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To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: Testimony Regarding the Governor's FY 2014-15 Budget

Testimony of Starr Sayres, Vice President, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, regarding the Governor's FY 2014-15 Budget

In opening, as a general observation, I must speak to the imperative asked of us by those who went before that we sustain our most unwavering guardianship of the state's natural assets. We are blessed with over 100 state parks, 65,000 acres of state forests and a treasure trove of agricultural, open space and recreational lands that represent our promise to the future. Let go, these resources will most certainly be diminished, be withdrawn from public access or in some instances be irretrievable. Is this the legacy we wish to leave on our watch?

I would ask your consideration of the following:

1. **Bonding support** for the acquisition of important natural landscapes is absolutely essential. We must be ready for unique and quixotic preservation opportunities as they come along or they may be lost forever. **The Community Investment Act** was prudently created to fund open space, agricultural lands, historical preservation, as well as affordable housing. To divert this funding to the Healthy Foods Initiative, as called for in the Governor's budget, would undermine, and in some cases terminate, critical efforts to preserve important natural assets. I strongly support the inclusion of \$10 million in bonding for open space and recreational lands acquisition, and \$10 million for the preservation of agricultural lands, as well as restoration of the original intent of CIA funding.
2. Rescissions to the **funding of our State Parks**, particularly in their 100th Anniversary year, will mark a damaging setback to our State Park system. Every citizen, regardless of economic status, enjoys affordable access to some of the State's most treasured landscapes. It is our entrusted inheritance and the promise of our forebears. We well know that as many as 8 million people visit our parks every year, a large number from out of state, a well documented and significant economic benefit. It is vital that we staff (particularly seasonally) and maintain these recreational resources if we are to sustain their value, both intrinsically and economically. I cannot urge strongly enough the funding necessary to keep our parks open, to keep park buildings and grounds safe and to welcome seasonal visitors from at home and abroad.
3. Our once proud **State Forests** have seen crippling staff reductions over a number of years and now stand threatened by lack of management and by particularly virulent invasive pests that are poised to destroy large numbers of trees. Shockingly, the DEEP Forestry Division has not a single forester to manage 25,000 State Forest acres in western Connecticut and 41,000 acres in eastern Connecticut. In addition, significant revenue generating potential of these forests is being lost without the qualified foresters needed to oversee sustainable forest product sales. It is estimated that \$2,000,000 in projected revenue to the State stands to be lost if we do not fund, at minimum, the three durational foresters now being trained to help with urban forestry and state lands management. Our State Forests are the people's land. It is imperative that we fund the staff necessary to ensure responsible stewardship of these public lands.
4. The **Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality** was established as an independent neutral oversight agency to hear public concerns about environmental issues. Its independence and neutrality

are what lend it objectivity and credibility. I am vehemently opposed to the CEQ being subsumed into the Office of Governmental Accountability, which will erode its capacities to serve the public.

In closing, the responsibility for stewardship of public lands is a weighty one, indeed. But it is one we gave our earnest pledge to uphold. It is now a responsibility we must fiercely defend.

Thank you.

Starr Sayres