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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised H.B. 6483: AN ACT CONCERNING THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION GRANT PROGRAM.	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 in support of **HB 6483**, which would increase the bond authorization for the Open Space and Watershed Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) administered by DEEP by \$10 million.

In 1997, the CT General Assembly adopted the statutory goal that “Twenty-one percent of the State’s land shall be held as open space land” ([C.G.S. Section 23-8b](#)), and the deadline for meeting that goal was set for 2023 in the state’s Green Plan. As part of that 21% acquisition goal, ten percent of Connecticut would be held as public lands such as State Parks and Forests, and eleven percent would be held as open space stewarded by land trusts, municipalities, and water companies. The General Assembly also established the state’s open space grants program as the major investor of state resources to conserve state and non-state lands, and the Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board, where I am serving as Co-Chair, to provide oversight.

So far, we have fallen short of the 21% goal because funding for acquiring open space has not kept pace. The 21% goal is for DEEP and its partners (land trusts, water companies, and municipalities) to protect 673,210 acres of public open space together. However, at the end of 2021, DEEP and its partners together had protected a combined 513,831 acres as public open space, or **76.33%** of the goal. At the end of 2020, for comparison, DEEP and its partners together had protected 511,909 acres as public space, or 76.04% of the goal.

If we continue at the current pace of adding only 0.29% of the goal each year (~1,900 acres/year), it will take more than 80 years for Connecticut to reach its statutory 21% goal.

If we wish to reach Connecticut’s 21% open space goal in our lifetimes, we should double or triple the funding available to do the job. Tripling the bond authorization to \$30 million per year would be consistent with recommendations in reports from the Governor’s Council on Climate Change. This would allow us to meet the statutory goal in approximately 20 years, compared to more than 80 years at our current pace.

We ask that the Committee approve the bill with a technical correction at the end of line 5 to add “per annum” after \$10 million. The base bonding authorization for the OSWA program should be budgeted to be at least \$10 million every year.

Thank you for raising this important bill. I’d be glad to respond to any questions you may have.