

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony in Support of S.B. No. 347 and H.B. 5413
To the Environment Committee

Submitted by: Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director
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Senator Meyer, Representative Roy and Members of the Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) strongly supports **S. B. No. 347: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE'S OPEN SPACE PLAN** and **H.B. No. 5413: AN ACT CONCERNING INVASIVE PLANTS**

CLCC's mission is to work with land trusts, municipal conservation commissions and open space committees, other conservation and advocacy organizations and landowners to increase the pace, quality and scale of land conservation in Connecticut. CLCC is a voice for land conservation at the Capitol and provides leadership, information, technical assistance, grant fund awards, and a common forum to discuss issues for Connecticut's land conservation community. CLCC is guided by a Steering Committee with statewide representation.

S.B. No. 347: An effective Open Space Plan will allow the state to establish a comprehensive vision and approach to protecting Connecticut's natural resources. C.G.S.A. Section 23-8 ("23-8") establishes the goal of conserving 21% of the state's land as open space ("the 21% goal"), but does not provide for a sufficiently meaningful process to achieve that goal. The amendments proposed by S.B. 347 would help to address this deficiency by requiring more detail in the state's comprehensive strategy to reach the 21% goal, including: a review of the state's open space strategy at regular intervals; an assessment of the state's resources available for the acquisition and proper stewardship of open space; a prioritization of lands for acquisition; a mechanism for keeping track of conserved lands; and a process for ensuring that state lands valuable for conservation purposes are legally protected as such.

Proposed 23-8(d), in particular, is especially important as it requires the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection ("DEEP") to address the important issue of how to best protect state lands that contain valuable natural resources but are not legally protected or specifically defined as open space under the statutes. Without a mechanism for legal protection in place, these lands are vulnerable to conversion to other uses which may threaten or destroy their conservation values.

Proposed 23-8(e), takes a step forward in addressing the serious problem of a lack of a statewide registry for holding reliable data about what lands are protected, where and by what mechanism. Although the State's Green Plan (2007) does contain some figures and the Land Trust Alliance -- a national, private NGO -- 2010 Land Trust Census Data offers further insight into the pace of conservation by private land trusts, without a centralized registry there is no accurate method for determining how many acres of land have been preserved for conservation purposes throughout the state.

A statewide registry will not only enable the state to track where it stands in relation to the 21% goal but will also promote good planning and policy making for conservation action, natural resource management and smart growth development at both the municipal and state level. While we respectfully contend that a truly effective system needs to be mandatory, a voluntary system is a good first step in the right direction.

H.B. No. 5413: Invasive plants are a pervasive and serious problem in Connecticut both on state and private lands, including those owned by land trusts and other conservation organizations. Protecting native species and the habitats in which they occur is a shared objective of DEEP and the conservation community. The Connecticut Invasive Plants Council has developed a list of invasive species that pose a threat of environmental harm to minimally-managed areas, such as conservation lands. Enabling the Council to maintain the services of an invasive plants coordinator is essential to making progress in addressing the control and eradication of invasive species.

Thank you for your consideration.