



Farmington River Watershed Association, Inc.

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February 18, 2014

To: Sen. Ed Meyer, Rep. Linda Gentile, Chairs; and Members of the Committee on Environment

From: **The Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA)**

Re: Testimony on Raised Bill No. 70, An Act Concerning the Preservation of Lands Under the Control of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on RB 70. This bill is a very welcome step forward in ensuring that state lands preserved for their high conservation value remain preserved for that reason in perpetuity, and we strongly support it.

The Farmington River Watershed Association is a non-profit citizen's group whose mission is to preserve, protect, and restore the Farmington River and its watershed. As a river protection organization, we are well aware of the immense value of preserved open space, especially forested land, in maintaining the water quality and habitat value of our river. One outstanding example is People's State Forest along the Farmington River's West Branch. Across the state, other state lands provide similar benefits.

The current inadequate protection for preserved state lands has two very unfortunate effects. First, state land that is set aside because conservation professionals assign it a high value can be incorrectly re-judged by others to have no conservation value, and re-used for other purposes. This opens the door to a gradual chipping away of our state's biological riches, ecosystem services, and scenic areas. These resources provide economic and public health benefits, contribute to the quality of life in Connecticut, and should be held in public trust.

A second effect is loss of public trust itself. The citizens of Connecticut rightly expect that "preserved land" means land that will be preserved. When preservation status is reversed, their expectation is betrayed. This undermines individual incentive to give land to the state for protection, which in turn undermines the state's effort to preserve 21% of our land as open space. There are economic ripple effects as well; for example, if state land can't be counted on as a permanent community asset, such unpredictability can affect the value of private property near state preserves.

While RB 70 does not provide guaranteed protection under all circumstances, it represents a huge improvement over the status quo. Again, we support RB 70 and encourage its passage.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eileen Fielding". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eileen Fielding
Executive Director