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*Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association*

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Support/ Oppose
<b>RAISED SENATE BILL 347:</b> AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERCENTAGE OF STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS THAT MAY BE USED TO PURCHASE OPEN SPACE UNDER THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM	Strongly Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For 120 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation issues.

I want to thank the Co-Chairs for raising Senate Bill 347 which would remove the 70% cap which is an arbitrary funding penalty against the land trusts, municipalities, and water companies that are fortunate enough to be granted both State and Federal funds for a land conservation project.

**There is significant local “skin in the game” without the 70% cap.** The goal of the cap may have been to require local matching funds for land acquisition projects, but this cap does not recognize all of the local investments made in the acquisition, management, and stewardship of a property. Two appraisals, surveys, legal services, closing costs, and ongoing expenses from a commitment to protection for perpetuity add up!

**Meeting Connecticut’s 21% open space goal.** Land trusts, municipalities, and water companies are working hard to meet the State’s 21% goal for open space protection by 2023. Collectively, land trusts, municipalities, and water companies are at about 68% of their overall goal and need help to meet it.

**The cap is unnecessary.** DEEP already limits its open space grants to 50 to 65% of the appraised value – the higher amount is allowed if the recipient is in a distressed municipality – so why should the state also limit what other funds may be available to fund a project?

**The State is losing leverage.** Federal funding programs such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Forest Legacy Program, the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and others were established to conserve land and routinely match State funding nationally. Why should Connecticut limit the matching power of State grants and potentially reduce future Federal investments?

**High priority projects attract Federal and State funding.** If a project is fortunate enough to receive both federal and state funds, it is typically a high priority project with multiple benefits for Connecticut. This is the kind of project that should be encouraged, not hindered.

Thank you again for raising this important bill and for the opportunity to testify! I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.