

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5296

AN ACT CONCERNING THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND

Title: ACQUISITION GRANT PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/28/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/14/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Joseph P. Gresko, 121st Dist.

Rep. Lucy Dathan, 142nd Dist.

Rep. Brandon Chafee, 33rd Dist.

Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.

Rep. Mary M. Mushinsky, 85th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

To increase our statutory goal of land conservation in the Connecticut.

Substitute language- LCO 3848

Added the words "per annum" for the bonding authorization

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

The General Assembly established a goal of having 21% of the State's land area preserved as open space. At this time we hold 71.08% of the state's goal but with this funding our partners will be able to use our annual grant round to provide the monies need to acquire the open space. DEEP currently offers annual grant rounds and the bond funding requested will provide matching grants to further the State's goal of conserving land for open space.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Danielle Cheesebrough, First Selectman, Town of Stonington

In order to meet the states goal of preserved lands we need an additional 3,213 acres. We have the largest state-owned Barn Island Wildlife Management but that is only 17% of our town lands. We hear from land owners that they are interested in preserving their family lands. This bill would allow us to purchase those properties but please add at the end of line 5 the words "per annum" after \$10 million.

Timothy Abbott, Director, Regional Land Conservation

By increasing the bond authorization from \$5 to \$10 million this bill would respond to the intense pressure to increase the land and water resources of Connecticut. During the 2020 round of grants DEEP was unable to adequately fund even the highest ranked projects.

David Anderson, Land Campaigns Manager, Save the Sound

This funding will help leverage municipal ARPA funding to be directed towards open space acquisition. These spaces play a role in supplementing our state park system and provide benefits ranging from better health to climate change mitigation.

James Berardino, Legislative Advocacy, Connecticut Council of Small Towns

Municipalities and their residents will profit by increasing funding for the Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Program. Lands acquired under this program are protected by permanent conservation easements.

Amy Blaymore Patterson, Executive Director, Ct. Land Conservation Council

The state's land acquisition efforts is off target and OSWA funding is critical to accelerating the pace of land conservation. Connecticut ranks at the bottom compared to other New England States in terms of federal per capita public funding of land conservation.

Guildford Land Conservation Trust

Since 1999 we have leveraged Open Space and the Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program has provided funds to assist with the purchase of 563 acres in Guilford. The program is critical to the work that land trusts do in Connecticut and to the conservation goals of the state. The price of land in Connecticut is high but protecting natural places is priceless.

Amanda Branson, Director of Operations, Northwest CT. Land Conservancy

Supporting the bonding for the OSWA program is essential to local conservation and to meet its statutory 21% open space goal. OSWA supports Urban Green and Community Garden investments for targeted and distressed communities. We ask that the at the end of line 5 you add "per annum" after \$10 million.

Patrice Carson, President, Northern Connecticut Land Trust

Without this bill the Northern Connecticut Land Trust would not have been able to preserve 1845 acres. As an all-volunteer Land Trust we rely on donations and grants to help protect farm and forest lands for future generations.

Elizabeth Gara, Ct. Water Works Association

As a trade association of municipal, private and regional water companies we act as stewards of the environment and water resources. Company owned public water supply watershed and Aquifer Protection Area lands obtain approval for a Water Company Lands Permit from the DPH to ensure water quality and or quantity in any way. Not all public water supply watershed lands are owned by water companies and have the same protection. Funding is not sufficient to make grants available. Connecticut Water Company supports our position.

Joseph Welsh, Aquarion Water Company

Aquarion watershed and aquifer areas have benefitted from several OSWA funding projects through out the state. The function of a healthy watershed is critical in minimizing the impact from intense rain events and flooding. We support the passive recreation opportunities that are created by this program

Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

As a nonprofit conservation organization for over 125 years we support increasing the pace of investment. We have fallen short of our goal of 21% of the state being open space. Since 1998 the open space grants program has only awarded approximately \$150 million or on the average \$5 million per year which is unacceptably low. We ask that at the end of line 5 "per annum" be added after \$10 million.

Peter Hearn, Executive Director, Council on Environmental Quality

As a nine member board that works independently of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection we assess, report and make recommendations to improve the states environmental programs advise other state agencies and investigate citizens' complaints and allegations of violations of environmental laws. Land conservation offers a double benefit for the climate by helping prevent greenhouse gas emissions.

William Hyatt, Vice Chair, Connecticut Fisheries Advisory Council

Conservation of lands is a natural condition and essential to the long-term management of the states natural resources. Conservation of lands provides corridors for fish and wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Kip Kolesinskas, Co-Chair, Ct. Working Lands Alliance

Having spent over 40 years as a professional soil scientist I know firsthand the importance of land conservation. The GC-3 Phase 1 recommends that we increase our land use planning and protect our critical green infrastructure for future generations. This program is a wise use of funding and allows Connecticut to leverage increased federal funds from the USDA and other federal agencies.

Robert LaFrance, Director of Policy, Audubon

As a not for profit entity we rely on the generosity of our members and donors to make properties available. Both residents and visitors enjoy birds and open space and this bill will provide the money to add more. For more information on our centers and programs you may go to [http:// ct.audubon.org/about-us/centers-sanctuaries-and-chapters](http://ct.audubon.org/about-us/centers-sanctuaries-and-chapters).

David Lersch, President, Waterford Land Trust

The Connecticut shoreline is getting more expensive and it is critical to protect the waters along Long Island Sound. There are 4 streams with Brook Trout that empty into various bays in Waterford. Development has the potential to destroy this habitat and killing the trout and destroying a precious resource.

Connie Manes, Greenprint Director, Housatonic Valley Association

On behalf of the Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative, a partnership of 33 organizations who works across town lines to conserve land we support this bill. Bonding for the OSWA program is essential to local conservation and the states meeting its statutory 21% open space goal.

Nathan Frohling, Director of External Affairs, The nature Conservancy

Our mission is to conserve the lands and waters and engage in protecting open space and watershed lands for decades. This program is essential to incentivizing and enabling municipalities and local land trusts to join in active conservation of Connecticut's open space. At the need of line 5 "per annum" should be added to assure that the \$10 million per year limit is clear.

Rick Newton, Treasurer, St. Land Conservation Council

The regional trust that I work for has utilized the OSWA funds for the following projects:

Paffard Woods Preserve – Stonington

Babcock Ridge Preserve – North Stonington

Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest Preserve – North Stonington / Preston / Griswold

Herman E. Sheets Family Forest (Green Fall River Glen) – North Stonington

Dutka Nature Preserve – Griswold

Bell Cedar Swamp Preserve – North Stonington

Without these funds they would not be available to the public to enjoy.

Barbara Thomas, Chair, Monroe Conservation & Water Resources Commission

On behalf of the Monroe Conservation & Water Resources Commission we ask that you support the bill and add the technical correction at the end of line 5 and add "per annum" after \$10 million. As yearly average temperatures rise we are seeing the effects of climate change in Connecticut forests. The pandemic highlighted the need for open space that is easily accessible to everyone.

Lori Vigagliano, Public Relations Specialist, Regional Water Authority

We rely on this program to help purchase and conserve open space and watershed lands to protect our public water supply. As a result of the funding we have been able to protect lands critical for providing high-quality public drinking water.

Julie Wagner, Vice President, Branford Land Trust

The citizens of Branford have directly benefited from these grant programs. Between 2000 and 2016 the program provided funding to the Branford Land Trust or the town for the preservation of six properties totaling more than 350 acres throughout the town. Land conservation is perhaps the most important natural climate solution. Undeveloped open space sequesters carbon and allows marsh migration which increases resilience to sea level rise and storm damage from flooding.

Bob Wall, Chair, Sustainable Fairfield Task Force

Protecting our natural environment along our watersheds is key to preserving a healthy ecosystem. Of paramount importance to the state's economy is the restoration and protection of marine life along the Long Island Sound.

Barton Jones, President, Cornwall Conservation Trust

Fred Jones & Susan Pearson, Co-Presidents, Hartland Land Trust

Aaron Lefland, Executive Director, New Canaan Land Trust

Ronald Luich, President, East Lyme Trust

Gwen Marrion, Director, Bolton Land Trust

Nancy Morse Adams, Secretary, Warren Land Trust

Joan Smith, President, Groton Open Space Association

Ben Soinit, President, Morris Land Trust

Stewart Winquist, Chairman, Middlesex Land Trust

Jill Drew, Sharon Land Trust

Walker Homes, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board

Connie Manes, Executive Director, The Kent Land Trust

The above all testified in full support of the bill and how important land conservation is in mitigating the impacts of climate change and to meet the statutory 21% open space goal. They all asked that line 5 include "per annum" after the \$10 million.

The following submitted testimony in support of the bill

Robert Andrews, Mia Aron, Karen Burnaska, Lisa Finnegan, Andrew Lopez, Bud McAllister, Parker Leonard, Craig Repasz and Sam Slater

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jim Perras, CEO, Home Builders & Remodelers Association of Connecticut

We understand the value and importance of open space and watershed protection but land preservations policies should not be viewed in a vacuum. As such, the HBRA-CT recommends that this bill be amended to, at a minimum, only allow municipalities that have met their obligations under 8-30j and have published their affordable housing plans be eligible under this legislation.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: April 5, 2022

