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From: Olivia Connors <olivia.55.connors@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 12, 2014 3:58 PM
To: Program Review and Investigation
Subject: Safeguarding a Long and Healthy Life for Our State Parks Through Increased Staffing

March 12, 2014

Dear Committee Members,

Imagine the well-maintained grounds and facilities, beautiful gardens to stroll through and enjoy, glimpses of wildlife in their natural habitat, buildings and monuments that reflect our past, and areas of open spaces that offer people a chance to just relax and enjoy their surroundings. Imagine offering on site educational programs as well as the use of various on site facilities to hold special conferences. Imagine some of these conferences creating opportunities for educators to meet and design learning activities involving all the sciences for school sponsored field trips. Imagine developing hands on learning activities for other park visitors as well. Imagine extending to all park visitors an invitation to attend concerts, plays, and art shows as part of the varied programs and activities offered by our state parks. These are just a few of the things that many of our state parks could offer to their visitors both now and in the future.

Not all is well with our state parks. The state parks are understaffed. Current staff members work hard to keep up with the maintenance of our state parks, but there are fewer people doing the jobs that were filled by a larger number of staff members years before. None of the things imagined in the above paragraph will happen (or continue to happen in some cases) unless there is the proper staffing of our state parks. Just in terms of maintenance, our state parks need to see a much needed and healthy staffing growth. We should not be witnessing, nor the parks and their staff members feeling, the stressful and negative effects that come from cutbacks. We have a responsibility to maintain and preserve these parks as a part of our cultural heritage. It won't happen without the proper staffing of our parks.

I have regularly visited Harkness Memorial State Park since 1976 and have enjoyed walking there almost daily in recent years. I love this park. It offers views of the shoreline as well as those of open fields and stonewalls which make up a part of the local countryside. The park is the site of a stately mansion and its historic gardens. And as a park, it is enjoyed by many who come to our part of the state as tourists.

Since my retirement three years ago, I have been an active volunteer with the Friends of Harkness organization. By working in the park's gardens and on the grounds, I feel that I am giving back to a place that has offered so much to me over the years. As a Friends of Harkness volunteer, I have seen first hand just how much work has been and continues to be done by both the park's staff members and the Friends

volunteers at Harkness. The historic gardens command a lot of attention. At the same time, I have seen sections of this park's historic gardens not benefitting from some much needed attention in recent years because there just isn't enough staff employed at the park. Even with the help of volunteers, there is so much that needs to be done just to maintain the East, the West, and the cutting gardens alone. It should also be noted that the gardens are not the only part of this park that commands the daily attention of staff members. As volunteers, we can only supplement the work being done by the staff members employed there. As volunteers, we are not serving as replacements for the staff whose numbers have diminished during recent years. From a park that at one time had one supervisor, five maintainers, two secretaries, and thirty-five seasonal employees, Harkness Memorial currently has a staff of one supervisor, and I believe- one maintainer, one secretary, and twenty-five seasonal employees, who continue to work hard in their efforts to maintain the grounds, gardens, and buildings at this park.

Visitors to our parks support local economies and bring in much needed revenue to the state. Our state, in turn, needs to look to home (so to speak) and offer employment opportunities to its citizens which will also benefit our parks. It is clear to me that more employment opportunities at the state parks are truly required to support their current and future needs. The immediate need for increased state park staffing should be recognized and remedied, not overlooked. The parks are an investment in terms of our future and our children's future. In turn, our children and grandchildren need to become a part of our parks' future through visits to the parks with their families as well as through school sponsored field trips- field trips that offer active participation in on site learning activities. These hands on learning activities would be designed to not only capture their attention, but would serve to educate and give the children a sense of ownership. All of this would encourage a sense of partnership with others in taking care of our parks and, therefore, helping to ensure a bright future for Connecticut's state parks.

In order to help safeguard our state parks so that they have a long and healthy life, a much needed staffing increase at these parks needs to occur.

Sincerely,

Olivia Jane Connors