

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on House Bill No. 6610  
Environment Committee  
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director  
February 15, 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.*

As a coalition organization, CLCC works with Connecticut's robust land trust community as well as DEEP, municipalities, and other entities committed to land conservation and addressing climate change at every level. CLCC was a member of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) Forests Sub-Group, a member of the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT Future) Working Group, and, most recently, a participant in the GC3 Resilient Infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions Working Group.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding **House Bill No. 6610, An Act Concerning "No Net Loss" of State Forestlands**. CLCC supports the bill subject to the following comments.

## **General Comments**

HB 6610 is an outgrowth of the GC3 Forests Sub-Group Report (2020), the Forest Action Plan for Connecticut (2020), and the PRFCT Future Working Group Report (2021) accepted by DEEP in early 2022. Based on other state models and research, components of a comprehensive NNLF policy would include the following actions:

- Avoid forest conversion ("keep forests as forests")
- Protect healthy, intact forests
- Offset planned or permitted forest losses (through compensatory reforestation and other tools)
- Provide financial incentives for stewardship, forest retention, and forest resiliency
- Protect urban forests, build more parks, and plant more trees

Consistent with the foregoing, CLCC contends that Connecticut's NNLF policy should be premised on the first action item: avoidance of forest loss. HB 6610 addresses only one of these important components. It's important to re-emphasize that a robust NNLF policy for Connecticut should include all of the aspects noted above.

## **Comments on Compensatory Reforestation**

Compensatory reforestation is an important tool to help offset unavoidable losses of trees and forests. The



PRFCT Future Working Group reached consensus support on the following elements to implement compensatory reforestation in Connecticut:

- Require State agencies to submit a compensatory reforestation plan to DEEP's Forestry Division for each project that results in the deforestation of one-half acre (0.5 ac/21,780 square feet) or more on land the State entity owns or maintains, subject to exemptions for standard land management practices such as forestry, wildlife management, arboricultural practices, or actively managing existing utility easements. **(Included in HB 6610)**
- Require entities receiving a permit from the Connecticut Siting Council for energy development to compensate for loss of forest, farmland, and other natural lands through the conservation, replanting, and/or reforestation of a comparable amount in another location, or if such conservation, replanting or reforestation is determined not to be feasible, to make payments to a mitigation fund. This compensatory mitigation should not change the standard that avoidance of forest loss should be the primary goal for siting energy facilities. **(Not included in HB 6610)**
- Require similar compensatory mitigation by utilities for significant forest or urban tree canopy losses due to tree removals along electric distribution lines. **(Not included in HB 6610)**

**In addition to the elements listed above, CLCC suggests including a requirement that the advisory council quantify the benefits of the trees and forests (as well as the forest soils disturbed as a result of deforestation) that will be lost by cutting – including values related to carbon sequestration, carbon storage, biodiversity, and other ecosystem services – in determining an appropriate replacement plan.**

CLCC concurs with the suggested amendments to HB 6610 proposed by the Connecticut Forest & Park Association presented by Eric Hammerling, its executive director.

All said, CLCC supports HB6610 as an important step forward in establishing a comprehensive No-Net-Loss of Forest Policy in Connecticut. I welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to address some of the foregoing comments.

Thank you for raising this bill and for this opportunity to provide input on this important topic. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.