

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 122
Environment Committee
Submitted by Amy Blaymore Paterson, Executive Director
January 30, 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 testimony in support of **Senate Bill No. 122, An Act Concerning the Replanting of Trees in Public Areas Cleared by Utility Companies** to require utility companies to create and administer a fund that distributes money to municipalities for tree planting projects in public areas.

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 and a member of the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut's Future (PRFCT Forest) Working Group.

Reports from these working groups as well as *The GC3 Phase 1 Report: Near-Term Actions* (January 2021) (GC3 Report) recognize that our state's forestlands, trees, natural areas, and working lands are among our strongest defenses against the impacts of climate change. The benefits of these natural climate solutions to public health, the economy, and environment include protecting biodiversity, reducing the risks and impacts of flooding, filtering pollutants from the air, and absorbing and storing carbon. Forests and trees work both ways in mitigating climate change impacts — absorbing greenhouse gas emissions and also preventing the release of significant levels of carbon emissions that would be caused by deforestation and conversion of open lands to active development.

Recognizing it is essential that these benefits are considered at every level of planning and management of our state's natural resources, the working group reports include a recommendation *inter alia* that Connecticut enable compensatory reforestation to mitigate actions by utilities that result in unavoidable losses of forests or urban tree canopy including from tree removals along electric distribution lines. This recommendation is subject to the important caveat that compensatory mitigation not change the standard that avoidance of forest loss be the primary goal for such activities.

We thank the committee for raising SB122, which is a welcome step forward in codifying a compensatory reforestation program in Connecticut, and for this opportunity to present comments. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

