

COMMISSIONER OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

1997 ANNUAL REPORT  
to the  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

in compliance with

Public Act No. 97-227, Section (b): An Act Concerning  
Acquisition of Open Space Land...

January, 1998

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to the  
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PUBLIC ACT No. 97-227: AN ACT CONCERNING  
ACQUISITION OF OPEN SPACE LAND...

Overview: Public act No. 97-227, Section (b) states that "It shall be the goal of the State to have not less than ten percent of the State's land area held by the State as open space land." The Commissioner of Environmental Protection is charged with the responsibility of providing a strategy for achieving the State's goal. In addition, the Commissioner is charged with setting a goal for increasing the amount of land held as open space by municipalities or by private non-profit land holding organizations. The strategy must be developed in consultation with The Council on Environmental Quality and private non-profit land holding organizations

Status: The State currently holds approximately 210,000 acres as open space. The land is managed by the Department of Environmental Protection as the State's system of parks, forests, wildlife, fisheries, boat access and natural areas. Municipalities have an estimated 60,000 acres currently designated as open space land. Private non-profit land holding organizations hold title to approximately 45,500 acres of land. The United States of America manages approximately 9,900 acres of open space land in Connecticut as scenic trail corridor, flood management resources, or wildlife management areas.

Goal: Meeting the ten percent goal established by Public Act No. 97-227 will require the State to hold title to 320,600 acres. The State's current open space land holdings, 210,000 acres, is equal to 6.6% of Connecticut's land area. The State will need to acquire an additional 110,600 acres. To achieve the State's goal, 3.8 % of the remaining private land in Connecticut will need to be acquired, leaving approximately 2,800,000 acres of the State's 3,205,760 acres in the private sector.

Action Taken: 1) In compliance with Public Act No. 97-227, the Department of Environmental Protection researched and reviewed open space ownership throughout Connecticut and compiled the totals given above.

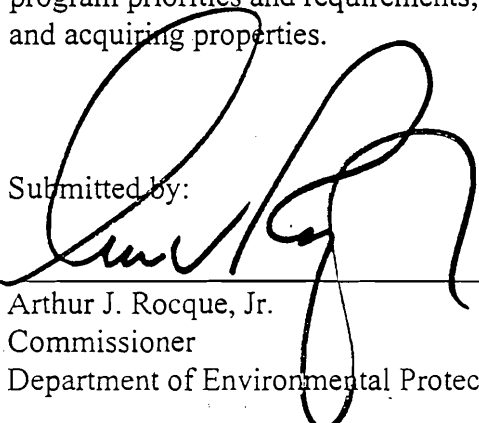
2) In August 1997 Governor John G. Rowland announced the formation of a Blue Ribbon Task Force on State Acquisition of Open Space Lands. The Task Force consisted of fifteen members representing state and local governments, environmental and conservation organizations and the business and sporting communities. It was charged with reviewing the ten percent goal for acquisition of open space, and proposing implementation strategies. The Department of Environmental Protection worked closely with the task force, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the Nature Conservancy in developing information and recommendations for the Task Force.

3) After four months of presentations by citizens and expert witnesses, discussions, and public information meetings, the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Open Space produced a report entitled "Open Space Connecticut! A Legacy for Life." This report, which is attached, describes the types of land necessary to achieve the 10% goal; suggests a timetable for acquisition; proposes a strategy for achieving the 10% goal; and outlines the resources needed.

4) Governor John G. Rowland, after reviewing the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, announced a comprehensive plan to increase Connecticut's stock of open space land. The Governor proposed dedicating \$166 million over the next 5 years to increase the number of acres of state owned open space and to assist municipalities, land trusts, and water companies with the acquisition of significant open space resources. In addition to the 10% goal for state held open space land, the Governor called for a overall goal of 21% of the state's land area to be preserved as open space by the first quarter of the 21st Century. Recognizing that state lands cannot be viewed in isolation, this figure includes open space land held by municipalities, private non-profits, the federal government, the state as agricultural development rights, and water utility Class I and Class II watershed lands. The current total of these and existing, DEP lands is 14.4 %.

Agenda 1998: During 1998, the Department of Environmental Protection will work toward implementation of the Governor's proposals. It will implement an acquisition program consummate with available funding to increase the amount of State owned open space land; streamline the acquisition process; promote cooperative acquisition efforts with municipalities and private non-profit landholding organizations; hire new staff; review the rating system; develop grant program priorities and requirements; and re-establish the "pipe line" for reviewing and acquiring properties.

Submitted by:



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