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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
H.B. 7157: AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR BIKEWAY PATHS, RECREATIONAL TRAILS AND GREENWAYS.	Support, but request increased bonding amount

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For nearly 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

CFPA strongly supports H.B. 7157: An Act Concerning Funding for Bikeway Paths, Recreational Trails and Greenways. Since 2016, the CT Recreational Trails & Greenways Program has put \$10 million into 60 municipal and nonprofit grants and multiple State Park and Forest projects in more than half of all communities statewide.

Last October, DEEP committed the last \$3.17 million in bonding authorization by supporting 19 high priority projects statewide. However, more than \$12 million in funding requests had been received and more than \$4 million in highly-ranked project proposals could not be funded. The need for additional funding is clear.

Recreational trails are one of the best ways that bond funds can be invested. Recreational trails for hiking, running, biking, equestrian, and other uses attract and sustain families and businesses, create healthy communities, and foster a high quality of life. Trails are also a critical part of Connecticut's outdoor recreation economy that generates \$6.9 billion in consumer spending, \$2.2 billion in wages and salaries in the private sector, \$502 million in state and local tax revenues, and supports 71,000 Connecticut jobs every year. Much of this outdoor recreation economy is associated with using trails that literally connect people to the land, to other trails, other communities, etc.

This bonding program is quite different from the funds spent by the CT DOT which are focused on completion of the East Coast Greenway through CT; a paved multi-use trail system.. Crucially, HB 7157 funds can go where federal dollars cannot – such as planning, design, and smaller but critical connections to various state trail networks. Notably, these funds have been leveraged with an additional ~40% in matching private investments.

It's clear that the public wants more, better-maintained trails. Connecticut's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for 2017-2022 incorporated statewide public opinion surveys that ranked recreational trails at the very top of community assets and needs for the future.

To ensure Connecticut will remain a trails leader, this important and economically significant investment in Connecticut's quality of life must be renewed this year. We recommend a bond authorization of \$3 million/year for both FY 2020 and FY 2021 rather than the total of \$2 million which this bill authorizes. This level of funding will provide the predictability of stable funding that allows the state, municipalities, and nonprofits to make longer-term investments that result in the best trails infrastructure for Connecticut.

We suggest a simple language change to provide funding at the \$3 million level for the next two years:

AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR BIKEWAY PATHS, RECREATIONAL TRAILS AND GREENWAYS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Section 23-103 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2019):

(a) For the purposes described in subsection (b) of this section, the State Bond Commission shall have the power, from time to time to authorize the issuance of bonds of the state in one or more series and in principal amounts not exceeding in the aggregate ~~ten~~ ~~twelve~~ sixteen million dollars.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony, and I am glad to respond to any questions you may have.