

March 8, 2013

Environment Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT

Reference: **HB6539** AN ACT CONCERNING THE FORMER SUNRISE RESORT PROPERTY

Chairman Meyer, Chairman Gentile, ranking member Chapin, ranking member Shaban and members of the Environment Committee:

Representative Ziobron's original bill (HB 5261) had a logical and necessary subject: Requiring "the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to develop a plan for the use of the Sunrise State Park that ensures the safety of the premises." The addition of "**or the sale of such property**" language to the bill is anathema to conservation groups and the legions of visitors that used Sunrise Resort or its predecessors. Senator Meyer, who fought so hard against the abominable Haddam Land Swap, should understand just how much the addition of this inflammatory language rankles those that fought so hard against that debacle. Forcing the DEEP to provide a plan is commendable, though such mandates would not be required if the Department had done its job. However, any language referencing "sale" should be removed. The firestorm that would be created by a sale would make the Haddam Land Swap issue look like small potatoes. Also, any such discussion flies in the face of the conditions and/or expectations of the special conservation funds that were used to purchase this extraordinary property.

Having the property stay as open space was the next best alternative to having it continue as a resort and far preferable to these unique 140 acres being developed for housing. That is one reason the town of East Haddam was so supportive of this acquisition. Of course, there was an expectation that the State of Connecticut, through the DEEP, would have at least used the facility as a campground or similar operation in light of the facilities already on the premises. Instead, through gross mis-management and outright neglect, \$100,000's of taxpayer owned assets were allowed to be vandalized, stolen or otherwise destroyed. Had a minimal effort been expended on this property, cabins now scheduled for demolition could have been rented and this state park would have been a viable asset for both the state and a tourist attraction here in East Haddam.

This (less than) benign neglect is symptomatic of the overall deterioration of the Connecticut State Park system. A lack of adequate funding and staffing has resulted in the deterioration of the taxpayer's state park properties. The historical short shrift given the state parks by the legislature, the governor and the DEEP not only deprives the citizens of this state of a quality experience but results in the loss of millions of dollars in tourist spending. Again, Senator Meyer is cognizant of the issues involving the DEEP shirking of its responsibilities in his district. This was demonstrated with the deterioration and demolition of the historic buildings in Forster Pond State Park. Additionally, in Chatfield Hollow State Park across the street from Forster Pond, one of the few remaining buildings constructed by the CCC, the Oak Lodge is being allowed to rot into the ground.

Until such time as the State of Connecticut takes responsibilities for its actions (or lack thereof) historic and important recreational lands such as Sunrise S.P. will continue to decline. Instead of a vibrant recreational facility, almost all of the buildings are now scheduled for demolition with fluorescent paint markings reminiscent of hurricane Katrina and New Orleans! 2013 is the 100th anniversary of the

Connecticut State Park system. This system pre-dates the National Park System by three years and I was told by NPS staff that Connecticut's park system of management and staffing was initially used as a model for the NPS. In the past forty years, two-thirds of the park supervisors have been eliminated. Similar reductions in the numbers of park maintenance staff has also occurred. Budgets continue to be woefully inadequate even as the system expands and the public demands more services and activities. The issues reflected by Sunrise are becoming the norm. The park system is a shadow of its former self and the declining numbers above cannot continue this way if we want the Connecticut State Park System to continue for another hundred years.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Smith

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