not even pay for the trails evaluation process for one trail; and
- 4) With resources being scarce at the Department of Environmental Protection, as they are everywhere, creating ATV trails is simply not a high priority for the use of state resources. Perhaps this is one of the many reasons that ATV trails have not been established? Directing the Commissioner of Environmental Protection to make state lands available for ATV use not later than July 1, 2012 is simply neither reasonable nor feasible.

We urge you to oppose H.B. 6574. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.