2026 BY 26

Setting the Target:
CT DEEP 2026 Goals

CONNECTICUT ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

TRANSPARENCY, PREDICTABILITY, AND EFFICIENCY

Commissioner's Introduction

Dear Friends,

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has a unique mission, charged with conserving, improving, and protecting the state's natural resources and environment while making cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy available for our residents and businesses.

As Commissioner, I have made it a priority to improve the transparency, predictability, and efficiency of DEEP's regulatory programs. In 2019, I launched the 20BY20 initiative at DEEP, committing the agency to twenty measurable goals to strengthen and improve our regulatory programs by the end of 2020. Four of the twenty goals were selected from stakeholder suggestions. Despite an intervening global pandemic, we met and even exceeded sixteen of the goals, with significant progress on the others.

The work we began in 20BY20 did not end in 2020. In fact, DEEP kept up the effort, all while weathering the necessary disruptions of a government-wide "retirement cliff" that saw the retirement of 19% of DEEP's Environmental Quality and Environmental Conservation staff, as we welcomed new staff to replace seasoned veterans.

As we begin a new year, I'm delighted to announce a new iteration of this performance improvement initiative: 20BY26. Over this year and next, DEEP will once again strive for increased transparency, predictability, and efficiency in our programs with a fresh set of sixteen goals to be achieved by the end of 2026. Once again, I invite the public to provide suggestions for four additional 20BY26 goals in areas where you think DEEP could make the most effective improvements. Please email us at DEEP.20BY26@ct.gov with your ideas for those additional four goals.

We look forward to collaborating with you and sharing regular updates throughout this initiative. In the meantime, I welcome your feedback at in-person stakeholder meetings or by emailing DEEP.20by26@ct.gov. Please also sign up for the 20BY26 mailing list to receive updates on the 20BY26 initiative as it rolls out and we provide quarterly status reports.

Sincerely,

Katie Dykes
Commissioner

SNAPSHOT OF
20BY20
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DEEP's 20BY20 Initiative established 20 measurable process improvement goals to be completed by December 31, 2020. By the end of 2020, DEEP successfully achieved most of these goals and has made strong progress on the rest in the intervening years.

MAKE PERMITTING TIMEFRAMES MORE TRANSPARENT

GOAL 1

DEEP established expected timeframes for all **125+ permitting processes** and a dashboard showing our success in hitting those targets.

ENHANCE PRE-APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

GOAL 2

DEEP established a popular pre-application permit assistance program whose **responsiveness generates high satisfaction ratings.**

REDUCE NUMBER OF LEGACY PERMIT APPLICATIONS PENDING

GOAL 3

By 2020, DEEP reduced by 45% the backlog of 331 permit applications filed with the agency before 2017.

REDUCE TIME FOR TRANSFER ACT AUDITS

To provide property owners with greater certainty about the remediation process during the sale of a property, DEEP **achieved its goal of rendering all audit decisions within 90 days.**

GOAL 4

FINALIZE REMEDIATION STANDARDS REGS AND ENVIRONMENTAL USE RESTRICTION REGS

After many years of development, DEEP **made necessary revisions and secured legislative approval** of the RSR and EUR regulations in January 2021, providing greater clarity and flexibility to property owners for site cleanups.

GOAL 5

FAST TRACK SAME-TO-SAME PERMIT RENEWAL TIME

DEEP finalized a new system for solid waste permit renewals in 2020, **shortening the processing time for these permits by three months.**

GOAL 6

CHANGE INDIVIDUAL PERMITS TO GENERAL PERMITS

In 2020, DEEP successfully issued consolidated general permits that **streamline the regulation of thousands of industrial and commercial wastewater discharges** to publicly owned treatment works statewide.

GOAL 7

ELIMINATE SOME PERMITS AND MOVE TO "PERMIT BY RULE"

Adding to the effects of Goal 7, in 2020, DEEP **secured legislative approval** to move environmental protections from permits into regulations for certain well-known, high volume, low-complexity sources of air emissions, thereby streamlining permitting and processing.

GOAL 8

SIMPLIFY NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE DETERMINATIONS

In 2020, DEEP **established processing timeframes** for NDDB determinations for threatened and endangered species. In 2022, DEEP launched a Natural Diversity Database (NDDB) portal to streamline the application process and put past applications on DEEP's online document search portal.

INCREASE EFFICIENCY OF GRANT ADMINISTRATION

In 2020, DEEP adopted digital routing protocols and signature tools, including DocuSign, **speeding up grant processing significantly** during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

AGENCY-WIDE SUCCESSION PLANNING

DEEP engaged in agency-wide succession planning to make the coming known wave of employee retirements in 2022 as seamless as possible, **hiring 100 talented staff** in that year alone.

ESTABLISH PERMITTING CONCIERGE FUNCTION

DEEP established a Permitting Concierge Service to provide **enhanced communication and support** for applicants and stakeholders with complex projects; permit assistance guides for specific sectors; benchmarked best practice in permitting processes for 11 other states; and sought input from an advisory council.

ACCELERATE E-GOVERNANCE INTEGRATION

DEEP's IT efforts were largely focused on responding to the needs of the agency and **supporting rapid solutions** for the operational challenges posed by the pandemic, like expanding our ez-File system, which also laid the groundwork for future innovation.

ENHANCE DATA TRANSPARENCY

GOAL 14

DEEP added a **new Document Online Search Portal that now contains over 1 million documents**, expanded entries into the CT Open Data Portal, and launched a Geographic Information Systems (GIS Open Data Portal (CT GeoData Portal).

DEVELOP A PREDICTABLE REGULATION ADOPTION TIMELINE

GOAL 15

DEEP launched a Laws and Regulations webpage to track our transparency goals and **extend opportunities for the public to participate** in the process of regulatory development at the agency.

INCREASE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN PROCESS IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

GOAL 16

During the pandemic, DEEP launched **innovative stakeholder engagement efforts,** such as the Connecticut Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management (engaging municipal leaders on waste initiatives) and the Governor's Council on Climate Change.

INCREASE THE TRANSPARENCY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

GOAL 17

DEEP created an environmental enforcement hub to help track the agency's efforts and later **made enforcement records available through the Open Data Portal.**

SEEK OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO ENHANCE SERVICES

GOAL 18

DEEP designed more interactive online tools to help the public take advantage of the state's rich wildlife, hunting, and recreational opportunities, and later spearheaded **new programs, like free swimming lessons and transport to state parks.**

EASE OF FINANCIAL ASSURANCE MECHANISMS AS PART OF PERMITTING AND ENFORCEMENT

An agency-wide working group identified a suite of tools that will **better assist the regulated public** as the financial assurance landscape continues to evolve.

UPDATE SPILL-REPORTING REGULATIONS

DEEP proposed and, **in 2022, received legislative approval** of new Spill Reporting Regulations which set minimum reporting standards for spills, so *de minimis spills* (which used to make up 50% of reports received) no longer have to be submitted.

20 BY 26

20 GOALS TO ACHIEVE BY THE END OF 2026
16 FROM US AND 4 FROM YOU

Building on the successes of 20BY20 and beyond, DEEP is committing to another round of improvements to increase our transparency, efficiency, and predictability. DEEP has identified 16 goals to achieve by the end of 2026, as follows. In addition, DEEP is seeking stakeholder input on an additional four goals that the agency should prioritize, to help us better meet stakeholder needs.

ADOPT RELEASE-BASED REGULATIONS TO MODERNIZE CONNECTICUT'S CLEANUP FRAMEWORK

GOAL 1 — PAGE 11

ACHIEVE 90% ON-TIME COMPLETION RATE FOR CRITICAL PERMIT APPLICATIONS

GOAL 2 — PAGE 13

REDUCE THE "LEGACY" PERMIT BACKLOG BY 65% BY 2026

GOAL 3 — PAGE 15

STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE

GOAL 4 — PAGE 16

ADOPT RELEASE-BASED REGULATIONS TO MODERNIZE CONNECTICUT'S CLEANUP FRAMEWORK

Connecticut's proud industrial history has left a legacy of contaminated sites that, if cleaned up and returned to productive reuse, would unlock enormous economic development potential for the state. The Property Transfer Act — Connecticut's existing environmental cleanup framework — has been a barrier to redevelopment. This framework unfairly and ineffectively distributes cleanup responsibility, requiring legacy contamination on certain types of properties to be addressed in a formal cleanup program at the time of sale of a business or property. By contrast, almost every other U.S. state utilizes a "release-based" framework for cleanups, which gives property owners and managers the tools to make smarter, more timely environmental decisions that also benefit them economically.

A recent study estimated that the existing Transfer Act has cost Connecticut up to 7,000 jobs and $178 million in tax revenue, as properties are abandoned and passed over because developers are reluctant to engage with the Transfer Act. Environmental advocates also question the act's effectiveness in reducing pollution with only about a quarter of the 4,200 properties that have entered the program since 1985 achieving a cleanup.

In response to near universal concern over the Transfer Act, the Legislature authorized DEEP to draft new release-based regulations in September 2020. Given the complexity and importance of this transition, the Legislature created the Release-Based working group co-convened by DEEP and DECD (the Department of Economic and Community Development) to receive advice and feedback from practitioners, advocates, and municipalities in drafting these regulations. to receive advice and feedback from practitioners, advocates, and municipalities in drafting these regulations.

What We Achieved in 20BY20:

Timely audit decisions for Transfer Act sites (20BY20 Goal 4) and finalized revisions to Remediation Standard Regulations and Environmental Use Restrictions Regulations (20BY20 Goal 5)

In 20BY20, DEEP committed to two key reforms to speed up Transfer Act cleanups and pave the way for a new regulatory framework. First, DEEP set a goal **(20BY20 Goal 4)** to issue a decision on whether DEEP will perform an audit of Transfer Act cleanups conducted by Licensed Environmental Professionals (LEPs) within 90 days of receipt. DEEP relies on LEPs to verify Transfer Act cleanups as complete and regularly audits a portion of LEP-verified cleanups for program integrity. Informing parties quickly about whether an audit will be performed adds certainty and predictability to commercial transactions. Only 15% of audit/no-audit decisions met this timeframe in the 2015-2019 time period; by the end of 2020, DEEP achieved our goal of 100% on-time completion. Since that time, DEEP has maintained 83% on-time decisions despite significant staff retirements, and a new leadership team is in place to address this going forward.

By the end of 2020, DEEP achieved our goal of 100% on-time completion.

Second, DEEP set a goal **(20BY20 Goal 5)** to finalize two sets of critical environmental cleanup regulations that had been under discussion and development since 2013 — the Remediation Standard Regulations (RSRs) and the Environmental Use Restrictions Regulations (EURs). By prioritizing completion of the regulations in 20BY20, DEEP was able to issue draft rules for formal comment and feedback from the regulated community in 2019, and ultimately obtain approval from the bipartisan Legislative Regulations Review Committee by the end of 2020. **Both regulations went into effect in February 2021**. They work together to ensure environmentally sound standards and greater efficiency of property transfer and redevelopment. They also pave the way for further development of release-based cleanup standards under a release-based cleanup program.

In addition, DEEP finalized updates to Spill Reporting Regulations in March 2022 **(20BY20 Goal 20)**, fulfilling a longstanding objective of DEEP stakeholders and legislators. Both the regulated community and DEEP have long sought out regulations that narrow the broad statutory mandate to report all releases in effect by default and instead clearly lay out what triggers a required reporting of releases of oil, petroleum, chemical liquids, and other harmful and hazardous materials to DEEP. These regulations promote the timely mitigation of releases, improve the quality of information provided to DEEP's Emergency Response Program, and have eliminated reporting of nearly 50% of spills which are considered minor. This positive development reduces administrative burdens and enables DEEP staff to better focus our efforts on responding to the most significant spills.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Secure formal adoption of Release-Based Regulations

In response to near universal concern over the Transfer Act, in 2020 the Connecticut General Assembly authorized DEEP to draft new release-based regulations that will ultimately replace the Transfer Act with a more effective and equitable release-based framework for cleanup of contaminated sites. Once these new regulations are adopted, Connecticut will sunset the Transfer Act – a cleanup program that has outlived its usefulness.

On December 29, 2023, DEEP released a full draft of the proposed Release-Based Cleanup Regulations to the Release-Based Working Group. The working group will be providing comments on this draft regulatory package, and the Department will consider advice and feedback prior to initiating the formal regulatory adoption process.

These regulations incorporate all aspects of cleanup – from discovery and initial reporting of newly discovered historical pollution to closure of releases and a framework for conducting audits – and introduce numerous improvements to the existing cleanup standards that will help expedite cleanups and lessen the regulatory burden for lower-risk releases. DEEP is committed to thorough consultation and engagement with working group members, legislators, and all stakeholders to ensure these important regulations are developed with clear communication, collaboration, and consensus wherever possible. Including the successful adoption of this regulation as a goal of the 20BY26 initiative signals the importance of this effort, and DEEP's commitment to ensuring the process for regulation development is transparent, collaborative, and timely. DEEP will provide updates on the timeline and process for Release-Based regulation development as part of the 20BY26 effort.

Stay up-to-date on the public process for adopting these regulations: Release-Based Clean Up Program.

ACHIEVE 90% ON-TIME COMPLETION RATE FOR CRITICAL PERMIT APPLICATIONS

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Transparent and predictable permitting timeframes

DEEP has responsibility for over 125 different state or federally-delegated permitting and environmental review processes. The permitting process is designed to ensure that certain activities can occur within acceptable limits, minimizing risk to the public and the environment. DEEP receives approximately 2,000 permit applications each year. Predictable approval timeframes for permit applications give all stakeholders clear expectations on how long it takes to acquire a DEEP environmental quality permit. These timeframes also help DEEP improve processes, innovate, and manage staffing resources.

As part of 20BY20, DEEP committed to establishing, for the first time, benchmark timeframes for completion of each of the agency's permitting processes **(20BY20 Goal 1)**. Each permit type is now categorized on the DEEP website, from "immediate decision" permits with minimum review and public process required, to more complex permit types requiring 3, 6, and 12 months for decision.

In 2020, DEEP tracked the percentage of applications processed within applicable timeframes, consistently reaching the timeframes 80% of the time. Then we went further: in 2021, DEEP launched an online permit timeframes dashboard. This dashboard helped us monitor permit timeframes during the 2022 retirement cliff, when on-time completion rates fell to 70% during an unprecedented wave of retirements and new hires that impacted some permitting programs.

Other critical 20BY20 successes included streamlining the process for permit renewals **(20BY20 Goal 6)**, which reduced processing times for certain solid waste permits by three months; issuing new general permits that eliminated the need for individual permits **(20BY20 Goal 7)** for certain industrial and commercial wastewater discharges to Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTW) statewide; and replacing some permit categories with "permit by rule" **(20BY20 Goal 8)** to achieve the same level of environmental protection with cost and time savings for businesses.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Achieve 90% on-time completion rate for critical permit applications

For 20BY26 Goal 2, DEEP is setting a new goal to achieve a 90% on-time completion rate within projected timeframes for permit applications in the 3-month category (55 permit types covered) and to regain the 80% processing timeline for the others. To achieve this goal, DEEP will continue to track and share progress via the Permitting Timeframes Dashboard and will use the information on the dashboard to identify challenges and develop solutions and supports for programs that are encountering difficulty meeting timeframes.

Strategies could include syncing our state permit processing timeframes with federal timeframes; streamlining certain applications to allow faster processing; evaluating opportunities to develop General Permits with registration only; pausing the processing clock on applications that are incomplete due to insufficient application materials or other reasons outside of DEEP's control; and conducting a LEAN process for the permit review processes that are lagging. LEAN is an iterative process of continuous evaluation on how we implement our programs, retaining value-added steps and eliminating non-value-added actions.

REDUCE THE "LEGACY" PERMIT BACKLOG BY 65% BY 2026

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Cut a backlog of pre-2017 permit applications by 45%

Closing out long-pending permits addresses regulatory uncertainty for applicants, increases environmental protection, and provides opportunity for public engagement. In 2019, 331 "legacy" permit applications submitted prior to 2017 were pending with DEEP. Most of these legacy permits involved significant technical complexity and potential risk to the environment.

Through the 20BY20 initiative, DEEP assigned teams and committed to reduce this backlog **(20BY20 Goal 3)**; created a Legacy Permit Dashboard to publicly track progress; and cut the backlog 45% by the end of 2020. And by the end of 2023, we reduced pre-2017 permit applications by 63%.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Reducing legacy permit backlog by 65%

DEEP's simultaneous focus on improving on-time completion of new permit applications **(20BY20 Goal 1)** has helped keep a new backlog from growing, despite the retirement challenges of 2020-2022. DEEP's new goal in 20BY26 is to make the reduction of pending legacy permit applications a permanent performance goal.

Going forward, permit applications pending for more than five years will be tracked as "legacy" permits. As of January 1, 2024, DEEP has 517 pre-2019 legacy permit applications. DEEP is setting a goal to further reduce the total backlog of legacy permit applications by 65% by the end of 2026, expanding the years of coverage to pre-2022 and increasing the amount of the older permit applications processed. This goal will be achieved by continuing the use of successful strategies established in 20BY20 and embarking on new efforts-including undergoing resource evaluation, balancing staffing needs, and developing a comprehensive strategic plan.

STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Increased transparency of environmental enforcement efforts

The public deserves to know which facilities are violating the conditions of their state environmental permits, and where they are doing so. This need is especially urgent in communities that are already overburdened with environmental stressors. The **20BY20 Goal 17** initiatives increased the transparency of DEEP's environmental enforcement activities through our website. The website includes enforcement statistics totals through 2023 and information on past formal enforcement cases that identify the violations and civil penalties and/or supplemental environmental projects.

Throughout 2020 and during the pandemic, DEEP continued to monitor compliance and prioritize our response to imminent or actual threats to human health and the environment. To increase availability of compliance monitoring and enforcement information to our stakeholders, we link to EPA's Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO), which provides fast, integrated searches of EPA and state data for more than 800,000 regulated facilities. ECHO focuses on inspection, violation, and enforcement data (both formal and informal, e.g., Notices of Violation) for the Clean Air Act (CAA), Clean Water Act (CWA) and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and includes Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) and Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) data.

As of 2022, DEEP's formal enforcement records are available on CT Open Data Portal. Additionally, EPA's State Review Framework Round 4 Audit was completed in December 2023, which ensures consistency across DEEP's enforcement programs.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Ensuring consistency across DEEP's enforcement programs, inclusion of equity and environmental justice in decision-making

DEEP will increase transparency on noncomplying permitted facilities, particularly those located in environmental justice areas. To begin, DEEP will update its Enforcement Response Policy, publish a list of Significant Industrial Users whose wastewater discharges do not comply with federal standards, and initiate enforcement mapping efforts for transparency. DEEP will seek to increase enforcement resources where needed and add enforcement screening tools in environmentally overburdened communities to ensure equity and environmental justice are integrated into our decision-making. DEEP will also update its Supplemental Environmental Project Policy to incorporate projects that benefit environmental justice communities.

EXPAND COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Enhanced use and ease of compliance assistance mechanisms in permitting and enforcement

As part of 20BY20 **(Goals 17 and 19)**, DEEP dramatically increased its compliance assistance work through field inspections, data tracking and monitoring, and new compliance assistance tools. Permitted facilities can use more help in complying with the law, especially those that have shown difficulty complying in the past.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Providing greater compliance assistance in sectors with higher noncompliance

As part of the 20BY26 initiative, DEEP will offer additional tools to help noncomplying permitted facilities come into compliance. A major step DEEP will take is to centralize all compliance assistance information into one webpage hub. Permittees can use this hub explore how to come into compliance under different programs, to read about the most common violations for certain types of permitting facilities, and to access updated guidance on stormwater and waste organics, among other topics. DEEP will also establish an online complaint intake system to make it easier for reporting of potential concerns.

20BY26 GOAL 6:

ENHANCED FINANCIAL ASSURANCE TRACKING AND MANAGEMENT

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Strategic planning for use of financial assurance, agency-wide

Robust and clear financial mechanisms ensure compliance with permits, orders, and regulations, while ensuring consistency and predictability for regulated entities. Financial assurance means being able to use money held in trust if a remedy fails or a permitted action is not completed. A strong financial assurance program gives DEEP and the public confidence that the agency will fulfill its commitments to environmental protection and conservation. Through 20BY20 **(Goal 19)**, staff from DEEP's legal and financial offices and the regulatory programs formed a workgroup that examined internal protocols and external communication about financial assurance to the regulated community.

This workgroup led to DEEP developing a draft internal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that instructs staff to ensure that a central office receives and stores financial assurance instruments and directs the use of standard templates. DEEP also began improvements for stakeholders' use of financial assurance. For example, in 2021, DEEP's stormwater program updated and streamlined financial assurance requirements related to solar developments requiring coverage under the General Permit for the Discharge of Stormwater and Dewatering Wastewaters Associated with Construction Activities.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Implement the strategic vision for comprehensive financial assurance management

With 20BY26, we are improving on what we started. Quite a few programs across DEEP use financial assurance mechanisms. DEEP will seek process improvements to standardize the menu of instruments agency-wide, develop a new Financial Assurance webpage hub to provide centralized information, and provide clarity on which tools are appropriate for each program, based on statutes and regulations.

COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOP REGULATIONS THAT IMPLEMENT RECENT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE REFORMS

As part of this new goal in the 20BY26 initiative, DEEP will provide for a predictable timetable and transparent process for implementation of Environmental Justice regulations.

In 2023, Governor Lamont signed into law Public Act 23-202, which strengthens Connecticut's primary environmental justice statute by enabling DEEP and the Connecticut Siting Council to consider the cumulative impact of environmental and health stressors when making certain permit decisions. These provisions take effect after the state adopts regulations.

DEEP is committing to working with regulated and environmental justice communities on designing an effective regulatory framework to implement that legislative directive. DEEP will begin in 2024 with listening sessions in communities and with regulated entities and by assembling the resources needed to develop the rules. DEEP will release a Request for Proposals in early 2024 to develop the "cumulative impacts tool" that ultimately will give businesses the information that they can rely on to design, from the start, successful permit applications. DEEP plans to release a strong but flexible set of rules for public comment in late 2025.

DEEP will create a website dedicated to the process, which also will include ways to contact the core team working on the rollout and to take advantage of stakeholder workshop sessions.

EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION FOR EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

While 20BY26's Goal 7 implements the cumulative impact provisions of Public Act 23-202, Goal 8 focuses on the provisions of that Public Act that expanded public participation requirements for certain permit applications.

These provisions took effect in October 2023, and DEEP is developing guidance on them for its new webpage on participation in the permitting process.

These new provisions range from increased residential participation in and tailoring of Community Environmental Benefit Agreements (CEBAs) to providing wider notice to communities of certain proposed permit applications. The law now offers permit applicants better access to best practices for efficient and effective engagement; enhances communication between facilities and potential host communities; and ensures that permit conditions reflect the comments and concerns raised by the community and that DEEP considers them throughout the decision-making process.

DEEP will make publicly available all environmental justice public participation plans and CEBAs produced pursuant to this law, including those that DEEP has previously received. This effort will provide more transparency in what these community plans and agreements entail. DEEP will produce other tools that similarly facilitate efficiency and engagement, such as more guidance on how our programs, including permitting, interact with "distressed municipalities" and highlighting opportunities for public participation in DEEP's own programs. These initiatives build on DEEP's 2022 release of environmental justice webpages that provide more information about the communities and facilities in the state that our EJ statute covers.

20BY26 GOAL 9:
ENHANCED PUBLIC RECORDS TRANSPARENCY

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Digitization of more than 1 million documents

In 20BY20 **(Goal 14)**, DEEP committed to significantly enhancing its public records transparency. The agency established a DEEP Document Online Search Portal containing over 1 million documents available to the public — an initiative that provided extraordinary benefits during the pandemic, by avoiding the need for many in-person visits to the DEEP file room. DEEP also expanded our agency's presence on the CT Open Data Portal with waste manifests, spills reports, and underground storage tank files and launched DEEP's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Open Data Portal (CT GeoData Portal) of over 200 GIS datasets and public viewers.

As of mid-2023, DEEP's Document Online Search Portal contained close to 8 million records, a number that includes the addition of 75% of DEEP's remediation records, which is the largest group of documents at DEEP. Additionally, enforcement records are now housed in CT Open Data Portal. The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act chemical inventory data management platform was established to increase data sharing with local emergency preparedness officials. We are now encouraging community officials to use the platform and will provide training.

As of mid-2023, DEEP's Document Online Search Portal contained close to 8 million records, a number that includes the addition of 75% of DEEP's remediation records, which is the largest group of documents at DEEP.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Complete document digitization

Our 20BY26 goal is to complete DEEP's records digitization project for other large record sets, including underground storage tank and PCB documents, and creating additional map viewers so that stakeholders can use DEEP's geospatial information make informed environmental decisions. We also are committed to creating an integrated Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Digital Records Center that automatically directs FOIA requests through DEEP's FOIA system (which follows the state's FOIA system, called GovQA) and the CT Open Data Portal. This 20BY26 work will further benefit the general public, businesses, environmental consultants, realtors, and attorneys conducting due diligence and project siting.

EXPAND TOOLS FOR ONLINE SERVICES

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Established e-permitting options for six permit types (Goal 13) and launched the Natural Diversity Database (Goal 9)

Through 20BY20 **(Goal 13)**, DEEP expanded our e-filing system for permits and document submittal. Along with the state Department of Consumer Protection, DEEP achieved e-licensing capabilities for pesticide applicators and products. Since then, DEEP has added e-permitting for five additional authorizations: structures, dredging and fill permits; certificates of permissions for coastal and tidal wetlands activities; spill contractors; hazardous waste transporters; and aquatic pesticides applications.

In 2022, the Land and Water Resources Division piloted a system to receive, process, and address complaints in a coordinated manner. This system will be implemented throughout DEEP in program areas where there is a high volume of callers and concerns so that DEEP can provide more timely response and protection to the people of the state.

Another significant win **(20BY20 Goal 9)** was the launch of the self-serve Natural Diversity Database (NDDB) portal, enabling regulated entities to save time and resources by receiving instant notification on their NDDB requests. Since the online review tool was launched in November 2022, 44% of the Level One determinations were issued automatically. That means that 582 applicants received an instant determination letter instead of the six to eight week processing turnaround time under the old process, which required staff review and processing. More than 4,700 NDDB records are now available on the Online Document Portal.

More than 4,700 NDDB records are now available on the Online Document Portal.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Integrate e-filing and data management systems

DEEP will continue to implement smart and efficient online records management, e-filing, and data management systems throughout DEEP's programs. Through 20BY26, DEEP will, for example, adopt an industry-leading platform on which to build solutions for cleanup-based data management and for permit and document submittal, and a streamlined docket system for our critical adjudications work. The 20BY26 initiative will prioritize customer benefits in deploying new IT solutions.

SPEED UP GRANT AND CONTRACTING PROCESSES BY 50% FOR KEY GRANT PROGRAMS

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Digitized processes for better contract routing and execution

As a critical part of DEEP's mission, we enter into hundreds of grant contracts and agreements with stakeholders every year. Those involved in our grants and contracting processes will benefit if we reduce the time between when a grantee submits an application or a contract is initiated to the point at which a contract is fully executed. Process streamlining means faster and easier contract execution. DEEP had much success in accelerating electronic solutions into our core business functions in immediate response to the pandemic **(20BY20 Goal 10)**, including through new processes for routing contracts and implementing DocuSign.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Speeding up DEEP's grants and contracting processes, by 50% for key grant programs

First, DEEP's team of legal and financial staff will implement a new contracting process that integrates streamlined workflows across the agency. Digital solutions will support this process, such as modern workflow tools for faster signature routing. We also will create new templates for some of our most frequently used grants and contracts and revamp the content of grant applications to better correspond to contract elements, speeding up the process by 50% for key grant programs. Additionally, DEEP will develop a step-by-step guidance for Grantees based on where applicants tell us they need the most assistance.

20BY26 GOAL 12:

EXPAND DEEP CONCIERGE SERVICES TO MUNICIPALITIES AND SMALL BUSINESSES

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Established DEEP's Permitting Concierge (20BY20 Goal 12) and provided timely pre-application assistance (20BY20 Goal 2)

DEEP established a robust pre-application assistance program by 2020. This program, which we encourage all prospective permit applicants to use, connects you to DEEP program staff with regulatory expertise to help answer questions about permitting requirements, estimate processing timelines, and identify process efficiencies, especially for projects requiring multiple permits from DEEP.

Our program has achieved a **100 percent success rate in holding all pre-application meetings within 30 days of request (20BY20 Goal 2)** and has been holding about 100 of these pre-app meetings every year since 2021. This ongoing commitment to timely engagement helps project developers identify an efficient approach to DEEP permitting from the outset.

In March 2020, DEEP launched the Client Concierge Service **(20BY20 Goal 12)** to provide a single point-of-contact and facilitation services for applicants navigating the environmental permitting processes. The Concierge Service (reachable at DEEP.Concierge@ct.gov) assists complex projects that involve multiple permits and coordination with other state, municipal, and federal agencies. In addition to permit facilitation, the Concierge Team strengthened DEEP's outreach and permit assistance with input from a stakeholder engagement process and benchmarking concierge services against approaches in eleven other states, and developed sector-specific factsheets with permitting information for Solar, Offshore Wind, Farm-based Anaerobic Digesters, and Breweries and Distilleries. DEEP's 2-minute Concierge Video explains how the service can help applicants reach their project goals.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Expanding Concierge Services to municipalities and small businesses

Building on DEEP's longstanding commitments to our municipal partners, we are pledging to launch a new strategic initiative to serve as a "front door" for municipalities seeking permitting, grants, and other DEEP services. Like our partner state and federal agencies, municipalities play a critical role in developing and implementing policies, regulations, grant opportunities, and more, that complement and achieve DEEP's mission. This initiative will help municipalities better navigate DEEP's systems, plan projects, receive status updates, and resolve issues.

DEEP also plans to enhance assistance to small businesses, including those that are traditionally underrepresented. Other stakeholders that will benefit from our enhanced Concierge program will include building trades and other labor organizations.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITH DEEP

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Agency-wide succession planning and increased stakeholder engagement

Our agency is committed to increasing the transparency of our work and deepening our relationships with the regulated community and other stakeholders. DEEP's 20BY20 initiative included a commitment **(20BY20 Goal 11)** to plan strategically for an unprecedented "retirement cliff" that occurred as many retirement-eligible veteran agency staff departed state service.

DEEP hired more than 100 new employees in 2022.

In the beginning of 2022, about 300 DEEP employees, representing more than 35% of the agency, were eligible for retirement; 160 employees exited. DEEP committed to filling those vacancies by **streamlining the hiring process and enlisting new outreach services to promote our jobs and attract top talent from across the country.** In July 2022 alone, we received over 3,600 applications in response to our postings. The agency leveraged Temporary Worker Retirees – a program that allows a retiree to return temporarily – to bridge gaps until we hired permanent replacements for vacant positions and, in some cases, to help train the new employees. DEEP hired more than 100 new employees in 2022. DEEP continues to hire and train new staff to bring them up to speed on permitting and processes. Being fully staffed means being fully equipped to serve the needs of Connecticut's residents and businesses. It also means ensuring that constituents have access to the right staff to respond to their inquiries.

Meanwhile, DEEP's commitment to stakeholder engagement **(20BY20 Goal 16)** improved our communication with key stakeholders through initiatives such as the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC), the Release-Based Working Group, the Connecticut Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management, the Governor's Council on Climate Change, and many others.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Improving access to DEEP staff and resources

Through 20BY26, DEEP is pursuing these evergreen goals through both straightforward updates — such as making our online resources clearer and easier to access — and more complex processes, such as enhanced stakeholder outreach and partnerships. We know that these changes not only will help the regulated community learn more about what we do and who does it, but also will make DEEP's work more relevant, targeted, and efficient.

DEEP is setting a new commitment to ensure that all stakeholders can easily find the information they need, or quickly contact the right person or program at DEEP that can help, from permitting and energy to natural resources and other matters. DEEP wants to make sure that you can Connect with staff and understand how the agency that

serves you is organized, whether it's speaking to the Engineer/Analyst who can answer your permit questions or attending a Meet and Greet to connect with new staff.

DEEP will:

1. **Improve our online resources and news**, including by creating a landing page for DEEP's website that better directs stakeholders to the information they seek; removing out-of-date webpages; and restructuring DEEP's newsletters and email lists to ensure better communication.

2. **Seek to talk more effectively** with Connecticut's stakeholders and communities, including by improving our public notices of upcoming meetings and decisions; better incorporating Limited English Proficiency tools; and improving broadband connections in underserved communities.

3. **Encourage all of you to take advantage of DEEP's opportunities** through stakeholder input groups; a more robust and open recruitment process for DEEP-related boards and commissions; and a set of best practices for our outreach and engagement work.

PERMITTING FOR DECARBONIZATION

In 2021, DEEP launched its Sustainable, Transparent and Efficient Practices (STEPs) for Solar Development program. STEPs is charged with recommending actions to help sustainably procure, site, and permit ground-mounted solar systems in the state. The STEPs team proceeded to develop draft guidance documents alongside the Department of Economic and Community Development and the Department of Agriculture, now available on the STEPs website for public review and feedback as well as by emailing DEEP.STEPS@ct.gov.

STEPs complements the work conducted by the Commission on Environmental Standards (CES) that DEEP convened in 2019 to provide input on best practices for avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating any environmental impacts from offshore wind facilities. The CES has continued to meet and has provided input on the request for proposal for DEEP's new offshore wind solicitation.

Building on that progress, DEEP is committing in 2026 to developing a broader programmatic approach for meeting renewable energy goals while protecting our natural resources and environment, and following through on best practices to streamline renewable energy permitting, including battery storage, solar, and wind energy.

Siting renewable energy in Connecticut requires permitting through DEEP, as well as engagement with other partners such as the Connecticut Siting Council, Department of Agriculture, electric distribution companies, and host municipalities. Streamlining this complex permitting process will not only help renewable energy projects succeed but also will help us meet the Lamont Administration's goals of achieving net zero carbon for Connecticut's electric grid by 2040, as required by Public Act 22-5 and will support DEEP's overall permit streamlining efforts.

Helping to meet its goal, DEEP will create a renewable energy siting mapping tool. This tool will help assist with identification of suitable renewable project siting areas that avoid or minimize negative impacts.

TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING AVAILABLE FEDERAL & STATE FUNDING

Increasing the deployment of clean energy, energy efficiency, broadband, and energy storage technologies, as well as providing resources to reduce GHG emissions and support investments in environmental priorities, are critical actions that DEEP is leading. Ensuring that the public has easy access to these resources is essential.

To that end, DEEP is creating tools that improve the equity and accessibility of energy programs and help individuals, businesses, and organizations navigate among incentives, grants, and other offerings. The tools include:

- An incentive navigator tool to help residents and businesses navigate to information about state, local, and federal energy and connectivity incentives (e.g., home energy efficiency rebates);

- A grants hub to help municipalities, nonprofit organizations, universities, and other grant seekers rapidly find the DEEP grant programs that are best suited to their needs, plus educational webinars, and a Grant Liaison.

- An online transparency dashboard to provide updated information for the public on DEEP's efforts to secure funding for various broadband access, clean energy, and environmental/climate priorities funded through the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.

These efforts will include public input, beta testing, and opportunities for feedback to ensure that these new tools are of greatest utility to various end-users.

DEEP PARTNERSHIPS WITH PRIVATE ENTITIES IN STATE PARKS

What We Achieved in 20BY20:
Innovative partnerships to improve services

Through **20BY20 Goal 18**, DEEP pursued creative strategies for getting Connecticut residents outdoors and enjoying all that the state has to offer.

As some highlights: DEEP partnered with the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, and the Connecticut Institute for Communities to offer free swimming lessons in underserved communities across Connecticut. The agency's community science initiative involved creating a new, online wildlife sighting reporting system, allowing citizen scientists to partner with DEEP by helping gather observation data on bears, bobcats, and moose, which enables DEEP to monitor their population distribution statewide. DEEP also partnered with the Department of Transportation to launch ParkConneCT, which provides free public transportation to Connecticut State Parks. And we partnered with another sister agency, the Department of Economic and Community Development, to create a new State Parks website that highlights local businesses located near Connecticut State Parks.

DEEP created a webpage dedicated to Responsible Recreation and a video series Living with Black Bears to provide tips on avoiding attracting bears to your yard and on what to do if you encounter a bear while recreating. DEEP also created new user-friendly webpages to help people interested in hunting learn what they need to do to get started, including "Hunting Roadmaps" for small game, pheasant, wild turkey, deer, and waterfowl. Additionally, we launched a quarterly electronic newsletter, Hunter Highlights, to provide timely information about hunting and hunter safety.

Building on Our Success in 20BY26:
Launching the Partnership in Parks initiative

Through 20BY26, DEEP is setting a new goal to establish innovative partnerships in Connecticut State Parks that will elevate the outdoor recreation and visitor experience, expand tourism destinations, and provide equitable and sustainable access to the outdoors.

As part of this goal, DEEP is launching a new Office of Outdoor Industry & Experiences to run a Partnerships in Parks initiative that builds upon successful existing partnerships in Connecticut State Parks.

DEEP manages Connecticut's 110 State Parks, which are a public treasure, contributing to the exceptional quality of life for state residents and visitors and a thriving outdoor recreation economy. Demand for outdoor recreation increased since the pandemic, with State Park visitation increasing from just under 10 million in 2019 to an estimated 17 million in 2022. Connecticut's outdoor recreation economy has grown significantly over the past two years and is

the second largest in New England, supporting almost 46,000 jobs.

Against this backdrop of a growing outdoor economy, DEEP is releasing a Request for Information (RFI) in early 2024 to seek information from the public and strategic partners – businesses, non-profits, and other interested stakeholders. This RFI will inform steps DEEP can take to pursue partnerships with the private sector that elevate visitors' outdoor recreation experiences in State Parks, enhance tourism destinations, and provide equitable access to the outdoors. DEEP will post a summary of concepts submitted to the RFI and then review the concepts with the intent of releasing subsequent draft Request for Proposals (RFPs) or Special Use Licenses.

ADDITIONAL GOALS FROM YOU, OUR STAKEHOLDERS

The sixteen goals released above reflect feedback we have heard, analyzed, and converted into actionable steps.

But we also have reserved space with these remaining targets — Goals 17 through 20 — for new ideas from you. Let us know what you think DEEP's top process improvement priorities should be over the next few years. Please share them by May 1st, 2024 through DEEP.20by26@ct.gov or at one of our upcoming 20BY26 events.

And you can follow our collective progress on 20BY26 by signing up for the 20BY26 mailing list and checking in on the 20BY26 dedicated webpage.

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

portal.ct.gov/DEEP-20BY26