



2013 CONSERVATION AGENDA FOR THE PEOPLE & LAND OF CONNECTICUT

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) has been offering recommendations on conservation priorities to the Connecticut General Assembly since 1897. These annual recommendations stay relevant because the context for making them changes every year.

Three issues define the context for the 2013 Conservation Agenda:

- 1) Destructive storms -- Tropical Storm Irene and the October Nor'easter in 2011, and Superstorm Sandy in 2012 -- have reminded us about the fragility of our state's infrastructure and the need for better management of natural resources to achieve environmental benefits and improved public safety;
- 2) The State Budget deficit challenges the notion that additional investments are critical to maintain the economic values that our State Forests, Parks, and other protected lands provide to Connecticut; and
- 3) Environmental spending as a percentage of the State Budget continues to be less than one-half of one percent (< 0.5 %). "The environment" is being viewed as a side issue rather than as a fundamental part of the bedrock which sustains economic benefits and public health for Connecticut's people. This must change if we are to make progress.

The structure of the Conservation Agenda is a little different this year. Rather than covering the broad range of conservation programs that CFPA supports at both the State and Federal levels, we are providing more in-depth recommendations on our top two State legislative priorities this year -- Roadside Forest Management and the State Parks. We include a list of all of the other CFPA priorities on the last page.

If you would like to become part of CFPA's Public Policy Conservation Team or sign-up for Advocacy Alerts, please visit our website (www.ctwoodlands.org) and/or contact our Executive Director, Eric Hammerling, via 860/346-TREE or ehammerling@ctwoodlands.org.

Sincerely,

David K. Leff, Chair
Public Policy Committee

Eric Lukingbeal, President
CFPA Board

Public Policy Committee Members:

Russ Brenneman, The Hon. Astrid Hanzalek, John Hibbard, David K. Leff, Eric Lukingbeal, Lauren McGregor, Eric Hammerling (CFPA Staff), and John Larkin (Contract Lobbyist)

Reducing Economic Losses and Enhancing Public Safety in Future Storms

The two major storms of 2011 - Tropical Storm Irene and the October Nor'easter - were responsible for more than \$3 billion in economic losses in Connecticut alone. To learn the lessons from these damaging storms, Governor Malloy established the Two Storms Panel which further recommended the need for a State Vegetation Management Task Force (established in April, 2012) to guide local and statewide efforts to better manage the roadside forests which were implicated in an estimated 9 out of 10 power outages. This Task Force recommended that investments in roadside forest management at the State and Municipal levels are required for Connecticut to reduce economic losses, enhance public safety, and have healthier trees along 21,000+ miles of state and municipal roads.

Task Force recommendations requiring action by the General Assembly follow:

- Require that Municipal Tree Wardens meet State Certification standards. Every town is responsible for appointing a Municipal Tree Warden, but at this time, there are no requirements that these front-line tree managers have expertise in trees. State Certification is currently required for arborists, foresters, and forest harvesters and has been critical to raise expertise and knowledge in the field; and
- Provide State Funding to Municipalities (recommended amount of \$100,000/town in both 2013 and 2014) to both develop a 5-year Roadside Forest Management Plan and conduct necessary roadside forest management (pruning, removals, and re-planting using "Right Tree/Right Place").

Realizing Economic and Public Health Benefits of Keeping State Parks Open

In 2013, the State Park System celebrates its 100-year Anniversary and will highlight a century of amazing achievements at many of the 107 State Parks. Ironically, budget rescissions and other cuts have already put the opening of several State Parks in jeopardy. [see feature on State Parks on next page]

We ask the General Assembly to consider the following proposals to support the Parks:

- Dedicate an additional \$3.5 million to bring Park field staff up to 100, add 4 En Con Officers, and restore cuts to Park seasonals; and
- Re-establish Enterprise Account as a Subaccount of Maintenance, Repair & Improvement Account to utilize new revenues from cabins, boats, bicycles, firewood, and camping necessities, and for concessions not chosen by BESB (Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind).

These general fund investments would be substantially offset by the following revenue generators:

- Increase user fees for Weddings, Special Events, and Pavilion Rentals in State Parks;
- Move Charter Oak pass to 50% of Annual Pass (rather than free) starting Dec 31, 2013; and
- Direct DEEP to establish admissions gates at up to 5 State Parks where it would be cost effective.

STATE PARKS AT 100: WILL CONNECTICUT INVEST OR DIVEST?

2013 is the Centennial of Connecticut's State Parks. 107 State Parks - public treasures such as Hammonasset and Rocky Neck State Beaches; Gillette Castle, Harkness Memorial, Sherwood Island, Sleeping Giant, West Rock Ridge, and so many others - are the special places that many think of when envisioning "Connecticut."

The State Parks provide immense value to the State. A 2011 study by UConn documented an annual economic benefit from State Parks of over \$1 billion and 9,000 private sector jobs. The Study also highlighted that every \$1 spent on the State Parks, returns \$38 to Connecticut's coffers. These economic benefits alone should make the case to invest in our State Parks.

Sadly, on this Centennial Anniversary we must question whether the State is willing to make the commitment to keep its State Parks open. Already, the expenditures on CT State Parks are amongst the worst in the nation on a per-capita basis. Unless the General Assembly acts now to invest, several State Parks will be closed or left unmaintained in 2013 and their outstanding value for Connecticut's residents will be lost.

Ten years ago (when there were only 101 State Parks), Clough Harbour & Associates LLP was commissioned to assess the infrastructure needs of the State Park System. Clough found that:

- "The total, system-wide costs of operations and maintenance labor, maintenance equipment and materials, and contracted services ... as determined by the model are approximately \$27 million per year." [In FY 2012 (pre-rescission), the State Parks budget was \$12.2 million]
- "The total, system-wide operations and maintenance staffing levels ... as determined by the model is 1,943 seasonal staff and 204 full-time staff." [In FY 2012 (pre-rescission), there are 550 part-time seasonal staff and 74 full-time field staff]
- "It is apparent from this differential between the estimated optimal annual operations and maintenance costs and staffing and the current spending and staffing levels, that the State needs to allocate additional funding for the operations and maintenance of its parks in order to avoid future problems ... and deliver the basic level of service to provide for their comfort, security and safety."

At present, only 74 full-time field staff (16 Park Supervisors and 58 Maintainers) are available to manage and maintain 107 State Parks, and 15 of these overstretched staff are eligible for retirement in 2013. In fact, on July 4th weekend this year, part-time seasonals accounted for 97% of all staff available to maintain the Parks.

There are other reasons why the State Parks must be kept open. Many of the State Parks resulted from gifts from donors who were assured the land would be cared for on behalf of all people, regardless of their economic status. In tough times, State Parks are needed more than ever to promote physical health and the psychological well-being of 7.9 million visitors annually. Parks are available at a reasonable cost, and are often a free alternative for those who cannot afford private clubs or the high cost of other venues.

CFPA FULL PRIORITY LIST FOR STATE & FEDERAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS IN 2013

New Priorities

State Legislative

1. Special Centennial Anniversary Request for CT DEEP State Parks System (2013):
 - Re-establish Enterprise Account for Cabins, Boats, Bicycles, firewood, and camping necessities, and for Concessions not chosen by BESB (Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind).
 - \$10 million special request for operational support to address chronic underfunding during State Parks Centennial.
 - Increase user fees for Weddings, Special Events, and Pavilion Rentals in State Parks.
 - Move Charter Oak pass to 50% of Annual Pass (rather than free) starting Dec 31, 2013.
 - Authorize admissions gates at 4 or more parks that don't currently collect fees.
2. Implement State Vegetation Management Task Force Recommendations, including:
 - Require Certification of Municipal Tree Wardens.
 - \$100,000/town for 2 years to implement better roadside forest management and develop a 5-year Roadside Forest Management Plan.
3. Secure State protection for New England Trail similar to protections for Appalachian Trail.

State Policy

1. Support efforts to ensure state lands dedicated for conservation/recreation are "protected."
2. Support expanding coalition for Connecticut Reinvestment and Conservation Act (CRCA).

Ongoing Priorities

State Level

1. Support base funding and staff for the following critical State conservation programs: CT DEEP (Forestry, Parks, Wildlife & Environmental Conservation Officers), UConn Extension, CT Department of Agriculture Farmland Protection program, and CT Agricultural Experiment Station Forest Research efforts.
2. Support maximum funding for Community Investment Act as well as Open Space, Recreation, and Farmland Preservation Bonding.

Federal Level

1. Support Appropriations for National Park Service/National Scenic Trails program.
2. Support Appropriations for Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).
3. Support Appropriations for Recreational Trails Program in Dept of Transportation.
4. Support USDA Farm Bill Conservation Title Programs.
5. Support USDA Forest Service Programs, e.g., Forest Legacy, State/Private and Urban Forestry.
6. Support restoration of cuts to APHIS for the agency's efforts on Emerald Ash Borer.
7. Support passage of No Child Left Inside Act.
8. Support tax credit as landowner incentive for conservation easements on National Scenic Trails.



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