

Public Comment against Committee Bill 6305
An Act Prohibiting Hunting in Proximity to Wildlife Preserves

March 18, 2013

Please do not support this bill. It is not defined, infringes on private property rights, could amount to “taking” under eminent domain by the state without just compensation to the landowner, could negatively impact management and acquisition of property by land trusts or similar organizations, and is not biologically sound.

The bill mentions both “Wildlife Preserves” and “Wildlife Sanctuaries” neither of which are defined. “Proximity” is not defined either. Any landowner can designate their private property as a “Wildlife Preserve” or “Sanctuary”.

Assuming the preserve is state owned property, the DEEP already has the discretion to limit or prohibit hunting on the property. If the preserve is privately owned property, the property owner has the right to limit or prohibit hunting.

Just because private property is designated by the owner as a preserve does not mean that hunting is prohibited on that property. I have permission to hunt on a property owned by a town land trust that is designated as a Wildlife Preserve. The land trust makes the decision whether hunting is permitted. This bill could potentially result in hunting being allowed in a preserve, and prohibited on property that is in proximity to that preserve. Clearly this makes no logical sense.

Land trusts and similar organizations dedicated to the preservation of land, may only have the opportunity to purchase certain tracts of land, or easements, on the condition that the land trust allows hunting on the land. Legislation like this could have the unexpected outcome of preventing future sales and donations of raw land for preservation. I was personally involved in a transaction where continued hunting was a condition precedent of land being transferred to a land trust for a wildlife preserve.

The DEEP should not have discretion to prevent hunting on private property adjoining preserves (even if hunting is prohibited in the preserve by the landowner). If a landowner bought his property and uses his property for hunting, an arbitrary change to prohibit hunting is not fair to the landowner. Farmers with property in proximity to Preserves could be negatively impacted by crop damage if hunting is not allowed. Hunting is an economic benefit of land ownership. If the state wished to prohibit hunting on private property because of its proximity to a Preserve, the state should be required to follow eminent domain procedures and compensate the landowner for the taking of hunting privileges.

Finally it is exceedingly hard to imagine in a state the size of CT that a species that lives part of its life in a Preserve would require special protection from the DEEP above beyond what is already provided. If such a species truly needed protection, there would not be an open hunting season on them to begin with. It is likely that the backers of this bill are more interested in protecting wild animals they view as pets than they are in sound biology.

In CT the landowner decides whether hunting is permitted on private property and the DEEP already has the discretion to protect wildlife and the general public under its existing powers. There is absolutely reason to change this.

Respectfully,

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