



145 Dennison Road
Essex, CT 06426
860/581-8554 FAX: 860/581-8543
www.rivercog.org

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Deep River, Durham, East Haddam,
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April 14, 2015

Senator Beth Bye and Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chairs
Appropriations Committee
LOB, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: House Bill 6824 – State Forests and Parks

Dear Senator Bye and Representative Walker:

At our March 26th meeting, the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) voted unanimously to support reinstatement of funding for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (CTDEEP) State Parks and Forests. The RiverCOG region is host to many of the state's preeminent parks and forests. Among them are Gillette Castle, Chatfield Hollow, and Machimoodus state parks; and Cockaponset, Nehantic, and Meshomasic State Forests. These parks and forests, along with Rocky Neck State Park and Hammonasset Beach State Park, which lie at our doorstep, provide the region and the state with an economic, scenic, and natural resource base that supports our tourism industry of marinas, restaurants, inns, boutiques, museums, and theaters.

For tourism to thrive in the region, our state parks and forests must be open, safe, and well-maintained. According to the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association (CFPA), a 2011 study by the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis, *The Economic Impact of State Parks, Forests and Natural Resources under the Management of Department of Environmental Protection*, shows that outdoor activities on state lands have an economic benefit of more than \$1 billion a year and 9,000 jobs. The study also documented that for every dollar the state spends on the state park system, it receives a return of \$38 in economic activity. Also, the entire budget for all 108 State Parks is under \$12 million. Approximately \$6 million of the current budget is for park managers; approximately \$2 million is in facility-related costs such as electricity and fuel; and most of the remaining funds would typically be dedicated to seasonal staff who comprise a large percentage of the staff available to maintain the parks from spring to fall. If the cuts in funding are enacted, that seasonal staff would likely be cut by two thirds, from approximately 550 to approximately 180, and this would likely result in several parks being closed or left unmanaged.

For these reasons RiverCOG supports initiatives and/or alternate funding sources that will reinstate DEEP's funding for state parks and forests in the Governor's FY 2016/2017 Biennial Budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Iino', written in a cursive style.

Catherine Iino
Chair, Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments
First Selectwoman, Town of Killingworth

cc: Senator Fonfara and Representative Berger, Co-Chairs, Finance, Revenue & Bonding
Senator Kennedy and Representative Albis, Co-Chairs, Environmental Committee
Lower CT River Valley Region Legislators
Commissioner Robert Klee, CTDEEP
Commissioner Catherine Smith, DECD