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Conserving Connecticut. Connecting people to the land.

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

Legislation before the Environment Committee on March 16, 2012	Position
<u>S.B. 347</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE'S OPEN SPACE PLAN.	Support
<u>S.B. 349</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING FOR INLAND WETLANDS AGENCY MEMBERS AND AGENTS.	Support
<u>H.B. 5413</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING INVASIVE PLANTS.	Support

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 CFPA, I am testifying on 3 bills today:

S.B. 347: There are several aspects of this bill that have great merit:

- It would help keep the State's Green Plan which is intended to guide land acquisition and protection for the state up to date by requiring an update every 5 years (the most recent Green Plan was released in 2007);
- It would include a strategy to protect appropriate state agency lands in perpetuity as open space; and
- It would help the state get a better picture of where protected lands are actually located.

As the old saying goes, "you can't know where you're going, until you know where you've been."

S.B. 349: I thank the Committee for raising this bill and the Council on Environmental Quality for its efforts to work with conservation organizations, municipalities, the Home Builders Association, and many others to find ways to raise the expertise level, effectiveness, and consistency of Inland Wetlands Commissions across the state. Inland Wetlands Commissioners (IWCs) in every municipality are literally the front lines of protecting aquatic resources in their communities by minimizing potential damage from various projects under their purview. Proper training in the law and science of wetlands is critical to ensure a thorough and consistent review of development proposals. DEEP is severely understaffed in its Wetlands staff, so it is critical to devise legislation that would be low-cost, low-burden, and effective at providing training options for new IWC volunteers as well as ongoing training to keep the skills sharp of current IWC members.

H.B. 5413: Invasive plants are a leading cause of habitat loss, and protecting native ecosystems is a top priority for DEEP. The Invasive Plants Council leads initiatives to educate the public about the problems created by invasive plants in lakes, forests and other natural habitats; recommends ways to control the spread of invasives; and publicizes important invasive plant research. The work of the Council is impossible to sustain without a dedicated invasive plants coordinator, and we strongly support the invasive plant coordinator being stationed at UConn.

**** I invite the members of the Committee to join us next Wednesday, March 21st to celebrate “Friends of CT State Parks Day” in the Concourse between the LOB and the Capitol between 10:00 and 2:00 p.m.** We will be providing information on both the tremendous value to Connecticut provided by the State Park system, and the many “Friends groups” that volunteer to support them.

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