

April 28, 2019

Dear Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee,

I am a member of the Board of Trustees of the Steep Rock Association, Inc., a land trust located in Washington, CT. I strongly oppose Section 1 of SB 1137 and Section 5 of SB 1138 both of which would require nonprofits, including land trusts, with "significant" savings accounts, endowments or pension funds to pay into a state "community development account" the equivalent of 25% property tax.

- SRA owns over 2,600 acres of land in fee primarily in the Town of Washington with a small property holding in the Town of New Milford adjoining other property.
- This land consists primarily of intact forest lands, riparian frontage on the Shepaug River and its major tributaries. The Macricostas Preserve protects the largest unused aquifer in the Town of Washington, a resource that will be available to the Town and its residents in perpetuity as are its other properties.
- Steep Rock maintains over 40 miles of trails that are open to the public. Fishing is permitted on portion of the Shepaug River.
- Certain smaller preserves are closed to public access as they are intended to provide habitat for native flora and fauna. SRA cooperates with the CT DEEP and private and public conservation and public and private educational institutions from Pre-schools to universities in conducting scientific studies on its Preserves and in providing education to the public on conservation and environmental matters.
- Some of the scientific studies undertaken by Steep Rock on or Steep Rock preserves extend back to the 1950s and include butterfly and moth collections now at Yale; some of the first scientific work on the Woolly Aigid that infested hemlocks in Steep Rock and elsewhere in Connecticut, to more recent studies of black bears, bobcats and several endangered animals and plants found in its Preserves that cannot be further identified as they are subject to collection.
- Since 1926 Steep Rock has protected over 20 miles of Shepaug River frontage extending from the conflux of the Bantam and the Shepaug River south to the Washington-Roxbury town line.
- This land has been acquired by donation or purchase since 1926. Many of the larger purchases since 2000 have been accomplished with private donations, Steep Rock funds and substantial grants from the State of Connecticut, the Town of Washington and the Federal Government.
- Steep Rock does not receive Town, State or Federal operating fund support except for certain special grants for removal of invasive plants.
- Since 2010, SRA has added acres to its Preserve system. Substantially all of this land is either agricultural land (Bronson and Johnson Farms) or critically intact forest land (four parcels on the ridge overlooking the Macricostas Preserve). Most of this land qualifies for Real Estate tax abatements under the 490 Plan. In March of 2019, SRA entered into a contract to purchase an 85 acre farm in the Towns of Washington and Woodbury. In applying for agricultural land acquisition funding for this property from the State of Connecticut and the Federal Government, supporting letters were obtained from the First Selectmen in both the Town of Washington and Woodbury.
- In considering whether to acquire any additional properties, SRA considers the applicable Plan of Conservation and Development that in Washington for example sets a goal of permanently preserving 30% of the acreage in Town to preserve its rural character. Steep Rock also uses the CT DEEP point system to weight each project in accordance to the type of lands to be conserved, connectivity to existing preserved lands and to trail networks and similar matters.
- SRA considers itself part of the community in Washington and its Preserves and trails are a major driver of tourists to town and of people looking to purchase housing in a Town that provides amenities and preserves its present character.

- SRA several years ago assumed responsibility for the ongoing cost and maintenance of the Judea Garden which provides fresh vegetables and in the future, will provide fruits to senior centers and food banks in Washington and New Milford

Our good citizenship and participation in the Town of Washington can be seen by looking the Town Website from today at <http://www.washingtonct.org/>.

Welcome to the Amazing Town of Washington Connecticut

... a collection of five iconic villages in glorious Litchfield County. Our name tells you much about our history but not all. Native Americans have been here for 10,000 years. Today, we are able to add nature, culture, food, shopping, hospitality
...and lots of fun.

Current and Upcoming Events are posted
on our [Events Calendar](#)

Lake Waramaug, New Preston Falls, the Shepaug River, the Steep Rock Preserves, The Chief Waramaug Pinnacle...lots of nature. The Washington Art Association, Institute of American Indian Studies, Gunn Museum and Library, The Gunnery School and the collection of Rossiter homes just off the Washington Green...lots of culture. Four-star formal, informal pub-style, quick serve breakfast-lunch and takeout eateries, numerous farms and orchards, markets, some farm...lots of food. Shopping for all ages, styles, tastes, clothing, books, art, antiques, even hardware...lots of shopping.
.... And, lots of fun.

Conservation of the Shepaug River has been a central focus of Steep Rock's activities since 1926. Our trail network includes Waramaug's Pinnacle and the Steep Rock Preserve was our first and still our largest Preserve.

This legislative proposal would divert critical resources from Steep Rock's ability to acquire and manage open spaces and other natural resources that benefit our quality of life and local economy. It would penalize our land trust for our efforts to set aside funds to help secure our organization's long-term viability and to care for our land trust's properties and easements in perpetuity pursuant to best management practices (The Land Trust Standards & Practices). This proposal would also undermine relationships with donors who want their donations to support land conservation and not a state tax.

This proposal would add a financial burden on our organization, threatening our ability to care for land entrusted to us for the benefit of future generations.

Please vote NO on these proposals that would tax land trusts.

Sincerely,

*William R. Coleman
Washington, CT*

Steep Rock Association Trustee, Chair of Governance Committee and member of the Stewardship and Preservation Committees.