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Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – March 20th, 2015

In Support of H.B. No. 6034 (RAISED) AA AUTHORIZING BOW AND ARROW HUNTING ON CERTAIN PRIVATE PROPERTY ON SUNDAYS.

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to express our support for H.B. No. 6034 (RAISED) AA AUTHORIZING BOW AND ARROW HUNTING ON CERTAIN PRIVATE PROPERTY ON SUNDAYS.

Large populations of White-tailed deer have been identified as a primary threat to the health and diversity of our forested landscapes, especially in southern Connecticut. Historically, deer populations were controlled by wolves, humans, and limitations of food supply. The eradication of wolves, the decreasing numbers of hunters and difficulties of hunting in many residential areas, the availability in winter of landscape shrubbery, and other changes to the landscape have allowed deer populations to dramatically increase in many areas. In southwest Connecticut, the density of deer ranges between 40 and 80 deer per square mile.

Densities in excess of 20 per mile can result in suppression of forest regeneration and reduction of biological and structural diversity. Conservancy staff have documented an alarming paucity of certain native wildflowers, and oak seedlings, in several of the state's most important large forest blocks. Numerous studies in Connecticut and the Northeast have confirmed the detrimental effects of overbrowsing on our forest habitats.

Over the past 15 years, the DEEP has made a number of changes to the regulations regarding deer harvest that affect two of the mostly densely-populated of its twelve deer management zones, southwest (Zone 11) and southern Connecticut (Zone 12). As a result of these changes, the deer harvest in these two zones has nearly doubled but it is still not sufficient to significantly reduce the abundance of deer.

Other ideas the DEEP is considering to increase the harvest of deer include permitting Sunday hunting and providing incentives to harvest more antlerless deer. While we do not feel that recreational hunting alone will sufficiently address the deer problem, we nonetheless feel that either of these measures would lessen it.

In 2011, approximately 44% of deer were taken by archery statewide. In Zone 11, which covers Fairfield County, nearly two-thirds of the harvest is by bow. Approximately 35% of the total harvest occurs on Saturdays when most hunters are currently available. A survey of hunters in Greenwich, CT revealed that most would take advantage of hunting on Sundays. Even if applied to just archery in Zones 11 and 12, Sunday hunting would significantly increase the total harvest.