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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
February 22, 2013 - Before the
Continuing Legislative Committee on State Planning & Development
Revised Draft Conservation and Development Policies Plan 2013-2018**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I would like to express our support for the latest revised draft of the State Plan of Conservation and Development as submitted to this Continuing Committee by the Office of Policy and Management. The Planning Staff at OPM has engaged in a very thorough outreach process in developing the plan to ensure that the draft reflects as comprehensive a range of perspectives as possible.

We very strongly support the following policy on page 20 under Growth Management Principle # 4, but recommend that it be amended as follows to explicitly mention "sea level rise", as the plan is mandated to do by Public Act 12-101:

"MINIMIZE the siting of new infrastructure and development in coastal areas prone to erosion and inundation FROM SEA LEVEL RISE AND STORMS, encourage the preservation of undeveloped areas into which coastal wetlands can migrate, and undertake any development activities within coastal areas in an environmentally sensitive manner consistent with statutory goals and policies set forth in the Connecticut Coastal Management Act;"

PA12-101 requires in reference to the State Plan of C&D: "(h) Any revision made after October 1, 2012, shall (1) take into consideration risks associated with increased coastal erosion, depending on site topography, caused by **a rise in sea level**, as defined in section 22a-93." While this legal mandate is sufficient reason for this phrase to be added, we also feel that it is critical to call attention to the related but differing impacts caused by storms and those caused by sea level rise.

Storms cause the most sudden, dramatic destruction, but sea level rise can create and already is creating more gradual, but very serious, problems for our communities. There are many examples along our shoreline of roads that used to flood once every several years that are now flooding a few times each year. Septic systems in coastal areas that are marginal now will fail when water levels rise even a few additional inches over the next couple of decades.

Tide gauges maintained by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration over the past several decades in Bridgeport indicate that sea level has been rising in Long Island Sound, by an average rate of 1 inch per decade from 1964 to 2006. Unpublished calculations of a rolling 10-year average of mean sea level rise in New London as measured by the NOAA's tide gauge data show a significant recent acceleration of the rate of rise. Compared to the average rate of rise from 1938 to 1988; since 1989, the rate of rise has tripled. Recently published scientific journal articles indicate that sea level rise along the Northeast U.S coast has been significantly more rapid than global averages. Our state and communities must be accounting for and preparing for this alarming trend in their planning.