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May 19, 2021

Secretary Melissa McCaw  
Office of Policy and Management  
450 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Secretary McCaw,

I write to with a hope that you can address an issue that was identified in the CREATES Report – the pressing need to increase the hourly rates of seasonal workers who are essential to the operations and maintenance of State Parks.

It is my understanding that current market conditions are putting the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection at a significant disadvantage when it comes to hiring seasonal staff. Generally the department is competing for seasonal staff with municipal Park & Rec and Public Works departments. These agencies have significantly increased their pay scales over the last couple of years as the minimum wage has increased.

The current range for hourly rates for seasonal State Park maintainers (between \$12 - \$14/hr.) remains woefully low. At those rates, State Park managers are only able, in general, to attract the following kinds of candidates – those who could not get jobs at neighboring municipal departments that generally pay better; older candidates who may be retired from other careers and have supplemental income; or candidates who have enough personal or family wealth so they can afford to work at below-market rates.

The CREATES Report emphasized the importance of this issue: “If DEEP cannot adjust hourly pay in order to attract qualified staff, it may have to close parks or services at a time when attendance is increasing. The inability to adjust pay for experienced seasonal workers is an example of how inflexibility in the State’s workforce management can impact the services it provides to residents.”

Of course, closing State Parks or reducing services that are attracting visitors at record high levels would be unacceptable to the public, especially when adequate funds are available through the Passport to the Parks to support a reasonable increase in hourly rates for seasonal workers.

These low hourly rates also result in inefficiencies for Park Managers whose ranks are already stretched thin. Park Managers need to spend additional time replacing seasonal workers who leave for other jobs that are better paying, and need to spend more time training or re-training seasonal workers who have lesser skills than those who accept jobs outside of DEEP. The low hourly rates also make DEEP less able to recruit and retain people of low-to-modest incomes who literally cannot afford to work at the hourly rates that are currently offered.

Resolving this issue this year is absolutely essential, as additional strains on State Park Managers are expected when almost 45% of DEEP’s Environmental Protection employees become eligible for retirement before July 1, 2022.

We ask you and Governor Lamont to urgently heed the recommendations in your CREATES Report, and address this critical issue by raising hourly rates before the potential for a successful 2021 field season is eroded any further.

If you have any questions, I can be reached via [chammerling@ctwoodlands.org](mailto:chammerling@ctwoodlands.org) or 860-346-TREE (8733).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Hammerling". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Eric Hammerling  
Executive Director

CC:

Senator Cathy Osten

Representative Toni Walker

Senator Craig Miner

Representative Mike France

CT DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes

CT DEEP Chief of Staff Andrew Hoskins