

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Conservation Agenda 2017

Introduction

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) advocates for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and works to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut. Among CLCC's constituents are land trusts (there are 137+ in Connecticut), municipal conservation commissions, garden clubs, and local and statewide conservation advocacy groups – each managed, supported, and governed by concerned residents. CLCC is a primary resource and voice for land conservation issues statewide.

CLCC believes that strong and sustainable land conservation is essential to a healthy environment and strong economy. Land conservation plays a crucial role in protecting and enhancing water quality, ensuring clean air, creating wildlife habitats, offsetting impacts of climate change, enabling access to locally grown foods and products, and providing opportunities for the public to enjoy the natural, scenic, cultural, historic and esthetic qualities of the environment for generations to come.

Land is a finite resource. Once gone, it's gone forever; and it is the responsibility and moral obligation of our current generation to ensure that future generations receive the same benefits derived from land conservation that we enjoy today.

CLCC works with, and encourages our constituents and partners to work with, members of the legislature on policy issues impacting land conservation in Connecticut. To that end, CLCC intends to pursue the following legislative and policy priorities in the 2017 Session of the Connecticut General Assembly.

2017 Legislative and Policy Priorities

Support Funding and Staff for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Open Space and other Programs

In the fiscal year 2016, the general fund portion of the DEEP budget was cut by approximately 5%. In the current fiscal year, the agency's budget was cut by an additional 14%, with another 10% reduction proposed for next fiscal year. These cumulative annual cuts to DEEP's budget have severely undermined the agency's ability to implement core programs and undertake key functions, with the potential to cause irreversible damage to the state's quality of clean air, water, wildlife, and recreational resources. Budget cuts in previous years have significantly reduced staffing for DEEP's environmental and conservation programs including a 20% reduction in staff over the last 10 years.

CLCC priorities with respect to funding for DEEP's programming for 2017 include:

- Ensure consistent and increased funding for state land conservation programs including Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Program, Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program and Farmland Preservation Program.
- Protect the Community Investment Act, which generates funding for state programs for open space, farmland/dairy production, historic preservation and affordable housing. Enhance public

awareness of the importance of the fund and ensure that the integrity and level of funding are protected, including restoration of full funding for the next fiscal year.

- Protect funding and capacity for DEEP to support acquisition, management (including state parks and forests) and inventorying of public lands and for other critical land and natural resource protection programs including, but not limited to, the Council on Environmental Quality, UConn Extension, CT Agricultural Station, and Invasive Plants Council.
- Protect DEEP's overall budget from further cuts to ensure preservation of the agency's core programs and key environmental protection functions.
- Pursue revenue-generating ideas and cost-avoiding proposals to mitigate the damage caused by cumulative reductions in general fund allocations to the agency.

Support Project Green Space Enabling Legislation

Pursue legislation enabling municipalities to collect up to 1% of real estate conveyance fee on buyers to support local open space and farmland acquisition as well as park, forest and trail management projects.

Pursue a Constitutional Amendment to Better Protect Public Lands

Ensure the second passage of a Constitutional Amendment bill that protects public lands from being conveyed without appropriate public process and compensation.

Protection of Class I & II Watershed Lands

Support efforts to ensure that existing laws that protect Class I and II Watershed Lands are not weakened.

Federal Level

Support appropriations for critical federal conservation programs, including: Land & Water Conservation Fund, USDA Conservation Title Programs, USDA Forest Service Programs (*including Forest Legacy Program*) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Programs (*including State Wildlife Grants Program*).

Connecticut Land Conservation Council **Steering Committee and Staff**

Catherine Rawson, Chair (*Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust*); Chuck Toal, Vice-Chair (*Colchester Land Trust*); David Bingham (*Salem Land Trust*); Sandy Breslin (*Bethany Inland Wetlands Commission*); David Brown (*Middlesex Land Trust*); Margot Burns (*Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments*); Kevin Case (*Land Trust Alliance*); Eric Hammerling (*Connecticut Forest & Park Association*); Stewart Hudson (*Audubon Connecticut*); Michael Hveem (*Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust*); Drew Iacovazzi (West Hartford); Honor Lawlor (*Trust for Public Land*); Connie Manes (*Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative*); Elisabeth Moore (*Connecticut Farmland Trust*); Shirley Nichols (*Darien Land Trust*); David Sutherland (*The Nature Conservancy*); Humphrey Tyler (*Connecticut River Watershed Council*)

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