

Testimony Submitted by Steven O. Fish
Member, Board of Directors
Friends of Connecticut State Parks

To the State of Connecticut General Assembly
Environment Committee

Re: Senate Joint Resolution No. 5

A RESOLUTION PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE STATE.

I am submitting this testimony to voice my strong support for a proposed Constitutional Amendment to protect public lands that would be subject to a change of use or a give away of public conservation land or easement, specifically, those lands with *agricultural, conservation or recreational* values, by requiring a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly. In addition, I believe S.J. 5 can be strengthened by providing for the public's input through public hearings on the *local level*, in towns where the public lands are located before any changes are made to those public lands within these towns. I must emphasize how important it is for the General Assembly to address this issue and how strongly I feel a Constitutional Amendment is necessary.

In the past, through the use of the "Conveyance Act," legislative conveyances of public lands have had several damaging impacts, including fragmentation and loss of state holdings that are ecologically valuable, loss of vital outdoor recreational opportunities and loss of agriculturally significant holdings so essential to farming. Each section of the Conveyance Act begins with the words "Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes ..." This powerful language essentially states "we hereby ignore any laws that we have passed previously," and it would override any legislative changes that might be protective of public lands. A Constitutional Amendment that curbs the manner in which the Conveyance Act is utilized cannot easily be ignored.

From my perspective as a person who has enjoyed our state parks and forest all my life, and spent most of my professional career studying and working within these public lands, I must say that some of the decisions that have been made in the past were nothing less than a breach of faith with our predecessors who worked hard to preserve these significant pieces of property. With ever increasing urbanization, I strongly believe we must do all we can to preserve and protect our public lands for future generations and to maintain and strengthen our state's quality of life. S.J. 5 will provide the legislative framework to ensure our most valuable natural assets are protected well into the future.

I want to thank you for holding a public hearing on this resolution and on the broader need to better protect our public lands.