

Conservation and Development Committee Testimony For Meeting of February 10, 2016

Submitted By :

Randall Miller
Board Member - Connecticut Federation of Lakes
Facilitator - East Haddam Lakes Association

Physical Address:

22 Forest Way
East Haddam, CT 06423

Mailing Address:

22 Forest Way
Colchester, CT 06415

The 5.75% cut to the budget of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection proposed in the Governor's Midterm Budget Adjustment's will be painful to a Department already woefully under-resourced in both its overall budget and its staffing. *The specific impact of this cut to Connecticut's lakes and the municipalities in which they are located can be disastrous!*

DEEP cuts of the magnitude proposed by the Governor will gut what is documented as one of the most underfunded lake programs in the country. Why would Connecticut continue to, and, in fact, increase the risk of harm to its precious and fragile lakes and ponds that are important to Connecticut's quality of life. It is unconscionable to make these cuts because any reductions in the protection and care of the lakes will take many years and many millions of dollars to restore and repair, if they can be repaired at all. Preventive care costs thousands while rehab care costs millions.

Lakes are important economically for out of state tourism, in state vacations, day-cations, the fishing and boating businesses, boat license fees, boat engine gas tax revenues and high property tax income for towns with lake property. Businesses in towns with lakes benefit significantly from the money spent by year round residents, seasonal residents and visitors on or around lakes.

There are studies done across the United States and even in Connecticut (Kara Fishman's 1999 UConn graduate thesis) that show that if a lake is no longer suitable for swimming or fishing, the property values will decrease 36% - 43%. This finding is substantiated by similar studies in other states (references can be supplied on request). In my hometown of East Haddam, a decrease of this magnitude would amount to a drop in revenue to the town of 6 - 8%! This is well documented and indisputable and almost impossible to be absorbed by the town!

Lake residents do not expect the State and municipalities to cover all the costs of maintaining their lakes. This is evidenced by the literally millions of dollars lake area residents have personally expended in the past 15 years alone to maintain their lakes, whether that is for invasive weed mitigation, catch basin maintenance, dredging, public education etc. The expectation is the State will also do their part. For example:

- Obtaining a DEEP permit to perform aquatic invasive weed mitigation was significantly delayed in 2015 due to staffing cuts. This resulted in many mitigation treatments being delayed and their effectiveness potentially being diminished. Funds expended for these services by lake residents and towns

need to be supported by DEEP. The dollars to be expended are not State dollars for the most part, but DEEP approval is required to be able to perform mitigation procedures. DEEP must have funding to be able to have staff to perform the review and approval function timely!

- Maintaining the Supervisor - Watershed/Nonpoint Source/Lake Management Program within DEEP. A critical point of contact and support for the lakes.
- Maintaining the Invasive Plants Council Coordinator position within DEEP, another critical position to coordinate the battle against invasive plants.

The vast majority of Connecticut residents are good stewards of our fragile environment, and expect our State government to be also. Please find other areas to truly save money, rather than cutting critical functions that will lead to increased future expenditures. If the State must raise some money, consider small surcharges on boat licenses, fishing licenses, boat motor gasoline taxes. Then put it in a lock box so it stays dedicated to the lakes.

Instead of cuts, Connecticut, like all other states with lakes and ponds, should be greatly increasing its funding to correct problems that hurt lakes like septic pollution, runoff from roads, lack of shoreline buffers and aquatic invasive species like weeds and zebra mussels. Proper responsible funding for our lakes is long overdue! Smart money goes to prevention!!

Dramatically reducing the budget, as proposed by the Governor, is bad news for a Department that is managing the environment for multiple benefits (lakes, recreation, habitat, water supply protection, etc.). There simply is no substitute for having enough professionals on-the-ground doing and planning for ongoing environmental management.

I implore you not to further reduce the DEEP budget below its already inadequate and embarrassing level. Stop the ongoing damage to these cherished resources, the disrespect shown to the municipalities and the added burden put on municipalities.