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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised HB 6482: AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDING FOR BIKEWAYS, GREENWAYS AND RECREATIONAL TRAILS.	Support

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 128 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

I want to thank the Committee for raising HB 6482 which would increase the bond authorization for the Recreational Trails & Greenways Grants by \$3 million. Although this bill only includes the equivalent of one year of bond authorization, the amount recommended in this bill is consistent with the bonding level of \$3 million/year for recreational trails that was included in both years of the FY 2022 – 2023 Biennial Budget.

We ask that the Committee approve the bill and consider adding “per annum” after \$3 million. The base bonding authorization for the Recreational Trails & Greenways program should be at least \$3 million every year.

People want trails and are using trails more than ever

Statewide public opinion survey responses, conducted as part of Connecticut’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for 2017-2022, have ranked recreational trails at the very top of community assets and needs for the future. This is consistent with the findings in previous SCORP reviews of public interest.

According to the UConn CT Trails Census, in 2020, trail use increased by an estimated 38% overall when compared to 2019. However, more than half of the trails included in the Census recorded increased visitation of 68% or greater. Similarly, attendance at State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas has been booming, and we expect this high outdoor recreation involvement to continue.

Trails bring economic activity and other benefits to communities

In 2021, outdoor recreation in Connecticut contributed \$3.9 billion to our GDP and supported over 44,000 Connecticut jobs ([U.S Dept of Commerce: ORSA](#)). Much of this outdoor recreation was associated with using trails, and its economic impact is growing. Economic activity from bicycling grew by almost 40% between 2019 – 2021, and during this same period, economic activity from hiking, camping, and climbing grew by over 50%.

According to the Connecticut Trail Census at UConn, recreational trails provide many benefits to communities (following are links to helpful summaries of trail benefits prepared by the CT Trail Census):

- [Trails promote health](#)
- [Trails support economies](#)
- [Trails build communities](#)
- [Trails enhance resiliency](#)

Trails are important to attract and retain people in Connecticut communities

It's not just trail advocates who believe trails are essential to attract and retain people in communities. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) and National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) both published recent reports that demonstrate trails are significant community assets of great interest to homebuyers.

- The NAR notes “The good news is that recent studies have confirmed living near trails and greenways will likely raise your property value an average of 3-5% and sometimes even as high as 15%. There is also not correlation that trails increase crime in their surrounding areas.” ([link to full story](#))
- The NAHB states “The top 5 most wanted community features are walking/jogging trails, a typically suburban neighborhood, a park area, being near retail space, and a walkable community. Most buyers of every generation want these features, [and there's] evidence that regardless of age, buyers will respond positively to their presence in a community.” ([link to full story](#))

There is significant ongoing need for trails funding

In Fall, 2021, DEEP issued a request for recreational trails proposals with only \$3 million available and received an unprecedented 65 applications requesting over \$22 million. The \$3 million was granted to twenty worthy projects, but another \$7 million in highly ranked proposals were unable to be funded.

Last year, the remaining bond authorization of \$9 million was approved by the Bond Commission, and DEEP's current request for proposals expects to fully commit all of its remaining funds to projects statewide. We expect the ongoing need for investments in Connecticut's outdoor recreation infrastructure to continue, and your support of additional bond authorization is critical to help meet the public demand for outdoor recreation on trails.

Trails are an important investment for the future

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 should be an ongoing priority for state-level investment.

Thank you for your support, and I'd be glad to respond to any questions you may have.