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

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Raised SB 1149: AN ACT ELIMINATING ALL RESTRICTIONS FOR SUNDAY HUNTING ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROPERTY.	Comments

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.

We appreciate that this is not an easy issue, and the Committee must weigh the potential gains or losses that would result if Sunday hunting restrictions were removed on both public and private lands.

As an organization, CFPA advocates for healthy forests, encourages more people to recreate outdoors safely, and respects the right of private landowners (such as those hosting trails) to determine what uses are compatible with the enjoyment of their property. We also support hunting done responsibly, and in fact, we permit hunting on several forested properties that CFPA owns and manages. We do this to be consistent with the forest management plans developed for these properties over time.

There is significant scientific evidence that excessive deer browse directly impacts the ability of young forests to regenerate. Overbrowsing can also alter forest composition and structure, eliminate or reduce other wildlife species through direct or indirect competition, and even drive some local plant species to extinction. White-tailed deer are widespread in Connecticut and can be a threat to forest regeneration, habitat value, and resilience.

At the same time, we have heard from many volunteer trail maintainers and users over time that they are concerned about their safety when working or walking in the woods during hunting season, even if they are wearing orange and taking other commonsense precautions. A non-hunter can certainly have their experience on the trails disrupted if they hear a firearm discharge unexpectedly. Today, these trail users are able to go for a walk in the woods on a Sunday without the anxiety that can result from hearing gunfire. The status quo allows for many different recreational users to coexist during the fall hunting season.

CFPA also has longstanding partnerships with many private landowners who host Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails (as well as municipal, state, water company, land trust, and corporate landowners). If these landowners wanted to permit hunting on Sunday on their properties, we are supportive when they allow bowhunting for deer under certain circumstances including the current prohibition of hunting within forty yards of a blazed trail.

There appears to be conflicting scientific evidence over whether allowing hunting on Sunday would make a significant difference in reducing deer herds. If the potential gain from allowing Sunday hunting is small, then perhaps the status quo should continue, because the perceived loss of safe access to the outdoors by some hikers can be large (based upon anecdotal evidence).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this bill, and hope you will make a decision that is both science-based and fairly balances the interests of all outdoor users.