

Appropriations Committee
March 2, 2015
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Budget Public Hearing

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jennifer Hockla, I work for the State of Connecticut, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Bureau of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry as a Forester 2, and I am providing testimony today, as a proud member of CSEA SEIU Local 2001.

Our Agency, DEEP, is responsible for overseeing numerous regulatory programs mandated by the State and federal government, however we lack the staff and time necessary to fulfill the goals and objectives of the programs.

For example, the Division of Forestry is responsible for implementing the Forest Practices Act through the Certification Program by certifying Commercial Forest Practitioners. Certification of forest practitioners is mandatory by law and directly affects the forest products industry in Connecticut, an industry that contributes \$155 million dollars to the State's economy every year. Four years ago the program staff was reduced through attrition from 2 full-time staff to the current level of one full time staff person who is responsible for overseeing and enforcing all aspects of this State-wide regulatory program. At the current staffing level it has become increasingly difficult to carry out all aspects of the program as required by law and regulation. In the near future, the program is faced with further program staff reduction through attrition. The continued lack of program staff will impact the forest products industry when individuals seeking certification may be increasingly faced with delays in the certification process thus affecting their ability to earn their living and the resulting impact on their personal income along with the impact on the State's economy. In light of the impact of invasive insect species on our State's forests, new firewood regulations serve to help protect the forests of Connecticut. With the passage of new regulations comes the potential of an increase in the program workload as individuals seek to capitalize on harvesting trees in our forests impacted by invasive insect infestations. Without additional assistance we are concerned about the ability to continue to meet regulatory requirements.

We as a union applaud the efforts of legislature in passing bills to help protect Connecticut's environment and encourage their continued efforts to do so. The Forest Practices Act is one example of your efforts. Its' implementation has been successful in helping to protect the natural resources of Connecticut. We ask for your support in seeking assistance in obtaining adequate staffing so we may continue to be successful in implementing existing environmental legislation as well as new legislation moving forward.

Thank you for the time and opportunity to be heard.

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