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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations  
before the Environment Committee**

**February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**In Support of S.B. No. 347 (RAISED) AAC THE PERCENTAGE OF STATE AND  
FEDERAL FUNDS THAT MAY BE USED TO PURCHASE OPEN SPACE UNDER  
THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM.**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to thank the committee for raising, and express our strong support for, Bill 347. The sentence that this bill would remove from the statutes was added to Section 7-131g(c) in 2008 to address one particular situation, and in effect penalizes communities for being successful in obtaining federal open space grants.

DEEP's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition program has been an extraordinarily successful one. Since its inception in 1998, approximately 400 properties totaling nearly 70,000 acres in over 125 municipalities have been protected.

Under the program, municipalities, land trusts, and water companies can apply for matching grants of 65% (*75% in Distressed or Targeted Municipalities*) of the fair market value of the land. The program enables lands that meet strict criteria to be conserved for the benefit of all of the state's residents, without the state having to bear the full cost of acquisition and or add the properties to its management obligations.

The sentence added in 2008 specifies that if a grant recipient is successful in obtaining a federal grant to meet all or part of its match, the state grant is to then be reduced so that the total of state and federal funds amounts to no more than 70% of the parcel's fair market value.

Federal grant program applications often require considerable work and burdensome paperwork. Since communities know that any federal funds received will in effect be capped by the sentence in Sec. 7-131g(c), it can discourage them from even applying to bring federal funds into our state.

Apart from any match they provide for projects, communities incur the costs of two appraisals, a survey, attorney's fees, title work, and ongoing management work. They also invest considerable staff or volunteer time in negotiating - in some cases - for years, with landowners. They should not be penalized for any success they achieve in competing for scarce federal funding.