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 Tele: 860-346-TREE
 www.ctwoodlands.org

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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<u>RAISED BILL 5369</u> : AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRI COMMITTEE CONCERNING CERTAIN FISCAL AND RESOURCE-RELATED MATTERS PERTAINING TO STATE PARKS.	Support
<u>RAISED BILL 5370</u> : AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRI COMMITTEE CONCERNING THE PERFORMANCE OF CONNECTICUT'S STATE PARKS.	Support

Co-Chairs Mushinsky, Kissel, and Members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut (1895). CFPA has offered testimony to the Legislature on issues such as sustainable forestry, State Parks and Forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation for over 115 years.

First, I want to thank the Committee and your excellent staff for doing a terrific job on your bi-partisan report documenting the resource deficiencies of the State Parks. CFPA, the Friends of CT State Parks, and others have been advocating for the State Parks for many years, and we are glad that your report provides some excellent analysis that we hope will lead to action in the General Assembly. I will freely admit that Park advocates wished that some of your recommendations went a bit farther, but Raised Bills 5370 and 5369 offer solid foundations to build upon. Thank you!

Next, I want to encourage you to read and re-read the testimony of Eileen Grant, President of the Friends of CT State Parks. She offers important detail in her testimony about the personnel levels that are dropping to the levels where DEEP, if this trajectory continues, will have to consider closing Parks.

When you read about the Parks, a few key numbers should jump out at you (I'll just mention a few):

17 – 17 is the number of Park Supervisors available to manage 23 Park Management Units. 8 of these Park Supervisors are eligible to retire in July.

23 – 23 is not only the number of Park Management Units, but also it is also the number of Park field staff who are eligible to retire within the next 2 years.

60 – 60% is roughly how much DEEP's Park staff has declined from a high of 185 field staff at the formation of DEP as a single agency in 1971, to the current staffing levels of around 78 with many eligible for retirement.

So, the State Parks equation for today is **17 + 23 + 60 = 100**

100 – Yes, 100. This year we are celebrating the 100-year Anniversary of the State Park system. What better time can there be to make a bold difference for our State Parks? I urge you to act now!



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Raised Bill 5370

Of greatest significance, Section 3 of Raised Bill 5370 provides for a process to return up to 50% of State Park revenues to support Parks rather than go to the General Fund. These revenues would be used to increase historically low personnel levels and offset dramatically increasing operational costs (fuel, trash removal, equipment etc.). I cannot emphasize strongly enough that this revenue returned to the Parks must supplement and not simply replace the budget allotment that State Parks presently receive.

While Raised Bill 5370 provides for up to 50% of these revenues being returned to the State Parks, I hope the Committee will seriously consider that Parks should receive 100% of these revenues (or perhaps the range in the bill can be changed from 25 to 50% to 50 to 100% given the current resource shortfalls in the Parks). The current 17 park supervisors and 53 maintainers is woefully inadequate for managing 107 State Parks for approximately 8 million visitors/year. Capturing revenues generated by the Parks is essential to immediately reverse this plummet, and Raised Bill 5370 is an important start.

Raised Bill 5369

This bill enhances the opportunities for individual Parks to retain income from rentals of buildings/structures for use in maintenance and other needs of those Parks. For example, as part of the Parks Centennial, 100 cabins are being built in various State Parks (and those already built have been very popular), but it takes resources to maintain these cabins now and into the future. History has shown that Park managers, when allowed to retain the fruits of their entrepreneurial efforts, have proven to be very industrious and inventive. As in Bill 5370, the more revenue retained by Parks, the more likely that Parks will be properly maintained and provide the services patrons most desire.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.



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Labbadia, Bonnine

From: Eric Hammerling <ehammerling@ctwoodlands.org>
Sent: Monday, March 03, 2014 6:03 PM
To: Program Review and Investigation
Subject: Testimony from CFPA on Bills 5369 and 5370 for tomorrow's field hearing in Wallingford
Attachments: Testimony State Parks PRI Bills 5369 and 5370 3.4.14.pdf

Attached.

See you tomorrow. ☺

All the best,

Eric

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director
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