



## **Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.**

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### **TESTIMONY TO THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING on Monday, March 8, 2021**

The Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc. (CACIWC) is pleased to submit testimony in support of **H.B. No. 6441 AN ACT CONCERNING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION**, and in particular, **Section 3**, which enables a municipal funding option to support climate resilience activities, open space preservation, urban forestry, and other environmental projects.

CACIWC has long supported efforts to permanently preserve important habitats in Connecticut, especially those lands of high conservation value. Our member conservation commissions endeavor to identify, index, and preserve critical habitats within their municipalities. Both forested and native grassland open space parcels have always ranked high among the various types of critical habitats that have been a focus of Connecticut conservation commission preservation efforts. Unfortunately, despite these efforts, many important parcels have become more fragmented over time. This trend has resulted in fewer large regional forest parcels and greenways, which decreases their value as sustaining habitats for various wildlife species. Many Connecticut year-round resident and migratory birds and other species are adversely impacted by the loss of these unique parcels.

These lost and fragmented habitat areas have not only contributed to declining populations of birds and other wildlife species, but the loss of these areas can adversely affect the quality of our critical streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, and groundwater supplies. The need to protect all habitats that serve as important water recharge zones has been emphasized during the severe drought conditions that had been identified in Connecticut and throughout the region in recent years. Thus, the importance of maintaining these habitats in the face of regional droughts, severe weather patterns and global climate change should not be underestimated.

Efforts to preserve these lands also improve the natural beauty and character of our local municipalities. Preserved open space tracts enhance the property values of adjacent residential areas. These lands also provide opportunities for their residents to enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities within their own communities.

Protection of these important local habitats is a major goal of our member municipal conservation commissions and aided by the efforts of municipal inland wetlands commissions. Conservation commissions, in cooperation with local land trusts, have been increasingly challenged in seeking funding sources to preserve these critical habitats.

Our member conservation commissions are authorized under CGS Sec. 7-131a, et al., as amended, to "conduct research into the utilization and possible utilization of land areas of the municipality and may coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies for similar purposes." These commissions are further authorized to inventory natural resources, and formulate watershed management and drought management plans, keep an index of all open space area, and acquire land in the name of the municipality, and make recommendations regarding land use to local planning and zoning commissions and other agencies.

Many of our member commissions have previously relied on state open space grant programs for funding but are seeing the size of these programs decrease in the face of increasing state budget deficits. Other sources of funding such as bonding or increasing property tax mill rates are facing increasing opposition in conjunction with other increasing challenges to municipal budgets. These funding challenges make it even more difficult to local conservation commissions to carry out their legislative mandates and support their local Plans of Conservation and Development.

By authorizing, but not requiring, municipalities to establish this mechanism to impose a buyers conveyance fee on certain real property sales, H.B. 6441 will provide an additional source of funding to support the purchase, preservation, and stewardship of these important habitats. CACIWC also supports the bill's mechanism to maintain the resulting funds in a separate local account and add other municipalities seeking inclusion. This will ensure that these funds are both protected from use in competing projects, while maintaining local control over the selection of parcels targeted for preservation efforts.

CACIWC is pleased to lend its support to the efforts of the CGA Environment Committee to support climate change adaptation with H.B. 6441 and help fund efforts to permanently preserve the varied and important land that make up our state. In doing so, you will not only protect important habitats and enhance climate resilience but help preserve the character of local municipalities and the State of Connecticut.

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*CACIWC is a non-profit organization working to protect Connecticut's wetlands, watercourses, and other natural resources through support and education of the 2000+ volunteers and staff that carry out the responsibilities of Connecticut's Conservation Commissions and Inland Wetlands Commissions. CACIWC, representing its member commissions, works with municipalities and environmental groups to promote public support for the judicious management and conservation of Connecticut's natural resources. For additional information contact Alan J. Siniscalchi, President at [board@caciwc.org](mailto:board@caciwc.org) or visit [www.caciwc.org](http://www.caciwc.org).*