

**Testimony Re: 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.**

**And Raised Bill 5370 an Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee concerning the performance of Connecticut's State Parks.**

Eileen Grant, Friends of CT State Parks, President  
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Dear Members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee,

Thank you for lending your attention to conditions in Connecticut's State Parks, first by initiating a study focusing on State Park Funding and secondly by crafting two bills which reflect some of the recommendations contained within the report. The Friends of Connecticut State Parks support both Raised Bill 5370 and Raised Bill 5369 as each contains proposals for the Park System to retain its collected fees and rental income. These revenues are desperately needed to supplement a wholly inadequate General Fund allotment.

Additional funds are most urgently required to help rebuild staffing numbers to levels sufficient to steward the Park and Forest System's 250,000 acres, maintain its 450 + buildings and most importantly to service its yearly 8 million patrons. At present, merely 78 full time field staff shepherd our parks; just 17 Park Supervisors and 53 maintainers care for these conservation properties and their visitors. Staff numbers in the last forty years have already steeply declined from a level of 185 workers in 1971; our present level of 78 does not approach the benchmark of 205 full time field staff recommended by the 2003 Clough Harbour Report, an exhaustive impartial study focused on infrastructure and personnel needs in the Park System.

In less than six years time, Parks' tiny field staff will be further decimated by the exit of a large percentage of retirees. By 2020, only 4 of our 17 Park Supervisors and 29 of our 53 maintainers will not be eligible to retire, 33 people left to manage 107 parks and 32 forests. At present, policy permits the State Parks Division to refill only 1 out of 5 positions lost to retirement. Therefore, at best, the number of field staff in 2020 would total 40 people, 20% of the number recommended by Clough Harbour to properly manage the System. Without an immediate influx of new hires to begin to reverse this precipitous decline, the Park System will not be able to service patrons in all but a small minority of its properties in the very near future.

Raised Bill 5370 provides for the opportunity for the Park System to retain between 25% and 50% of its collected fees and revenues for the purpose of supplementing

its General Fund budget, acknowledged by the PRI report to be insufficient for park needs. Those funds could be used to recruit staff and help address rapidly escalating operational costs. In light of critically low personnel levels, anything less than 50% of revenues is not truly sufficient to reverse the coming plummet.

The Friends of CT State Parks do believe that 100% of collected revenues, this year totaling \$6.1 million, are needed to hire sufficient numbers of employees. We believe this will become increasingly clear to budget makers as time moves on. An additional \$6 million for a System that stimulates close to \$2 billion in economic activity for our state is not exorbitant and is certainly a wise investment in a proven entity.

While acceptance of Bill 5370 may hopefully occur in this session, real budget approvals can only come from next year's legislative body. Initial requirements imposed on DEEP per Bill 5370, would make a hiring process unlikely to begin in earnest until 2016. The proposal by this committee to help recoup funds for parks through retention of a percentage of collected fees is greatly appreciated and fully supported. However, parks do need some immediate help as well.

By July 2016, 23 of 78 supervisors and maintainers may retire. Clearly, 100% rather than 20% of vacated positions need to be authorized for refill. In addition, the six out of 23 huge park units without onsite permanent supervisors (see attached map) need to be promptly staffed with new managers and a minimum of 2 maintainers per each of those 6 units.

Our magnificent Park System has been unfortunately so starved for resources that both short and long term remedies are really required. We thank this committee for offering, through both Bill 5369 and Bill 5370, important long term opportunities for the Park System to effect a better future, to control a little more of its own destiny, and to be better able to provide consistent service to patrons. We ask you, as well, to promote, in any way that you can, those immediate measures that are necessary to staunch the bleeding and help put our wounded Park System back on its feet, at least until major reinforcements arrive.

Thank you for your attention and for your support of Parks and Forests.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen Grant, President, Friends of Connecticut Parks

**THE STATE OF STATE PARKS**  
**A Profile of the Connecticut State Parks System**

**The System is comprised of 107 State Parks and 32 State Forests**

**CT. Parks and Forests cover 250,000+ acres**

**CT. Parks and Forest properties contain 450+ buildings**

**Park & Forest Attendance Yr. 2013- 8 million visitors**

**Camping Visits to Parks & Forests Yr. 2013- 26,241 Reservations**  
**Number of camping nights occupied: 78,710; 334518 Campers**

**Connecticut State Parks System Budget 2013- \$11.9 million**

**Expenditures:**

**Permanent Personnel- \$6.1 million**

**Seasonal Personnel- \$3.2 million**

**Operations (Utilities, Fuel, Trash, Leasing)-\$2.6 million**

**Revenue Collected 2013- \$6,160,057**

**Parking & Admissions Fees- \$3,786,753**

**Camping Fees- \$2,373,304**

**Parks' Division's Number of Permanent Field Staff Positions-80**

**2 Operations Supervisors**

**17 Park Supervisors**

**53 Maintainers**

**5 Clerical**

**1 Environmental Analysts**

**Number of field staff eligible to retire by 7/1/14: (22)**

***(9) Maintainers, (8) Park Supervisors, (1) Env Education  
Coordinator (4) Clericals***

**Parks' Division's Number of Full-time Hartford Staff Positions-8**

**Number of Hartford staff eligible to retire by 7/1/14: (3)**

**Average Number of Seasonal Employees Each Year-550**

**Average Duration of Employment- 2.5 months (late May- mid Aug.)**

## **Retirement Eligibility Summary**

**February 2014 Present Staff Level :**  
**17 Park Supervisors**  
**53 Maintainers**

**By Yr. 2020 Projected Staff Level:**  
**4 Park Supervisors (13 eligible to retire)**  
**29 Maintainers (24 eligible to retire)**

**Total remaining : 33 of present 70 field staff**  
**Authorized refill rate is 1 position for every 5 lost**  
**Therefore, at best, the number of field staff in 2020**  
**would total 40 people.**

**Note: In 2014 , there are 8 others considered park field staff- 2 Operations Supervisors, 5 Clerical, 1 Environmental Analyst.**

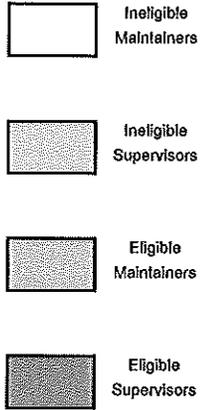
**By 2020, all but 1 of the 8 will be eligible to retire.**  
**Only 1 position of 7 lost would be authorized to be refilled.**

**Projected Total: 41 field staff in 2020 (compared to 78 today)**

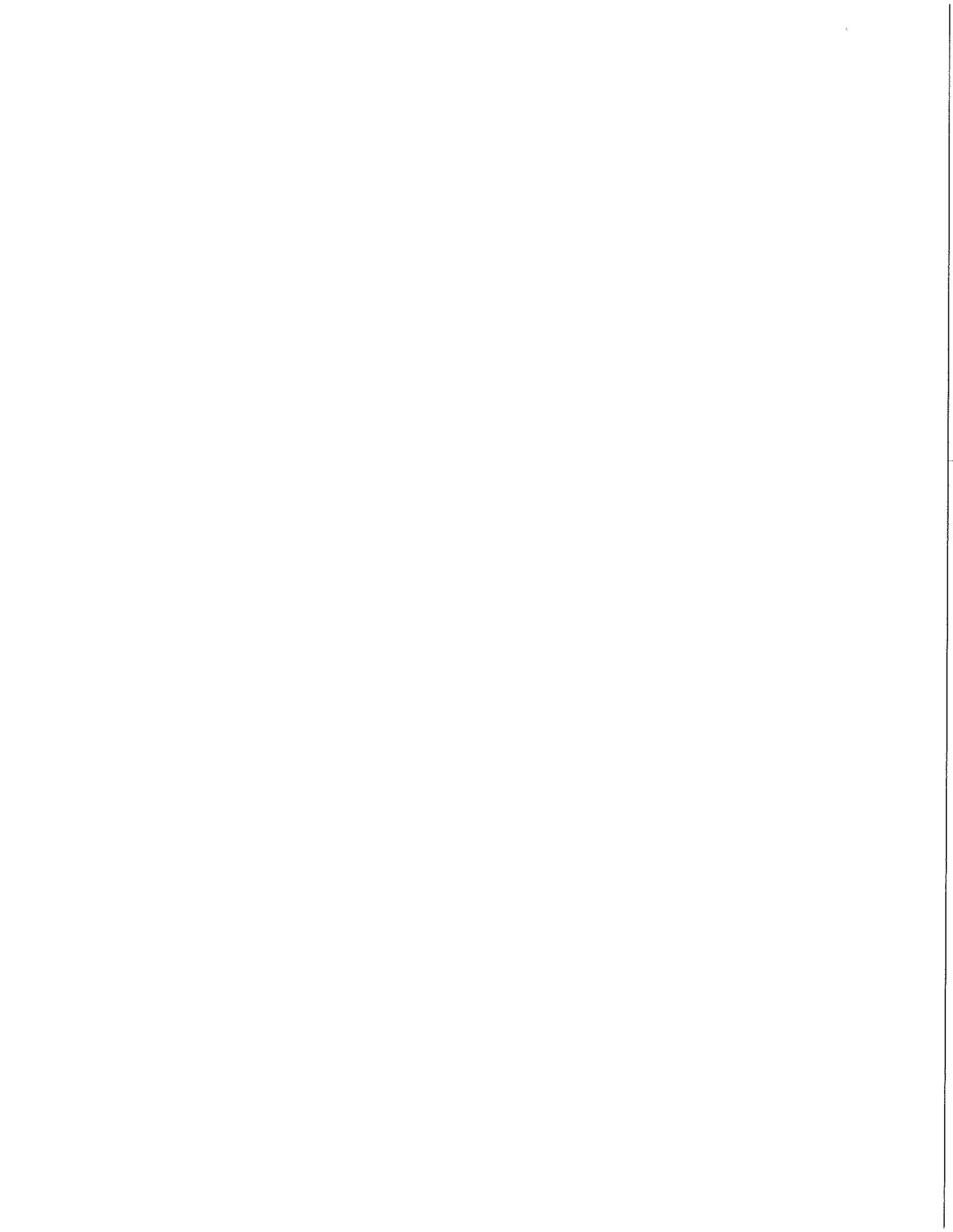
**Field Staff in 1971: 185 Field Staff**

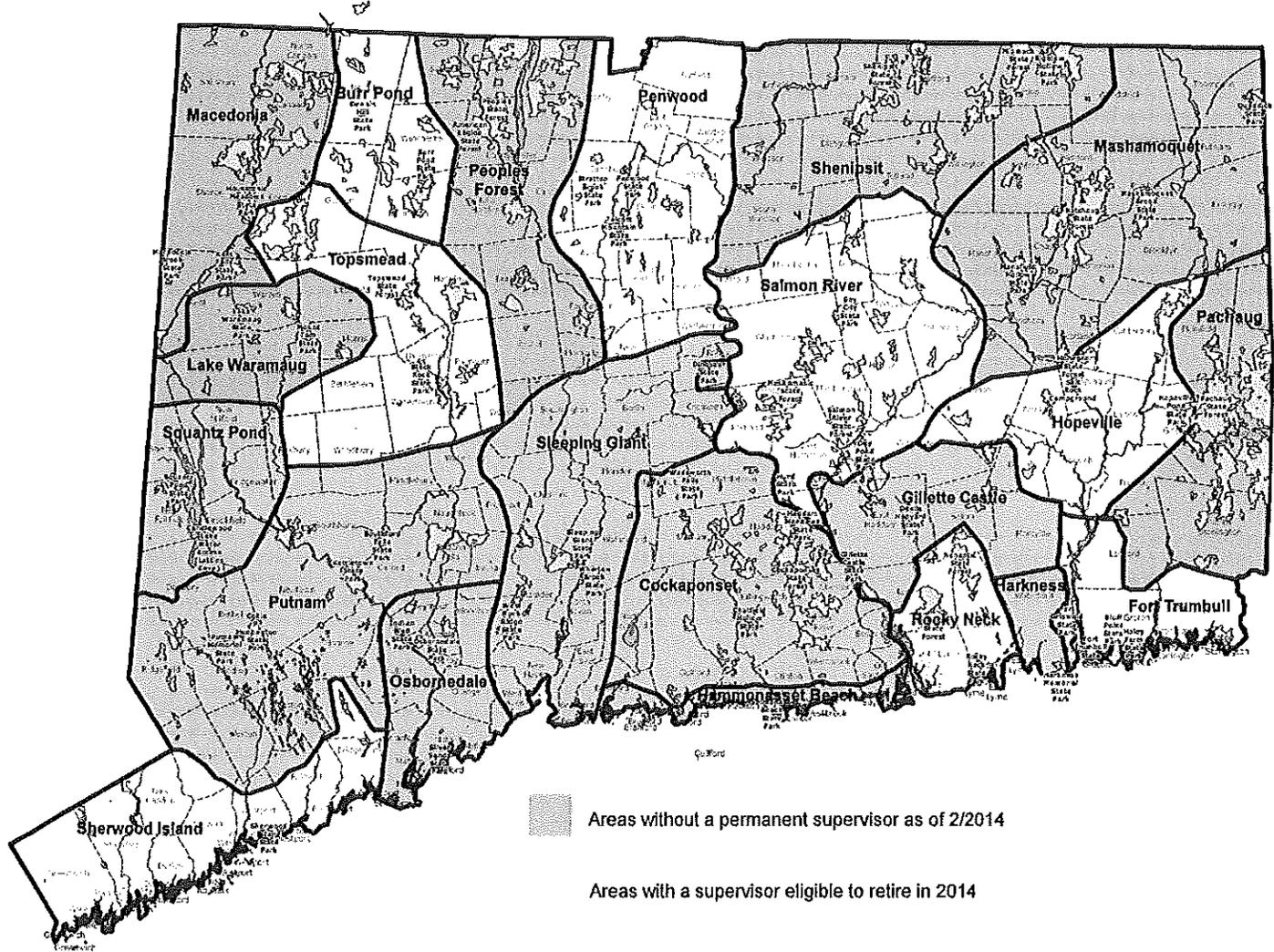
**Staff Levels Recommended in 2003 Clough Harbour Study:**  
**205 Field Staff**

**STATE PARKS FIELD STAFF**  
**Projection of Eligibility for Retirement**



2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Maintnrs Ineligible	Maintnrs Ineligible	Maintnrs Ineligible	Maintnrs Ineligible	Maintnrs Ineligible	Maintnrs Ineligible	Maintnrs Ineligible
	Supvs Ineligible					
	13% Maintnrs Eligible	17% Maintnrs Eligible	26% Maintnrs Eligible	32% Maintnrs Eligible	38% Maintnrs Eligible	43% Maintnrs Eligible
27% Supvs Eligible	44% Supvs Eligible	56% Supvs Eligible	61% Supvs Eligible	61% Supvs Eligible	72% Supvs Eligible	72% Supvs Eligible





Edited Feb 25, 2014

