

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, ranking members, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Chuck Lee. I am a resident of Eastford, an elected officer in CSEA SEIU Local 2001, and an Environmental Analyst for the State of Connecticut. I provide testimony today in support of retaining three foresters in the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), who are scheduled to be removed from state service this spring due to a lack of funding for their positions. We are asking that the state find the money to continue funding these three positions. The timber sales that result from the work of these foresters generate significantly more revenue for the State of Connecticut than the cost of their three positions combined. They are projected to generate a net \$2,000,000 in revenue over the next ten years.

Eliminating these forester positions is shortsighted and will have negative consequences for economic growth in Connecticut's rural areas. Among other responsibilities, the DEEP Division of Forestry is charged with managing 180,000 acres of state owned forests. The three foresters, who are about to be laid off, have spent two years learning the state forests and how the state of Connecticut sells forest products to private sector industries through bidding and contracts. Without these foresters on the job, our state forest will go under managed, under harvested, and economic opportunities will be lost.

As the single largest forestland owner in the state, Connecticut has considerable investments in forests. Through proper forest management, we can realize the return on this investment while increasing the value of our standing crop of trees. As we harvest timber, the remaining trees will increase in growth and thus increase in value, further growing our investment. However, without foresters to mark, tally, and bid out timber sales or supervise the harvests, Connecticut will not be able to reap the economic benefit of our state forests.

By properly harvesting timber from our state forests, we create private sector jobs for forest harvesters, sawmill operators, truck drivers and the associated industries that support these workers. Timber in our state forests is harvested and transported to mills for processing. The milled lumber is then purchased throughout the country in the form of lumber and flooring, or exported out of the country. Other forest products harvested from our state forests include cordwood and wood pellets; a critical energy source for many homeowners trying to offset soaring heating costs. Although they maintain a lower profile than natural gas, forests products are an important component of home heating in Connecticut.

It is my understanding that the original Federal grant that funded these positions was given to address climate change by sequestering carbon. Wisely, the Federal Government understood how proper forest management could aid in this effort. It's my understanding that funds from that grant are being reduced and the Department has chosen to use the remaining funds to support other priorities. It has been my experience during my 25 plus years working at DEEP that Federal grants are often meant to be used as seed money so that the state can have time to permanently establish and fund programs. It's time for Connecticut to permanently fund these positions so that we can continue this worthwhile and economically valuable effort.

Sincerely,

Chuck Lee
Eastford, CT