



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 2, 2012
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Daniel Esty

Proposed House Bill No. 5262 - An Act Concerning the Preservation of Certain Trails and Areas for Equine Use

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Raised House Bill No. 5262 – An Act Concerning the Preservation of Certain Trails and Areas for Equine Use. We appreciate the Committee’s willingness to discuss this issue. However, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) believes that the legislative designation of trails to be preserved for equestrian use as set out in the bill is premature at this time.

The [Equine Advisory Council](#) (EAC) was established in 2007 to assist DEEP in establishing and preserving equestrian trail use throughout DEEP managed lands. The EAC has been working with DEEP in developing a comprehensive Equestrian Trail Plan for Connecticut. This plan compliments existing regulation (Section 23-4-1. (l)) that defines multi-use trails as being open to equestrians unless posted otherwise. To date, trails have been identified and some blazed with a yellow diamond as being recommended by the CT Horse Council (partnering with EAC and DEEP to mark, market and maintain these trails) for equestrian use. The trails are also identified on DEEP maps which are available on our website. We have completed trail systems in [Shenipsit](#) and [Pachaug](#) State Forests and are working on a trail system for Natchaug State Forest in partnership with the Friends of Goodwin State Forest’s Trails Committee.

DEEP believes that the ongoing work of the EAC should supersede any related legislation. For instance, the proposed bill includes the Shenipsit, Pachaug, and Naugatuck State Forest trails as well as the Machimoodus State Park trails. Not all trails in these forests and parks are suitable for equestrian use especially those that are part of the CT Blue Blazed Hiking Trail System. These are the types of issues and inconsistencies that are resolved through the EAC’s process. Further, DEEP recommends that the existing language be amended to remove Natchaug, Cockaponset and Huntington trails for the same reason.

Regarding the Pequonnock and Housatonic Rail Bed Trail in Bridgeport, Trumbull, Monroe and Newtown, DEEP, in concurrence with DOT’s comments, notes that these trails are either in-place or in final design with a paved travel surface. These trails should remain paved in order to safely accommodate the most users, due to funding source requirements, and due to the nature of the areas (urban-heavy use) thru which they pass. Equestrian use on these trails, should it be found to be necessary, can occur as it is a

multi-use system. However, equestrian users would be forced to use pavement which they typically do not prefer. Consequently, DEEP recommends the addition of the following new subsection to Section 23 – 10e : “ (d) The preservation of a trail by the Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection pursuant to subsection (a) shall not provide cause for re-development or re-design of such trail to change the surface type.”

Regarding the Bissell Trail, DEEP has similar comments. The extension of the Bissell Bridge trail is in its final stages of construction through Windsor Meadows State Park and is designated and designed for safe multi-use. Again, equestrian users can use this paved trail (which they typically do not prefer as discussed above), or they can use a natural surface trail which will be constructed by the CT Horse Council in cooperation with State Parks staff this year. The Bissell Bridge trail also includes a bridge which has been designed for multi-use and will accommodate equestrians.

Sunrise State Park is presently under a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, which anticipates a long term public -private partnership to redevelop this recreational property. Proposals are due later this spring, and it is premature to designate equestrian use until that RFP process is complete.

The Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Preserve and the Haley Farm trail systems in Groton are designated non-motorized multiple use areas, which includes equestrian uses. Park managers would not be inclined to ban equestrians unless safety became a concern.

Beyond the specific forest and park lands referenced above, other state lands exist that are managed for specific purposes that may not be compatible with one or more uses, like equestrian riding. Examples of such properties include Natural Area Preserves and Wildlife Management Areas wherein the foremost objective is wildlife conservation and wildlife focused public use.

DEEP is pleased to be working with the EAC on this planning effort and looks forward to the completion of this project. Should legislation be needed to achieve the intended outcome of this proposed bill it would surely benefit from the guidance of a completed comprehensive equestrian trail plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact DEEP’s legislative liaison, Robert LaFrance at 424-3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov