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IN SUPPORT OF BILL 5413 - AAC INVASIVE PLANTS.

Testimony of David Sutherland - Director of Government Relations Before the Environment Committee – March 16, 2012

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I am here today to express our appreciation for the attention that this committee has given to the issue of invasive plants over the past several years, and our support for bill 5413 - AAC Invasive Plants.

This bill would provide funding to enable the University of Connecticut to continue the employment of the state's Invasive Plants Coordinator. The funding for this position will be depleted by the end of this fiscal year if this bill is not passed.

The coordinator has played a vital role in coordinating the efforts of scores of volunteers who have worked to eradicate or control outbreaks of various invasive plants. He has conducted trainings for municipal officials and produced a guide for the proper disposal of problematic plants. The coordinator has also served as staff person for the Invasive Plants Council, which has been an important venue for citizens and often-conflicting interest groups to discuss, reach consensus on, and implement workable solutions on a variety of invasive plant issues. These issues and discussions often involve scientific information and proceedings which must be compiled, reviewed, and tracked by a staff person.

Most of the thousands of non-native plants, which have been introduced to New England from other regions over the past few centuries, do not present problems for natural habitats. Several dozen of these alien species, however, are a grave threat to forests and other natural areas, because they are able to aggressively out-compete native plants, and are not nearly as valuable for native animals which evolved with those native plants. Instead of a mosaic of many species of native plants and animals, our forests and wetlands become dominated by far fewer species of plants and animals, and therefore less healthy. Many lakes and rivers have become impenetrably clogged with aquatic invasive plants. Unlike pollution, invasive plants, once introduced, continue to spread without further human assistance and do not degrade over time.

Bill 5413 would enable a crucial component of the state's efforts to combat these plants to continue. This modest funding of \$90,000 would leverage thousands of hours of volunteer time. By helping to identify and eliminate new outbreaks of plants, this funding would help avoid much larger expenditures by the state and municipalities to eradicate populations in the future once they have become well-established.