

**From:** j.neafsey@cox.net  
**Sent:** Monday, February 18, 2013 6:07 PM  
**To:** AppropriationTestimony  
**Subject:** State Parks and Forests Budget Testimony

RE: The Conservation & Development Appropriations Subcommittee is holding a public hearing on Wednesday (2/20) at 6:30 p.m. in Room 2C at the Legislative Office Building (300 Capitol Avenue in Hartford). Testimony can be submitted by email to [appropriationtestimo@cga.ct.gov](mailto:appropriationtestimo@cga.ct.gov)

We are CFPA members and wish to reiterate and support their points on maintaining full funding for Connecticut State Parks and Forests for 2013.

We live in Stafford and visit local state parks and forests frequently and care deeply about their continued protection and maintenance. We urge you to continue to support full for increased unding for 2013. We can't think of a better use for what amounts to a tiny fraction of our tax dollars!

#### 1. Keeping State Parks Open to Benefit Connecticut

##### Background

Only 74 field staff are currently available to manage 107 State Parks, and 15 of those staff are eligible for retirement in July, 2013. Because of rescissions and continued attrition, several Parks will either not be opened or will have services reduced in 2013. The Governor's proposed Budget would cut funding necessary to hire seasonal workers who are critical to keep Park buildings and grounds safe for visitors.

##### Talking points:

- \* 2013 is the 100 year anniversary of the State Park system. This should be an opportunity to celebrate State Parks and give them a funding boost.
- \* 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.
- \* Providing affordable venues for outdoor activities is fundamental for healthy lifestyles and reducing vexing problems like child obesity.
- \* 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 the 9/11 catastrophe.
- \* 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.
- \* Every citizen, no matter what their economic status, has easy 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 Fire Threat Reduction Benefits

### Background

Years of retirements and staff attrition have left the DEEP Forestry Division without a single forester to manage over 41,000 State Forest acres in eastern Connecticut, and 25,000 State Forest acres in western Connecticut. The management plans for most of these forests have expired, some several years ago. Forestry Staff are also overwhelmed by the great needs to provide expertise to better manage roadside trees to reduce storm damages, and respond to threats from invasive pests such as the Asian Longhorned Beetle and Emerald Ash Borer.

### Talking points:

- \* 3 durational foresters that were hired to help with state lands management and urban forestry outreach are being laid off in April, 2013. 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.

We hope the General Assembly will add funding to allow DEEP Forestry refill these 3 positions and make them permanent.

- \* 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 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.

- \* 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.

- \* Investing in these positions now will earn the state of Connecticut money, benefit the state and people environmentally, and re-establish ourselves as responsible stewards of the peoples' land.

## 3. Maintaining independence and expertise for CT Council on Environmental Quality

- \* 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.

- \* We do not support consolidating the Council on Environmental Quality into the Office of Governmental Accountability. CEQ should remain an independent watchdog agency with specific environmental expertise and experience. Consolidation would dilute its effectiveness.

## 4. Sustain Funding for Protection of Critical Conservation Lands

- \* We support the inclusion in the proposed Governor's Budget of \$10 million in bonding for acquiring open space/recreation lands as well as \$10 million in bonding to support the preservation of agricultural lands.

- \* We do not support the proposal to divert funding from the Community Investment Act. The budget proposes diverting \$4 million/year from the CIA to the Healthy Foods Initiative in the Department of Education. These funds should be dedicated to the original purposes of the CIA fund -- open space, agricultural lands/dairy farmers, affordable housing, and historic preservation.

Thanks for your support.