

10 February 2016

TESTIMONY – Conservation & Development – DEEP - State Parks

Dear Esteemed Members of the CGA Appropriations Committee:

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the Governor's proposed cuts to the 2016-2017 Budget as they will be applied to the CT State Park system.

Connecticut is fortunate to have an amazing assemblage of State Parks and Forests nestled into one of the most densely populated areas of the country. These special places, representing Connecticut's beauty, culture and history, serve as places of respite, education and conservation for the citizens of our state. They are venues for reconnecting with nature, enjoying healthy exercise, staging special events, and creating a sought-after quality of life that attracts corporations and new businesses to our state.

Our beautiful state park and forest resources are in trouble. For more than three decades the conservation budgets have been in decline; death by a thousand cuts as it were. In the 1970's, the staff assigned to maintain the parks, forests, campgrounds, boat launches and trails numbered around 285. Today, that number is 70. Since the 1970's, the number of acres of state-owned conservation properties has increased by thousands of acres and the number of annual visits has exploded from 2-3 million to 8.5 million visitors a year. Connecticut's State Parks and Forests play a significant role in the state's economy and tourism industry.

Due to the new "lump-sum" allocation to the agencies, it is unclear how the cuts will impact the parks. What is clear is that any cut will negatively impact the core services currently provided. The only "discretionary" funding in the parks is in operation and maintenance of the park and forest recreation areas. That funding has been cut to the bone with the annual 5% reductions – year after year. Increasingly, active recreation areas have been turned into passive, unmaintained sites. Buildings have been moth-balled and trails maintenance has been mostly delegated to volunteers. The CT State Park system celebrated its Centennial two years ago. The reductions made in the beginning of its new century do not bode well for the future of the parks.

I understand your task is daunting given the significant shortfall but, the parks have endured cuts year after year. Please do all that you can to preserve the budget for our parks and forests so that future generations can enjoy Connecticut's beautiful outdoors and past generations have done for more than 100 years.

Respectfully,

Pamela Aey Adams
Retired State Parks Director
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