


Connecticut State Open Space 2021 Annual Report

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection



*Prepared in accordance with
Section 23-8(b) of the General Statutes*

A wide-angle landscape photograph of Platt Farm Preserve during autumn. The foreground is a lush green field, possibly a meadow or pasture, with a few scattered trees. In the middle ground, there are rolling hills covered in dense forest with trees showing vibrant autumn colors of orange, yellow, and red. The background shows more distant hills under a clear blue sky with a bright sun in the upper left corner, creating a soft glow. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Autumn Sun at Platt Farm Preserve — Julie Stuart
Photo taken at Platt Farm Preserve Flood Bridge
Road, Southbury, protected by the Southbury
Land Trust. One of the winners of the 2021 Annual
Diana Atwood Johnson OSWA Photo Contest, held
in partnership with the Connecticut Land Conser-
vation Council.

Acknowledgements

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Cameron Clegg — Environmental Analyst

State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board:

Amy Paterson (Co-Chair) — Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council
Eric Hammerling (Co-Chair) — Executive Director, Connecticut Forest and Park Association
Elanah Sherman — Representing the Interests of People with Disabilities
Eric K. Lindquist — Environmental Analyst, Office of Policy and Management
Joe Welsh — Aquarion Water Company
John Triana — Real Estate Manager, South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Joseph Gresko — State Representative, Connecticut House District 121
Karen Burnaska — Watershed Lands Advocate
Linda Francois — Director and President, Bethany Land Trust
Tim Abbott — Regional Conservation and Greenprint Director, Housatonic Valley Association
Walker Holmes — Connecticut State Director, The Trust for Public Land

Connecticut's Open Space Goal

Recognizing the threat of loss or degradation of natural resources to land-use change and development, the General Assembly set a goal of preserving 21% of Connecticut's land base as public open space (CGS Section 23-8). The Connecticut Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan set a target to meet this goal by year 2023. To reach this goal, 673,210 acres across the state needs to be acquired as open space. Of the total open space goal:

- **10% (320,576 acres)** shall be held by the State of Connecticut (DEEP), and
- **11% (352,634 acres)** shall be held by DEEP's land conservation Partners (municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies).

At the end of 2021, DEEP and its Partners together held a combined 513,831 acres as public open space, or 76.33 percent towards achieving the total statewide open space acquisition goal.

To reach their goals, DEEP must acquire 57,776 acres, and DEEP's Partners must acquire 101,603 acres to reach their open space targets.

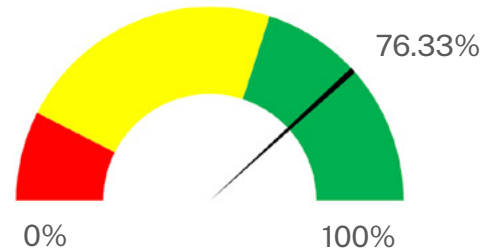
State (DEEP) Open Space:

As of December 31, 2021 DEEP held an estimated 262,800 acres of land in its system of Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management and water access areas, or 81.98 percent of its open space goal. Of this, approximately 239,128 acres have been acquired in fee title. Acquisition of less-than-fee interests are atypical and include the purchase of conservation easements and restrictions.

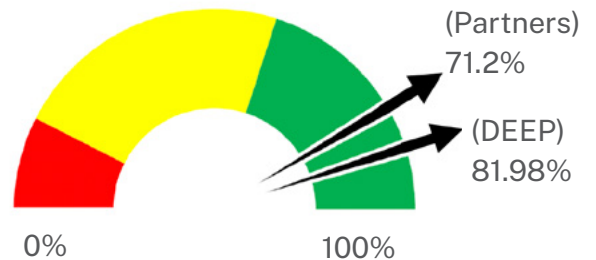
Partner-held Open Space:

As of December 31, 2021, DEEP conservatively estimates that its Partners held 251,031 acres, or 71.2 percent, of their share of the statewide open space goal. Of this, non-profit land conservation organizations held about 68,380 acres, municipalities held 84,435 acres, and water companies held 97,775 acres as open space.

2021 Status Statewide Open Space



Total: 513,831 ac.
Need: 159,379 ac.



DEEP-held: 262,800 ac.
Need: 57,776 ac.

Partner-held: 251,031 ac.
Need: 101,603 ac.

Front cover: Mirrored Reflection — Norm Jensen

Photo taken at the Silvermine — Fowler portion of the Still Pond Preserve, protected by the New Canaan Land Trust. One of the winners of the 2021 Annual Diana Atwood Johnson OSWA Photo Contest, held in partnership with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council.

2021 Statewide Open Space Land Acquisitions

In 2021, DEEP acquired 732.5 acres of land under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program, the primary vehicle for adding land to the State’s system of Parks, Forests, Wildlife areas, water access areas, and other open spaces. An additional three conservation easements over 199.35 acres of open space were purchased through the Forest Legacy (2) and Long Island Sound programs. These lands were acquired with generous assistance from federal and private funding sources and private donations, leveraging about \$1.46 for every State dollar spent (**Appendix A**).

With over \$3.5 million in funding assistance from DEEP’s Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies were able to complete 12 projects, protecting 1190 acres in 12 towns across the state (**Appendix B**).

DEEP Land Acquisitions:

6	976.85	\$1.46
Properties acquired for new State open space	Acres of open space protected by the State	Match dollars leveraged for every State dollar spent

State Funding to Partners:

12	1,190	\$3.7 million
Partner projects completed under the State’s open space grant program	Acres protected by Partners under the State’s open space grant program	Grant funding assistance to Partners

Since 1998:

51,000+ acres

preserved as open space under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program.

38,000+ acres

protected by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies under the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program.

600+ Partner Projects

reviewed and approved for funding under the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program.

\$137+ million

provided in State funding to partners under the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program.

Over 300 Acres New Core Forest Preserved in Northeast CT With Help from DEEP Open Space Grant

With \$234,000 in aid from a State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant, the Wyndham Land Trust permanently protected 365 acres of undeveloped land located on the east side of Swedetown Road in Pomfret, connecting 1,400 acres of adjacent protected lands in the immediate area. The property features headwaters to Nightingale Brook, which flows into Mashamoquet Brook, and a large, forested swamp with native shrubs. The property can be accessed by car pull-off along Quarry Road for public passive recreation, such as bird watching.



2021 DEEP Open Space Acquisition Actions

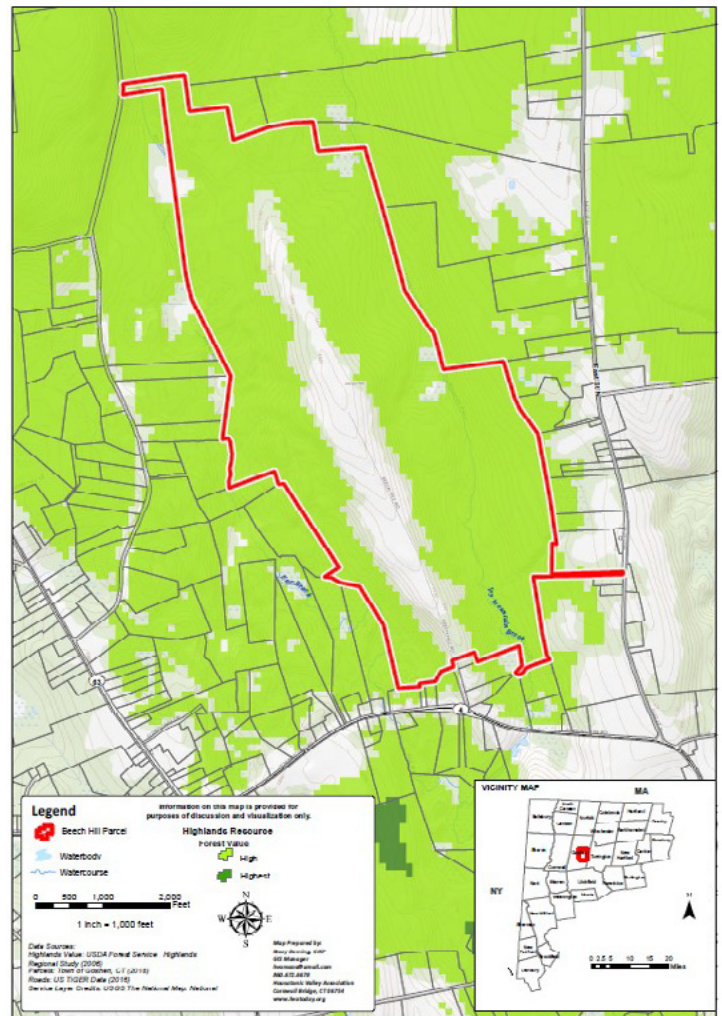
State Property Acquisition Review

DEEP evaluated 18 properties covering over 1,375 acres eligible for State purchase through the **State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program**. There are currently over 100 properties covering thousands of acres that have been reviewed and approved for acquisition. Statewide real estate transaction trends saw an increase in demand for property sales, especially lots in rural and suburban areas, favoring sellers and making State acquisitions of larger parcels for open space very competitive. Moreover, continued challenges presented by the COVID-19 virus pandemic presented challenges to the number of properties that could be purchased by DEEP.

Federal Partnership Protects Over 600 Acres of New Public Open Space in Goshen

A spectacular, 625-acre property and one of the largest remaining undeveloped lots in Goshen was purchased by DEEP with \$1,225,000 in federal assistance from a US Fish and Wildlife Service, Highlands Conservation Act grant. The Highlands Conservation Act program provides funding for the acquisition of lands or interest in land valuable for protection of water, forest, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources within the designated “Highlands Region” states of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Added to the Goshen Wildlife Management Area, this property is ideally located near the center of town and expands opportunities for natural outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing. The acquisition helps to protect populations of New England Cottontail in a focus area where efforts to restore their preferred habitat is underway. The property boasts open fields and more than 500 acres of mature core forest. Two brooks flank each side of the property, providing important habitat for documented populations of native brook trout. Additionally, the property contains inland forested and shrub wetlands, which are identified as Key Habitats in Connecticut’s State Wildlife Action Plan.



The Green Plan: Connecticut's Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy

The Green Plan was released by DEEP in 2017 as a statewide planning document developed in partnership with municipalities and numerous conservation organizations to guide land acquisitions towards achieving the state's open space goal. The Green Plan includes a **5-year Action Strategy** which should drive the protection of lands key for watershed and coastal resources, fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and buffers to climate change. The Action Strategy sets priorities and target acreages for land acquisition through year 2022, such as large forest blocks, trail linkages, and tidal marsh upland migration areas. The plan contains additional information about existing open space in the state, grant funding programs, and more.



Looking Ahead — Revising the Green Plan

As required by statute, DEEP is revising the Green Plan to provide an updated assessment of statewide open space since its last version, including progress towards implementing the 5-Year Action Plan and reaching Connecticut's goal of protecting 673,210 acres.

DEEP needs to hear from all stakeholders to develop Connecticut's next planning document that will be of highest value for the state, municipalities, regional planning agencies, land conservation organizations, and the public. View or download the Green Plan by visiting www.ct.gov/deep/greenplan. Stay tuned to DEEP's webpage for news and information on how you can provide comments on how to use or improve the next Green Plan.



2021 State Assistance to Land Conservation Partners: OSPA

The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA)

In 2021, 12 projects were financially completed with over \$3.7 million in assistance from the OSWA Grant Program, permanently protecting 1,190 acres (**Appendix B**). In the fall of 2021, DEEP announced grant awards totaling \$7.19 million to support protecting another 1012.08 acres and 15 open space projects submitted to the 24th grant round (**Appendix C**).

DEEP subsequently opened the 25th grant round and will announce those awards in the fall of 2022. OSWA leverages State, local, and private funds to create a cooperative open space acquisition program. OSWA provides grants to municipalities and nonprofit land conservation organizations for the acquisition of open space land, and to water companies for the acquisition of Class I and Class II watershed land.

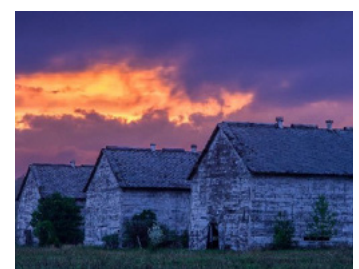
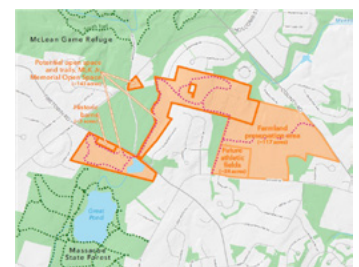
In exchange for grants, DEEP receives a conservation and public access easement over the property acquired to ensure that it is protected and available to residents as open space forever. Class I watershed land is sometimes exempt from the public access requirement for public health reasons. DEEP is willing to accept limited public access (at the discretion of the Commissioner) when a conservation easement is purchased on land where it would be disruptive of active agricultural activity.

To help DEEP support its partners in reaching their open space goals, the State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board convenes several times a year to review OSWA project selection criteria, policies, and procedures. The Review Board also makes State open space program recommendations to the Commissioner and others each year.

Historic Location Preservation: 131 Acres of Historically Significant Property Preserved in Simsbury

With \$400,000 in OSWA grant funding from DEEP, the Town of Simsbury permanently protected 131 acres at Meadowood featuring a historically significant site with tobacco farm barns where Martin Luther King, Jr. lived and worked during summers in his early adult life under Atlanta's Morehouse College work exchange program. The barns will be restored and interpretive signage installed. The State Historic Preservation Office received an American Civil Rights Grant to facilitate marking the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

This preserved site connects the 4,400-acre McLean Game Refuge with Massacoe State Forest, and over 25 miles of hiking trails from Simsbury to Granby and Canton. An additional adjacent 158 acres were secured by the Town of Simsbury for farmland protection and municipal active recreational fields. Combined, the total Meadowood property purchase was made possible through additional funding from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Highlands Conservation Act Program, the George Dudley Seymour Trust Fund, and many generous private donations to the Town.



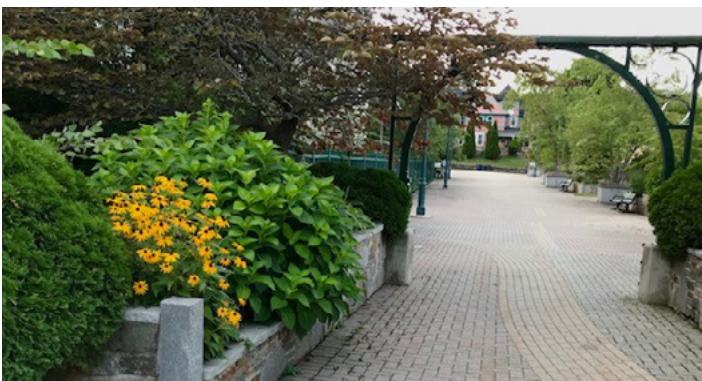
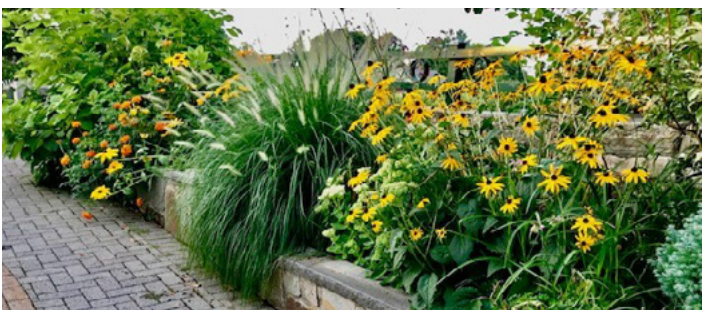
2021 State Assistance to Land Conservation Partners: UGCG

In 2021, six (6) municipalities were awarded a total of \$276,203 in funding from the State Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) to maintain local green spaces and community gardens (table below).

Since 2007, this program initiative has provided over \$2.5 million in grants to eligible cities and towns across Connecticut. Addressing multiple open space needs in densely populated areas, these grants help renovate municipally-owned lots into new or enhanced green spaces for recreation and local food production in urban neighborhoods. Among other improvements, grants can be used to towards small garden tool sheds, designing ADA-accessible walkways, and procuring materials for garden beds for use by children, people with disabilities, and senior citizens.

Municipal Sponsor	UGCG Project	Grant Award
City of New Haven	Kimberly Field Restoration	\$60,950
City of New Haven	Improvements to Various Community Gardens	\$70,000
City of Waterbury	Brass City Green & Community Garden Initiative	\$65,000
Town Killingly	Community Garden Enhancements	\$2,382
Town of Windham	Garden on the Bridge Improvements	\$60,371
Town of Groton	Municipal Complex Project	\$17,500
Total:		\$276,203

The Garden on the Bridge Gets Fresh Funding



The Town of Windham secured \$60,371 in UGCG grant funding to continue local efforts underway to revitalize the beloved pedestrian bridge over the Willimantic River and its approaches on Main Street and Pleasant Street in Willimantic. With these funds, the Town and its non-profit project co-sponsors, Garden Club of Windham and Friends of the Garden on the Bridge, will perform mulching and replanting of rehabilitated garden beds, resurfacing of cracked flower containers, installation of new nighttime lighting, ADA-compliant paver walkways, a bicycle rack, trash receptacles, and more. These measures will ensure the public park remains safe and enjoyable for community residents and visitors.

Federal Land Acquisition Grant Programs

In the acquisition of new properties for public use and benefit, DEEP makes use of available Federal grant programs to further leverage State bond funding. Staff at the Department's Unit of Land Acquisition and Management weaves these complementary funding programs, finding parcels which match multiple values criteria, and guiding prospective sellers through the State and Federal land purchasing processes.

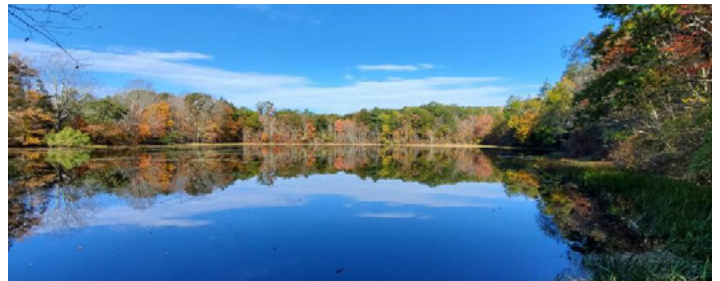
The Highlands Conservation Act

The Highlands Conservation Act Grant Program, administered through the US Fish and Wildlife Service, provides 50% matching funds to DEEP or its partners for the acquisition of lands within the Highlands region of Connecticut. The conservation of lands within this region helps preserve core forest habitat, supporting thriving wildlife populations, protect clean drinking water resources, and provide abundant recreational opportunities for the public. This grant program is an increasingly important asset for DEEP acquisitions within Connecticut's share of the region. Since its inception in 2004, DEEP and its partners have utilized over \$7,987,000 in funding to protect 3,786 acres of open space of the Connecticut Highlands region.

In 2021, DEEP managed to leverage \$1,335,000 in Highlands funds for the purchase of two properties, protecting 702 acres of open space (**Appendix A**). In addition, \$1,400,000 in Highlands funds was paired with the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grand Program (OSWA) for the purchase of a conservation easement over 131.7 acres within the Meadowood property in Simsbury (**Appendix B**).

The Forest Legacy Program

The Forest Legacy Program is an important part of the land acquisition puzzle in Connecticut. The program targets valuable forestland for the purchase of conservation easements. The program pays 75% of the appraised value of the property, with the owner donating the remaining 25%.



In 2021, the Forest Legacy Program helped to complete the acquisition of conservation easements over the final two properties within Connecticut's Whip-Poor-Will Forest Legacy Project, providing a total of \$406,000 to protect 179 acres (Appendix A). The Whip-Poor-Will Woods (WPWW) project is a coalition of seven landowners who have agreed to protect 1,553 acres of forestland in Stafford, CT. The protected landscape is home to several state listed wildlife species and species identified as Greatest Conservation Need. This project also protects 400 acres of public water supply watershed areas, and directly abuts a reservoir as well.

The EPA Long Island Sound Grant

The US EPA's Long Island Sound Futures Fund aims to protect marsh land for migratory species and to improve the health and ecosystem of Long Island Sound. DEEP made use of this fund in 2021, securing a \$500,000 award towards the acquisition of Medlyn Farm in Guilford (Appendix A), securing a conservation easement over the 20.58 acre property. The property is exceptional in a number of ways: it is part the popular Brandford Trail's Stony Creek section, containing traditional indigenous territory of the Totoket and Menunkatuck communities of the Quinnipiac, and containing a portion of the Jarvis Creek estuary along Route 146. The estuary is a rare piece of open salt marsh, home to many native and threatened species of plants, fish and migratory birds.

2021 State Land Encroachment Resolutions

DEEP established and follows an Encroachment Enforcement Response Policy in an effort to preserve and protect lands held in public trust as protected open space. Public Act 06-89 was enacted to better protect public open space by allowing the Department to seek relief and penalize those who encroach upon it. Encroachment means to conduct an activity that damages or alters the land, vegetation, or other features without appropriate permission. The act applies to all publicly held open space, including any land in which the State, municipalities, or a nonprofit land conservation organization holds a conservation easement interest. Under this act, encroachers can be directed to restore, and/or pay for the restoration of, affected open space areas. Cases of knowing and willful violation can have further damages charged equal to five times the cost of restoration.

In cooperation with other Divisions across the agency, staff at DEEP's Land Acquisition and Management Unit actively assists with identifying, documenting, and addressing known encroachments at lands held as open space by DEEP. DEEP has successfully resolved many of these encroachments. In 2021, notable effort towards encroachment resolutions included work to address unauthorized tree cutting, fence installation, and debris dumping at State Park and Forest lands.

What's an Encroachment on State Land? For example ...



Unauthorized Construction

- Sheds, docks, fences, other structures;
- Building or improving trails, roads, driveways;
- Landscaping;
- Utilities



Alterations

- Destroying or moving stone walls;
- Cutting trees;
- Clearing vegetation;
- Moving or removing boundary markers



Storage/Dumping

- Leaving vehicles;
- Tool depots;
- Material storage;
- Trash or debris piles

Appendix A

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021

Property Name	Town	Fee Acres	Easement Restriction or R.O.W.	State Share	Cooperator Share	Cooperator (Grant Program)	Purpose of Acquisition
Szymanski	Winchester & Torrington	74.75	N/A	\$110,000	\$110,000	USFWS (Highlands Act)	Addition to Paugnut State Forest
White	Pomfret	30.63	N/A	\$200,000	N/A	N/A	Addition to Mashomoquet Brook State Park
Hopko Phase II	Stafford	32.22	N/A	N/A	\$64,500	USFS (Forest Legacy Act)	Conservation Easement, CT Whip-Poor-Will Project
Miller-Baker-Brown	Stafford	146.55	N/A	N/A	\$342,000	USFS (Forest Legacy Act)	Conservation Easement, CT Whip-Poor-Will Project
Medlyn Farm	Guilford	20.58	N/A	N/A	\$500,000	EPA (Long Island Sound)	Conservation Easement, Long Island Sound Grant
Beech Hill Road LLC	Goshen	627.12	N/A	\$1,225,000	\$1,225,000	USFWS (Highlands Act)	Addition to Goshen WMA
Total		976.85		\$1,535,000	\$2,241,500		

Appendix B

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants Financially Completed by DEEP January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	Grant Amount
Berlin Land Trust	Lamentation Mountain Property	Middletown	46.56	\$63,450
Groton Open Space Association	Sheep Farm South	Groton	103.32	\$600,000
Northern CT Land Trust	Wright Property	Ellington	116.43	\$132,500
Town of Southington	136 School Street & 1205 Marion Ave	Southington	5.50	\$82,600
Avalonia Land Conservancy	Green Falls River Glen	North Stonington	86.50	\$195,000
Manchester Land Conservation Trust	Lombardo Farm Property	Manchester, Glastonbury	102.10	\$300,000
Madison Land Conservation Trust	Lowry Woods	Madison	78.83	\$462,500
Steep Rock Association	Hillside Farm	Washington, Woodbury	85.10	\$350,000
Town of Simsbury	Meadowood	Simsbury	131.73	\$400,000 (\$1,400,000 Highlands)
Wyndham Land Trust	Townshend Property	Pomfret, Woodstock	364.25	\$234,000
Wilton Land Conservation Trust	183 Ridgefield Road	Wilton	13.46	\$707,000
Town of Sprague	Peltier Property	Sprague, Franklin	56.36	\$158,200
Total			1,190.14	\$3,685,250

Appendix C

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program Grant Awards Announced 2021

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	Grant Amount
Winchester Land Trust	Rosgen Property	Winchester	59.23	\$90,000
Stamford Land Conservation Trust	Margaret & Arthur Altshul Trust	Stamford	64	\$2,250,000
Middlesex Land Trust	Mashomasic Rattlesnake Preserve	Portland & E. Hampton	147.4	\$364,000
Madison Land Conservation Trust	Birch Branch Meadow	Madison	29	\$585,000
Salisbury Association	Belter Wack Forest (easement)	Salisbury	50	\$162,500
Southbury Land Trust	Bothwell Farm	Southbury	31.2	\$253,500
Sharon Land Trust	Goldfrank Property	Sharon	81	\$527,800
Aspetuck Land Trust	Montanaro Property	Wilton	9.8	\$298,125
Killingworth Land Conservation Trust	Greer-Duffy Property	Killingworth	24	\$78,000
The Nature Conservancy	Granskog Property	Redding	99	\$1,105,000
East Haddam Land Trust	Saunders Property	East Haddam	68	\$198,250
Town of Bozrah	Glenbowdki-Ous Property	Bozrah	160	\$300,000
Town of Willington	Talmadge Estate	Willington	16.17	\$81,250
Town of Oxford	Vaill Property	Oxford	78	\$409,500
Town of Wallingford (Water Division)	264 Williams Road	Wallingford	95.28	\$487,500
Total			1,012.08	\$7,190,425