



2014 CONSERVATION AGENDA FOR THE PEOPLE & LAND OF CONNECTICUT

This year, CFPA's Conservation Agenda focuses on the critical question: Will the State maintain the public's trust by protecting and managing your State lands?

Protecting and managing conservation and recreation lands requires both 1) skilled people, and 2) legal protections. Currently, the State is losing skilled state land managers (mostly from attrition through retirement without replacement), and is not using available legal mechanisms to protect your public lands from being traded, sold, or given away.

The State is failing in its land management obligations. If further losses of State land managers occur, some State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas will be closed; and without legal protection of these lands, the future of our public lands is uncertain.

We ask the General Assembly and Administration to take action now 1) to authorize the Commissioners of DEEP and DoAg to place conservation restrictions on their high value conservation lands; and 2) to prevent the State workforce essential to manage Forests, Parks, and other State lands from plummeting below the levels that are already at all-time lows.

Let us mark the 100-year anniversary of the State Parks with the resolve to do better!

Sincerely,

David K. Leff, Chair
Public Policy Committee

Eric Lukingbeal, President
CFPA Board

** 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.

CFPA Public Policy Committee Members:

Russ Brenneman, William D. Breck, The Hon. Astrid T. Hanzalek,
John E. Hibbard, David K. Leff, Eric Lukingbeal, Lauren L. McGregor,
Eric Hammerling (CFPA Staff), and John C. Larkin (Lobbyist)

PROTECTING YOUR STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

Connecticut owns over 255,000 acres of State Parks, State Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas that have been donated or acquired over the past century and are now held in public trust for the enjoyment of all.

We have all assumed that these special places will be protected forever. Not true.

That's right, iconic state lands like Hammonasset Beach State Park, Gillette Castle State Park, Peoples State Forest, Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, and many other state treasures are at risk of being sold or given away. The same is true of state-owned agricultural lands.

How could this be? Most State lands are not protected for two primary reasons:

1. There is nothing recorded in the deeds and town land records that either requires permanent protection, or clearly references the intended use or purpose of the land.
2. The General Assembly uses a mechanism every year known as "The Conveyance Act" whereby State lands are put forward to be traded, sold, or given away to a private corporation, town, or other entity for uses that may be completely at odds with preservation for public enjoyment. Sometimes this bill is so vaguely written that it is unclear which properties are in jeopardy, and the opportunities for public knowledge and comment are minimal.

We are recommending three initial steps to better protect your State lands:

1. The Commissioners of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Department of Agriculture (DoAg) must be authorized to place a conservation restriction (such as a conservation easement) on high conservation value lands they own. This is a logical step to implement a recent open space law (P. A. 12-152) which requires DEEP to define and develop strategies for permanent protection of lands with high conservation value;
2. The Conveyance Act process must be more transparent and provide an opportunity for public input and debate before state lands are traded, sold or given away; and
3. DEEP's policy on land exchanges (officially expressed in the 2008 Directive on Exchanges and Conveyances) is protective and reasonable; it should be codified into statute.

In addition, CFPA agrees with the recommendation by the CT Council on Environmental Quality for a State constitutional amendment that would protect State lands in a way that would be difficult for the General Assembly to circumvent. Your State lands should not be so vulnerable, but they are. Your involvement and support is essential to protect these lands for today, and for the future.

For more information about preserving State lands, visit www.ctwoodlands.org/advocacy

MANAGING YOUR STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

Managing Your State Parks: There are only 68 full-time field staff (51 Maintainers and 17 Park Supervisors) responsible for the year-round management of 107 State Parks. Fifteen of these field staff are currently eligible for retirement and as staff leave only 1 out of every 5 positions lost is being refilled. In stark contrast, the respected 2003 Clough Harbor & Associates infrastructure study recommended 204 full-time staff and 1,943 seasonal staff at a time when there were only 101 State Parks.

The decision to invest or not in the State Parks is extremely important both to Connecticut's economy overall and to the many communities that host State Parks. Your State Parks attract 8 million visitors every year, and according to a 2011 UConn economic study, the State Parks generate almost \$2 billion in annual revenues and support 9,000 jobs.

To adequately sustain these benefits is not a high cost item. Every year, the State Parks bring in ~\$6 million in revenues to the General Fund from parking, admissions, and camping fees. The expense of running a bare-bones State Parks System is currently ~\$12 million/year. So, the net annual cost to the State is only ~\$6 million. To provide staff in all State Parks, it would probably take another \$4 million. The Legislature should be eager to allocate an extra \$4 million to protect an annual return of \$2 billion and 9,000 jobs!

A report released on January 23, 2014 by the Program Review and Investigations Committee provides some good recommendations for new and improved funding mechanisms for the State Park system. Following are a few key recommendations from the PRI report:

- A portion of the annual fees collected from cabin rentals should be deposited into the Maintenance, Repair, and Improvement account for parks with such cabins and be used to help offset cabin maintenance costs.
- Between 25% and 50% of revenues generated in State Parks shall be appropriated biennially to the Parks Division ... The shared park-generated revenue shall not supplant the General Fund obligation to the Parks Division.
- DEEP should use a portion of its bonding authorization for car counters to validate and improve the data used to generate estimates of Park attendance and use.
- An additional 6 Park Supervisors and 6 Park Maintainers are necessary for management units to return to a more acceptable, ongoing staffing level. This would ensure 1 Park Supervisor for each of 23 management units and support basic maintenance functions.

Managing Your State Forests: Trees dominate the Connecticut landscape, covering almost 60 percent of its total acreage. Connecticut is the 5th most forested state in the nation, and has a higher percentage of its citizens living in close proximity to forests than any other state. As a forest-dwelling people, we recognize that trees provide numerous societal and environmental benefits. Would it not make sense to invest in better management and care of our forests? Sadly, this is not the case.

The DEEP Forestry division has 18 staff, 10 of whom are eligible for retirement within the next 5 years. There are only 6 staff dedicated to the management of 160,000 acres of State Forests (many more acres than in our State Parks), and there are only 4.5 staff to assist private forest landowners and municipalities that together own over 1.5 million acres of forests (approximately 85% of the total forests of Connecticut). The current level of Forestry staff support is clearly inadequate to maintain and provide expertise on the wealth of forests we have in Connecticut.

Funding to hire additional Forestry expertise could be generated through the better management of State Forests; however, under the current system most of these funds go to the General Fund. A 2008 Yale Study suggested that DEEP could sustainably harvest and generate revenues at 3 times the current rate (they are bringing in \$500,000/year through harvests). Sadly, DEEP only has the Staff capacity to have active Forest Management Plans on about half of the acreage of the State Forests. According to several studies, State Foresters return more value to the General Fund than their staff positions cost the State, but we are not investing in needed staff. Without that investment, we are allowing our State's greatest natural asset to remain a liability instead of a revenue-producing asset.

Environmental Law Enforcement: Unfortunately, there are only 34 Environmental Conservation Police (EnCons) along with 10 support staff at DEEP to protect the entire state. As a comparison, the police department in the city of Stamford has a roster of 315.

EnCons are responsible for enforcing commercial and recreational fishing, hunting, and wildlife laws, and are involved in wide range of other activities such as nuisance wildlife, search and rescue, boating enforcement, and the illegal use of recreational vehicles such as ATVs. Our EnCons are well-trained and heroic, but they are severely under-resourced and the resultant problems of increased trash in the parks, increased damage from all-terrain vehicles, and others such as illegal drug activities are going unaddressed.

For more information about the need for better management of your State lands, visit www.ctwoodlands.org/advocacy

CONNECTICUT FOREST & PARK ASSOCIATION CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR 2014

1. Manage Your State Parks and Forests
 - a. Support the recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee that provide a new funding mechanism for State Parks such as capturing revenues from cabin rentals to help offset cabin maintenance costs.
 - b. Appropriate \$5 million to DEEP for the purpose of re-filling and increasing positions for Park maintainers, Foresters, and EnCons.
2. Protect Your State Parks and Forests
 - a. Authorize Commissioners of DEEP and DoAg to place conservation restrictions (conservation easement or other mechanism) on high conservation value lands.
 - b. Reform Conveyance Act process and information to better recognize conservation/agricultural values of DEEP and DoAg properties.
 - c. Promote CT Constitutional Amendment as best way to protect public lands.
3. Make Technical Corrections to Public Act 490
 - a. Fix dates that currently frustrate assessors.
 - b. Require certified forester's report when P.A. 490 lands change ownership.
4. Require Municipal Planning and Zoning Commission to consult with Municipal Tree Warden to ensure that roadside tree planting plans utilize Right Tree/Right Place standards.
5. Provide a tax incentive for the removal of invasive plants or pests under the direction of a certified forest management plan, wildlife management plan, or farm plan.
6. Remove the 70% cap on federal/state matching grants for open space and agricultural land preservation as required in C.G.S. 7-131g(c).
7. Provide ongoing support for State land acquisition programs, notably the Community Investment Act (keep intact), Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program (\$10 million), Farmland Preservation bonding (\$10 million), and the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust (\$10 million).
8. Provide continued support for Federal land acquisition programs, notably the Land & Water Conservation Fund, Forest Legacy, and USDA Farm Bill Conservation Title programs.
9. Continue to support appropriations for National Park Service/National Scenic Trails program, particularly the New England Trail.
10. Provide continued support for the U.S. Department of Transportation/FHWA Recreational Trails Program.

For more information about CFPAs Conservation Agenda, visit www.ctwoodlands.org/advocacy



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