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DEP holds hearing on proposed revisions to Conn.'s ESA list of endangered species

September 15, 2009 - Connecticut

A Public Hearing for interested parties to express their views on the proposed revisions to Connecticut's ESA List of Special Concern, Threatened, and Endangered species was held on September 16 at the Connecticut DEP, 79 Elm St., Hartford. Are you prepared for the possible changes and what they mean for your planned land development projects in Connecticut? The opportunity for amending regulations only comes along every five years.

Connecticut is a state that has a diverse landscape of varying climate, topography, geology, wetland and surface water features, and land uses. This diverse landscape contributes to its high quality of life attracting residents, tourists and a diversity of natural habitats which, in turn, hosts a high diversity of flora and fauna. The attraction of people to these natural resources continues to create opportunities for land development and conservation. With the passage of the Connecticut Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1989, the Connecticut citizenry and legislature recognized the importance of our state's ecological and natural heritage and the need to conserve, protect, restore and enhance our native flora and fauna from threats that could lead to their extinction. Various species of conservation concern were listed in the Act as Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern according to their level of extinction risk. Collectively, these species are often referred to as "listed" or "rare" species. According to the Public Act 89-224:

" 'Endangered Species' means any native species documented by biological research and inventory to be in danger of extirpation throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the state and to have no more than five occurrences in the state, and any species determined to be an "endangered species" pursuant to the [ESA].

'Threatened Species' means any native species documented ...likely...become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the state and to have no more than nine occurrences in the state, and any species determined to be a "threatened species" pursuant to the federal [ESA]...

'Species of Special Concern' means any native plant species or any native non-harvested wildlife species documented ... to have a naturally restricted range or habitat in the state, to be at a low population level, to be in such high demand by man that its unregulated taking would be detrimental to the conservation of its population or has been extirpated from the state."

The CT DEP's Natural Diversity Database serves as the main source of information on the status of Connecticut's listed species. The database, established in 1983, stores information on nearly 2,000 species and 45 natural communities of conservation concern.

Connecticut's first list was compiled by DEP biologists with input from experts in each of the taxonomic groups. Members of the public have all contributed valuable data on listed species over the years as well. Pursuant to CGS 26-307, the DEP is mandated to review the list every 5 years to

determine if changes in Connecticut's flora and fauna populations warrant any additions, removals, or change in designation. Since the original list issued in 1992, revisions have been issued in 1998 and 2004. The proposed changes for the 2009 revision include new species that are proposed to be added to the list for the first time, species proposed for removal from the list, and species for which other status changes are recommended.

The delisting of species reflect success in achieving the Act's goal - population recovery sufficient to warrant delisting - and delisting is a testament to the efforts of DEP wildlife biologists and citizenry who work hard to protect the species' habitat, study their life histories and otherwise support conservation efforts directly, indirectly, or both.

Other proposed revisions include the addition of some species that would be listed for the first time. These additions reflect years of continued population declines by these species due to habitat loss or fragmentation, pollution, disease, competition with non-native invasive species, unknown causes or a combination of these factors.

Many native species beneficially serve as crop pollinators, natural pest control, provide us with a source of food, fur, pharmaceutical products, or may have some other yet unforeseen economic, aesthetic, or recreational importance and thus warrant protection. Much progress has been made since 1989 to create mitigation, enhancement and management plans and implement best management practices to balance land development with listed species protection. Responsible growth and sustainable development practices require early planning and an integrated approach from the siting and permitting consultants and the design and construction professionals.

Further details can be found at the following link:
<http://www.ct.gov/dEP/cwp/view.asp?A=2586&Q=444390>.

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