

Testimony Concerning a Proposed Constitutional Amendment bill (S.J.5) to protect public lands.

My name is Starr Sayres and I am a resident of East Haddam, CT. Thank you for holding this hearing to consider a Constitutional Amendment to protect our public lands in Connecticut. It is a subject near and dear to my heart. My husband and I, who cherish the Connecticut River and its environs, watched with deep concern several years ago when a unique piece of State-owned property across the River from us was being considered in trade for a piece of undistinguished forested property further north. Fortunately, the financial inequity of the trade, together with dissenting voice of the public, prevailed, and the trade was extinguished. We likewise were saddened when another valued piece of property that was part of Hammonasset State Park was successfully passed to the Town of Madison for its uses. This past year, several other dismaying trade proposals across the State were brought to our attention, causing new alarm.

These giveaways willfully break the trust of the people of Connecticut for our government, whom we hold responsible for protecting lands that have been acquired over many decades, some given in good faith to the State to provide us with the kind of lifelong quality that comes with abundant outdoor recreational opportunities and relief from our increasingly urbanized lives.

A constitutional Amendment would ensure that publicly owned lands – lands of we the people – cannot be sold or given away 1) without a local public hearing, 2) without a more strenuous majority than that currently required, 3) without fair compensation to the locality where the property is lost, and 4) as an add-on to any other bill, allowing passage with little or no notice.

We are heartened by the hope that a Constitutional Amendment could provide assurances that lands of special meaning and value to all of us will be better protected against sale, or otherwise loss to future generations. It is an important issue for the General Assembly to consider because it affects every one of us who live in Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration.