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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Government Administration & Elections Committee– March 16th, 2015**

**In opposition to Section 8 of H.B. No. 6998
AACTHE CONVEYANCE OF CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to express our strong opposition to Section 8 of the proposed land conveyance bill, which would transfer approximately 130 acres of Centennial Watershed State Forest (CWSF) land to the Town of Fairfield. We have been notified over the week-end by a town official that Fairfield intends to withdraw this request. We very much appreciate the Town's cooperation in this and Senator Hwang's work in facilitating a more productive approach. I present the following as background concerning all of the lands in the Centennial Forest.

In 2002, the State, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), acquired ownership from Aquarion Water Company (AWC) of roughly 6,000 acres and also conservation and public access easements on an additional 9,000 acres. About 90% of the land is in Fairfield County, with the rest in Litchfield, New Haven, and Hartford Counties. The State contributed \$80 million and TNC raised \$10 million in private funds to execute what remains the largest conservation project in state history. We have an obligation to our donors and the taxpayers of Connecticut to do everything in our power to protect their investments.

The name "Centennial Watershed" was chosen to honor the 100-year anniversary of Connecticut's State Forest System and to recognize that one of the main purposes of the land is to protect drinking water supplies.

Although different arrangements of ownership and easements were established on various parts of the properties to facilitate effective management of the lands, the three parties formed a Centennial Watershed State Forest Conservation Land Committee, under which we all are responsible for the oversight and management of all of the lands within CWSF. All three partners are committed to the overall goals for protecting these lands: protection of safe, reliable and abundant drinking water; *permanent* preservation of open space; promotion of a healthy, diverse and resilient forest that benefits humans, plants and animals; support and maintenance of significant tracts of mature, diverse and continuous forest cover; and providing opportunities for public use that are consistent with these goals.

As an individual organization and as a partner in this protection and land management effort, TNC takes seriously the responsibility to protect and manage the few remaining undeveloped lands in highly-developed Fairfield County. Once fragmented, the remaining forested lands begin to lose their values for wildlife, aesthetics, recreational opportunities and drinking water protection. This value of drinking water protection is amplified in areas where parcels are directly adjacent to reservoirs and reservoir tributaries. . We cannot stress enough that these parcels must remain subject to the terms of the original agreement entered into by CT DEEP, The Nature Conservancy and Aquarion.