

CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION'S CONSERVATION AGENDA: 2012

Dear Friend of Conservation,

In 2011, CFPA and its conservation partners achieved the following victories in the General Assembly which were effectuated with Governor Malloy's signature:

- Restoring significant liability protection to municipalities on recreational lands;
- Protecting 14,000 acres of forest by keeping taxes reasonable for the landowners who made a 100-year commitment to keeping their forests as forest through the 10 Mill program;
- Establishing a Timber Harvest Revolving Fund that will allow CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to recoup up to \$100,000 of timber harvest revenues to enhance its ongoing forest management and planning activities; and
- Sustaining the Community Investment Act funding which preserves farmland, historic sites, low-income housing, and a safety net for dairy farmers.

However, the calendar year of 2011 concluded with several open conservation questions:

- How will Connecticut manage its roadside trees and forests to both minimize power disruptions in future storms, and maintain "community character" in Connecticut?
- How will DEEP utilize its diminishing resources to meet the needs of public recreation in its State's Parks, Forests, Wildlife Management Areas; federal and state mandates for clean air, water, and protected lands; AND the requirements associated with its new energy mission?
- How will we pay for these necessary investments in our state's natural resources?

UConn released a Study on December 9, 2011 that documents an annual economic benefit of over \$1 billion and 9,000 jobs directly tied to our State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas. At the same time, the Study warns that if we allow our State lands infrastructure to crumble, we will begin losing the many benefits we currently enjoy.

Indeed, DEEP may have reached the tipping point where its ability to manage natural resources is actively eroding due to chronic underfunding and ongoing staff attrition. Please take a minute to review the scant resources available to natural resources staff atop the following page.

In 2012, your voice is essential to ensure Connecticut doesn't fall farther behind the rest of the nation (a 2011 study by CT Voices for Children ranked our state 50th in per-capita investments on the environment). We can do so much better, and we will need your help to make a difference!

Sincerely,



David Leff, Chair
CFPA Public Policy Committee



Eric Hammerling, Executive Director
CFPA, Public Policy Staff Liaison

Committee: Russ Brenneman, Astrid Hanzalek, John Hibbard, Eric Lukingbeal, Lauren McGregor
Contract Lobbyist: John Larkin

CFPA CONSERVATION AGENDA: 2012 PRIORITIES

State Funding and Resources

Issue: DEEP must address chronic underfunding and staff attrition in its natural resource programs. Along with highlighting resource deficiencies, we make specific recommendations that staff be added in the following priority areas:

- To maintain 107 State Parks, DEEP employs only 17 park supervisors and 58 maintainers;
 - Recommendation: Add 5 Parks Staff to highest priorities in the field in time for the 2013-2014 celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the State Parks.
- To manage 170,000 acres of State Forests, DEEP employs 7 state lands foresters (2 of whom are durational). Also, there are only 3 service foresters available to assist private forest landowners (private landowners own ~90% of Connecticut's forests);
 - Recommendations: 1) Add 2 service foresters and 2 community foresters to work with private landowners and towns to produce town tree inventories and health assessments [see Two Storm Panel recommendations below]. 2) Make 3 durational forestry positions permanent.
- To patrol and enforce hunting, fishing, and other environmental laws statewide, there are only 52 environmental conservation officers;
 - Recommendation: Add 4 environmental conservation officers with emphasis on extra patrols in areas suffering from illegal ATV encroachments. Also, refill vacancies as retirements occur.
- To provide educational programs through No Child Left Inside, Project Learning Tree, and other programs there are 4 environmental educators at DEEP.
 - Recommendation: Add 3 educators to help re-fill vacancies at Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby and re-fill vacancy for museum curator.

Issue: Tropical Storm Irene and the October nor'easter helped highlight the significant need to better manage our roadside trees to maintain community character while also protecting our power infrastructure. CFPA's testimony presented to the Two Storm Panel suggests the following tree-based priorities:

- Compile town-by-town inventories, maps, and health assessments of roadside trees;
- Utilize these inventories, maps, and assessments to develop tree maintenance, pruning, and/or cutting plans and schedules for each town; and
- Provide information/education/outreach on "right tree, right place" to encourage landowners to not plant certain trees in areas that will likely cause future power line/tree conflicts.
 - Recommendations: 1) Provide incentives to towns to encourage training their municipal tree wardens and managing their roadside trees to the level required to attain "Tree City USA" and/or "Connecticut ReLeaf" status (there are only 19 Tree City USA towns in CT); 2) provide additional resources for Community Forestry at DEEP, UConn Extension, the CT Ag Experiment Station, and potentially Regional Planning Agencies to assist with inventories, maps, health assessments, management planning, and outreach on "right tree, right place."

State Policies

- Support increased bonding as well as regular grant rounds for expending existing Open Space bonding and Community Investment Act funds.
- Support technical amendments to P.A. 490 program.
- To ensure forest regeneration, support limited Sunday bow hunting for deer only, on private lands only, and only in areas deemed by the DEEP Commissioner to have deer overpopulation problems.
- Support rejuvenation of Connecticut Conservation Corps for job training and in-the-field experience.
- Oppose All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) use of State Forests, Parks, and Wildlife Management Areas.

Federal Funding and Resources

- Support (S. 1265) fully authorized funding for Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million. The LWCF also provides funding to the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program.
- Support ongoing funding of \$100 million for the Recreational Trails Program administered by the Federal Department of Transportation/Federal Highways Administration (Connecticut has received ~\$1.2 million/year for the last few years).
- Support funding for the New England Trail through the U.S. National Park Service's National Scenic Trail Appropriations (approximately \$65,000 for Connecticut in 2011).
- Support restoration of funding for USDA Farm Bill conservation programs which include critical programs such as the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Grassland Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (If budget sequestration occurs, it could result in a \$15.6 billion cut in farm bill in FY 2013).

Federal Policies

- Support passage of the "No Child Left Inside Act" (H.R. 2547/S. 1372). This bill would enable Connecticut to receive funding to support outdoor educational programs since it has completed an environmental literacy plan (CFPA worked with the Department of Education to do this).
- Support passage of the "Complete America's Great Trails Act" (H.R. 481). This bill would provide a tax credit to landowners who donate a conservation easement that would secure recreational access for a national scenic trail traversing their property.
- Support making the "Enhanced Conservation Easement Incentive" permanent (H.R. 1964/S. 339). This would:
 - Raise the maximum deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their adjusted gross income (AGI) in any year to 50%;
 - Allows qualified farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their AGI; and
 - Increases the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.
- Support "Estate Tax Incentives for Conservation," such as increasing the 2031(c) exclusion from 40% to 50% of the restricted value of land protected by a conservation easement with a cap of \$5 million. The current exclusion is capped at \$500,000 and is further reduced in cases where the easement reduces a property's value by less than 30%.
- Support "Clean and Beautiful Communities Act" authored by Congressman Chris Murphy which would authorize funding for land acquisition, stewardship, improving the effectiveness of land trusts, and assist with land acquisition transactional expenses.

** CFPA has been preparing a Conservation Agenda for Connecticut's state and federal legislative leaders since 1897. An essential element of many victories for the environment over time has been CFPA's work with hundreds of conservation partners. CFPA has a reach that goes beyond our organization alone through its active membership and participation on several Boards and Steering Committees. CFPA works directly with and thanks the following groups that share our land conservation, environmental education, forestry, state lands management, outdoor recreation, and farmland preservation priorities: the Connecticut Greenways Council, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, Connecticut Urban Forest Council, Connecticut Environmental Literacy Plan Committee, Friends of Connecticut State Parks, Friends of Goodwin Forest, and Working Lands Alliance.