

Good afternoon. I am Rob Warren, Managing Director of Conservation for The Trustees. First, my thanks to the Committee for providing this opportunity to voice our strong support for the Public Lands Preservation Act.

In the last 20 years, approximately one billion dollars in public funds has been invested in conserving open space at the municipal and state levels. The nonprofit land trust community has also made a significant investment in conservation lands over this same time, often in partnership with a town or state agency.

Many conservation areas held by nonprofit land trusts both enhance, and are enhanced by, adjacent Article 97 lands. Part of the decision-making process that every land trust goes through in determining what land to acquire and protect is a close review of the geographic relationship of other protected lands to that property under consideration. More often than not, this landscape context includes Article 97 lands, and the land purchase decisions made by land trusts have been based on that existing network of conserved lands. This gives land trusts a very strong interest in the future of land conserved under Article 97.

In many cases, state and town owned parcels have been acquired with the direct assistance of nonprofit land trusts, whether that assistance comes as a sharing in the financial cost of a project, or by playing a procedural role, such as acquiring a property for later re-conveyance to the state agency or town.

For all these reasons, as a property protected under Article 97 is considered for possible disposition, land trusts have a clear interest in knowing about, and voicing their perspective about, that possible change in protected status.

This bill envisions for the future a reliable and consistent process which assures both citizens and the nonprofit partners of the state and municipalities, increased transparency and well-explained decisions regarding Article 97 dispositions. This in turn would strengthen the partnership between public agencies and the land trust community, a partnership which has produced the remarkable land conservation achievements that we enjoy across the Commonwealth.

Thank you for hearing our comments today.