

TO: Environment Committee
State of Connecticut Legislature

RE: TESTIMONY - Raised Bill 6539 – An Act Concerning the Former Sunrise Resort Property
Friday, March 08, 2013

FROM: Will Brady
Chairman: East Haddam Open Space Committee, East Haddam Historic District Commission

I speak to express my concerns about this bill and neglected status of Sunrise State Park.

The bill is entitled “An Act Concerning the Former Sunrise Resort Property”. Although the site was once a major resort in the area, the title ignores that fact that the property is now – and has been for four years - a State Park. I am particularly concerned that the bill contains any language that suggests that state would sell the parcel in a private purchase.

Sunrise State Park is a 143 acre parcel located in the Leesville/Moodus section of the Town of East Haddam. The park abuts the Machimoodus State Park, created in 1998, which includes and additional 306 acres. These two parcels are, themselves, on part of a much larger contiguous preserved open space area abutting the Salmon River, including other parcels of land that are part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, which was established “...to conserve the abundance and diversity of native plants and animals and their habitats...” in the Connecticut River watershed.

The former Sunrise Resort has important historical, tourism and land preservation value not only for the State of Connecticut in general, but also to East Haddam, as well as to the open lands conservation and preservation efforts in the Northeast part of the United States, in particular.

Although purchased by the State of Connecticut through the Department of Environmental conservation, funds for the purchase also came from the Recreational and Natural Heritage Fund, the Land and Water Conservation Funds from the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the George Dudley Seymour Trust. All programs set up to preserve and conserve land for the public and not to be sold.

The fact that this bill includes the following language is particularly troublesome:

“Such report shall include, but not be limited to, a description of the status of such property and its improvements and any plan that the department has for the use or the sale of such property.”

I oppose the insertion of such language. Most State open space purchases are made with these or similar funds that are designated to set aside the property for the preservation and conservation of lands for future outdoor recreational use, wildlife and fishery habitat protection, watershed protection, and historic or cultural preservation and are not to be sold at some future date.

These preservation efforts have been going on for, quite literally, decades, and have involved citizen, corporate, non-profit, educational and government stakeholders in their planning and land consolidation efforts.

The very idea of a sale of this property (or any other parcel purchased with the intent of preserving it for future generations) thus indicates an arrogance and total disregard of the citizens and other entities who have worked hard at planning for the region's future with a strong sense of vision, purpose and concern for ensuring the citizens of the future have land specifically designated for recreational use, wildlife and ecosystem preservation.

The state purchased the Sunrise Resort property, on January 3, 2009 for \$3.2 million dollars. This took place after a number of years of negotiations between the owners and representatives from the CT Department of Environmental Conservation (the predecessor to DEEP)

Sunrise Resort had been in operation back as far as 1916 when Henry Engle began the campgrounds as "Elm Camp." Under subsequent owners Ted Hilton, Frank Davis and the Robert Johnson family it grew to its present size. Sunrise was one of many seasonal vacation resorts (there were, actually, more than 60) in the East Haddam-Moodus area. Sunrise was the crown jewel of those resorts.

All of them employed area residents and attracted visitors and tourists from area the country, but especially from the Northeast United States.

Since purchasing Sunrise Resort the state has done nothing to the resort area. The entire area where structures are has been repeatedly vandalized. In addition to the seasonal resort buildings stand several homes of importance historically to East Haddam's heritage. These, too, have been broken into, trashed and vandalized. It is clear that, with regard to Sunrise State Park, that the State has proven to be poor stewards of the land.

Under the Rell Administration plans from the state were to include a 143 acre state park, named "Sunrise State Park" and bring the developed sections into a future campground.

I respectfully request that the language suggesting selling off land already saved for future generations be omitted, but that the State now goes forward with careful, thoughtful planning on how to show best stewardship of this valuable resource.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Will Brady". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.