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Staff Update

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# State Parks and Forests: Funding

September 26, 2013

Legislative Program Review  
and Investigations Committee

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Connecticut General Assembly

## 2013-2014 Committee Members

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Diana S. Urban

### **Committee Staff on Project**

Brian Beisel, Principal Analyst  
Eric Michael Gray, Associate Legislative Analyst

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Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
State Capitol Room 506  
Hartford, CT 06106



## State Parks and Forests: Funding

### Background

In June 2013, the program review committee authorized in concept a study of Connecticut's state parks and forests. The study focuses on funding of the state park system, including a comparison of revenues and expenditures within the park system and an assessment of the adequacy of funding to support short- and long-term operational needs.

State parks were first established in Connecticut 100 years ago, under the supervision of the State Park Commission, which became the State Park and Forest Commission in 1921. The commission was absorbed into the then newly established Department of Environmental Protection in 1971, which became the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in 2011.

Currently, there are 107 parks (35,000 acres) and 32 state forests (228,000 acres) providing public outdoor recreation areas in the state. Parks and forests are used for various activities, including hiking, bird watching, picnicking, hunting, boating, fishing, swimming, and camping.

Approximately one-quarter of the parks and forests (35 of 139) charge fees for parking, admission, or camping. Fee levels are set by regulation and vary by residence status and by time and day (i.e., weekend or weekday) of entrance. In many cases, the fees are only assessed from April through October.

To complete this update, committee staff reviewed information provided by DEEP, including financial documentation and personnel interviews. Program review staff also reviewed relevant legislative documents and has conducted several interviews with knowledgeable persons and interested parties outside of DEEP.

### Main Points

**State parks and forests are primarily operated by the Parks and Public Outreach Division within DEEP.** However, there is significant involvement by other DEEP divisions, such as wildlife management, environmental conservation police, forestry, and field support services. Most park-related divisions fall under the Bureaus of Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources. Some parks also receive significant contributions from park-specific "friends" groups.

**The number of state parks and forests rose steadily from the 1920s through the 1960s**, with approximately 100 parks and forests established before 1970. Acquisition and designation slowed in the 1970s and nearly stopped in the 1980s before resuming over the last 20 years. These numbers do not reflect expansion of existing areas, a common practice.

**Total funding for state parks and forests increased yearly from FYs 05-09, and has remained in the \$15-16 million range the last 5 years.** Special Funds used for state parks were eliminated from the agency budget and transferred to the General Fund in FY10. A decrease in General Fund resources beginning in FY12 was offset by a notable increase in bond money. Park and forest revenues were over \$6 million in FY12.

**The number of full-time parks division staff decreased from 110 in FY08 to 89 in FY13**, a decline of 19 percent. The loss of staff has necessitated some park supervisors oversee more than one park management unit. At present, there are 18 supervisors for 23 units.

### Next Steps

The final phase of this study will include an assessment of:

1. The adequacy of current funding levels to maintain existing service provision and expected future maintenance and improvements;
2. Park and forest use issues and trends, including describing shifts in demand for park services and potential use-conflicts, and their relative impact on park expenses;
3. Available performance measures regarding state park and forest operation, such as attendance, revenue, and safety data;
4. Short- and long-term planning efforts and implementation; and
5. Key components of Connecticut's state park system in comparison to those in a variety of other states. Special attention will be given to funding mechanisms used by other states to determine if Connecticut might benefit from using a different model.



# State Parks and Forests: Funding

PRI Staff Update

September 26, 2013

# State Parks and Forests

- Background
  - Organization
  - Services/Activities
- Fees
- Budget Expenditures
- Staffing
- Next Steps

# State Parks and Forests: Background

- 139 parks and forests
  - 107 parks
  - 32 forests
- 8% of acreage in the state (263,000 acres)
  - 35,000 parks
  - 228,000 forests
- Wide range of park and forest sizes
  - Largest: Pachaug State Forest (29,000 acres)
  - Smallest: Minnie Island and Satan's Kingdom (1 acre each)

# State Parks and Forests: Background

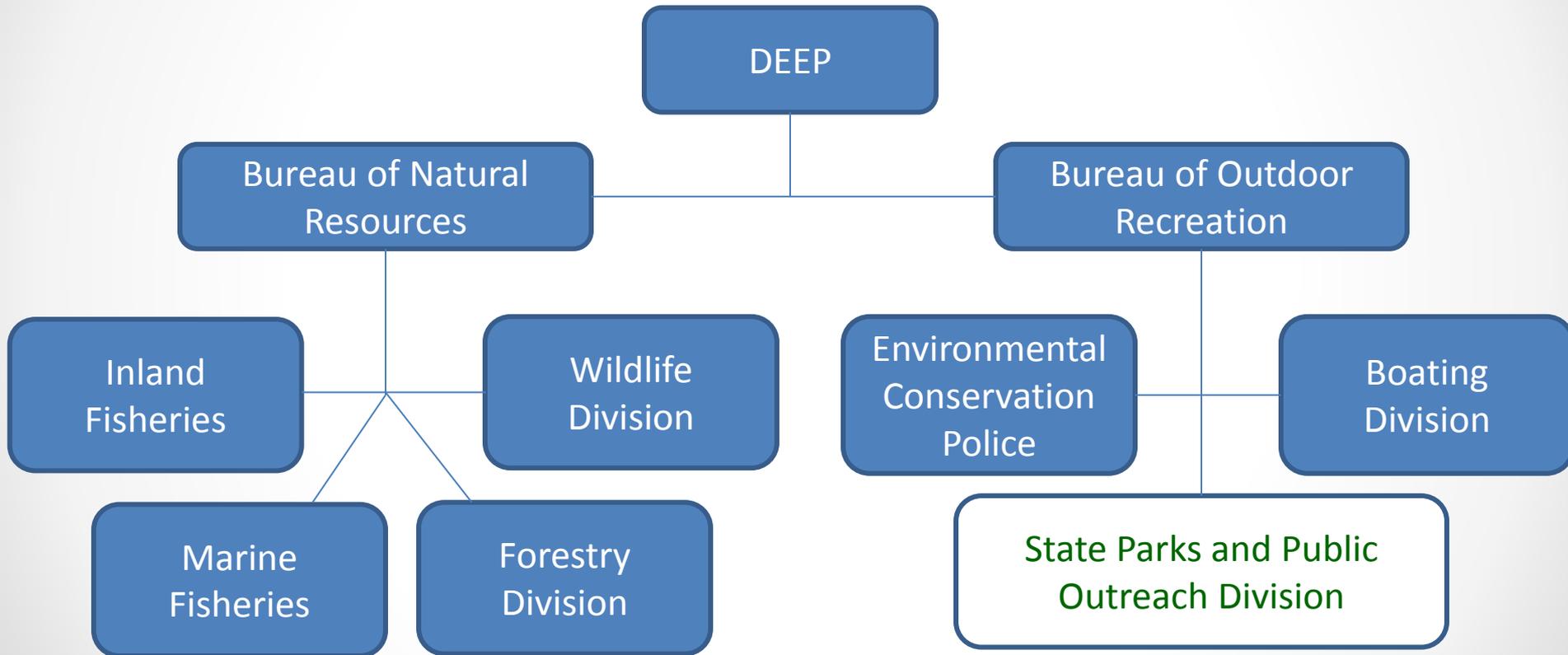
- **State Parks Mission Statement**

Established in 1913, the mission of the Connecticut State Park System is to provide natural resourced-based public recreational opportunities and educational opportunities through a system of state park and forest recreation areas, environmental centers and nature centers which provide an understanding of, access to and enjoyment of the state's historic, cultural and natural resources.

(State Parks and Public Outreach Division)

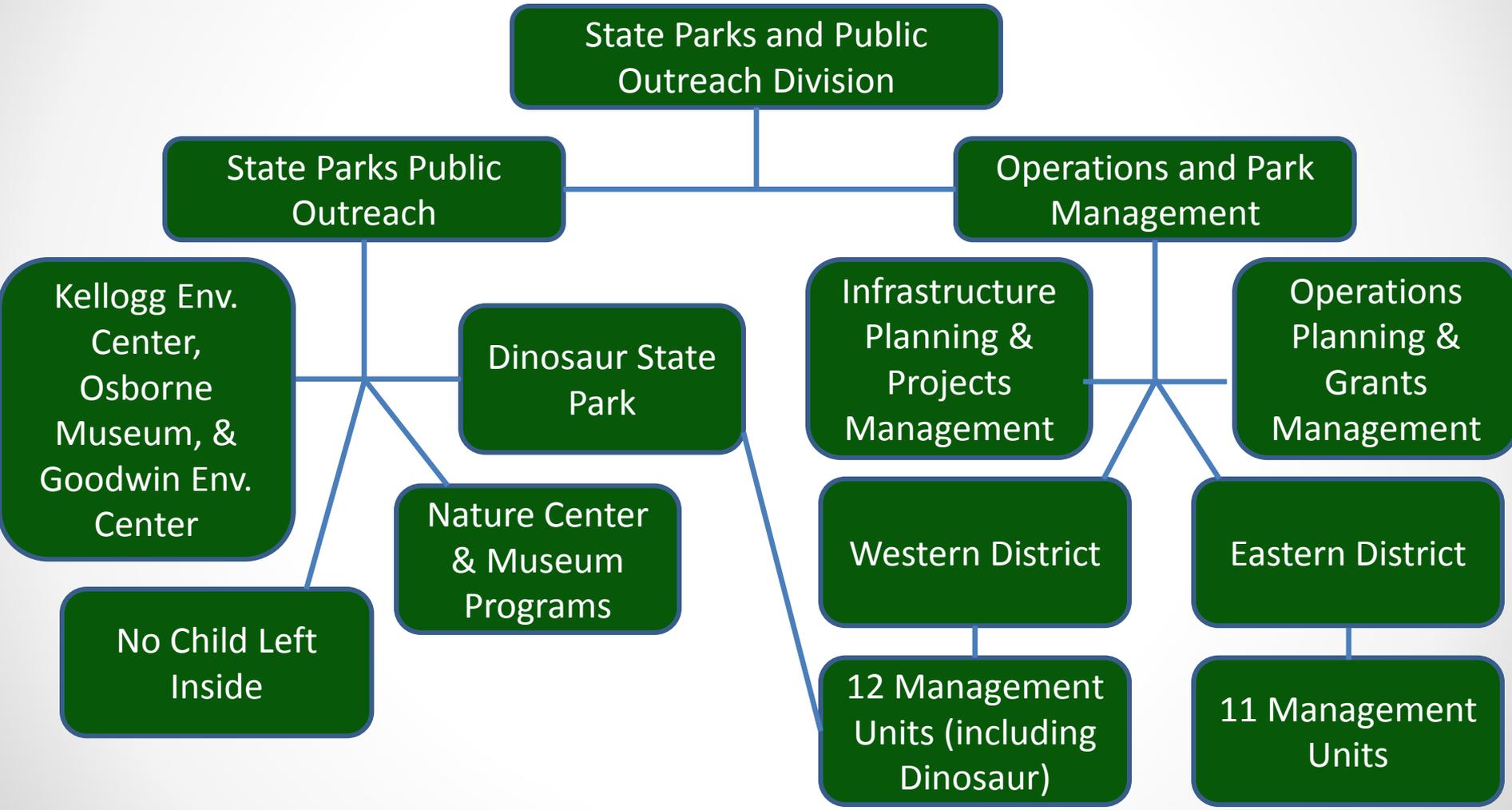
- *Note: The Connecticut State Park system includes both parks and forests. The remainder of this update will use the term “parks” to refer collectively to state parks and state forests.*

# DEEP Divisions with State Parks Responsibilities



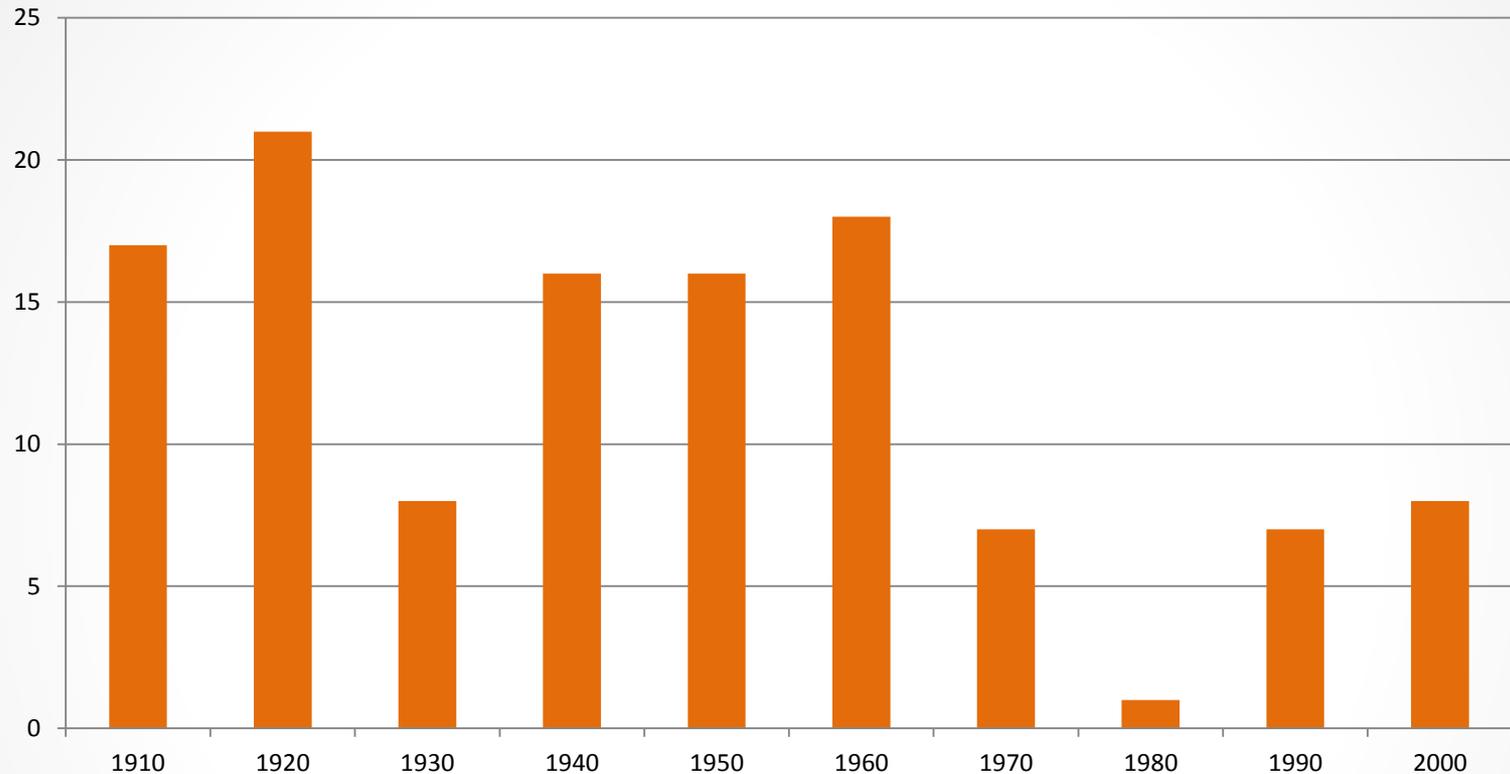
# State Parks and Public Outreach

## Division





# Number of Parks Added Per Decade



- Steady increase in the number of parks before the 1970s, except during the Depression
- New acquisition largely halted in the 1980s before resuming from 1990s to the present
- Number of park increases does not reflect expansion of existing parks
- Dates not available for approximately 20 parks

# Services/Activities at 139 Parks

- Swimming
  - 23 designated swimming areas
  - 11 parks with lifeguard squads
- Campgrounds
  - 1,400 reserveable campsites
    - Includes a limited number of rustic cabin rentals
- Other
  - Hiking
  - Hunting
  - Picnic Areas
  - Restrooms

# State Parks Fees

- Fee levels set through regulation
  - Authorizing statute C.G.S. Sec. 23-26
- Fees were doubled for FY10-11 budget (P.A. 09-3)
  - Beginning October 1, 2009
  - Subsequently reduced before 2010 park season (P.A. 10-3)
  - Current values based on increase over 2009 values
    - 35% increase for residents
    - 50% increase for non-residents

Parking Fees			
	Number of parks	Residents	Non-Residents
Weekend	26	\$9-13	\$15-22
Weekday	11	\$6-9	\$10-15
Late-day (after 4 pm)	10	\$5-6	\$6-7
None	113	-	-

Camping Fees (per site per night)			
	Number of parks	Residents	Non-Residents
Basic Campsite	13	\$14-20	\$24-30
Sites w/electricity, water, or sewer	2	\$33-40	\$45-52
Primitive Riverside Camping	4	\$5 per person	
Rustic Cabins	5	\$50-70	\$60-80
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Parks may offer more than one type of camping/campsite.</i></li> <li>• <i>14 parks have non-primitive campgrounds.</i></li> </ul>			

## Historic Site & Museum Admissions

	Age 13+	Ages 6-12	Ages 5 and under
Dinosaur State Park	\$6	\$2	Free
Fort Trumbull State Park	\$6	\$2	Free
Gillette Castle State Park	\$6	\$2	Free

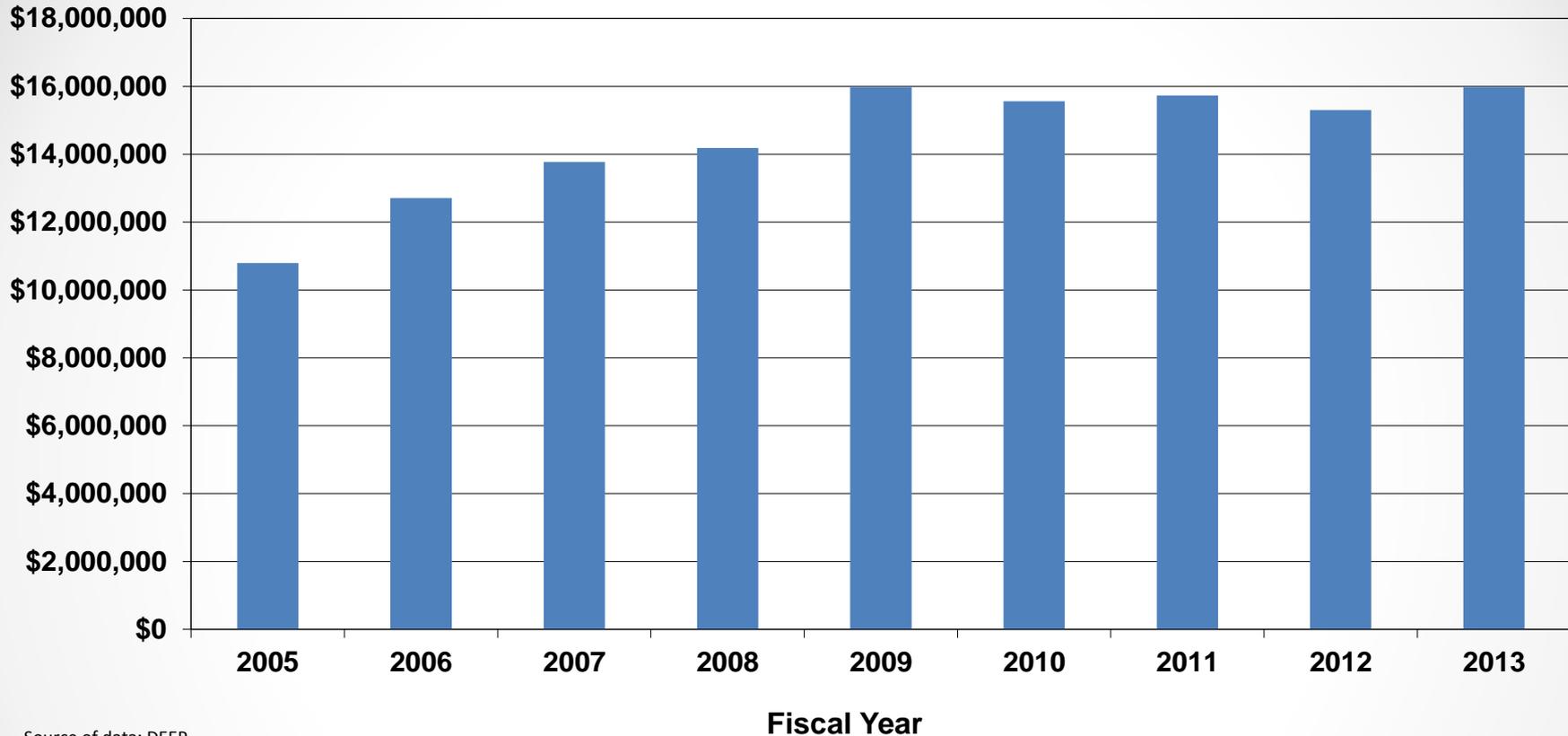
## Special Passes

	Eligibility	Use	Cost
Charter Oak Pass	CT Residents 65 and over	Lifetime Parking and Admission	Free
Disabled Veteran Pass	CT Resident Veterans with Service Related Disability	Lifetime Parking and Admission	Free
Heritage Passport	One year of unlimited access to Gillette, Dinosaur, Ft. Trumbull for a family		\$67
Season Pass	Unlimited parking for one car for one calendar year		\$67 (CT) \$112 (non)

# Attendance and Revenue

- More than 8 million annual visitors
- \$6.3 million total revenues
  - \$2 million in campground fees (FY12)
  - \$3.8 million in day use fees (FY12)
    - parking
    - admission
    - bus permits
  - \$450,000 from special use permits/facility rentals
    - weddings
    - pavilions

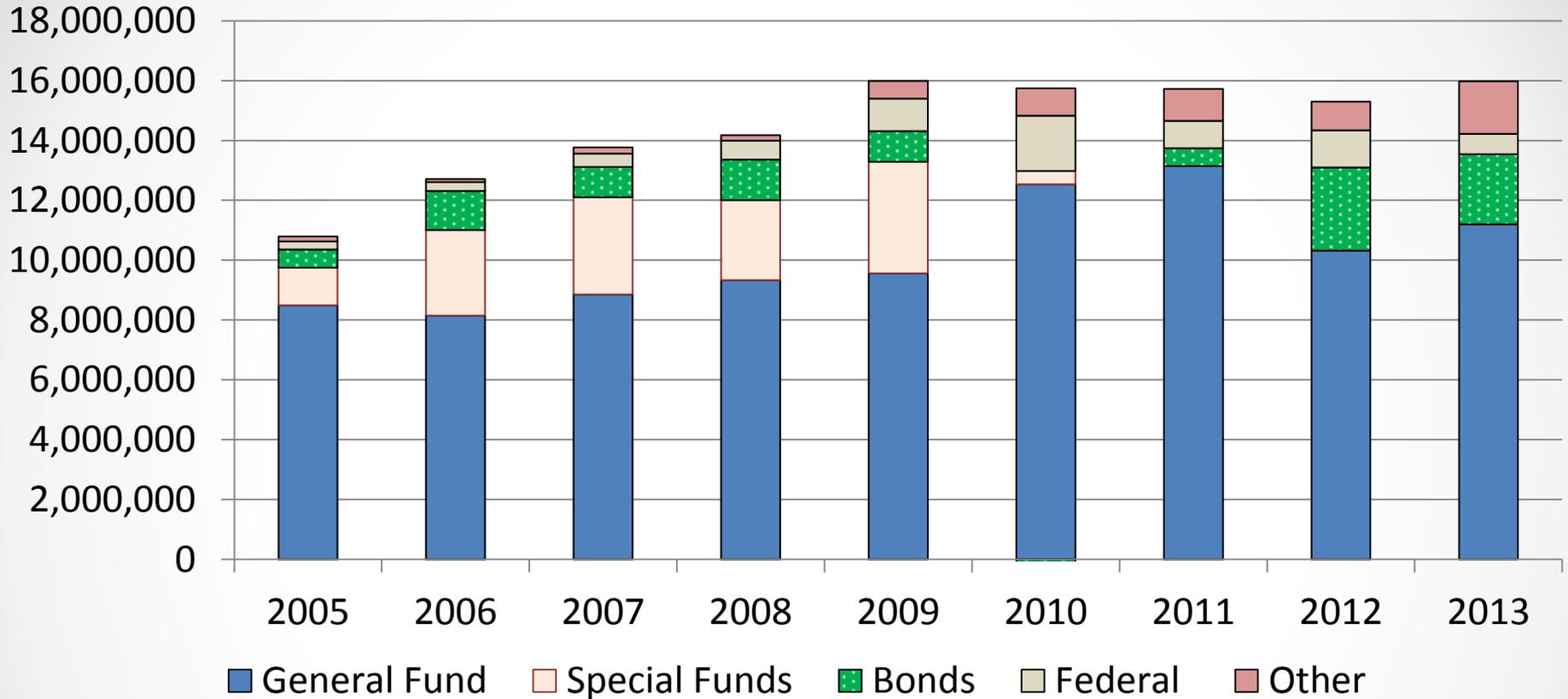
# State Parks Division: Total Expenditures FYs 2005-2013



Source of data: DEEP

- From FYs 05-09, total expenditures steadily increased from \$10.8 million to just under \$16 million (48%). Beginning with FY10, expenditure levels have remained relatively flat, ranging between \$15.3 million in FY 12 and \$15.9 million in FY 13.

## State Parks Expenditures by Fund Type FYs 2005-2013



- There was a mixed trend in overall state contributions (i.e., General Fund, Special Funds, bonds) for parks, ranging from a low of \$10.4 million in FY05, to a high of \$14.3 million in FY09.
- The use of Special Funds for state parks was eliminated in FY10. Such funds were transferred to the General Fund. (Most Special Funds money came from the Conservation Fund.)
- Expenditures using bond funds increased noticeably in FYs 12 and 13, helping to offset the loss of Special Funds.
- Annual federal funds averaged just under \$826,000 over the nine-year period examined.

# Additional Key Change to State Parks Budget

- P.A. 10-3 created a separate General Fund Maintenance, Repair, and Improvement (MRI) account; Act transferred \$1 million from Conservation Fund special account to the MRI account.
  - Individual MRI sub-accounts were established for 17 specific parks generating revenue from rental activities and a DEEP administration sub-account. Expenditures for FYs 11-13 totaled \$1.1 million.
  - All revenue collected from rent paid for use of state park property for any special event (e.g., weddings and receptions) is deposited in the park sub-accounts. Funds may be received from private or public sources, including the federal government or a municipal government.
  - Parks with MRI sub-accounts may use funds to help offset property maintenance, repair, and improvement expenses; also may be used for building new structures. Funds may not replace state appropriations for general park operations.
  - Accounts are non-lapsing and cannot be used by other parks; semi-annual expense reports by DEEP to OFA are required. Fund balance at the beginning of FY13 totaled \$1.6 million (mostly for the Harkness and DEEP administration sub-accounts).

# State Parks Division: Full-Time Staffing FYs 2005-2013

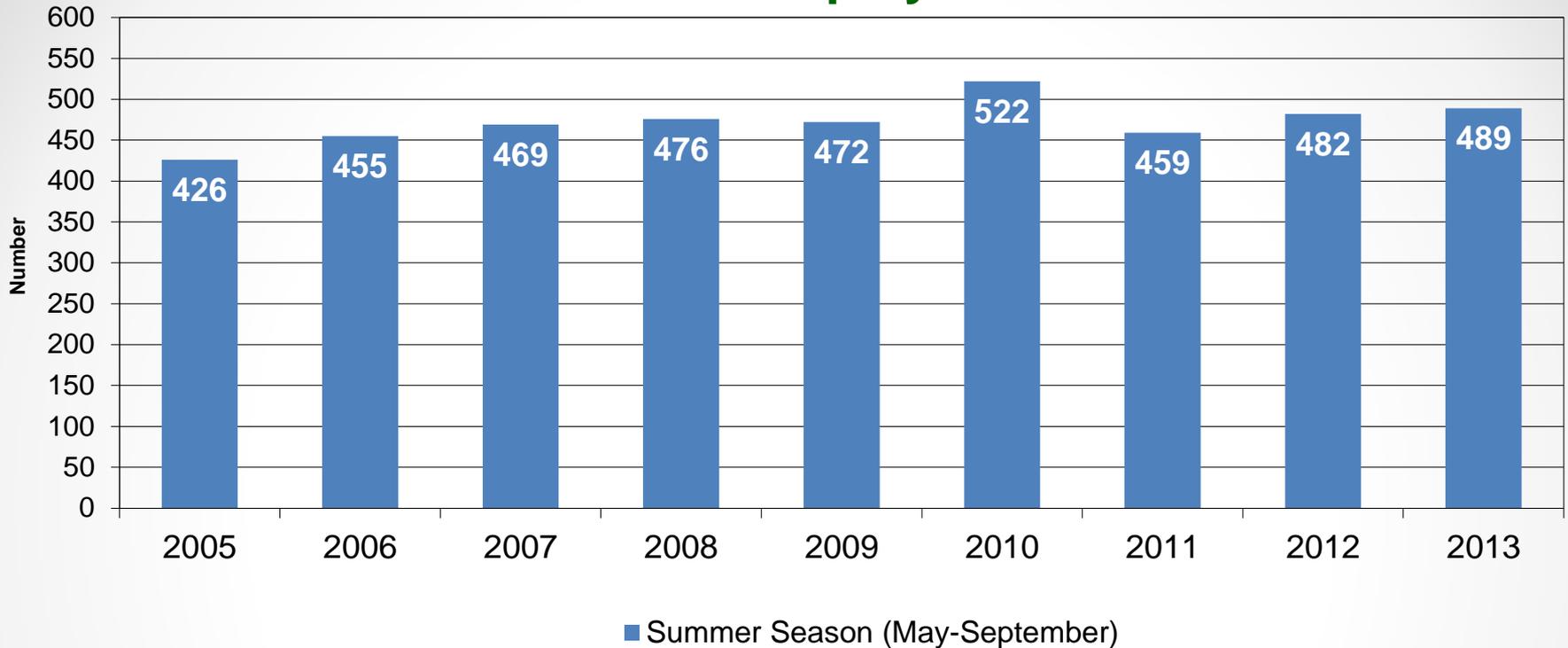


- The total number of full-time staff has steadily decreased since FY08, with an overall decline of 21 positions (19%).
- The number of field managers, supervisors, and maintainer positions, which are the bulk of the field staff for state parks, dropped by 16 positions (18%) since FY08.

# Recent Staffing-Related Changes

- Currently, 18 park supervisors oversee 23 management units statewide. An additional 2 managers are responsible for district-level operations.
- The boundaries and supervisory classification of park management units are determined through a “point system.” Points are assigned to various characteristics of parks.
- A system whereby unionized staff (e.g., park supervisors and maintainers) may bid every two years for assignments/shifts was first implemented in 2009.

# State Parks Division: Average Number of Summer Seasonal Employees 2005-2013\*



\* Summers include seven pay periods; 2013 data includes four of seven pay periods.

- The average number of summer seasonal employees for FYs 05-13 has ranged from 426 to 522. Following a drop to 459 positions in FY11, there has been a steady increase for FYs 12 and 13.
- Since FY11, the number of seasonal positions designated department-wide for DEEP has been restricted to 960; 682 of the seasonal positions are allocated to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which includes state parks.

# Next Steps

## Assessments of:

- Existing service provision levels and expected future maintenance and improvements.
- Park and forest use issues and trends, including describing shifts in demand for park services and potential use-conflicts, and their relative impact on park expenses.
- Available performance measures regarding state park and forest operation, such as attendance, revenue, and safety data.
- Short- and long-term planning efforts and implementation.
- Key components of Connecticut's state park system in comparison to those in a variety of other states. Special attention will be given to funding mechanisms used by other states to determine if Connecticut might benefit from using a different model.

# State Parks and Forests: Funding

Public Hearing  
LOB Room 2D 2:30 PM  
September 26, 2013