



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – February 24, 2016
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee
Presented By Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen

House Bill No. 5315 (Raised) – AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF THE HABITUATION OF POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS, THE POSTING OF INFORMATIONAL NOTICES CONCERNING ENCOUNTERS WITH WILDLIFE AND THE STATUS OF SNAPPING TURTLES UNDER STATE LAW.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **Raised House Bill No. 5315 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF THE HABITUATION OF POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS, THE POSTING OF INFORMATIONAL NOTICES CONCERNING ENCOUNTERS WITH WILDLIFE AND THE STATUS OF SNAPPING TURTLES UNDER STATE LAW.** The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee's willingness to raise this bill at the request of the DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would expand authority under Section 26-25a of the General Statutes concerning the feeding of wild animals to enable DEEP to adopt regulations that would prohibit or restrict the feeding of potentially dangerous animals in the wild on private land. This authority is currently limited to prohibiting or restricting the feeding of wildlife on state-owned property. This change would enable DEEP to address public safety issues that arise from the feeding of potentially dangerous wild animals on private property and would likely reduce the need for more aggressive responses.

As populations of larger wild animals (especially bear and coyote) increase in Connecticut and their ranges expand, interactions (often negative) between the public and these wild animals are increasing. The feeding of such wildlife by the public, whether intentional or inadvertent (e.g., unsecured garbage cans), can reduce their fear of humans and eventually lead the animals to associate humans with food. Most notably, bears that routinely forage on human-sourced foods often develop bold or aggressive behavior towards humans, sometimes leading to home incursions, attacks on pets and livestock, or even direct threats to humans (note there was a recent incident of a black bear killing a human in New Jersey, September 20, 2014).

Currently, federal law pursuant to CFR Title 36: Parks, Forests, and Public Property, Section 2.2, Wildlife protection prohibits the feeding of wildlife on properties managed by the National Park Service (NPS).

Both the NPS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have extensive, ongoing campaigns warning people of the dangers of feeding wildlife. The Connecticut General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research produced a report in November 2012 (2012-R-0351) specifically addressing *Bear Feeding Laws in the Northeast*. As of 2012, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island prohibited the feeding of bears. Since that time Massachusetts, Vermont, and Maine have passed "no feeding of wildlife" laws. Across the rest of the country, California, Montana, Florida, Arizona and Washington State are among the other states that have "no feeding wildlife" laws.

DEEP does have concerns about Section 2 of the bill, which would require that posters with specific directions on how a visitor should interact with wildlife at the facility where wildlife might be encountered. We appreciate the concern of the sponsors of this section, but believe that there may be other techniques that may be employed to better convey the wildlife conflict information envisioned.

This proposal would authorize DEEP to develop regulations concerning the feeding of potentially dangerous wild animals on private property. The ability to regulate feeding in specific instances on private property would provide the Agency with a much needed tool for use in reducing negative interactions between the public and wild animals, and would provide an additional nonlethal response mechanism. This authority would be used judiciously to respond to threats to the public to de-escalate issues with dangerous animals.

In summary, DEEP strongly supports **House Bill No. 5315 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE PREVENTION OF THE HABITUATION OF POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS ANIMALS, THE POSTING OF INFORMATIONAL NOTICES CONCERNING ENCOUNTERS WITH WILDLIFE AND THE STATUS OF SNAPPING TURTLES UNDER STATE LAW** and looks forward to taking this step to reduce negative interactions between the public and wild animals and provide an additional nonlethal response to ensure public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact Robert LaFrance, DEEP's Director of Governmental Affairs, at 860.424.3401 or Robert.LaFrance@ct.gov or, Elizabeth McAuliffe, DEEP Legislative Liaison, at 860.424.3458 or Elizabeth.McAuliffe@ct.gov.