FRIENDS OF CONNECTICUT STATE PARKS, INC.
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March 16, 2015

Testimony HB6998 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONVEYANCE OF CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND.

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing in opposition to **Section 3** of the Conveyance Act which would convey 4+ acres of Silver Sands State Park to the town of Milford for "municipal purposes" and the price of $0 and, **Section 8** of the Conveyance Act which would convey over 100 acres of the Centennial Watershed Forest to the town of Fairfield for $0.

Conveying State Recreation properties is an affront to the public trust. It sets a very bad precedent which could easily result and many acres of property being removed from any state park, forest or trail for a purpose which does not serve all taxpayers of the state who have a invested in the protection of these lands. The properties referenced in both of these sections are currently open to the public, free of charge, for recreation and enjoyment of the outdoors.

In the case of Milford, Silver Sands was a developed residential area that was devastated by the hurricane. The town did nothing with it and, ultimately turned ownership over to the DEP/DEEP. As soon as the state, at considerable expense to Connecticut taxpayers, drew up a plan of development, cleaned the shorefront of debris and developed the first phase of the park, the City of Milford began to push the state for free access to this property in perpetuity. If this were to happen, it would be very reasonable to expect that every city and town in Connecticut with a state park or forest within its boundary would expect the same consideration for their residents. Our beautiful recreation areas would be dotted with paved parking lots and, revenues to the state from the loss of fees would plummet. These special properties are acquired, developed and maintained with money paid by all of the taxpayers of our state. They should never be available for special consideration to benefit one community.

Silver Sand SP is currently free to all users; it is unclear why free parking for Milford residents in another location is necessary. Further, there is a town beach (Walnut Beach) immediately adjacent to the boundary of Silver Sands SP. If Milford's intent is to free access to the beach for its residents, they might consider waiving the $5/car fee currently charged to Milford residents.

This year's Conveyance Act (HB 6998) includes two such proposals (at least):

1) Section 3 of the Conveyance Act would convey 4+ acres of Silver Sands State Park to the town of Milford for "municipal purposes" and the price of $0. DEEP had previously refused the town's request to establish an exclusive parking area only for town residents, and so the town asked for the areas in question to be taken from Silver Sands and be given to Milford. Silver Sands is one of the state's most beautiful beaches, and has been the beneficiary of millions of dollars of rehabilitation work utilizing state funds over the past few years.

2) Section 8 of the Conveyance Act would convey over 100 acres of the Centennial Watershed Forest to the town of Fairfield for $0. Although DEEP owns the land and Aquarion Water Company apparently holds conservation easements on this property, this proposal was made without the knowledge of either DEEP, Aquarion, or of The Nature Conservancy who works in partnership with DEEP and Aquarion on the land management of the Centennial Watershed Forest.

The Centennial Watershed State Forest is a property is owned by the DEEP and contains conservation easements held by Aquarion Water Company. This proposed conveyance was made without the knowledge of either DEEP, Aquarion, or of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) who works in partnership with DEEP and Aquarion on the land management of the Centennial Watershed Forest. Should this conveyance be successful, public water supplies may be jeopardized and groups such as TNC will be loath to partner with a State Agency whose property cannot be guaranteed to remain in the public trust.

Please do not move forward with conveying state properties identified in Sections 3 and 8. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Respectfully,

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