

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

Testimony
Senate Bill No. 419 and House Bill No. 5454
Environment Committee
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Co-Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) in support of **Senate Bill No. 419, An Act Concerning Vegetation Management By The Department Of Transportation** and **House Bill No. 5454, An Act Establishing A Task Force To Study The Department Of Transportation's Vegetation Management Program.**

As the State's umbrella organization for the land conservation community, including its 130+ land trusts, CLCC advocates for land conservation, stewardship, and funding, and works to ensure the long-term strength and viability of the land conservation community in Connecticut.

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, we are currently experiencing the sixth mass extinction on the planet, but the first caused by humans—with as many as 1 million species at risk of extinction in coming decades. There is not a single species not at risk of extinction. Connecticut is no exception, with endangered plants and animals at risk of becoming extinct; threatened species likely to become endangered; and species of special concern facing further decline. The primary reason? Loss of habitat. (CT DEEP)

Each year, the state Department of Transportation (DOT) commissions large scale cutting of trees along state highways. These trees serve as habitat for birds and other wildlife, which may include endangered and threatened species and pollinators. In addition to protecting biodiversity, trees help to keep our air clean – removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and offsetting the carbon emissions from disruption of natural habitats and other activities. To ensure minimum impact on the environment, like all intensive development activity, large scale tree-cutting projects should therefore be subject to thorough review and scrutiny prior to implementation.

CLCC supports SB 419 which would require that prior to conducting any tree removal project that is one acre or larger and adjacent to any state highway, DOT shall assess whether such project will destroy or adversely modify essential habitat for endangered and threatened species. SB 419 is consistent with the provisions of Connecticut's Endangered Species Act (C.G.S. Section 26-303 et seq.) and the state's policy to conserve, protect, restore and enhance any endangered or threatened species and essential habitat. It would bring accountability and oversight to DOT's tree cutting practices by requiring the submission of the assessment to DEEP and the Environment Committee prior to commencing any such project.

Consistent with the foregoing, CLCC also supports HB 5454 which proposes the establishment of a task force to study the scope, need and effects of DOT's vegetation management program.

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

