



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

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

Public Hearing – March 11, 2016
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee

House Bill No. 5584 (Raised) – AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A KAYAK LAUNCH AT SUNRISE STATE PARK FOR PERSONS WITH HANDICAPS.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony **regarding Raised House Bill No. 5584 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A KAYAK LAUNCH AT SUNRISE STATE PARK FOR PERSONS WITH HANDICAPS.** The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony. We appreciate the intent of this bill, which is to increase public use of and access to the portion of Sunrise State Park in East Haddam that is adjacent to the Salmon River, but we have concerns regarding the costs involved, and the reasonableness of the timeframe in the bill to accomplish the goal.

As background, Sunrise State Park, consists of 146 acres located in the northwest part of East Haddam. The park, in the Moodus section of town, was purchased by the state in 2008 from the owner who previously managed the property as Sunrise Resort, and it shares a common boundary line with the 300 acre Machimoodus State Park to the southeast and the Salmon River to the west. The state park benefits from 4,700+ feet of frontage on the Salmon River. After the state's purchase of the property, at the urging of local officials, a process was undertaken, through a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) and then a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify possible public-private partnerships that might be developed to manage the property. Those efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and the state undertook the demolition of the dozens of dilapidated and substandard structures that existed on the property from the previous resort era.

Now that the buildings and other hazards have been removed from the property, the public is welcome to visit the property, hike the trails, view wildlife, and enjoy other outdoor pursuits. Because of deteriorated condition of the internal roads, the public does not have vehicular access throughout the park, and it is approximately 4/10 of a mile walk from the established parking area to reach the Salmon River. This proposal would require that the internal park roads be open to the public, and that a handicapped accessible car-top boat launch be constructed along the River less than 60 days from today

(May 30, 2016, a date that is likely prior to the date of passage of this bill if it were to become a Public Act).

While we do support additional public access to the River at Sunrise State Park, the road and boat launch improvements that will be required will take some time and funding to accomplish. A very preliminary estimate of the costs to improve a small portion of the road network (the shortest route to the riverfront) would be approximately \$80,000. The current paved boat launch on the river has a relatively low slope, but the ramp itself and the surrounding area between the ramp and a possible parking area do not currently meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The preliminary estimates for the improvements needed to meet the ADA requirements for the car-top boat launch would total roughly \$40,000. Neither of these estimates include a cost for staff time needed to conduct these projects, or to manage the projects with external contractors. Additionally, the boat launch improvements would likely include the need for environmental permits to allow the construction in and along the river. Those permitting processes may add another 90 days to the project timeline.

As previously reported to the Committee, we did receive a response to our recent State Park Concessions RFI from someone proposing to run a kayak concession at Sunrise. We are working diligently to determine whether such a concession might provide adequate benefits to the public such that it could be established on a trial basis this summer. Our hope is that such an arrangement could provide additional access to the river, and would include someone on-site who could provide assistance to any and all visitors.

In summary, DEEP supports the expanded use by the public of Sunrise State Park, but we must oppose the specific language included in **Raised House Bill No. 5584 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A KAYAK LAUNCH AT SUNRISE STATE PARK FOR PERSONS WITH HANDICAPS**, as **the language sets a statutory deadline for the completion of a project that cannot be met**. We look forward to working with the proponent of this bill to identify the best path forward to accomplish our shared goal of greater public access through the park, and in particular for those with physical disabilities to enjoy such a beautiful area of our state.

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 .