

POSITION OF CFPA ON THE POTENTIAL CLOSURE OF MDC LANDS TO RECREATION

The Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA), established in 1895, is the first nonprofit, membership-based conservation organization in the state and has an ongoing mission of “connecting people to the land in order to protect forests, parks, walking trails, and open spaces for future generations”. CFPA believes strongly that free access to the outdoors encourages people to connect to the land.

Regarding the potential closure of MDC lands, this is our position:

- CFPA thanks the MDC for providing such outstanding recreational opportunities on over 10,000 acres of land which it owns in the greater Hartford region as part of the MDC mission to provide a public benefit.
 - Hosted on some of these MDC lands are blue-blazed hiking trails such as the Metacomet/New England Trail¹ and the Tunxis Trail² which are part of the 825-mile system of trails maintained by CFPA volunteers statewide;
- CFPA understands that the MDC, as a nonprofit municipal corporation, has the same legal status as a municipality. When the MDC considers the closure of its lands to recreation due to liability concerns, their decision will likely affect the decisions of many other municipalities and municipal corporations;
- CFPA is asking the General Assembly to fix the state’s Recreational Liability Statute in order to provide towns (and municipal entities like the MDC) with the same strong protection against liability that is enjoyed by private landowners. Not taking this action will put the future of recreation on municipal properties in great jeopardy;
- Outdoor recreation is critically important to support community health and well being; to support businesses that thrive when there are local places to recreate; to support an appreciation of the bountiful natural resources around us; and to provide places away from motorized traffic that are free for the public’s enjoyment; and
- In light of all of this, we strongly encourage the MDC to keep its recreational lands open to all non-motorized recreational uses while CFPA and other dedicated advocates are asking the General Assembly to do its part to protect towns against personal injury lawsuits.

¹ The New England Trail (NET) was designated as the nation’s newest national scenic trail when it achieved this distinction in March, 2009. The NET is a combination of the Metacomet, Mattabesett, Menunkatuck, and Metacomet-Monadnock Trails which extends 220 miles from Long Island Sound through 20 towns in Connecticut and 19 towns in Massachusetts northward to the New Hampshire border. CFPA is responsible for the maintenance and programmatic oversight of NET activities in Connecticut, the Berkshire Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club maintains the NET in Massachusetts, and the National Park Service provides technical assistance and funding.

² Between the Metacomet/New England Trail and the Tunxis Trail, there are approximately 12 miles of blue-blazed hiking trails hosted on land owned by the MDC.