

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony regarding House Bill No. 7278  
Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Esq., Executive Director  
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Chairman Fox, Co-Chairs McLachlan and Winfield, Vice-Chairs Frantz, Slossberg, and Winkler, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in opposition to **Sections 3,9, and 10 of House Bill No. 7278 , AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONVEYANCE OF CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND** (the Conveyance Act). As the State's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 137 land trusts, 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.

**General Concerns:** The State holds over 250,000 acres of State Parks, Forests, Wildlife Management Areas and other open spaces valuable for conservation, recreation and agricultural purposes. Most of these lands are largely unprotected, leaving them vulnerable to conversion to non-conservation purposes, raising the following concerns:

- **Public Trust** -- There is an expectation that public lands intended to be protected and preserved to safeguard the quality of our state's water resources and for conservation and recreational purposes, will be protected as such *in perpetuity* to the greatest extent possible.
- **Precedent** -- Conveying public lands, particularly for the benefit of private individuals and/or for economic purposes, sets a troubling precedent for further erosion of the public trust in the state to protect such lands.
- **Process** -- The current conveyance process: (i) lacks a comprehensive system of review; (ii) provides limited, if any, opportunity for public comment; and (iii) is structured so that all proposed conveyances – good and bad – are bundled in one bill and voted on together.
- **Fiscal responsibility** -- With the state not even close to being on track to meeting its land conservation goals, and at a time of tremendous fiscal uncertainty, we strongly question the practice of allowing public lands to be conveyed for little or no consideration.

**Specific Concerns:** This year, we are opposed to three sections of the Conveyance Act:

- **Section 3** proposes a transfer, for no cost, of 8.46 acres of Shade Swamp Sanctuary Wildlife Management Area owned by DEEP to the town of Farmington for “municipal purposes and for use by a nonprofit entity for cemetery purposes.” In addition to concerns over the lack of consideration, there is a question of whether the transfer would violate the terms of a grant from the White Memorial Foundation used to acquire the property.
- **Section 9** proposes a transfer, for \$10,000, of “11.65 acres” (we understand that this is a drafting error), from the Babcock Wildlife Management Area in Colchester to private individuals. The fact that the transfer is for the benefit of private individuals is in and of itself cause for concern, necessitating a heightened level of scrutiny over all aspects of the proposal.
- **Section 10** proposes a transfer, for no cost, of 10 acres of DEEP land to the town of Groton for unspecified “economic development purposes”. The only identifying information for the land is that it contains the former Mystic Oral School. No other details are provided.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments and respectfully request that the foregoing sections of HB 7278 be removed. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

