



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – February 13, 2015
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee
Senate Bill No. 215 – AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATE PARKS

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Senate Bill No. 215 – AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATE PARKS (Committee Bill)**. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

DEEP supports the general intent of **Senate Bill No. 215 – AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW STATE PARKS** to promote public involvement and transparency in the creation of new parks, and we currently utilize a number of outreach techniques to ensure that the public's voice is heard. However, DEEP has concerns about the proposal and welcomes the opportunity to offer the following information regarding these concerns.

This proposal would mandate that DEEP hold a public hearing prior to a decision to proceed with the designation of a new state park, and the text of the bill includes some specifics about the public hearing notice, and the topics to be discussed at such hearing. While this language and the bill's intent appear relatively straightforward – i.e., to bring transparency to the processes related to the creation a new state park – as drafted the bill may require having a hearing at a time when a substantive conversation with the public may not be appropriate, or when the information needed to have a substantive conversation may not yet be available.

In the case of a newly purchased or acquired parcel that might be designated as a park either initially or at a later time, the timing of a public hearing may cause unintended consequences. A requirement to hold a public hearing in advance of the real estate acquisition could negatively impact the negotiations to purchase the property, or would mandate the hearing happen at a time when the details of acquisition and development costs are not yet known.

Furthermore, many of our state parks today are the result of multiple purchases of adjoining parcels of property over time. It is not clear how the provisions in the proposed bill would apply to the frequent additions of new parcels of property to expand existing state parks, which has greatly benefited the public and open space preservation.

In addition, the most recently established state park – the state-owned former Seaside regional center in Waterford – provides a relevant example. At Seaside, the state is now engaged in a very robust master planning and public engagement process regarding the development of the new state park. We have already held two public information meetings and anticipate at least two more public meetings in Waterford prior to finalizing development plans. At each of these meetings the public and local officials has an opportunity to hear information developed in the master planning process, provide comments, and speak one on one with agency officials and planning and engineering consultants. In addition to these many meetings, the state is using numerous other outreach techniques including a special website that provides updates and documents about the planning process, and has a dedicated email address for comments.

If this bill had been in place prior to the establishment of Seaside State Park, DEEP would have been required to hold a hearing in Waterford before any of the information required in the proposed bill about the specifics of the development and proposed costs would be available.

In summary, the bill creates a “one size” mandate that does not fit the complexities and many different pathways that are used to create new parks whether through new acquisitions or from existing state property. DEEP suggests that state and local officials continue the current practice of collectively determining, on a park by park basis, the best ways to engage the public in the specifics about the development of parks.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP’s Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov (or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov).