

Remington Woods gets boost at Capitol

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HARTFORD - A small group of land-preservationists took to the halls of the Capitol complex on Monday in an effort to raise awareness among lawmakers about the 420-acre Remington Woods in Bridgeport and Stratford.

They said the city should not take over the woodlands and 25-acre lake for development, as planned.

The 10 people called, rather, for the state to preserve it for passive recreational purposes, once Dupont cleans up two centuries worth of spent and live ammunition scattered throughout the property.

"When you're in it, it's like you're in the middle of New Hampshire," said Milan Bull, a member of the Friends of Remington Woods. "It's a great place for birds and the surprising thing is it's almost right smack in the middle of Bridgeport."

Bull, the Connecticut Audubon Society's senior director for science and education, said the woods are homes for a wide range of animal life, including the black-crowned night heron, blue-winged warblers, species of brown thrashers, box turtles, red-tailed hawks and two species of owls.

"It really is an amazing place," he said in an interview, noting that when Lewis and Clark made their famous trip up the Missouri River in 1804, they had gunpowder made in what is now the Remington Woods.

While Remington made most of its ordnance in an East Side factory, the woods were used to store and test bullets and other projectiles.

DuPont acquired the site from Remington, barring public access while it has slowly cleaned up spent and unexploded ammunition.

"The lake is not polluted," Bull said. "The lake is amazingly clean and they don't exactly know why, probably because there's no development around. It has some munitions in it but it's not chemically polluted."

The property includes 350 acres in Bridgeport and about 70 acres in Stratford.

Although there is no legislation pending in front of the General Assembly, the group held a news conference to underscore the opportunity to protect the urban forest and to promote an exhibit of photographs of the woods in the pedestrian concourse linking the Legislative Office Building to the Capitol.

Peter McKnight of Fairfield, the current president of

the group, called the woods "a precious ecological linchpin" that includes the site of an ancient human settlement.

"Even as we gather here this morning, the DuPont Corporation, the owners of the property, are proceeding with plans to clear cut and bulldoze a natural rarity that most of our citizens aren't even aware exists," he said.

Jeff Kohut, another member of the group, said the city's priority is to expand its tax base, but paving over woodland, when there are vacant properties that have been used for manufacturing in Bridgeport's past, seems counterintuitive.

"The economics of it make absolutely no sense, when there are 700 acres of brownfields," Kohut said in an interview.

Rep. Christopher L. Caruso, D-Bridgeport, believes the advocates met their goal to raise awareness.

"There's a lot of merit to protecting it," Caruso said in an interview. "I believe it's a treasure that once lost, never returns. There's other land in the city that can be developed for industrial and office use and I think we should develop that before we think about Remington Woods."