



16 Meriden Road  
Rockfall, Connecticut  
06481-2961

T 860 346-TREE

F 860 347-7463

Email: [info@ctwoodlands.org](mailto:info@ctwoodlands.org)

[www.ctwoodlands.org](http://www.ctwoodlands.org)

*Conserving Connecticut. Connecting people to the land.*

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

**Legislation before the Appropriations Committee on February 20, 2013**

GOVERNOR'S BILL H.B. 6350: AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2015, AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATING TO REVENUE.

Co-Chairs Hurlburt and Duff and Honorary Members of the Appropriations Conservation & Development Subcommittee,

In 1895, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) became the first conservation organization established in Connecticut. CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly every year since 1897 on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation.

On behalf of CFPA's members and supporters, I submit testimony today on the Governor's Budget with emphasis on three priorities:

1. Keeping State Parks Open to Benefit Connecticut;
2. Managing Healthy State Forests for Economic, Wildlife, and Other Benefits; and
3. Maintaining the independence of the CT Council on Environmental Quality.

When the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) became the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), we were excited that the importance of the Department was growing ... and it has. Unfortunately, the overall budget for DEEP has not kept pace with the promise of its expanded mission, and in particular, the natural resource programs within DEEP have been hard hit by rescissions and in this budget.

**1. Keeping State Parks Open to Benefit Connecticut** (*Recommendation: CFPA recommends an increase of \$3.5 million to enable the State Park System to fund at least 100 field positions in order to sustain 107 parks on the 100 year anniversary of the Parks*)

In 2003, Clough Harbour & Associates were contracted to study what personnel and capital resources were necessary to have a well-maintained State Park System. Although there were only 101 Parks at the time, CH&A recommended that staff levels should be at 204 full-time staff and 1,943 part-time seasonal employees.

Today, there are only 74 full-time field staff and 550 part-time seasonals available to manage 107 State Parks, and 15 of those staff are eligible for retirement this July. Due to recent cuts to seasonals and continued attrition, several Parks will either not be opened, or will have services reduced in 2013. The Governor's proposed Budget would extend cuts in the funding necessary to hire seasonal workers who are critical to keep Park buildings and grounds safe and attractive for visitors.

We know that this is a difficult time for the state budget, but further cuts to the State Parks inflicted during the 100 year anniversary of the State Park system simply does not make sense. Here are just a few reasons why:

- A 2011 Economic Study by UConn documented an annual contribution of over \$1 billion and 9,000 private sector jobs to Connecticut from the State Parks. The study highlighted that every \$1 spent on the State Parks returns \$38 to Connecticut's coffers. The study also noted that if investments to maintain the Parks are not made, these economic values will be lost.
- The value of properties adjacent to or overlooking state parks is an average of 13% higher than properties that do not (similar to the benefit by homes on the Sound.) Parks' iconic landscapes and landmark historic buildings are treasured by our citizens; and proximity to park property is also coveted by those relocating from other states.
- Approximately 8 million people visit the State Parks each year (Connecticut's population is 3.5 million). The Parks System is perhaps the most dominant member of Connecticut's tourism network, and the relative condition of its facilities is of tremendous importance to surrounding businesses.
- Municipalities, school systems, businesses, and a host of non-profit entities depend upon the Park System to provide sites for large community events.
- Parks' open spaces and trained staff have been invaluable in times of civic emergency. For example, Hammonasset State Park and Sherwood Island State Park were critical staging locations during Storm Sandy and 9/11.
- Every citizen, no matter what their economic status, has access to our State's most beautiful lands, which were specifically preserved to be enjoyed by all.

## **2. Managing Healthy State Forests for Economic, Wildlife, and Other Benefits**

*(Recommendation: CFPA recommends the General Assembly add \$300,000 to allow DEEP Forestry to refill these 3 forestry positions and make them permanent)*

Years of retirements and staff attrition have left the DEEP Forestry Division without a single forester to manage either 41,000<sup>+</sup> acres of State Forest in eastern Connecticut, or 25,000<sup>+</sup> acres of State Forest in western Connecticut. The management plans for most of these Forests have expired, some several years ago. Also, Forestry Staff are inundated by requests from municipalities to manage roadside forests to be more storm resistant. Furthermore, threats from invasive pests such as the Asian Longhorned Beetle and Emerald Ash Borer require more eyes in the forest for early detection and eradication.

Two years ago, DEEP wisely hired 3 durational foresters to help with state lands management and urban forestry outreach. Their durational terms are all coming to an end in the next 2 months(!). If their jobs are not retained, two years of investment in their training and experience will be lost, along with some \$2,000,000 in projected general fund revenue over the next 10 years.

Full-time DEEP Foresters who manage state lands generate an average of \$90,000 annually apiece for the Connecticut General Fund from growing and harvesting forest products. This means they typically earn the state more than they cost. In less than two years, the durational state lands foresters have produced 10,000 acres worth of forest management plans and generated forest product sales projected to earn some \$240,000 in income for the state. At the same time, these activities produce significant jobs and economic activity for Connecticut's private sector industry while enhancing the habitat and other ecological benefits these forests produce.

Overall, this lack of staffing means public requests cannot be serviced, and tens of thousands of dollars in forest products sale revenues are lost annually. Over 600 miles of State Forest boundaries are not regularly monitored. Recreation value is lost, invasive species problems increase, insect and disease infestations go undiscovered and unchecked, and firewood sales for homeowners cannot be offered.

It is almost embarrassing to have to testify before you to try to save just 3 Forestry positions. That being said, we strongly believe that investing in these positions now will earn the state of Connecticut money, benefit the state and people environmentally, and give DEEP the tools to be more responsible stewards of the peoples' land.

**3. Maintaining independence and expertise for CT Council on Environmental Quality**  
*(Recommendation: CFPA recommends the General Assembly not consolidate CEQ into the Office of Governmental Accountability)* As you know, CEQ provides an important, neutral venue to hear public concerns about a wide range of environmental issues. It also puts forward an environmental agenda for the legislature which is always informative and well-researched. CEQ should remain an independent watchdog agency with specific environmental expertise, experience, and focus. Consolidation would dilute its effectiveness, and damage its ability to be an advocate for the natural resources of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.

