



Connecting people to the land since 1895

16 Meriden Road
Rockfall
Connecticut 06481-2961
Tele: 860-346-TREE
www.ctwoodlands.org

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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised S.B. 924: AAC THE STAFFING AND RESOURCES OF THE DEEP.	Support
Raised H.B. 6498: AAC THE SITING OF CERTAIN SOLAR FACILITIES ON FARMLANDS AND CORE FORESTS.	Support

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

I am testifying today to express CFPA's support for Raised SB 924 and HB 6498.

SB 924 requires DEEP to produce the following reports by January 15, 2022:

1. An accounting of positions (full-time or temporary) paid for by the Passport to the Parks; and
2. An assessment of the foreseeable impacts that retirements during 2022 will have on DEEP including a look back to previous reductions in force, and a look forward to challenges ahead that require staff.

There are several reasons why we support this bill in its current form:

- 2022 is right around the corner, the retirement cliff is very real (DEEP is projected to lose ~26% of its staff to retirement in the next couple of years), and losses in staff and replacements make a large impact on programs like operating State Parks which cannot be done "remotely" from home. This is an important discussion to be having now with urgency whether or not this bill passes.
- As advocates of the Passport to the Parks from the very beginning, we have seen the program succeed in many ways, but it has still struggled with promoting its successes consistently. We have and continue to strongly support the Passport and its many benefits and appreciate the Committee's strong support for keeping the Passport to the Parks fund intact with no exemptions and no diversions.
- We have always believed that the Passport to the Parks is a GREAT deal for the public and for State Parks; however, to date, DEEP hasn't done a good enough job publicizing what the Passport funds are accomplishing or how individuals across Connecticut are supporting and benefitting from the Passport's success. We believe better communications from DEEP about the Passport (and perhaps in the DMV as well) would help more people to understand and value its importance.
- We have been encouraging DEEP to prepare an "Annual Report" on the Passport to the Parks to show the importance of this critical program to operating and maintaining State Parks for the public. This is extra important as the public continues to use State Parks and outdoor resources at record high levels.
- Although we did not ask for this bill to be raised and would expect that DEEP would address the issues in SB 924 without legislation, we believe the bill does raise the critically important issue of reconciling the many things we ask DEEP to do, and the scarce resources actually available to DEEP to get the job done.

HB 6498 would enable DEEP and the Department of Agriculture (DoAG) to provide additional scrutiny on projects of 1 MW or greater that would “materially affect” (undefined) important farmland soils or core forest. This would change the current statute which limits DEEP and DoAG scrutiny on projects of less than 2 MW or on projects of 65+ MW which go directly to the Siting Council for consideration. This bill also requires posting of a “decommissioning bond” by project applicants to ensure installations that have run their course can be decommissioned and rehabilitated. This bill also requires DEEP and DoAG to put application information online.

We support 6498 in its current form for the following reasons:

- We believe that Connecticut needs more solar power, but also that it should not come at the expense of losing or converting core forest (as the best natural sponge that forests represent) and important farmlands. Increasing the scrutiny by DEEP and DoAg below its current 2 MW limit will help address the proliferation of projects at 1.99 MW that have been incentivized under the current statute.
- We support efforts to ensure that solar development does not have a material effect on core forest or farmland (though it would be helpful to see a firmer definition of what “materially affect” actually means). Perhaps the language and definition of “substantial adverse environmental effect” could be extended throughout this bill.
- DEEP recognizes the conflict between forests and farmland soils and their immense value for sequestering and storing carbon and other greenhouse gases. In its recent [January Phase I GC3 report](#), DEEP noted “As Connecticut deploys large-scale solar projects, it is important that this development does not supersede other climate change mitigation strategies, including the carbon sequestration and storage potential of natural and working lands.” We strongly support this recommendation in the GC3 report.
- According to some, there may not be enough land in the northeastern U.S. to accommodate both our region’s interest in more solar and in protecting farmland and open space. This doesn’t mean that Connecticut should just accept the loss of forests and farmland. First, we should be making it as easy as possible to add solar in already developed areas such as brownfields, roofs, parking lots, and other existing hardened areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on these bills, and I would be glad to respond to any questions you have.