

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 1061

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 1062

To the Environment Committee

Submitted by: Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director

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Co-Chairs Kennedy, Albis, and Members of the Environment Committee:

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in support of **Raised Bill 1061, An Act Concerning the Fiscal Sustainability of State Parks** and **Raised Bill 1062, An Act Providing Continued Funding for the DEEP's Recreational Trails Program**. Thank you for raising these bills in support of our State Parks and other land used for conservation and recreational purposes.

CLCC works with land trusts (now numbering over 137), other conservation and advocacy organizations, government entities and landowners to increase the pace, quality, scale and permanency of land conservation in Connecticut while assuring the perpetual, high quality stewardship of conserved lands in the state.

CLCC is committed to supporting the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) natural resources programs to ensure the proper stewardship, management and inventorying of state conservation lands. We are therefore extremely concerned that the proposed \$2 million cut to the already tight budget for State Parks (\$11.5 million for 107 State Parks) would render the State Parks system unsustainable.

In addition to providing the public with opportunities to recreate and enjoy our state's natural resources, Connecticut State Parks are economic drivers. They are investments worth protecting -- attracting 8 million annual visitors and generating over \$1 billion and 9,000 jobs for the state each year. For every \$1 spent on the State Parks, over \$38 is returned to Connecticut.

CLCC supports Raised Bill 1061 which provides creative mechanisms, including a dedicated State Parks Sustainability account, to enable funds to be donated and dedicated for the purpose of supporting our State Parks. To ensure the exclusivity of the use of the funds for that purpose, CLCC concurs with the recommendations set forth in the testimony of Eric Hammerling, on behalf of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA).

We are sensitive to the fact that certain sections of the Bill raise some concerns for the concessionaires; we respectfully urge the Committee to continue to explore options for a system of revenue sharing to help offset the cuts to the budget for State Parks.

CLCC also supports Raised Bill 1062 which would maintain support and funding for DEEP's Recreational Trails Program (RTP) – an assistance program of the Federal



Highway Administration administered by DEEP. RTP funding may be used for the: construction of new trails; maintenance and restoration of existing trails; remediation of trails for accessibility by persons with disabilities; purchase/lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment; acquisition of land or easements for trails and trail corridors; and operation of relevant outdoor educational programs.

Funding from the RTP program has provided CLCC's member land trusts and municipalities with critical support for these types of projects around the state. The funding leverages match dollars from public and private sources. The RTP is a program that truly makes a difference.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council Steering Committee and the members of Connecticut's broad-based conservation community, I thank you for this opportunity to submit these comments and would welcome the opportunity to answer any questions.