

**Testimony Re: Senate Joint Resolution No. 5
Resolution Proposing An Amendment to the State Constitution Concerning
the Environment and Natural Resources of the State**

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Dear Chairs and Members of the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Joint Resolution No.5 and to speak in support of an amendment to the State Constitution to better protect state conservation properties. It has become an increasing matter of concern to all who treasure these places that the Land Conveyance Act has been regularly utilized to remove them from State control, wholly or in part.

Our state held conservation, recreation, and agriculture lands have been acquired in a great variety of ways, but most acquisitions have involved the painstaking work of many, as well as the faith of taxpayers who have underwritten their purchase and maintenance with the presumption that these public lands would remain preserved for all future generations.

Some properties have been accrued through bequests or donations from private citizens, land trusts, or philanthropic organizations and foundations; some have been sold to the State at bargain prices with the understanding or stipulation, that they be utilized in very specific ways in perpetuity.

Others have been purchased with tax dollars by the State and its agencies (the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture) to fulfill or further the long-term goals inherent in the mandates and missions of those agencies. Determining the "best" choices for state land purchase has been no casual matter for agencies as resources have been limited for many years. DEEP's budget, in particular, has been inadequate for decades. Expenditures for land acquisition, therefore, have been by necessity, deliberate and strategic.

The ever-mounting instances of the misuse of the Land Conveyance Act to take possession of protected state conservation properties for parochial purposes both shatters public trust and callously squanders the arduous work done by a multitude from both the private and government sectors; further precious resources are needlessly wasted by environmental advocates and department staffs alike, in efforts to fore-stall destructive land grab proposals.

With increasing frequency, State Park and Forest System lands have been targeted for sale, trade or outright giveaway. As these lands are CT's most beautiful open space, one can certainly understand why they might be coveted. However, any

confiscation, swap or forced sale not resulting in the provision of **more significant benefit** to the state citizens who own them, ought to have been rejected by the General Assembly. Sadly, this seldom has been true with respect to the “Land Conveyance Act.” Not all members of the Legislature place their responsibilities as guardians of communal conservation property, and as champions for the interests of ALL Connecticut citizens, above the drive to provide service to their own constituents. Some believe that promoting the “local” trumps securing the greatest good for the greatest number. That’s a problem, especially when valuable State assets can instantaneously disappear with the phrase “Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes....” in the 11th hour of session without opportunity for debate, hearing or minimal fact checking investigation.

State Parks and Forest advocates are certainly convinced that a Constitutional amendment is needed to adequately protect state owned (DEEP and DoAg) conservation, recreation and agriculture properties and are very grateful that the Environment Committee has raised this bill for consideration and public hearing. We would respectfully suggest a few additions and changes to S.J.5 to assure that protections in the Amendment are adequate.

Any proposed divestiture of these lands should be approached with great caution. Each proposed divestment should be put forth in a **separate and distinct bill**; each should be fully vetted in hearings **at both state and local locations**; each should be approved in the separate chambers by a **2/3 vote**. To offset the considerable losses suffered by state citizens as a result of any divestment, **full market value for the property** should be paid by the party or parties taking possession of the acreage to DEEP or DoAg and **reinvested in land of equal or greater conservation or recreation value** in close proximity to the lands lost.

Thank you for raising this resolution. I know that any addition of a Constitutional Amendment is a very serious matter, but codifying true protections for our communal landscapes merits such a step.

Eileen Grant , Friends of CT State Parks Board of Directors