

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 5214
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
March 10, 2023

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 ~130 land trusts. We advocate for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and work to ensure the long-term strength and viability of Connecticut's land conservation community.

Thank you for this opportunity to present general comments regarding **House Bill No. 5214, An Act Concerning the Conservation of Certain Waters and Lands of the Upper Farmington River.**

Watershed lands are essential for protecting reliable sources of clean drinking water in Connecticut. These lands serve as crucial drainage areas in and around communities and protect drinking water supplies that serve the majority of Connecticut residents. They filter pollutants – keeping water and air clean – provide critical wildlife habitat as well as opportunities for recreation and access to nature. An important nature-based climate solution, watershed lands prevent flooding and absorb and store carbon and other greenhouse gases. Recognizing the value of watershed lands to the State's residents and the environment, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted legislation in 1998 giving the state, municipalities, and land trusts the right of first refusal to purchase Class III land from water utilities before the land could be offered to for-profit buyers.

CLCC joins Save the Sound and other conservation organizations in strong support of the protection of Metropolitan District Commission land around the Colebrook and Goodwin Reservoirs (potentially 4,000 acres) as part of an upcoming abandonment proceeding. As recognized by this bill, this conservation effort has the potential to protect one of the state's largest remaining contiguous blocks of forested natural land around the Federally-designated Wild and Scenic Upper Farmington River. While we strongly support the intent of the bill in recognizing the importance of this major conservation effort, we share the concern that the commissioning of a study at this time may serve to hinder an existing opportunity to protect these lands. We encourage the Environment Committee to work with and support the leading land and water conservation organizations to ensure that these essential lands and waters are permanently protected as part of the expected abandonment process, and appreciate existing efforts currently underway in that regard.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our comments on this important issue.

