

Western Connecticut COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



February 11, 2023

Esteemed Chairs Lopes and Gresko,
Members of the Environment Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on Raised Bill 965, *An Act Providing Funding for the Removal of Hazardous or Dead Trees by Municipalities*.

The spread of invasive, tree-killing pests, in conjunction with extreme weather and climate stress, are producing high mortality in common tree species (e.g., ash, hemlock) across Connecticut. Where such trees abut roads or public facilities, they become a safety hazard when they die and must be taken down. The mass mortality the state is experiencing in affected species is producing tree removal needs that fall well outside of the historical norm and often exceed the capacity of municipal crews and budgets to resolve. Bill 965 would provide additional resources to meet this additional need, helping ensure that unsafe trees are removed before they fall of their own accord.

In addition to supporting this initiative, WestCOG notes that species die-offs are diminishing the biodiversity of the Connecticut's forests, and since biodiversity is critical to ecosystem resilience, such loss also undermines the resilience of the state's ecosystems. While it may be challenging to arrest the spread of invasive pests, options to protect and enhance forest biodiversity exist.

As Connecticut fells dying trees, the state may also wish to contemplate the planting of new trees – including the potential return of the American chestnut¹ (which accounted for ca. 25% of the biomass in eastern forests) and the American elm². Both these trees are now available in varieties that are resistant to the invasive species that occasioned their decline.

Should you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis R. Pickering". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Francis R. Pickering
Executive Director

¹ [SUNY ESF: Restoring the American Chestnut \(esf.edu\)](http://SUNY ESF: Restoring the American Chestnut (esf.edu))

² [ScienceWriters: Bringing back shade: American elms tested for city life \(NASW.org\)](http://ScienceWriters: Bringing back shade: American elms tested for city life (NASW.org))