



A Centennial Overview
1913-2013



**A State Park Centennial Message from
Energy and Environmental Protection
Commissioner Robert J. Klee**

Dear Friends,

This year, we are celebrating the Centennial of the Connecticut State Parks system.

Marking the 100th anniversary of our parks is a fitting way to pay tribute to past conservation-minded leaders of our state, who had the foresight to begin setting aside important and scenic lands for public access and enjoyment. It is also a perfect moment to commit ourselves to the future of our park system – and to providing first-class outdoor recreation opportunities for our residents and visitors well into the future.

Our park system had humble beginnings. A six-member State Park Commission was formed by then Governor Simeon Baldwin in 1913. One year later the Commission purchased its first land, about four acres in Westport for what would become Sherwood Island State Park.

Today, thanks to the dedication and commitment of many who have worked in the state park system over the last century, Connecticut boasts a park system of which we can all be proud.

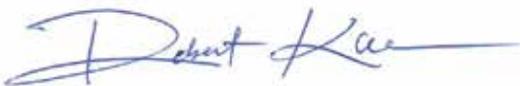
This system includes 107 locations, meaning there is a park close to home no matter where you live. Our parks cover more than 32,500 acres and now host more than eight million visitors a year – and have hosted a remarkable total of more than 450 million visitors since we first began counting in 1919.

Looking beyond the statistics, our parks offer fantastic opportunities for families to spend time outdoors together. They feature swimming, boating, hiking, picnicking, camping, fishing – or simply the chance to enjoy the world of nature.

You can become part of the history of our state park system by making time to visit and enjoy our parks. You can find out more about them online at www.ct.gov/deep/stateparks and you can read more about the State Parks Centennial at www.ct.gov/deep/stateparks100.

I hope to see you and your family at one of our state parks soon.

Sincerely,

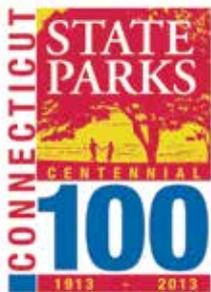
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Klee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

CONNECTICUT STATE PARKS CENTENNIAL

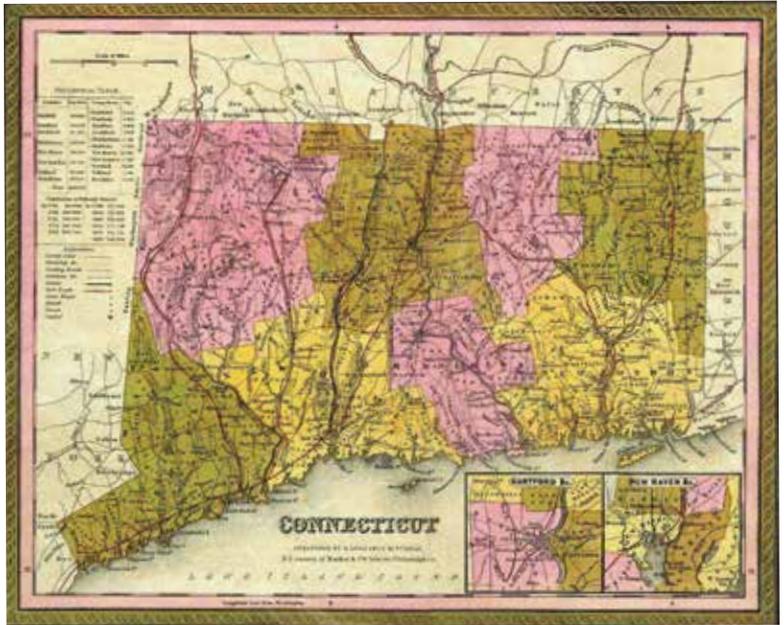
An Historical Overview

As the Connecticut State Park System reaches its milestone Centennial, we take a look back at how the parks developed over one hundred, sometimes wonderful, sometimes challenging, years.

To set the stage for the creation of the Park Commission and the first park land acquisition, we begin with an overview of what life was like in Connecticut in the 1910s, before there were any state parks.



A pre-1900 Connecticut map showing counties, city centers and major rail road routes of transportation.

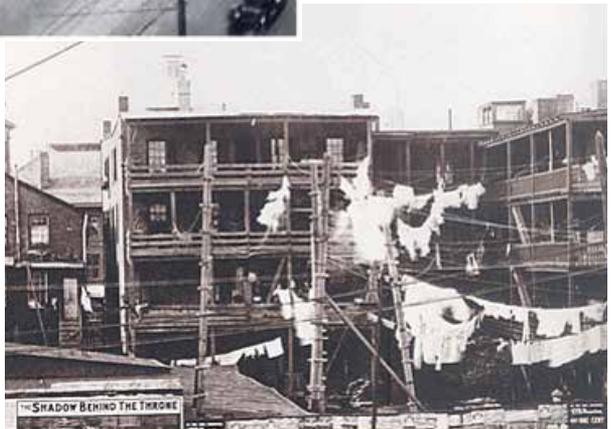


One hundred years ago Connecticut was a very different place than it is today. The 1910 census reported Connecticut's population at 1,114,756. By 1913 it had grown by 85,244, or 7.2 percent, to 1,200,000.



Increasingly, this growing population was concentrating in the cities.

Congested urban living conditions, ca. 1910.



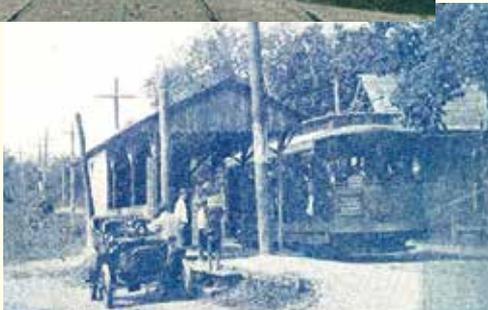
Since the 1860s, city parks had been growing in popularity across the state. But many people needed relief from the cities, especially in the hot summer months.



Colorful picture post cards from around the state depicted the wide variety of city parks in the early 1900s.



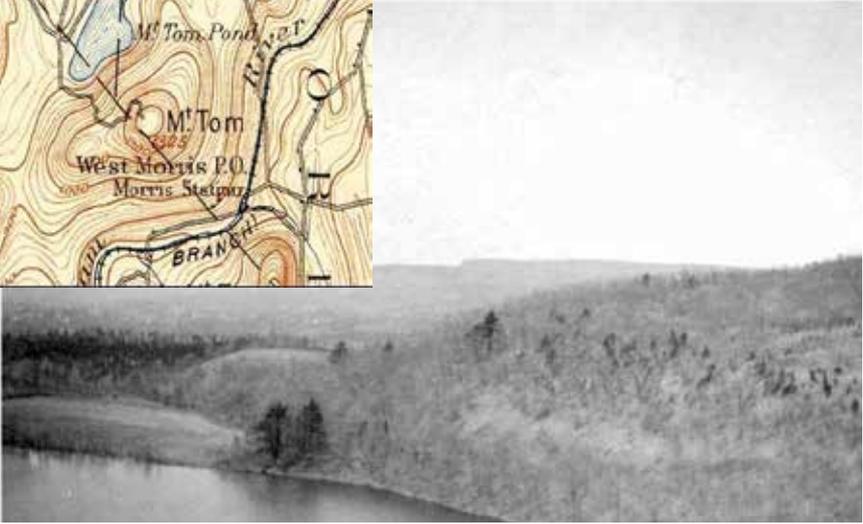
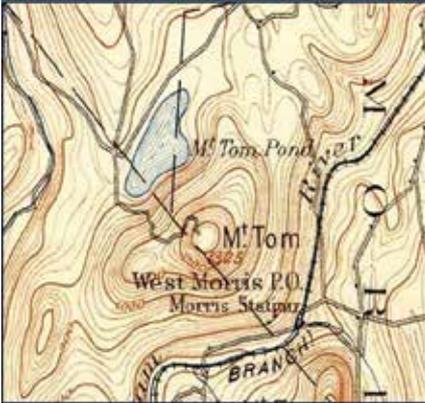
In 1913, Connecticut's mass transit system, the trolley, had grown to its greatest extent with 1,118 miles of track in service and became the most convenient way to move around the state.



100 years ago trolley travel offered most city dwellers the opportunity to crisscross the state conveniently.

An Early Gift

In 1911, the State of Connecticut received a gift of land atop Mount Tom in Washington, Connecticut specifically for use as a state park.



The U.S. Geological Survey map shows the elevations and the photograph shows the celebrated view from the top of Mount Tom - the first gift to the state for use as a state park.



Simeon Baldwin was Connecticut Governor from 1911 to 1915.

Unfortunately, though our three neighboring states had state park properties, Connecticut did not. As a result, the land was assigned to Connecticut's existing State Forest Commission.

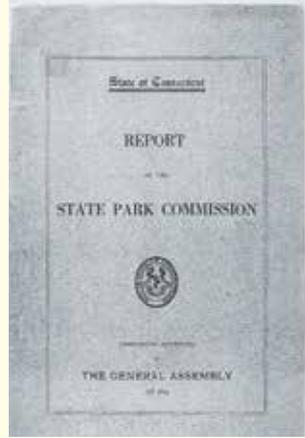
That gift gave impetus to a growing movement for a state park commission in Connecticut. As a result, Governor Simeon E. Baldwin assigned a temporary State Park Commission to study the feasibility of such an undertaking and report their findings to the General Assembly.

Once the General Assembly received the report in the spring of 1913, they committed to creating a permanent State Park Commission.

The official act which established the State Park Commission in 1913 was:

**Chapter 230,
Public Acts of 1913**

The Governor on or before July 1, 1913 shall appoint six persons, who shall constitute a board to be known as the State Park Commission. The members of this commission shall hold office ... beginning with the first day of September, 1913.

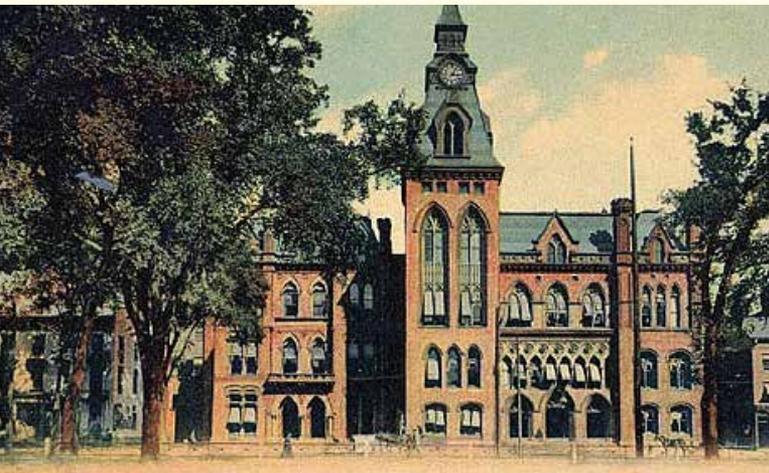


On September 29, 1913 the State Park Commission held its very first meeting at the New Haven County Court House in New Haven, CT.

The 1913 report convinced the General Assembly that there was the need, desire and opportunity to begin a State Park Commission in Connecticut.

The original six member Commission voted General Edward Bradley, whom it held in the highest esteem, as its Chair. He was joined by John Calhoun, John Fox, Edward Wilkins, Lucius Robinson and Herman Chapman.

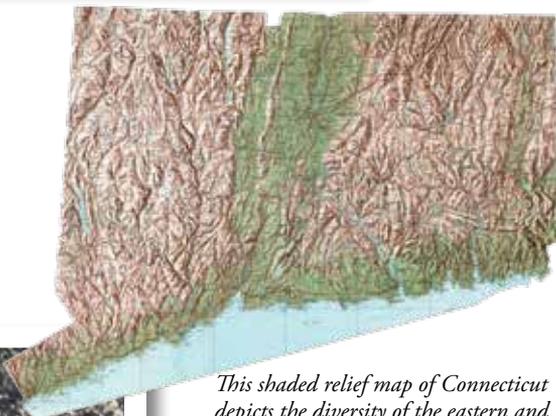
The first State Park Commission meeting took place in the old New Haven County Courthouse in September, 1913.



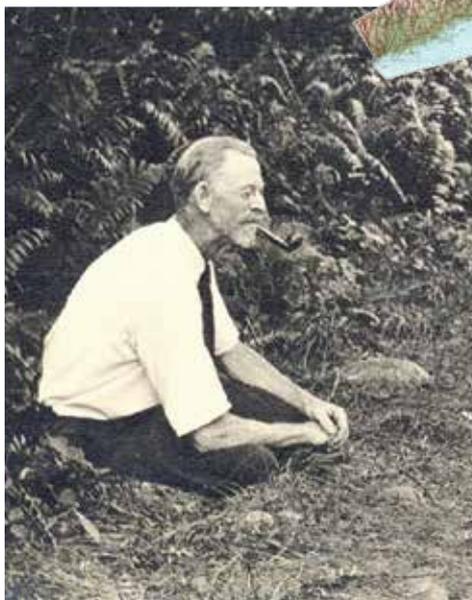


The First Park Commissioners were (from left to right) by John Calhoun, John Fox, Edward Wilkins, Lucius Robinson, Chairman Edward Bradley and Herman Chapman.

The six member State Park Commission was chosen to represent the primary geographic regions of the state: the eastern and western hills, the Connecticut River valley and the coastline.



This shaded relief map of Connecticut depicts the diversity of the eastern and western hills, the central valley and the diverse coastline.



Though anxious to get underway, the Park Commissioners knew that before any land was purchased a systematic examination of the state's entire landscape must be made. Within four months the Park Commission had the man for the job.

Enter Albert M. Turner

Turner was a native of Litchfield, Connecticut and a Yale educated



Turner travelled the length of the Connecticut coast inspecting all beaches for state park potential. He photographed this view of Sherwood Island in Westport in spring of 1914.

civil engineer. He, more than any other person, is the man who in his 28 years with Parks shaped the state park system into what we know and enjoy today.

The 46 year old Turner began his statewide investigation immediately. From the start, Turner was guided by one overriding quest - the nearly universal desire to be near the water, especially Long Island Sound.

Turner traversed the entire 254 mile Connecticut coast and recommended three locations easily recognizable to us today: Bluff Point in Groton, Hammonasset Beach in Madison, and Sherwood Island in Westport.

For the people in the northern tier of the state, Turner realized their waterfront of choice was along a lake shore. He compiled a list of 108 lakes forty acres in size and larger, culled it to 57, visited each of those and recommended 18 priorities.



Squantz Pond in New Fairfield, ca. 1914.



Selden Neck on the Connecticut River in Lyme, ca. 1914.

Continuing his concentration on water locations, Turner next appraised the lower rivers in the state.

He reported that the Connecticut River has always been and will continue to be

a priority, especially below Middletown; the Thames River was beautiful, but full with advanced development; the Housatonic River offered charming possibilities (there was not yet a north-south roadway built through the valley); and the then heavily industrialized and polluted Naugatuck River was a 'disgrace to our civilization.'

Once the priorities were known and agreed upon, the six commissioners could get to work laying the groundwork for assembling a system of state parks.

The Acquisitions Begin

The first challenge that the new Park Commission faced was one of funding. The original Act allotted the State Park Commission \$20,000 dollars for land acquisitions for their first two years.

But an acre of saltwater beach shorefront with buildable upland behind it was valued at \$6,500 an acre.

A single factor was readily apparent: the shoreline should be the first to be preserved since its value was high and escalating rapidly.



Once the first State Park Commissioners agreed to a plan of land acquisition they were ready to begin the business of acquiring land for a state park system.

With these factors in mind, on July 7, 1914, the Commissioners agreed to an option on “. . . a certain piece of land containing about four acres, located in



Albert Turner was disappointed by the development along some portions of the coastline in his 1914 reconnaissance.



the Town of Westport, which is about to be offered at public auction . . .” When the land-locked property was recorded in the in the Town of Westport records on December 22, 1914, the State Park Commission had its first real estate on what would become known as Sherwood Island State Park.

A week later, 427 acres in East Haddam were recorded as Hurd State Park and Connecticut’s State Park system was truly underway.

The early state park acquisitions continued along those lines - by word of mouth and general affordability. Mountain tops, upland brooks and Connecticut River properties dominated these first purchases. Slowly, over the next four years, the park system grew.

During the First World War, which ended in 1918, park properties had had little pressure on them since few visitors came.

But by end of the War, change was underway. Henry Ford had incorporated

the assembly line into his automobile production in 1913 making cars affordable for nearly everyone. Times were changing.

The State Park Commission accommodated this increase in motoring by initiating a new kind of park, a wayside park.

Visiting motorists could fill their gas tanks, eat and camp free for one night. 1918 also brought a time for reflection about the Commission's first five years. There were now 15 parks in the system, and for Albert Turner it meant a time of critical review.



Top: Haystack Mountain, Norfolk, circa 1900.

Middle: A transition time of auto travel and trolley tracks, circa 1920.

Bottom: Wharton Brook State Park opened for motorists in 1919.

At the State Park Commission meeting on December 10, a frustrated Turner spoke forcefully about the persistent, ongoing lack of a coastal park: “The greatest need for action continues to be along the shore of Long Island Sound.” It was time to obtain funds, purchase land and develop ‘ . . . one large shoreline park so that the people can decide if it is good.’

With these comments, Turner set the wheels in motion for the single greatest feat of the early park system.

As a Civil Engineer, Turner knew that



*State Park
Field Secretary
Albert Turner
first targeted
Hammonasset
Beach as a
possible park in
spring, 1914.*

the infrastructure necessary for the comfort and well-being of tens of thousands of park visitors would essentially be that of a small city. The challenges to building this infrastructure would be great.



Hammonasset Beach Pavilion as proposed in late 1919.

He had visited Savin Rock Amusement Park in West Haven and observed that the problems of congestion from its 1.2 million annual visitors had become so acute that intervention of the State might be the only solution.



Turner noted that private industry's solution for managing the public was minimizing the space for people to move about, thus making it easier to control them.

But Turner had a different vision: 'The shoreline State Park must have breathing space for the multitudes, and the shore must be preserved essentially un-tarnished.'



The crowds at Savin Rock Park in West Haven inspired Turner to use an "open space" format for the predictably popular shoreline state parks.

With those words, Turner had motivated the Commission, and the Commission motivated the Connecticut General Assembly. When the next budget was released in June, 1919, the Park's new allocation was \$365,000,



The mostly hand-built, 310 foot long wood pavilion was completed in less that six months.

up from the previous \$20,000. The Commission's influence had been profound.

Work began immediately at the beach Turner had recommended and, thirteen months after the money was committed, in July 1920, the first Connecticut shoreline park available to the public opened at Hammonasset Beach in Madison.

In those thirteen months, land totaling nearly 500 acres was purchased, the infrastructure of water, sewer, roads, and electricity for 20,000 daily visitors was drawn up and laid out, plans for a 310 foot long, all-wood pavilion were finalized, materials ordered, labor contracted and construction completed.

Hammonasset Beach met with immediate success! Albert Turner was right.



Hammonasset beaches and boardwalks attracted thousands.



The Clamshed offered food and refreshments to thousands of beach goers every summer.

Thousands came by car and trolley from the cities and rural communities to enjoy the fresh air and walk the boardwalks.

When the food service in the new Pavilion proved to be too small for the crowds, the Commissioners had a new structure built: The Clamshed.

It became the park eatery for literally thousands of visitors, and home to Park's own sandwich: the ten cent Hammonasset Special, and a namesake cigar: *the Hammonasset Beach Perfecto*.

The opening of Hammonasset Beach State Park in 1920 set the tone for the entire decade. Seventeen new additions to the park system during this decade brought the total to 38.

Notable among these, and thanks to the work of the Sleeping Giant Park Association and purchases by the Park Commission, 878 acres of the Giant were preserved in Hamden beginning in 1925.



Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden.



The early 1920's beachwear saw near-full body coverage for women and tee shirts for men.



In 1929 a conflict of fashion occurred along the Connecticut shore as summer beach styles were trending towards uncovering the body – a sharp contrast from the ladies beach dresses and men’s sleeveless shirts of just a few years previous.

The Park Commissioners knew Sun Back bathing suits were coming in 1929, a style that dared to reveal arms, legs and featured a low cut, open back!

Most visitors accepted the fashion as the natural progression of beachwear. Some however, wrote letters objecting to such vulgarity and threatening to boycott the parks.

The angst was quelled by posting signs, but within a few years the style was common and the once heated issue had evaporated.

But by the end of October 1929, the prosperous decade had come to an end and a Great Depression set in.





Top: The depressed economy often forced individuals and companies to sell land to raise much needed cash, but buyers needed cash at hand to close the deals.



Middle: Before Rocky Neck State Park opened as a beach, it had been privately owned and home to a fish processing plant.

Bottom: CCC boys waiting in line for chow at Camp Roosevelt in Killingworth, circa 1934.

After the stock market collapsed, money for the State Park System became extremely limited.

But this created opportunities to add new properties to the park system for less expense than the previous decade.

The old fish factory and its accompanying half mile beach situated along the shore in East Lyme was purchased in June of 1931 for \$55,000 . . . \$21,000 below its price eight years earlier.





Funding for state park staff became a challenge and President Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs helped fill the void.

These crews of young men did extensive work in state parks and forests and completed projects which we still benefit from today. Examples include roads, bridges, dams, ponds, campgrounds, shelters and recreation areas.



From 1933 to 1942 twenty three CCC camps flourished across the state.

In the winter of 1934 WPA impressionist artist Harry Leith-Ross captured the CCCs at work on State Forest lands in Torrington that, once completed, went on to become Burr Pond State Park.

Impressionist artist Harry Leith-Ross captured the CCC boys at work in what would later become Burr Pond State Park in Torrington.



CCC projects included picnic shelters as above and tent encampments that were later converted to tar paper cabins.

The construction of the new pavilion at Rocky Neck State Park was the largest State Park project of the 1930s.

Local vacations were the rule during the decade of the Depression and as a result state parks were becoming crowded places. Two million visitors enjoyed the Connecticut State Parks in 1932.



Affordable labor was plentiful during the Great Depression and allowed for the completion of landmark park projects.

Below: Campgrounds filled up quickly at Hammonasset Beach in the summer of 1933.





By 1938 park attendance had peaked at 2.8 million.

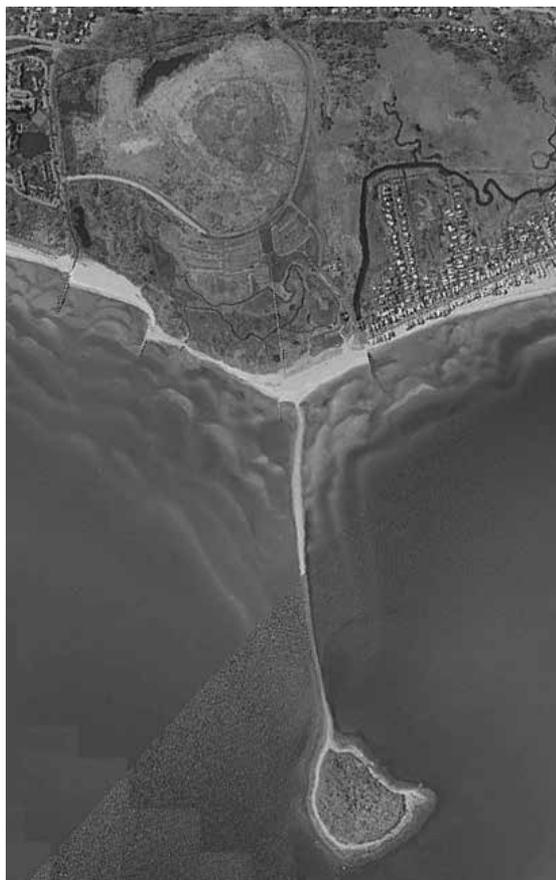
But by the early 1940s, the onset of World War II, gasoline rationing and military occupation of coastal parks brought such park visitation growth to an end.



Top: These crowds at Stratton Brook State Park in Simsbury were typical of the popularity and convenience of the many local state parks around the state during the war years.

Middle: In 1943 State Parks acquired actor William Gillette's "Castle" and grounds with the help of longtime State Park friend, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA).





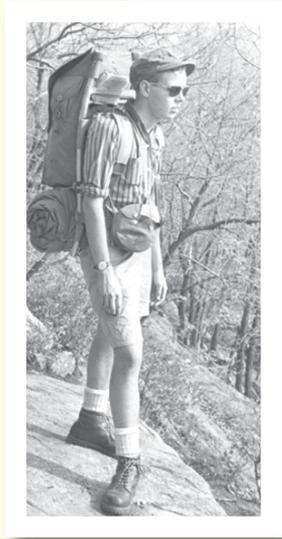
Despite the War, 16 new parks were added. One unique purchase in Hadlyme met both the river frontage and historical acquisition priorities of the Commission - Gillette Castle.

Some of the continued growth in parks was planned, as with the addition of the Heublein Tower acreage to the existing Talcott Mountain State Park along the Simsbury-Bloomfield line.

Top: The 1960 Acquisition of Silver Sands State Park in Milford continued the Park and Forest Commission tradition of providing recreational public access to the beaches at Long Island Sound.

Bottom: The 1966 Heublein Tower purchase brought hundreds of ridge-top acres to the existing Talcott Mountain State Park.



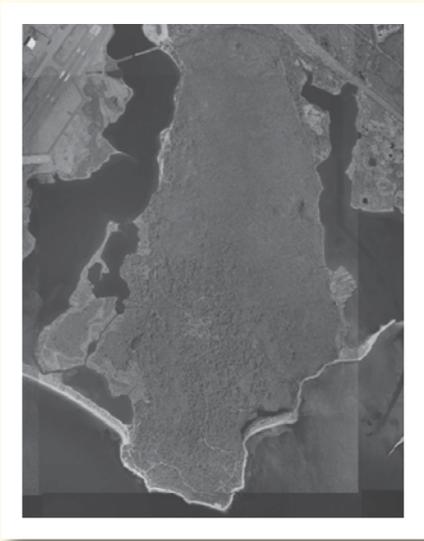


And other parts were surprises, as with the accidental discovery of the remarkable dinosaur trackway in Rocky Hill!

A New Era

The whole nature of recreation in parks changed after World War II. By the 1950s, leisure activities and leisure time jumpstarted the beginning of outdoor recreation as we know it today.

Camping, hiking, birding, skiing, fishing and the free time that came with the post war economy were all enjoyed in Connecticut State Parks.



Bluff Point in Groton was the first property that field agent Albert Turner noted as desirable for a state park in his 1914 survey of the Connecticut coastline. It finally became a park in 1963.

Outdoor recreation continued to grow in popularity into the 1960s and, as a result, state parks increased its frontage on Long Island Sound by fifty percent with the addition of Silver Sands in Milford and Bluff Point in Groton.



An historic discovery of dinosaur tracks on August 23, 1966 led to today's Dinosaur State Park.



In September 1971, the Park and Forest Commission, which began in September 1913, came to an end as “Parks” became a Division of the newly formed Department of Environmental Protection.



Over time the DEP logo has evolved from oval to circle with the most recent change finding ‘Parks’ as a division of Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.



In the 1970s and ‘80s, local residents who were adamant about their neighboring parks took up advocacy that, over time, formalized into our many Friends groups.

The Friends joined with Park's historic outdoor recreation and state ally, Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA), to continue to help the parks enhance and enlarge the park visitors' experience.

Continued growth along the lines of education and interpretation of the natural environment combine with a variety of outdoor activities to better serve the growing and diverse visitor base.



Today, Connecticut State Parks boasts 23 individual volunteer friends groups and an advocacy office which supports parks through education and public awareness.

The Connecticut Forest and Park Association began in 1895 and has been working cooperatively with state parks since Park's inception in 1913.



But the acquisition of, and improvements to, state park properties has not ended. Connecticut continues its search to acquire special or unique park properties as the opportunities present themselves.

And today, vendors at many of our parks add to the visitor experience. Steam trains originate from Connecticut Valley Railroad State Park in Essex, riverboats dock at Eagle Landing State Park in East Haddam and canoe rentals available at Burr Pond, Lake Waramaug and Squantz Pond State Parks are just a few examples of the enjoyable opportunities available at a variety of Connecticut state parks around the state.

A Centennial

At the Connecticut State Park 100 year anniversary, the 107 state parks stand as a tribute to the earliest visionaries and to all the staff who have contributed their excellence since the start.



In 2002 Fort Trumbull State Park, along the Thames River in New London, became one of the most unique historic properties in the state park system.

Eagle Landing State Park along the Connecticut River at Haddam provides access to the waterfront and beautiful views of the river valley.



The most recent addition to the state park system is Sunrise State Park in East Haddam. Overlooking the Salmon River and abutting Machimoodus State Park the two, in combination, offer 450 acres of hills, waterside, trails, meadows and ponds.

The 32,500 park acres have hosted 450 million visitors since counting began in 1919, and today everyone in the state is within a 15 minute drive of a park property.



The State Park Centennial has provided the opportunity to reflect upon and commemorate the first 100 years of Connecticut State Parks

and now, it's *Onward Ho!*.....

. . . to the next 100!



Connecticut State Parks and Forests provide outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the year.

Visit our Home Page at www.ct.gov/deep/stateparks and search by keywords such as camping, hiking maps, fishing, boating, swimming, mountain biking, earth caching, letter boxing, trails, disabled access and winter activities for additional information.



www.facebook.com/CTStateParks



Follow us on Twitter
[Twitter.com/CTDEPoutdoorrec](https://twitter.com/CTDEPoutdoorrec)



Today in Connecticut State Parks

Connecticut State Parks are home to some of the best outdoor activities in the state. Here is a list of some of the best locations:

Birding: Devil's Hopyard State Park, East Haddam
George Dudley Seymour State Park, Haddam
Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison
Osbornedale State Park, Derby
Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme
Sherwood Island State Park, Westport

Bicycling: Airline State Park Trail, Hebron; Multi-town
Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison
Hop River State Park, Bolton; Multi-town
Larkin State Park Trail, Southbury; Multi-town
Stratton Brook State Park, Simsbury

History: Dinosaur State Park, Rocky Hill
Fort Griswold State Park, Groton
Fort Trumbull State Park, New London
Gillette Castle State Park, East Haddam
Harkness Memorial State Park, Waterford
Osborne Homestead Museum, Derby
Putnam Memorial, Westport

Hiking: Bigelow Hollow State Park, Union
Gay City State Park, Hebron
Kettletown State Park, Southbury
Mashamoquet Brook State Park, Pomfret
Millers Pond State Park, Durham
Sleeping Giant State Park, Hamden

Fishing: Black Rock State Park, Watertown
Burr Pond State Park, Torrington
Chatfield Hollow State Park, Killingworth
Day Pond State Park, Colchester
Mansfield Hollow State Park, Mansfield
Quaddick State Park, Thompson
Mount Tom State Park, Litchfield

Canoeing & Kayaking Bigelow Hollow State Park, Union

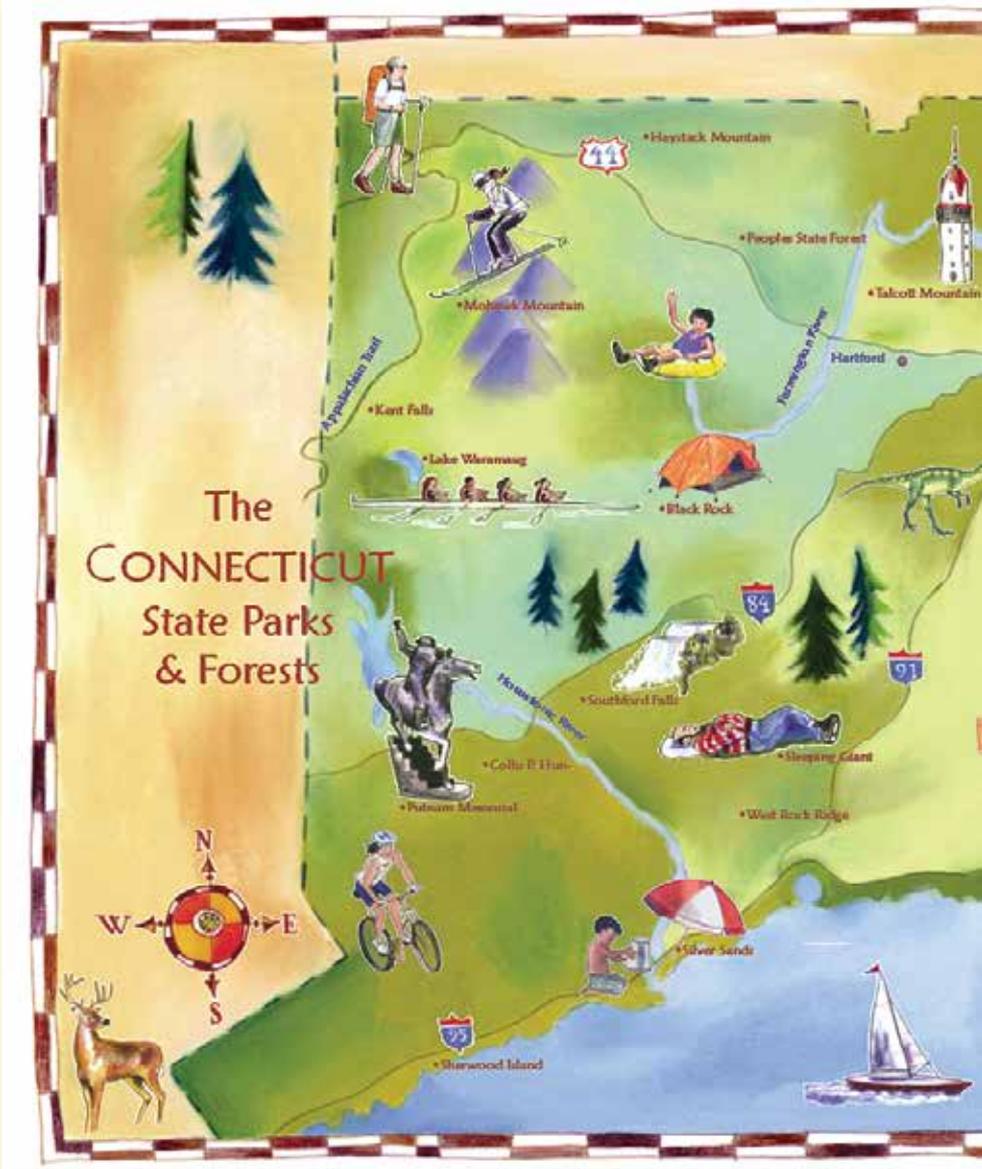
Bluff Point State Park, Groton
Hopeville Pond State Park, Griswold
Collis P. Huntington State Park, Redding
Lake Waramaug State Park, Kent
Mansfield Hollow State Park, Mansfield
Mohawk Mountain State Park, Cornwall/Goshen
Quaddick State Park, Thompson

Swimming: Black Rock State Park, Watertown
Burr Pond State Park, Torrington
Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison
Indian Well State Park, Shelton
Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme
Sherwood Island State Park, Westport
Silver Sands State Park, Milford
Squantz Pond State Park, New Fairfield
Wadsworth Falls State Park, Middletown/Middlefield
Wharton Brook State Park, Wallingford

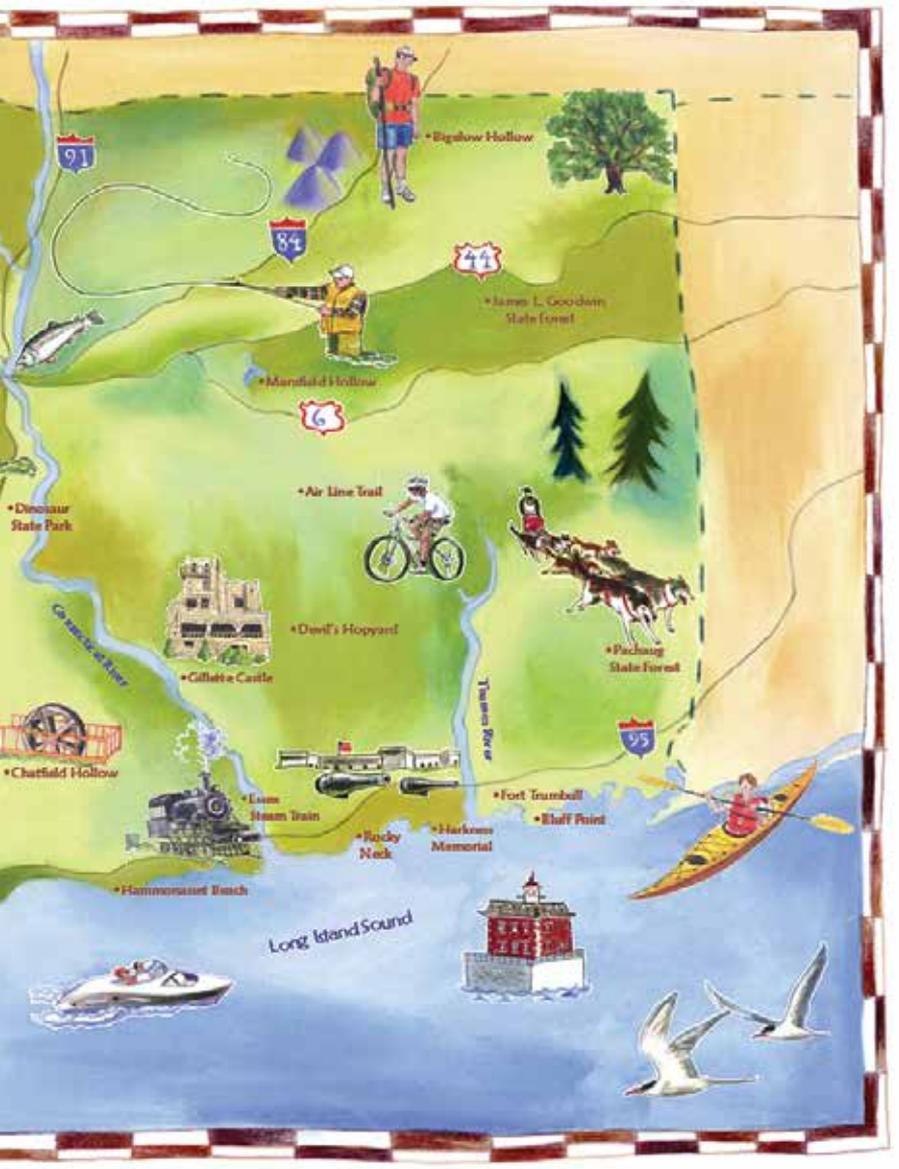
Camping: Black Rock State Park, Watertown
Devil's Hopyard State Park, East Haddam
Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison
Hopeville Pond State Park, Griswold
Housatonic Meadows State Park, Sharon
Kettletown State Park, Southbury
Lake Waramaug State Park, Kent
Macedonia Brook State Park, Kent
Mashamoquet Brook State Park, Pomfret
Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme
Salt Rock State Park Campground, Sprague

Winter Activities Fort Griswold State Park, New London, Sledding
George Dudley Seymour State Park, Haddam, X-country skiing
Haddam Meadows State Park, Haddam, X-country skiing
Collis P. Huntington State Park, Redding, X-country skiing
Mansfield Hollow State Park, Mansfield, Haddam, X-country skiing
Osbornedale State Park, Derby, Sledding and ice skating
Southford Falls State Park, Southbury, Ice Skating

At 100 Years old, Connecticut State Parks offer opportunities for relaxation, active recreation, history and culture from the shores of Long Island Sound, up through the major river valleys and into the northwest and northeast hills.



Explore it all at: www.ct.gov/deep/stateparks OR, better yet, visit a state park near you soon!



No Child Left Inside®

Launched in 2006, No Child Left Inside® is a promise to introduce children

to the wonder of nature – for their own health and well-being, for the future of environmental conservation, and for the preservation of the beauty, character and communities of the great State of Connecticut.

While today's children

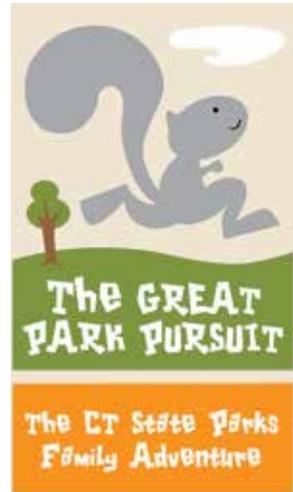
are often disconnected from nature – the No Child Left Inside® initiative provides the opportunity for them to unplug from technology and discover the vast opportunities that Connecticut's State Parks and Forests have to offer.



The Great Park Pursuit

For nine years the Great Park Pursuit (GPP) has offered family based activities and the opportunity to explore state parks and forests around the state.

Exciting adventures take families on Saturday outings to discover the rich diversity of state parks and forests and open up the wonderful recreational opportunities they provide. Children, parents and grandparents continue to enjoy the GPP held each Saturday from May to mid-June. Get more information at NoChildLeftInside.org and keep the tradition alive!



**CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT
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JULY 2014

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