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

Legislation before the Environment Committee on March 2, 2012	Support/ Oppose
<u>R.B. 5262</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF CERTAIN TRAILS AND AREAS FOR EQUINE USE.	Oppose

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.

On behalf of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA), I testify in opposition to Raised Bill 5262.

As you know, CFPA and our volunteers are the backbone of the 825 mile-long blue-blazed hiking trail system. CFPA volunteers spent approximately 18,000 hours maintaining the blue-blazed hiking trails in 2011 alone. By the way, several of the blue-blazed hiking trails, which are officially foot paths by statute, have segments of trail that also accommodate equestrian and other recreational uses.

The primary reason that CFPA opposes R.B. 5262 is that this Bill is unnecessary and would circumvent the two processes that are already in place to establish equestrian and other trails on state lands.

First, the General Assembly established the Equine Advisory Council (EAC) in 2007 through P.A. 07-42. The EAC (which is comprised of representatives from the CT Horse Council, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), and CFPA) has the following goals:

1. Promote equestrian use on public lands.
2. Preserve, maintain and restore existing trails.
3. Promote the development of new "Multi-Use" trails.
4. Document and create trail maps for equestrian users.

The EAC is currently working with DEEP to develop a comprehensive Equestrian Trail Plan for Connecticut. This plan identifies and recommends trails that are best suited for equestrian use. Although existing regulations do allow all multiple-use trails to be open to equestrian use unless posted otherwise, it is wise for the EAC to recommend and post/blaze with a yellow diamond those trails that are most appropriate. DEEP has identified those trails recommended by the EAC on maps available on the DEEP website.

To date, the EAC has completed its trail recommendations for the Pachaug and Shenipsit State Forests, and it is currently working on trail recommendations for new trails in the Natchaug State Forest in coordination with the Friends of Goodwin Forest and CFWA.

Secondarily, DEEP has an internal process set-up for trail advocates who wish to propose a new trail on state lands. This internal DEEP process is critical to evaluate such important questions as:

- Is the trail appropriate for the terrain upon which it is proposed?
- Does the trail proponent have volunteers or means to help maintain new trails?
- Are there conflicts with endangered/threatened species habitats, sensitive historic sites, or other state trust resources?
- Will the proposed trail negatively impact neighboring landowners?

This DEEP process is essential to ensure that any trails – hiking, biking, equestrian, or otherwise – are considered in the consistent, rigorous, and thorough manner that will help ensure any new trails are built sustainably and will be safe for a wide variety of users.

We believe the EAC and DEEP processes are the appropriate ones for putting forward and duly evaluating proposed equestrian trails. Therefore, we encourage the Committee to vote against R.B. 5262.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.