

Testimony for Senate Joint Resolution 35 (SJ 35)

To: The General Administration and Elections Committee, CT Legislature

We strongly support Senate Joint Resolution 35 (SJ 35), the “Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the State Constitution to Protect Real Property Held or Controlled by the State.” We first supported its passage in the 2016 legislative session (as SJ 39), again last year, and want it approved this year so that citizens will be able to vote on the amendment in November 2018.

While it is unfortunate that we need a Constitutional Amendment to protect our public land and natural resources it is also necessary given the irresponsible actions of government within our state at all levels. Ever since the infamous “Haddam land swap” proposal, it has been clear that politics and private interests, not a conservation ethic, too often drive state land policy. In fact, we currently are witnessing this again with renewed, non-transparent attempts to sell Seaside Park. Since the legislative maneuvers used to affect such land transfers override existing protections by using the “[n]otwithstanding any provision of the general statutes...” language, a Constitutional Amendment is required to end this practice.

SJ 35 is not perfect, as it is not an outright ban of bad policy and actions by state government. Further, some important provisions in the original legislation were dropped from the proposed amendment, e.g. holding a public hearing in the towns where proposed sale lands are located, requiring compensation at least equal to an unbiased appraisal of the land.

However, the essential points of the proposed amendment – a required public hearing on land proposed for sale, transfer, or change of use, consideration of any such action in a separate, specific bill (not an omnibus bill or buried as a “rat” in non-germane legislation), and a majority vote of 2/3 of the state legislature to effect the sale, transfer, or change of use – dramatically improve transparency and citizen input/oversight of our public lands.

We are tired of private companies, local, and state government taking land and resources without discussion and the informed consent of the public. While SJ 35 is not perfect in preventing such land and resource grabs, the increased transparency and public input, along with a 2/3 vote, on the record, of the legislature is a necessary first step in fostering conservation stewardship ideals within our state government. We urge the Government Administration & Elections (GAE) Committee to again pass SJ 35 – as it has unanimously in both 2016 and 2017 – and give citizens the choice to amend our state Constitution in 2018.

Kevin Gough & Paula Jones
5 Bear Ridge Drive
Bloomfield, CT 06002-1107
kvngough@aol.com