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**Testimony on the Biennial Budget 2015
Concern Over \$2,000,000 Budget Cut to State Parks**

February 28, 2015

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee

I have served as a volunteer for the Connecticut State Park System for 23 years, beginning as the first elected president of the Friends of Harkness in 1992, and the second president of the Friends of Connecticut State Parks. I believe CT's 107 State Parks, and the eight million visitors they attract each year, are essential in the contribution they make to our quality of life, but also to the health of our Connecticut economy.

A study conducted by the **Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis at UConn** in 2011 concluded that our State Parks contribute \$1 billion to Connecticut's economy annually:

The Economic Impact of State Parks, Forests, and Natural Resources
Under the Management of the Department of Environmental Protection
http://www.friendsctstateparks.org/FCSP/Economic_Impact_Study.html

Executive Summary

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) manages a network of parks and state forests that deliver significant economic benefit to Connecticut residents and park visitors. In 2010, resident and nonresident visitors to Connecticut's 107 State Parks and 32 Forests spent 8.5 million visitor-days touring within the state. Total expenditures by residents and visitors for outdoor recreation activities and ancillary spending exceeds \$1 billion annually. This \$ 1 billion breaks down as follows:

- An estimated \$544 million was spent by visitors to DEEP venues spent for general tourism activities In 2010
- Another \$426 million – plus was spent by 189,000 sportspersons, holding 293,600 licenses and permits issued by DEEP, spent additional funds to pursue their specific sporting activities:
 - \$264 million for angling, of which 90% came from Connecticut residents;
 - \$100 million for hunting, of which \$95.1 million came from Connecticut residents;
 - \$36.8 million for recreational boating, attributed to DEEP-managed boat launches and training activities, net of anglers' boating expenditures;
 - \$26.2 million for skiing and attending educational and other venues;
 - Participation in other sports located in the parks and forests or to attend them.

I'm writing today our of concern over the disproportional \$2,000,000 in proposed cuts to the CT State Parks budget in the Governor's Biennial Budget plan. I have watched as funding for the parks

has been hit again and over the years, gutting full, part-time, and seasonal staffing, machinery and equipment, and supplies. To maintain the quality of our parks and the visitation they attract, they can't cut much more.

In tough economic times, every department should cooperate to help balance the budget in a equitable, proportionate way. However,

- Numbers show that at \$2 million cut is 17% of the overall budget. This hit to our State Parks is neither equitable nor proportionate.
- Examining the State Park Profile numbers below, the only place to cut \$2 million is staffing, threatening DEEP's staff ability to maintain venues that attract 8 million visitors each year and add \$1 billion to the state's economy.
- Currently, State Parks bring in over 50% of their annual budget in revenue. A cut of this size also threatens the State Parks' ability to keep the current number of parks open to the public, keep them safe with adequate personnel, and keep them well-maintained, therefore impacting their ability sustain this revenue stream.

I ask that you look at the inequitable cut to State Park funding, consider the cuts that have been made over the past 40 years, and restore full funding to the department.

Thank you very much.

Diana

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THE STATE OF STATE PARKS

A Profile of the Connecticut State Parks System

Connecticut State Parks System Budget 2014

\$11.5 million

Expenditures:

- Permanent Personnel \$5.7 million
- Seasonal Personnel \$3.4 million
- Operations \$2.4 million
Utilities, Fuel, Trash, Leasing

Revenue Collected:

- Parking & Admissions Fees \$3,988,601
- Camping Fees \$2,405,321
- Total Revenues 2014 \$6,393,933

Connecticut State Park System Scope

- 107 State Parks
- 32 State Forests
- ***One CT State Park within 20 minutes of every CT citizen***
- CT Parks and Forests cover 250,000+ acres
- CT. Parks and Forest properties contain 450+ buildings

Attendance 2014

- 2014 Overall Visitation: Over 8 million park visitors
- Camping: 6,294 Reservations
- Campers: 335,682 Campers
- Camping nights occupied: 78,984

Staffing

- Parks' Division's Number of Permanent Field Staff Positions 77
- Operations Supervisors 2
- Park Supervisors 15
- Maintainers 53
- Clerical 5
- Environmental Analysts 2
- Average Number of Seasonal Employees Each Year 550
Average Duration of Employment- 2.5 months (late May- mid Aug.)