

Legislative Program Review & Investigations Committee

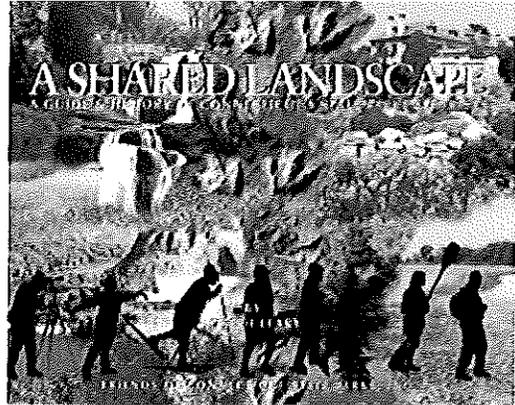
Testimony of Diana McMasters Friends of Connecticut State Parks

Thursday, September 26, 2013, at 2:30 p.m.
Room 2D of the Legislative Office Building (LOB)

I believe in the value of Connecticut's State Parks. Citizens of Connecticut have a State Park within 20 minutes of their home. Connecticut's State Parks generate more than 1.6 billion dollars in revenue and taxes. Drawing 8 million visitors each year, they play a tremendous role in the state's Tourism Industry. State Parks are often touted as a draw to lure business & industry because of the quality they add to the lives of folks who live here.

I have been a volunteer for our state parks for 21 years, first as president of the Friends of Harkness, then as a founding member and later president of the Friends of Connecticut State Parks. I have traveled about the state to start individual park Friends groups to help us from seven groups in 1992 to 23 groups today. These groups work in partnership with DEEP park staff to help preserve, maintain, and educate the public about these amazing resources.

Friends groups have contributed in excess of \$8 million in funds and goods since our first Friends' group's inception. In addition, groups' yearly combined labor contribution is 79,000 volunteer hours (value \$2.2 million per year). In addition, we commissioned a book about Connecticut's State Parks, called *A Shared Landscape*, by Joseph Leary.



Volunteers are a tremendous resource, but they cannot replace trained professionals to run our state park system. In the 21 years I've been volunteering, the number of sites and acreage has increased while staffing and operating budgets have decreased.

**In 1978, we had 90 State Parks and 31 State Forests with 278 full time employees.
Today DEEP manages 107 State Parks and 32 State Forest
with 75% fewer fulltime employees, currently at 70.**

The State need only consult the independently conducted *Cough Harbour State Park Infrastructure Assessment* to begin to understand the scope of the need our State Park and Forest System. I'm grateful the State is having this hearing to look further into the fiscal needs of State Park and Forest funding to ensure these resources remain open to the public and are maintained properly for use by all today, and remain intact for future generations to enjoy.

Sincerely,
Diana B. McMasters
Former President FCSP
Former President Friends of Harkness