



Audubon CONNECTICUT

PLANNING COMMISSION EXHIBIT

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Testimony of Patrick M. Comins Before the Old Saybrook Planning Commission

November 10, 2004

Old Saybrook Connecticut

Dear Commission Members:

I am providing testimony today on behalf of the 13,000 members of Audubon Connecticut regarding the proposed development of the property known as "The Preserve", in the northwest corner of Old Saybrook.

We ask that the Commission consider the importance of this property to nesting and migrating birds, both in and of itself and in the context of larger landscape-scale features. We further respectfully request that any site plan for this parcel seek to minimize forest fragmentation to the largest extent possible by clustering the development at the edge of the property, towards existing developed areas and away from adjacent forested parcels.

This approximately 1000-acre parcel of mostly forested land provides important habitat for many species of birds that are listed as being of high conservation priority by Partners In Flight or included on Audubon's WatchList of species of conservation concern.

Partners in Flight (PIF) is a coalition of state, federal, non-profit, private and academic groups working to ensure healthy populations of birds in North America. PIF has identified Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Louisiana Waterthrush, Eastern Wood-pewee as high priorities within its Bird Conservation Plan for Physiographic Area 9, in which the proposed development area lies.

A centerpiece of conservation at Audubon, the WatchList is an early warning system that focuses attention on at-risk bird species before they become endangered. Saving species pushed to the edge of extinction is difficult and costly. The WatchList shifts the agenda from reactive, last-minute rescue attempts to preventive action. Wood Thrush and Worm-eating Warbler are included on the Audubon WatchList.

The species outlined above all depend upon large unfragmented forest blocks in order to reproduce successfully and maintain viable populations. While the property provides important nesting habitat for the above and many other species of forest-interior nesting bird species, one must also look at larger landscape scale features when evaluating the impact of any one development on forest resources and the birds that depend upon them. The proposed Preserve development is located toward the center of a 3183-acre block of unfragmented habitat identified by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection's Resource Protection Project of 1997. This habitat block is directly adjacent to another identified habitat block of 3127 acres (please see attached map "Proposed Development in Relation to Unfragmented Habitat Blocks as Identified by the CT DEP Resource

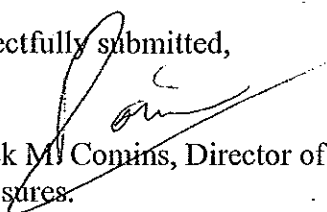
Protection Project"). Through an independent visual analysis of the DEPs 1997 Landuse/Landcover data, Audubon Connecticut identified a relatively unfragmented forest block of ~6000 acres in which this property is situated (please see attached map "Approx. Location of Proposed Development Within Larger Forest Block").

The site of the proposed Preserve development is a key parcel on an even larger scale than this. It lies within the greater Cockaponset forest of Connecticut, which provides critical habitat for many nesting species of forest interior birds. This property also lies within a north-south oriented corridor of relatively unfragmented oak dominated woodlands that stretches nearly from Long Island Sound to critical nesting habitat for Neotropical migrant landbirds (songbirds come to North America in the breeding season and winter in Central or South America or the Caribbean) in Northern New England. This corridor stretches from Sachem's Head in Guilford, and the Salt Meadow Unit of Stewart B. McKinney NWR in Westbrook, through the greater Cockaponset area, crossing the Connecticut River in the area of Maromas in Middletown to the greater Meshomasic forest to water company lands in eastern Glastonbury and Manchester, through Bolton Notch and north to the Shenipsit State Forest and beyond. The north-south orientation of this corridor, combined with its proximity to the Connecticut River and the oak-dominance of the woodlands makes this feature an important flyway for many species of Neotropical migrant landbirds, such as warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, thrushes and other songbirds, in spring and fall migration (please see attached map "Property Within Large-Scale North/South Corridor).

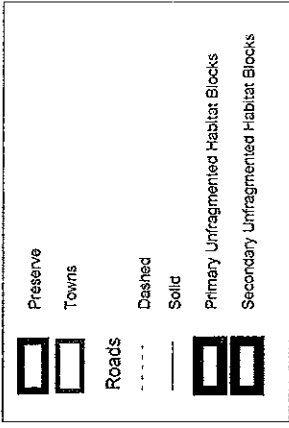
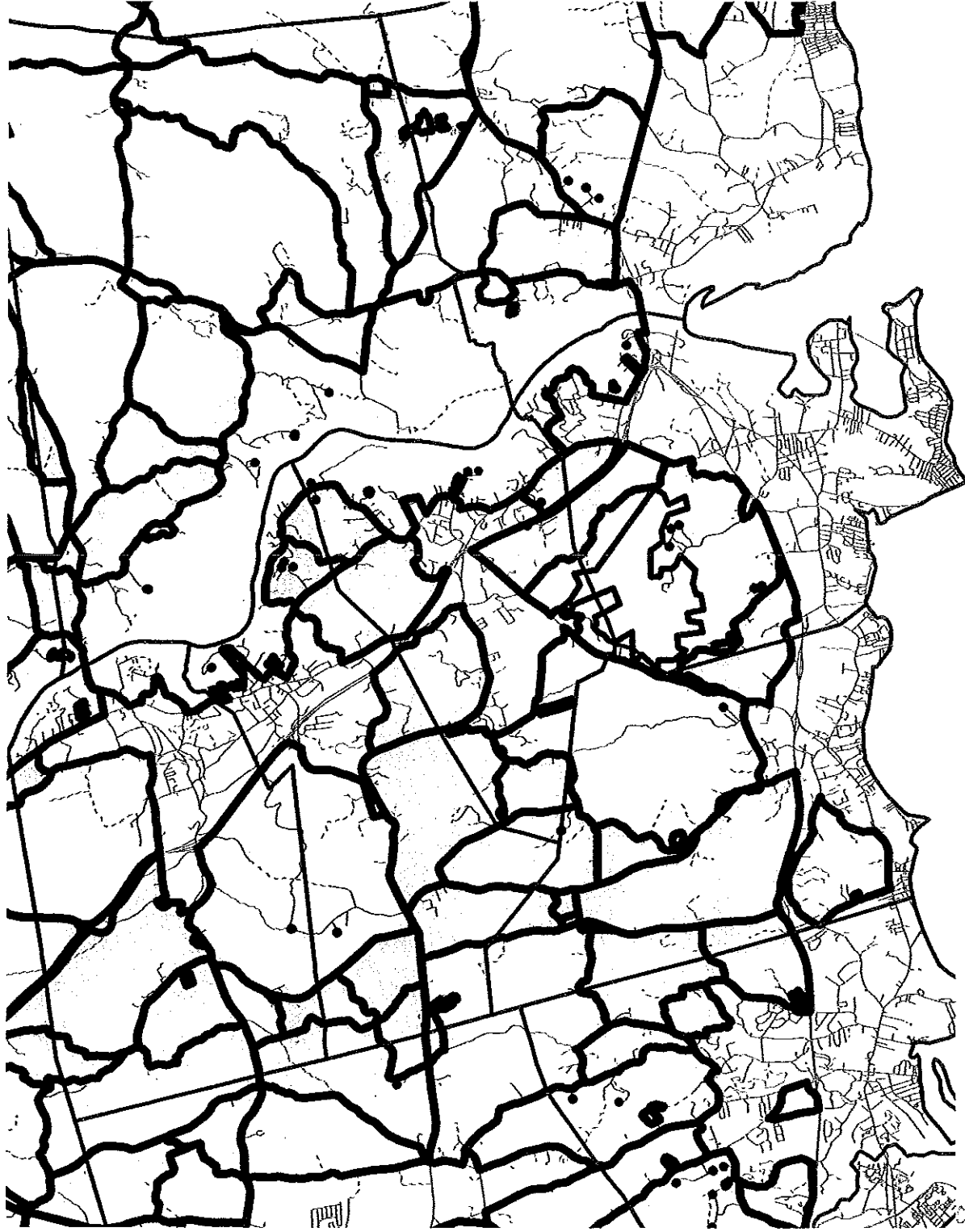
Fragmentation is a serious problem for forest ecosystems with effects ranging far beyond the actual amount of habitat lost to development. Not only are many forest species less likely to nest in areas that are within a certain distance from a forest edge, but fragmentation can also exacerbate many other problems for healthy forest ecosystems. For example, fragmentation can allow invasive species to reach further into a forest by allowing a seed stock to be established within the formerly forested block. Additionally, fragmentation can permit Brown-headed Cowbirds, an edge dependent nest parasite that lays its eggs in the nests of other species of birds, to range further into the forest to find host nests, thus reducing the productivity of forest nesting birds. Fragmentation and development can also allow predators such as American Crows, domestic cats and Gray Squirrels to range further into the forest, thus impacting forest species far away from the actual fragmenting feature. The configuration of the proposed development known as "the Preserve" would create numerous openings, converting a large intact forest ecosystem into a patchwork of developed areas and fairways as well as smaller, less functional forest blocks. Such extensive fragmentation would certainly bring about the negative impacts noted above and decrease the value of the overall forested landscape in which this parcel lies.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter and for the opportunity to provide comments on this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,


Patrick M. Conins, Director of Bird Conservation
Enclosures.

Proposed Development in Relation to Unfragmented Habitat Blocks as Identified by CT DEP Resource Protection Project



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