

To: Environment Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
From: James W. Little, Hebron CT
Date: February 18, 2016
Re: Constitutional Amendment Bill (S.J.5)

I am writing in support of the proposed Constitutional Amendment to Protect State Lands. We need greater transparency in the land transfer process and the amendment proposes a balanced solution allowing for needed change while protecting the public interest through more analysis and robust discussion.

The amendment limits opportunities for inappropriate transfers that might appear an abuse of power because they benefit only a small constituency. This is best for the general public and for legislators trying to meet the needs of their community(s).

Our state forests and parks are important to my family because we walk, hike and run on these lands throughout the year. The Airline Trail and Gay City State Park are important, and fun, recreation assets to my town of Hebron. They contribute significantly to our quality of life.

State lands are also important economic assets generating over \$3 billion in economic activity. Here are three numbers from a 2015 report by the North East State Foresters Association, "The Economic Importance of Connecticut's Forest Based Economy" to consider:

- \$2.1 billion is the annual Gross State Output of Connecticut's forest products industry. Roughly 8,200 people are employed in the forest products, maple and Christmas tree sectors.
- \$1.2 billion is the amount generated by the forest-based recreation economy, which accounts for 4,600 jobs in the sectors that include and support this recreation economy.

As a history buff, I am also aware that a surprising number of state parks and forests (Penwood, Gay City, Harkness, Peoples, and Wadsworth Falls are examples) were given to Connecticut. We need to be good stewards of these gifts and protect them from being used as assets in a political quid pro quo. It is a duty not a choice.

I encourage you to enthusiastically support the bill as good public policy and as a positive action for your constituents and our shared land.