

Open Space Report to the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee and the State Bond Commission

March 2022

Overview

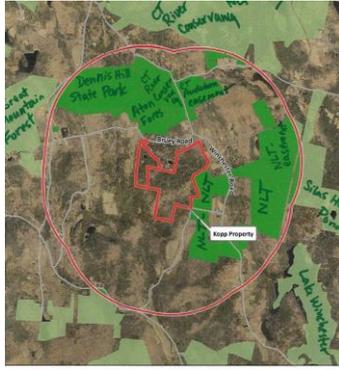
Section 22a-6v of the General Statutes of Connecticut requires the Commissioner of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection to submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to finance, revenue and bonding and to the State Bond Commission each month. The report provides information on the acquisition of land or interests in land by the state, a municipality, water company or nonprofit organization using funds authorized for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program established under Sections 7-131d and the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program established under Sections 23-73 to 23-79 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program provides grants to municipalities and private nonprofit land conservation organizations for the acquisition of open space land and to water companies to acquire land to be classified as Class I or Class II watershed land. The State of Connecticut receives a conservation and public access easement on property acquired to ensure that the property will be protected and available to residents of Connecticut as open space in perpetuity. Three Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition grants were funded in March 2022. Additional information on the projects follows.

Sponsor	Project	Town	Acres Protected
Norfolk Land Trust Association, Incorporated	Kopp Property	Norfolk	234.571
East Lyme Land Trust, Inc.	Nehantic Nature Preserve	East Lyme & Montville	301.78
City of Bristol & Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut, Inc.	Pigeon Hill Property	Bristol & Burlington	64.112

Norfolk Land Trust, Incorporated (NLT)
Kopp Property, Norfolk
234.571 Acre – Fee Acquisition



This property adjoins Norfolk Land Trust's Hall Meadow Brook and East Branch Headwaters Preserves and is easily accessible via Burey and Winchester Roads. It is a significant link between other large blocks of protected land such as the Great Mountain Forest and Dennis Hill State Park. It contains 210 acres of core forest including upland and forested wetland habitats. The upland forest, slopes, wetlands, and elevations create a wide diversity of habitats, timber stands and terrain that mitigate the impacts of climate change and support many important wildlife species. The NDDB identifies at least 10 species of rare animals and plants. The property has ponds and wetlands that form headwaters for Lake Winchester and both branches of the Naugatuck River. It is ideal for passive recreational uses as hiking, cross-country skiing, nature study, bird watching, picnicking, fishing, photography, and painting. There is an existing entrance/parking area and trails on the property as well as a small, rustic cabin on the large pond that NLT will convert into a bird observation blind for public use. There will be two trail spurs to the pond, one to the bird blind and one to a fishing spot. Additional funding was provided pursuant to a U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Fish & Wildlife Service Highlands Grant.

**East Lyme Land Trust, Inc. (ELLT)
Nehantic Nature Preserve, East Lyme
301.78 Acre – Fee Acquisition**



This property is less than ½ mile from the Holmes Road East Lyme entrance to the Nehantic State Forest. It is a large undeveloped forest with a healthy wildlife habitat of whitetail deer, turkey, rabbits, upland and migratory birds and small animals. Surface water bodies include Cranberry Meadow Brook and Latimer Brook, which contribute to the quality of the Niantic River, Niantic Bay and Long Island Sound. A portion of the property contains endangered, threatened and special concern species and significant natural communities. This parcel will provide watershed protection, drinking water protection, habitat protection and passive recreational activities. There are several dirt roads with smooth surface and condition, offering a feasible transition into wheelchair accessible trails.

**City of Bristol (City) & Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut Inc. (ELCC)
Pigeon Hill Property
64.112 Acre – Fee Acquisition**



This collaborative effort between the City and ELCC, protects 34.552 acres in Bristol purchased by the City and 29.56 acres in the Town of Burlington purchased by ELCC. The property is part of a 750-acre network of sanctuaries, preserves and education centers run by ELCC, which educates over 20,000 children and adults about nature each year. There are several linkages to existing open space including the ELCC Harry C. Barnes Memorial Nature Center, Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, Seymour Park and the CFPA Blue Trail System. Freeman Hill Brook flows through the property and is home to native Brook and Brown Trout. There are wetlands, a 0.6-acre pond, a 45-acre mature, mixed hardwood forest, 9 acres of fields, a glacier esker along the western edge of the property and 15+/- acres of Statewide Important Soils. ELCC plans to extend its existing trail system to this property, providing opportunities for hiking, bird watching, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing and expanding educational programs here for children’s summer camp, Boy & Girl Scout programs. The fields currently used for equestrian purposes will be converted to grass and pollinator fields. A gravel mine, abandoned 25-30 years ago, will be developed into shrubland and pollinator habitat.

Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program is the State of Connecticut's primary program for the acquisition of lands for the beneficial use and enjoyment of the public as additions to the State's system of parks, forests, wildlife, fisheries and natural resource management areas. The program acquires land that represents the ecological diversity of Connecticut, including natural features such as rivers, mountainous areas, coastal systems and their natural areas, in order to ensure the conservation of such land for recreational, scientific, educational, cultural and aesthetic purposes. There were two closings for one Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program acquisition in March 2022. Additional information on the project(s) follows.

Property Name	Town(s)	Cooperators & Cost Share	State Share	Acres Protected	Purpose of Acquisition
Woodbury Mountain, LLC	Cornwall	USFWS Highlands \$560,000	\$0	109.327	Addition to Wyantanuck State Forest
Ruth Turner Estate, LLC	Cornwall	USFWS Highlands \$80,000	\$0	54.709	Addition to Wyantanuck State Forest

Woodbury Mountain, LLC
Ruth Turner Estate, LLC
164.036 Acres Combined – Fee Acquisition

The Woodbury Mountain, LLC and Ruth Turner Estate, LLC properties are part of a larger project in which DEEP is acquiring several parcels totaling 536 acres in Cornwall. The property is in a rural residential section of town, bordered by large tracts of undeveloped land. The property is mostly forested and are characterized by steep slopes and high mountaintops that drain into various streams that feed into low lying swamps and river corridors that extend between the hills. The lands will be added to the Wyantanuck State Forest and provide enhanced access for passive recreational uses. Funding was provided by a Highlands Conservation Act grant administered by the USFWS.

