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Testimony Regarding SB 347

My name is David Bingham. I am privileged to live in the Eightmile River watershed, which covers over half of my hometown of Salem, CT. The Eightmile is a remarkably pristine river system, which has received national recognition as a Wild and Scenic River because of its outstanding natural resources.

Among these resources is a diversity of habitats that sustains over 200 species of birds, abundant wildlife, and numerous threatened species, including plants, animals, and butterflies.

The Salem Land Trust, which I have served since its founding, has worked hard to raise funds to preserve farms and forests within this watershed for future generations. But we are a small local land trust and must rely on resources from the State and federal government as a partner, along with help from the community and from foundations.

However, the 70% cap on combined State and federal grants limits the ability of the Salem Land Trust to apply for some federal grants that would exceed this cap, despite the fact that the special prioritization by the federal designation and recognition of the Eightmile River Watershed would otherwise qualify for combined federal and State funding beyond that cap.

It makes no sense to limit the State's interest in maximizing support for projects that protect its special natural resources. Those who feel the locals should have more "skin in the game" fail to realize that some locales, especially in our rural and less financially advantaged communities, have to stretch a lot further to meet levels of support that would be available to our wealthier communities.

Moreover, land trusts have an obligation to protect "in perpetuity" the natural resources of lands they acquire. This results in ongoing local costs for stewardship, monitoring and sometimes legal action, costs which are not reflected in the cost of the land itself.

I urge the Committee to support SB 347, to remove the arbitrary and punitive cap on combined State and federal grants for land. After all, lands that the State has an interest in protecting have benefits that extend far beyond the local watershed, including downstream clean air and water and Long Island Sound, assets that are treasured by all citizens of the State.

Respectfully,

David Bingham, Salem, Connecticut 1/28/2015