

To: the CT Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee:

From: Pamela Aey Adams
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Date: March 3, 2014

Subject: Raised Bill 5369 An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee concerning certain fiscal and resource-related matters pertaining to State Parks.

As a retired Director of the Connecticut State Parks system and, a current member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of CT State Parks and the Friends of Harkness Memorial State Park, I am writing in support of the above referenced legislation.

Raised Bill 5369 – Implementation of this recommendation would have a significant and positive impact on the ability of the State Parks to maintain and improve the park facilities for the benefit of the millions of park visitors. A similar, and very successful Enterprise Program, had been in effect a number of years ago in the parks. The staff embraced the program as it not only provided them an opportunity to be creative and entrepreneurial but, they could see the immediate benefit to the parks and users as a result of their efforts. The users loved it as it provided extra amenities that made their visit more enjoyable. Once the program was swept and the money incorporated into the General Fund, there was neither funding available to maintain the existing enterprise ventures nor, “start-up” money to create new enterprises. The result was detrimental to the park visitor experience and, to the enthusiasm of park staff that makes every effort to provide an enjoyable experience to park users.

Therefore I support this bill and ask that the rental monies from new and existing cabins be deposited in the Maintenance Rental and Improvement Account to both maintain the structures and generate revenue which will help better service park patrons.

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Subject: Raised Bill 5370 An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee concerning the performance of Connecticut's State Parks.

As a retired Director of the Connecticut State Parks system and, a current member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of CT State Parks and the Friends of Harkness Memorial State Park, I am writing in support of the above referenced legislation.

I am writing today to support the return of up to 50% of park revenues back to the parks to stave off the downward trending levels of park staff. Prior to the mid-1970's when the DEP (now DEEP) was created, the State Park Commission had a staff of 278 full-time field staff to maintain the parks (far fewer than exist today), forests, boat launches, wildlife areas and, much more. After the formation of the DEP, maintenance functions were decentralized and the park field staff was reduced to approximately 170 with the other staff distributed to other natural-resource disciplines. When I retired in 2009, the field compliment was 124. Today, with 107 State Parks, and 32 state forest recreation areas to maintain and more than 8 million visitors annually, the number of field staff is at a dangerous low of 78 (17 Park Supervisors and 53 Maintainers.) With no intervention, that number is projected to decline to a paltry 33 (4 supervisors and 29 maintainers.) by the year 2020 – essentially putting our beautiful park system out of business. This is sad situation to ponder as the parks are celebrating their centennial year this year. New staff has not been hired to replace those that have retired. This means, there is no one to pass along valuable information to new employees such as knowledge of the antiquated mechanical systems and infrastructure, no full-time staff to train and supervise hundreds of seasonal employees, no on-site presence to deter the bad behavior of a few park visitors, no one to learn the amazing history of the park facilities and the men and women who made them possible, no one to instill the wonderful customer service ethic that has been a mainstay of the Connecticut State Parks. It is wonderful that the Bond Commission has allocated a significant amount of money to the parks to improve infrastructure and build new, revenue-generating, facilities but, without enough knowledgeable staff in the park and forest recreation areas, these will fall prey to wear and tear and vandalism.

I, therefore, implore you to recommend that 50% of the revenue generated in the parks be returned to the State Park system to add staff, critical to park maintenance and operation. While this number will not be sufficient to reverse the significant decline in resources, it will serve to stop the downward trend and begin to restore the parks and recreation areas to their former glory.

Thank you for your excellent assessment of the status CT State Park system and, for raising this very important piece of legislation.