

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5004
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
March 8, 2024

Co-Chairs Lopes and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Hochadel and Palm, Ranking Members Harding and Callahan, and members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is the state's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its ~120 land trusts. CLCC is a 501(c)(3) organization operating statewide. Our mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony in strong support of **House Bill No. 5004, An Act Concerning the Implementation of Certain Climate Change Measures.**

I represented CLCC and the land conservation community as a member of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Forests Sub-Group and Resilient Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Working Group, and the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT Future) Working Group. I chair the state Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board, which provides oversight and input into the state's land conservation programs, policies, and planning.

In all capacities, CLCC's goal is to safeguard our natural and working lands, prioritize the vital role of nature-based solutions in mitigating the escalating effects of the interrelated crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, and ensure that everyone everywhere has access to the benefits of nature.

Through this lens, CLCC offers the following testimony concerning HB 5004.

We strongly support HB 5004, which proposes a comprehensive approach to addressing climate change, including urgent action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency, enhancing climate resilience, creating workforce development, encouraging sustainable businesses and workforce development, and integrating nature-based solutions across Connecticut. Many sections in HB 5004 advance recommendations in the [GC3 Phase I Report](#) and others proposed by the [GC3 Working Groups](#).

CLCC is especially supportive of Section 22 of the bill, which requires the development of strategies utilizing nature-based climate solutions.

Forestlands and trees, wetlands, healthy organic soils, riparian buffers, and other natural ecosystems are among our most potent defenses against the impacts of climate change. The myriad benefits of these nature-based solutions to public health, the economy, and the environment include reducing the risks and effects of flooding, filtering pollutants from the air, and absorbing and storing carbon. These same ecosystems are also critical to protecting biodiversity.



The climate crisis and biodiversity loss are integrally connected. The changing climate negatively impacts habitats and ecosystems, while the loss of biodiversity (and associated reduction in carbon storage capacity) contributes to and intensifies the effects of climate change. We can't address one crisis without addressing the other.

The data on nature-based climate solutions is compelling: Experts have estimated that nature-based solutions can contribute 20-37% to keeping temperature increases below 2°C.¹ For forests and trees, in Connecticut, these nature-based solutions absorb around 7% (3 million tons) of the 47 million metric tons of carbon pollution released into the atmosphere annually.²

Section 22 recognizes ample room for improvement and optimism by tapping into the power of nature. Following recommended strategies identified in numerous studies and reports, including those produced by the [GC3 Forests Sub-Group](#) and [PRFCT Future Working Group](#), Connecticut forests are poised to absorb even more carbon pollution. These pathways include avoided deforestation, mature forests, improved forest management, sustainable timber production, and increased tree cover.³ Section 22 provides a necessary vehicle for investigating and implementing these and many other strategies to advance nature-based solutions that support climate mitigation and adaptation.

We strongly support this bill and, along with our colleagues at Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts, and Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, have suggested a few modifications to the language in Section 22 that we believe would strengthen and improve it for implementation in the long-term (these proposed changes are marked-up at the end of my testimony).

In particular, in addition to minor but important clarifications, we suggest that Section (a) be amended to require the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to chair a standing Commission on Nature-Based Solutions that includes the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health, and the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management (or their respective designees) as members.

Creating a standing commission overseen by the Commissioner of DEEP with representation from multiple agencies will ensure an ongoing, coordinated, and holistic approach to advancing nature-based solutions and addressing the multifaceted impacts of climate change on our environment, economy, and public health.

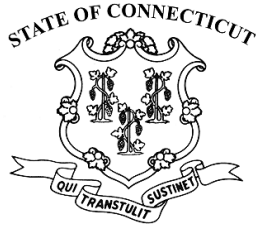
We urge the Committee to approve HB 5004, a major step toward ensuring a stronger, healthier, and more resilient Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments and for all you do. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ [Natural climate solutions. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) (Griscom, et al. 2017)

² [New England's Climate Imperative: Our Forests as a Natural Climate Solution](#) (Highstead 2022)

³ Id.



General Assembly

February Session, 2024

Raised Bill No. 5004

LCO No. 2340

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Referred to Committee on ENVIRONMENT

Introduced by:
(ENV)

AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CERTAIN CLIMATE CHANGE MEASURES.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Sec. 22. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) [(a) The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall prepare a report that outlines a proposed plan and program for advancing nature-based solutions in the state that support climate mitigation and adaptation. Such report shall include, but not be limited to, an analysis of the associated funding needs for such plan, an identification of potential federal, state, or other funding sources and a proposed timeline for implementation of such plan, provided such plan shall be implemented not later than July 1, 2025. Not later than December 31, 2024, the commissioner, in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes, shall submit such report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the environment.]

(a) The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall establish a commission on nature-based solutions to provide recommendations on best practices to authorize and incent the use of nature-based solutions as the preferred alternative, where appropriate,

to allow Connecticut's ecosystems to naturally sequester and store carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase biodiversity, and protect against climate change impacts that negatively affect critical resources, our communities and our economy. The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, or the commissioner's designee, shall serve as chair of the commission established by this act. The Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, or the secretary's designee, the Commissioner of Agriculture, or the commissioner's designee, and the Commissioner of Public Health, or the commissioner's designee, shall serve on such commission. The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, shall appoint additional members to the commission that can provide interdisciplinary scientific and policy expertise, including, but not limited to experts in climate science, ecology, forest science, soil science, wildlife biology, environmental economics, and other appropriate disciplines. The chair of the commission established in this act shall, not later than January 1, 2025, report its preliminary findings and any proposed legislative changes to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to, agriculture and the environment, public health, and planning and development in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes. The chair of the commission established in this act shall, not later than March 1, 2025, report its final findings and any proposed legislative changes to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating agriculture and the environment, public health, and planning and development in to in accordance with section 11-4a of the general statutes.

(b) **[The nature-based solutions program]** The commission on nature-base solutions described in subsection (a) of this section shall [include] investigate and make recommendations including, but not be limited to, the following: carbon sequestration and storage; water quality and quantity concerns including flooding and drought; air quality and heat island impacts; local food supply; and loss of biodiversity. Such investigation and recommendations shall also include, but not be

limited to, the following: (1) Increasing carbon sequestration through increased forest extent, including reforestation, and soil health across all landscapes, (2) controlling invasive species, (3) growing forests to greater maturity, (4) protecting carbon stocks through the avoided conversion of forests and wetlands to other purposes, (5) restoring coastal and riparian habitats, and (6) increasing climate-smart agriculture and soil conservation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while improving habitat and protecting biodiversity.

(c) **[The nature-based solutions program]** The commission on nature-base solutions described in subsection (a) of this section may **[include,]** investigate and make recommendations including, but shall not be limited to, the following: (1) Acquisition of land and conservation easements to provide upslope advancement zones adjacent to tidal marshes and inland water resources, (2) a comprehensive modeling assessment of the extent of inland migration of tidal marshes needed to inform adaptation decisions, (3) the acquisition of land and conservation easements in riparian areas adjacent to cold water streams, (4) the adoption or amendment of regulations, in accordance with chapter 54 of the general statutes, that provide stream flow levels necessary to ensure the resilience and ecological integrity of **[cold water]** rivers and streams, (5) increasing active management of upland forests to improve regeneration, diversity and resilience, (6) collaborating with other northeast states and federal agencies to develop a coordinated regional adaptation approach for the conservation of habitats and species at risk, and (7) advancing connectivity among habitats.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:

Sec. 22	<i>from passage</i>	New section
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Statement of Purpose:

To implement certain measures relating to climate change including advancing and implementing the state's goals for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the phasing out of the use of natural gas, investment in renewable energy and green economy startup businesses,

incentivizing sustainable purchasing by local governments and the enhancement of nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change.

[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]

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