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**Testimony of Andy Bicking, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association
April 9, 2024**

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
Proposed Conveyance of State Lands (HB 5520, HB 5522 & SB 460) 3 Acts Concerning the Conveyance of 3 separate parcels of State Land	Opposed

Introduction & General Comments

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 129 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State park and trail recreation, sustainable forestry, climate change and land conservation issues.

CFPA has been a leading advocate for transparency in the public lands conveyance process. As a relative newcomer to Connecticut, I have been deeply moved by the public’s strong interest in protecting their State Parks, Forests, trails, waterways and farmlands. We thank you for bringing multiple bills forward individually, and for holding a public hearing as required in the state constitution.

Multiple conveyance bills have been introduced for your consideration. As a general matter, CFPA encourages you to apply the following rubric when evaluating their merits:

1. Is there a significant public benefit?
2. Did the entity proposing the conveyance meet with the State agency and receive affirmative support?
3. Will the State be made financially whole if a conveyance is approved?
4. Is the future use of the property clearly stated?
5. Will the property revert to the state if the future use of the property isn’t followed?
6. Is the State Properties Review Board involved as a final step?
7. Will there be no risk of negative impact on contiguous forest, State Parks, trails, water bodies or open space?

CFPA maintains today, as we have in the past, that conveyance proposals must meet the above criteria to be further considered. We believe that public interest in the environment, and consideration of the benefits received from land its natural state, must be primary considerations. Lands that are contiguous to other protected land, or cherished for their ecological, recreational, recreational or aesthetic values, have an innate worth and should be seriously considered to maintain as open space.

Today, we will focus our testimony on two conveyance bills that affect property owned by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), HB 5522, and HB 5520, and one conveyance bill that affects property owned by the Department of Corrections (DOC), SB 460.

HB 5522 - AN ACT CONVEYING A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE TOWN OF WOODSTOCK.

Opposed.

This proposal would convey 19.3 acres of State Forest from DEEP to YMCA of Metropolitan Hartford, Inc. to benefit YMCA Camp Woodstock for "seasonal recreation and camp related activities." 95% of the land is forested. The remaining 5% is water, in its natural state.

This land has inherent value as a natural and protected landscape. It is also contiguous with other forested land and parcels that border on Black Pond. It contains wetlands, and a portion of the land is included in the State's Natural Diversity Database.

The proposed uses of the property are vague. "Seasonal recreation and camp related activities" could include any number of activities, including permanent conversion of forest land to other uses that would forever damage the natural habitat and aesthetic value of the site. The language used in the proposal does not even require that the land in its entirety be used for recreational uses.

It is important to note that this proposal does not contemplate consistency with Goal 3 of the 2024-2029 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which the State, CFPA, and their many partners helped to develop. The State's goal is to:

"Address the threats of climate change on outdoor recreation and the conservation of natural, historic and cultural resources by working together with outdoor recreation participants to implement strategies for habitat preservation, conservation, decarbonization, and climate change mitigation, adaptation resilience and education."

Criteria	Evaluation/Notes
Is there a significant public benefit?	No.
Did the entity proposing the conveyance meet with the State agency and receive affirmative support?	Unknown. We encourage the General Assembly to inquire with DEEP regarding this, and their opinion on the matter.
Will the State be made financially whole if a conveyance is approved?	No. The applicant proposes to cover only administrative costs, whereas Fair Market Value is approximately \$277,996.53.
Is the future use of the property clearly stated?	No.
Will the property revert to the state if the future use of the property isn't followed?	Yes.

Is the State Properties Review Board involved as a final step?	Required.
Will there be no risk of negative impact on contiguous forest, State Parks, trails, water bodies or open space?	No. The land is contiguous to other forested parcels.

HB 5520 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONVEYANCE OF A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE TOWN OF BERLIN. **Opposed.**

This proposal would convey approximately 2.7 acres of a 47.77 acre parcel of the Lamentation Mountain State Park Scenic Reserve from DEEP to Meriden Homestead II LLC, a private entity, for continued existing use, which includes access driveways and accessory structures.

The survey map accompanying this proposal strongly suggests that the purpose of this conveyance is to transfer a portion of that has been encroached upon by Meriden Homestead.

If approved, it could risk establishing a precedent that encroachments on public land are a justification for conveyance of the public land for private benefit.

Criteria	Evaluation/Notes
Is there a significant public benefit?	No.
Did the entity proposing the conveyance meet with the State agency and receive affirmative support?	Unknown.
Will the State be made financially whole if a conveyance is approved?	Yes.
Is the future use of the property clearly stated?	Yes.
Will the property revert to the state if the future use of the property isn't followed?	No.
Is the State Properties Review Board involved as a final step?	Required.
Will there be no risk of negative impact on contiguous forest, State Parks, trails, water bodies or open space?	No. It is a part of a protected forest landscape.

SB 460 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONVEYANCE OF A PARCEL OF STATE LAND IN THE TOWN OF ENFIELD. **Opposed.**

This proposal would convey approximately 14.5 acres of a 283.33 acre parcel of an existing wetland and open space complex from the Department of Corrections to the Town of Enfield for soccer fields, a parking lot with surface area and capacity to hold 341 automobiles, or open space purposes.

This land has inherent value as a natural landscape. It contains 3.3 acres of natural meadow and 11.2 acres of wetlands and meadow within wetlands. With contiguous parcels, it is part of an existing wetland system and the Freshwater Brook watershed. The State’s Natural Diversity Database also identifies this land as an area of importance, and the Town of Enfield is home to several endangered, threatened, special concern species, and significant natural communities.

While CFPA respects the interest of the community to promote outdoor recreation, we are concerned that the proposed development could have negative impacts on this important natural resource. We would like to see additional analysis take place before this proposed conveyance is considered further, and a demonstration that the proposal will not negatively affect the broader wetland complex.

Criteria	Evaluation/Notes
Is there a significant public benefit?	Unclear.
Did the entity proposing the conveyance meet with the State agency and receive affirmative support?	Yes. DOC was involved, however it is not clear if DEEP was consulted.
Will the State be made financially whole if a conveyance is approved?	No. CFPA notes that wetlands and adjacent open space lands have an intrinsic value and provide well documented public benefits. The application proposes no compensation to the public or mitigation for the loss of ecological function.
Is the future use of the property clearly stated?	Yes.
Will the property revert to the state if the future use of the property isn’t followed?	Yes.
Is the State Properties Review Board involved as a final step?	Required.
Will there be no risk of negative impact on contiguous forest, State Parks, trails, water bodies or open space?	No. The land is part of a broader wetland complex.