

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

February 16, 2024

Sent via email: deep.partnershipsinparks@ct.gov

Re: Parks RFI Comment

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC), I am pleased to submit comments in response to the Notice of Request for Information, Opportunity for Public Comment, and Public Meeting dated January 11 regarding the Partnerships in Parks Initiative.

CLCC is the statewide umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including ~120 land trusts. Our mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut, envisioning a future where every community is supported and sustained by a diverse mix of conserved land, with land conservation embraced as an essential community value.

In line with our organizational mission and vision, we offer the following comments regarding the Partnerships in Parks Initiative (“the Initiative”):

CLCC recognizes the importance of ensuring equitable access to nature for all Connecticut residents and sees potential benefits in public-private partnerships to achieve that goal. To that end, we are intrigued by the Initiative and interested in exploring partnership ideas for passive recreation with land trusts, other non-profit organizations, and DEEP.

By its mission, CLCC is a staunch advocate for conserving Connecticut's natural environment, including its State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas (“Public Lands”). The State acquired many of these Public Lands subject to specific restrictions required by the grantor and/or public funds designated for their conservation, such as through the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust program.

In all cases, the citizens of Connecticut are considered the owners of Public Lands, and the government’s responsibility is to protect and maintain these resources for the benefit of the public. This “Public Trust Doctrine” was the underpinning of the Constitutional amendment overwhelmingly voted by the public in November 2021 to ensure that the Public Lands conveyance process is as open and transparent as possible.

We emphasize the importance of a thorough and transparent review process for any changes or expansions of use proposed for Public Lands through the Initiative to ensure that activities align



with the intended use of these Public Lands and are compatible with the natural environment. Public scrutiny is especially significant for activities proposed on Public Lands designed to generate private revenue. This process should include ample notice and opportunities for public comment to ensure community voices are heard and valued, like the CEPA review process for large projects (including notice in the Monitor, scoping process, and EIE).

CLCC looks forward to collaborating with DEEP to ensure the public is fully informed and engaged throughout the Partnerships in Parks Initiative and that this new public-private partnership achieves its admirable goals while safeguarding the natural heritage of our state for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Amy Blaymore Paterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Amy" being the most prominent.

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director