

CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

General Comments on Senate Bill No. 896
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 general comments regarding **Senate Bill No.896, An Act Concerning Tree Removal on Properties Under the Control of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.**

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.

The GC3 Phase 1 Report: Near-Term Actions (January 2021) (GC3 Report) as well as Governor's Executive Order No. 21-3 (December 2021) 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. It is essential that these benefits are considered at every level of planning and management of our state's natural resources.

It is also essential that members of the public have confidence that there is a system in place to ensure that land entrusted to the state for conservation and public recreation will be protected for those purposes to the greatest extent possible. Last year's public outcry over the removal of trees at Housatonic Meadows State Park underscored that need and led to the enactment of Public Act 22-143, Section 17 which requires DEEP to develop a hazardous tree mitigation policy for the designation, removal, and mitigation of trees located in state parks and campgrounds that are determined to be hazardous by the agency.

While CLCC supports efforts to build upon last year's legislation with respect to standards for transparency, public engagement, and the establishment of an objective system for evaluation and determination of hazardous trees and environmental impacts, we contend that any new requirements be accompanied by appropriate increases in investments in the agency's budget and staffing to ensure DEEP has the capacity to implement these additional responsibilities.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments on this important effort to protect trees and forests held in trust for public use. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

