



February 24, 2022

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
HAZARD TREE MITIGATION PROCESS

NOTICE OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC MEETING

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) manages approximately 265,000 acres of land across the State of Connecticut, in State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, Forests, and other properties, providing for public access at these properties for outdoor recreation and public enjoyment. Most of these acres are forested, with approximately 99 million trees populating DEEP-managed properties.

In recent years, DEEP has observed a significant increase in tree mortality across the State, including DEEP-managed properties, resulting from gypsy moth outbreaks, recurring drought, invasive emerald ash borers, and severe storms. Trees that are compromised due to disease, insect infestation, environmental factors, etc. can pose a safety hazard to visitors to DEEP-managed properties, if branches or entire trees fail and strike a park visitor. Unfortunately, despite reasonable precautions, fatalities and other injuries due to tree failure have occurred on DEEP-managed lands.

In 2018, DEEP initiated a Hazard Tree Inventory process to augment the agency's ability to minimize risk to the public associated with the increase in damaged, diseased, and dead trees in high-use areas such as parking lots, picnic areas, campgrounds, trails and roadways where people tend to linger or congregate, and safety risks are elevated. The Hazard Tree Inventory process included:

- A decision-making rubric, imbedded in an ArcGIS Survey 123 application, for use by DEEP property managers when identifying and assessing whether a tree constitutes a hazard tree;
- A review of hazard tree areas in the Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB) to ensure hazard tree projects would have no impact on endangered species, threatened species, or species of special concern; and
- Training for property managers in the use of the ArcGIS Survey 123 tool.

Since 2018, DEEP has utilized the Hazard Tree Inventory process to identify and remove 18,252 trees on DEEP-managed properties. DEEP does not currently have a formal policy or directive for addressing hazard trees, generally.¹ DEEP has publicly committed to improving the process

1

DEEP has a directive for addressing hazard trees in specific circumstances where the tree is located on a property boundary.

by which we engage in hazard tree projects. By way of this public Notice, DEEP is announcing its intention to develop a Hazard Tree Mitigation policy and to seek public comment in the development of that policy.

DEEP will apply the following five overlapping considerations in developing the Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy:

1. Public Safety – taking reasonable steps to protect the public from hazard tree risks, particularly in areas of high use such as campgrounds, picnic areas, parking lots, etc.
2. Natural Resource Conservation – protecting the ecological resources on state lands
3. Transparency – implementing positive practices for public notification and communication as hazard tree mitigation projects are developed and implemented
4. Resource Limitations – implementing positive, enhanced approaches within fiscal, time and staffing constraints
5. Accessibility – ensuring public access for outdoor recreation

By way of this Notice, DEEP announces it is holding a virtual meeting to introduce background and process information related to the Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy development and invite stakeholder comments on the scope of the Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy Development on **March 15, 2022, at 6:00 PM Eastern Time via Zoom**. To join the meeting, please register at [HAZARD TREE MITIGATION PROCESS](#).

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the virtual meeting.

The objective of the meeting will be to provide an overview of, and seek public input on, the expected topics, approach, and schedule for adoption of the Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy. DEEP particularly welcomes input and comment from the public on the following key areas:

- I. Policy Application – What types of hazard tree mitigation projects should be subject to this policy - (e.g., based on the number or density of trees being removed, utilization of a contractor, etc.)? What types of activities should not be subject to this policy (e.g., routine landscaping, invasive species removal, hazard tree management following storms, responding to forest fires, and other emergency events)?
- II. Areas of Significance – Should DEEP establish or identify certain threshold factors for hazard tree projects or activities to be considered “significant,” where additional investment of resources or approaches to mitigation could be utilized? What factors would be appropriate to consider, e.g., riparian zone, wetlands, along a Wild & Scenic River; cultural, aesthetic or ecological value; number of trees being addressed or density of stands?
- III. Hazard Tree Risk Assessment – What type of information is needed to make informed decisions on hazard tree mitigation? What level of training, experience, certifications and qualifications (for contractors or staff) should be associated with these decisions?

IV. Public Engagement – What types of notice (signage, website, etc.) should be provided to the general public regarding scheduled hazard tree mitigation projects?

Written comments may be submitted directly to DEEP at deep.hazardtrees@ct.gov on or before **March 29, 2022, by 4:00 PM Eastern Time**. All materials submitted by stakeholders in this proceeding will be posted on the DEEP website. After reviewing the comments initially received in this meeting and the following written comment period, DEEP will prepare a draft hazard tree mitigation policy which will be published for additional comment before the policy is implemented. DEEP anticipates preparing and releasing such draft on or after June 2022, to enable the Department to incorporate any perspectives or legislative directives resulting from the 2022 legislative session. Any questions may be directed to deep.hazardtrees@ct.gov.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer that is committed to complying with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please contact us at (860) 418-5910 or deep.accommodations@ct.gov if you are seeking a communication aid or service, have limited proficiency in English and may need information in another language, require some other accommodation or wish to file an ADA or Title VI discrimination complaint. Any person needing a hearing accommodation may call the State of Connecticut relay number – 711. Requests for accommodations must be made at least two weeks prior to any agency hearing, program, or event.