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

Legislation before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee on March 4, 2013	Support/ Oppose
GOVERNOR'S S.B. 842: AN ACT AUTHORIZING AND ADJUSTING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS, TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER PURPOSES.	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. 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.

Today, I submit the following testimony on behalf of CFPA in strong support of **Sections 13, 21 and 61 of S. B. No. 842** which authorizes bond funding to support critical state land conservation programs.

Section 13 provides \$10 million in bond funding for the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) open space grant program. This grant program is the only state matching grant program for land trusts, towns and water companies seeking to protect open space, forests, and farms. Funded through bonding and the Community Investment Act (CIA), the DEEP Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) program provides matching grants which often fund 50 percent of the purchase price for a property.

To date, the OSWLA program has supported the purchase of 380 properties totaling 24,352 acres in 120 communities since 1998 and continues to foster strong collaboration amongst state and local governments, land trusts and private landowners. The 2012 grants which were announced in December by Governor Malloy would permanently protect another 2,730 acres.

Section 21 authorizes \$10 million in bond funding for DEEP's Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust (RNHT) Program – the agency's primary program to acquire and manage land for the state's system of parks, forests, wildlife, and other natural areas. Consistent, annual funding through the RNHT program is critical to the state's ability to meet its own share (65,903 acres) of the 21% statewide land conservation goal. Like the towns and land trusts with which it partners, DEEP also has a list of properties in the queue which it seeks for conservation purposes. The bond funding authorized by

Section 21 of this bill will enable the agency to continue to move forward with its conservation priorities.

Section 61 authorizes \$10 million in annual bond funding for the Department of Agriculture's (DoAg) Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) which enables the agency to preserve farmland by acquiring development rights to agricultural properties. To date, the FPP has preserved over 40,000 acres constituting approximately 30% of DoAg's goal of preserving 130,000 acres. More than half of these acres are classified as prime and important farmland soils. As with the OSWLA grant program, the state's investment in the FPP has leveraged significant matching dollars.

Setting aside lands for recreation, wildlife, farmland, and watershed protection is an important investment in Connecticut that is worth continuing because of the many benefits these lands provide to our quality of life, economy, and environment. We are thankful that Governor Malloy's budget recognizes the importance of bonding for these three programs which are essential both to the state's ability to meet its conservation goals and to protect the resources that make our towns more attractive for people to live and for businesses to operate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.