20BY26 RESULTS

WINTER AND SPRING 2024

TRANSPARENCY, PREDICTABILITY, AND EFFICIENCY

Commissioner's Introduction

In February 2024, DEEP launched the **20BY26 Initiative**, setting 20 performance targets to achieve by the end of 2026 that will improve the transparency, predictability, and efficiency of DEEP programs. This initiative builds upon DEEP's previous, highly successful **20BY20 effort**.

As part of our commitment to transparency, I'm excited to share this results report — the first in a series of reports that will share progress made towards 20BY26 goals. Many goals have already seen significant advancement. For example, we have hit targets for processing so-called "legacy" permit applications (Goal 3). The Remediation Division has successfully digitized a staggering 10 million records (Goal 9). And our Environmental Justice team has been releasing guidance documents and increasing outreach (Goal 8).

When we announced the 20BY26 Initiative, we set 16 goals and invited stakeholders to suggest four additional goals. I am grateful to the many commenters who suggested creative ideas with clear potential for impact. This report announces the final four critical goals selected: improving our natural diversity database review process (Goal 17), increasing dam safety (Goal 18), developing equity hubs throughout the state (Goal 19), and launching an agency-wide metrics dashboard (Goal 20).

I hope you enjoy the following information about what we have done so far this year, and please **sign up** for updates, including future reports.

Thank you!

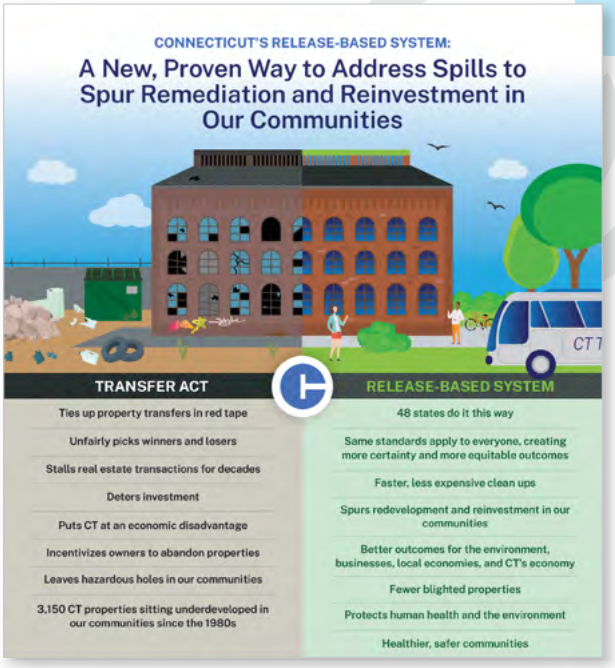
Katie Dykes
Commissioner

20BY26 GOAL 1:

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

DEEP is developing, through Goal 1, new regulations that will ultimately replace the Property Transfer Act with a more effective and equitable release-based framework for cleaning up contaminated sites.

In winter and spring of 2024, DEEP continued to engage with key stakeholders, providing Q&A and feedback sessions on the draft Release-Based Cleanup Regulations with its Working Group, environmental professionals, attorneys, chambers of commerce, real estate developers, municipal leadership, other state agencies, and the real estate finance community.



Up Next:

Thanks to the efforts of the Working Group, DEEP staff, and our stakeholders, DEEP is ready to release the draft regulations for notice and public comment in July 2024. After launching this formal regulation adoption process, DEEP and the Working Group will provide more opportunities to discuss the proposed regulations and to make comments available in various media formats accessible to all stakeholders.

20BY26 GOAL 2:

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

For Goal 2, DEEP is working towards a 90% on-time completion rate for permit applications that have a 3-month expected completion timeframe (55 permit types covered). DEEP is also striving for an 80% on-time completion rate for permit applications that have 6- or 12-month expected completion timeframes.

During the spring of 2024, DEEP reviewed all permit processing timeframes. We recategorized some permit types to better reflect factors such as federal permitting timelines and required public comment periods that commonly affect the timeframes for completing permit decisions. We also carefully reviewed the data on DEEP's Permitting Timeframes Dashboard to recognize team successes, identify challenges, and develop solutions such as increased permit assistance and process improvements. Through our review, we found that, in each quarter of 2023 and in Q1 2024, at least 3 of 7 permitting divisions consistently have been closing as many, or more, applications than they are receiving.

But work remains, as the following table shows. The first quarter of 2024 is generally representative of the 2023 quarters. (See more complete table on our permitting dashboard.)

PERCENTAGE OF PERMITS COMPLETED WITHIN EXPECTED 3-, 6-, AND 12-MONTH TIMEFRAMES BY DIVISION IN FIRST QUARTER OF 2024

Timeframe (months)	3	6	12
AIR (Air Engineering)	89	38	none due
ERSP (Emergency Response & Spill Prevention)	none due	NA	NA
LWRD (Land & Water Resources)	78	22	NA
REMED (Remediation)	0	NA	0
WEED (Waste Engineering & Enforcement)	99	none due	15
WPED (Water Permitting & Enforcement)	78	88	25
WPMD (Water Planning & Management)	43	75	none due

NA = Not applicable because no permits exist in that column for this division's programs
Darkest shading = 80% or higher completion
Medium = 50-79% completion
Light = 49% or below completion quarters, as the more complete table on our permitting dashboard shows.

In Spring 2024, DEEP teams advanced solutions to process permits more efficiently, including:

- DEEP is speeding up the process for our **Water Resources Construction General Permit** — expanding statewide maintenance plans for minor activities; increasing certain thresholds for allowable impacts to help with federal Section 404/401 permits; and adding a new resilience category to help the state address flooding. After extensive coordination with state agencies, DEEP published a Notice of Tentative Determination in April 2024 to re-issue this GP for public comment.
- After a January 2024 listening session, DEEP's Stormwater Program held four technical workshops in April/May 2024 for the proposed Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) General Permit to better understand municipal challenges.
- DEEP also updated its **Contacts webpage** so permit applicants know whom to call or email with questions; the engineer or analyst of the day answers emails within 48 hours.

Up Next:

Look for issuance of the Water Resource Construction General Permit and Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems General Permit.

20BY26 GOAL 3:

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

DEEP's Goal 3 seeks to reduce the number of pending legacy permit applications by 65% by the end of 2026. Legacy permit applications are ones that remain unresolved more than five years beyond estimated permit processing timeframes.

- In the spring of 2024, DEEP updated the universe of legacy permit applications to include 2017 and 2018 to keep a five-year lookback. Our Office of Information Management also worked with permit managers to develop database queries that increase quality control and consistency across programs and permits.
- By the end of March 2024, DEEP had processed 69% of the legacy permit applications, or 348 total applications — those that should have been resolved by the end of 2018 — an improvement from 67% (223 of 331 applications) at the start of the year, achieved by resolving 125 more legacy permits that accumulated in 2017 and 2018.
- Although we have made great progress (see DEEP's Legacy Permit Dashboard), we will be adding to this universe annually will pursue further reductions. Our true measure of success will occur at the end of each successive year as we continue to reduce the number of legacy applications.

STATUS OF LEGACY PERMIT APPLICATIONS

	pre-1/1/2017	1/1/2017-12/31/2017	1/1/2018-12/31/2018	Totals
# Legacy permits	331	60	116	**507***
# (and %) of legacy permits processed as of 3/31/24	223 (67%)	41 (68%)	84 (72%)	**348 (69%)**
# Remaining legacy permits to be processed as of 3/31/24	108	19	32	**159**

* The number of legacy permits is 507, not 517 as stated in the February 2024 kick off report.

Up Next:

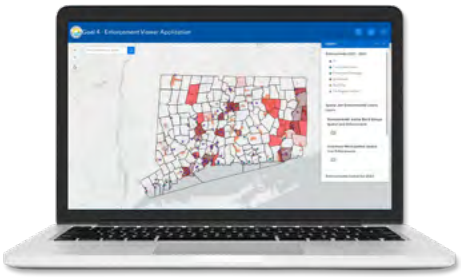
DEEP will continue this work and should see additional reductions in pending legacy applications as a result of our Goal 2 improvements.

20BY26 GOAL 4:

STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT RESOURCES

Goal 4 of 20BY26 sets targets to increase consistency and transparency in enforcement programs across DEEP and to incorporate equity and environmental justice into decision-making. Since announcing this initiative, DEEP has deployed new tools to strengthen our enforcement programs:

- **First,** DEEP launched the new Enforcement Viewer Application, an interactive map of formal enforcement actions from 2021 onward that includes an Environmental Justice Communities layer. Users can toggle layers off and on, filter enforcement actions by DEEP program, and export entire datasets or filtered subsets.
- **Second,** after having launched a new community-focused, state-of-the-art air monitoring tool called GMAP, short for Geospatial Measurement of Air Pollution, in September 2023, GMAP toured Hartford and East Hartford in Spring 2024 to pinpoint elevated ambient air pollution and compare GMAP data with analogous data from the nearest EPA National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) monitor.
- **Third,** after the Water Permitting and Enforcement Division (WPED) released, in December 2023, its new online noncompliance reporting platform, WPED has received 266 reports. This platform provides a single point of entry for regulated entities to self-report instances of noncompliance and houses notification and report forms that facilities with discharge permits from WPED can use. DEEP staff is using the data to review, triage, and respond to noncompliance in real time and to categorize the reports to determine which sectors could use additional compliance assistance. In Spring 2024, WPED solicited feedback from the regulated community on the platform and will continue to take feedback throughout 2024.



Vehicle with mounted GMAP.

Up Next:

DEEP will be increasing transparency regarding noncomplying permitted facilities, particularly those located in environmental justice areas, including by adding information on inspections to the enforcement map viewer. And, for GMAP, over the summer, DEEP plans to display the Hartford/East Hartford monitoring data and maps on its website along with conducting public engagement.

20BY26 GOAL 5:

EXPAND COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE

In Goal 5, DEEP is developing additional tools and providing greater compliance assistance in sectors with higher non-compliance. In Spring 2024, DEEP created compliance tools to meet this challenge:

- **Stormwater Guidance:** DEEP completed the Stormwater Quality Manual and the Guidelines on Soil Erosion and Sediment Control, both effective on March 30, 2024. Permittees can now better design projects that meet various permitting program requirements for the construction phase through project completion. DEEP simultaneously, and supported by the Long Island Sound Study, ran an education program in partnership with UCONN CLEAR that reached 550 participants through 3 webinars (available on CLEAR'S webinar archives) and reached 335 participants through workshops, in addition to consulting with more than 100 individuals.

- **New Complaint Intake System:** The Land and Water Resources and Water Permitting & Enforcement Divisions updated their public complaint intake systems, converting them from traditional paper forms and phone calls to digital surveys. These online tools provide exact locational accuracy through an interactive map, plus traditional multiple choice, drop down, and freehand text options. Staff then can review, sort, and assign data to efficiently provide an appropriate response.

DEEP's Land and Water Resource Division's Complaint Intake form.

- **LWRD Compliance Guidance:** To better inform CT residents about resources and structures along our coastline and state permitting requirements, in Spring 2024, LWRD hosted a hybrid public Q&A on its updated Beach Association Guide to Coastal Activities and Permitting, published along with the Coastal Property Owner's Guide (ct.gov). Both guides inform CT residents about resources and structures along our coastline and state permitting requirements. LWRD's Enforcement webpage has more information.

Up Next:

DEEP will be adding more programs to the electronic complaint intake system; providing outreach and materials for the regulated community about changes in permits, barriers to compliance, and development of new, clearer permits; and launching a Compliance Assistance online hub.

20BY26 GOAL 6:

ENHANCED FINANCIAL ASSURANCE TRACKING AND MANAGEMENT

Goal 6 of 20BY26 concentrates efforts on strengthening our financial assurance management, which applies to money held in trust to address failed remedies or incomplete permitted actions. Eleven programs across DEEP use financial assurance mechanisms.

In Spring 2024, DEEP formalized an internal standard operating procedure to guide staff on the proper management of financial assurance, such as standardized document formats; types of financial instruments; intake, storage, and tracking of documents; and adjustment, termination, and calling of financial instruments.

Up Next:

DEEP will review instruments for standardization across programs and establish an agency-wide tracking database.

20BY26 GOAL 7:

COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOP REGULATIONS THAT IMPLEMENT RECENT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE REFORMS

Goal 7 of 20BY26 reinforces our commitment to environmental justice by guiding DEEP's work implementing Public Act 23-202.

This new law authorizes DEEP and the Connecticut Siting Council to consider background environmental and public health stressors in communities when they make certain permitting and siting decisions. The amendments also require DEEP to develop regulations and tools to implement these new authorities.

In Spring 2024, DEEP held informational sessions for stakeholders groups including CEEJAC, CBIA, SIPRAC, SWAC, HWAC, the Environmental Business Council, DEEP's Remediation Roundtable, the CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, and the Windham/Willimantic NAACP. These sessions were designed to introduce the rulemaking process, timeline, underlying EJ framework, and need for these regulations. DEEP also partnered with Save the Sound and local environmental justice advocates to set up an Advocates Task Force.

EJ REGULATIONS DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

Up Next:

DEEP will be hosting stakeholder sessions on key regulatory concepts, plus a September 2024 Kickoff Meeting; releasing an RFP to select consultants to develop a cumulative impacts tool to aid permit applicants; and launching a website. Feel free to contact DEEP.EJRulemaking@ct.gov with any questions or comments.

20BY26 GOAL 8:

EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION FOR EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Goal 8 challenges DEEP to learn from and incorporate all communities in its mission. In Spring 2024, DEEP's Office of Equity and Environmental Justice, along with its permitting and programmatic partners:

- Shared new guidance outlining the public participation requirements in Connecticut's environmental justice law for certain permit applications.
- Released a webpage about participation in the permitting process to further support developers in planning community engagement about their facilities subject to these requirements. DEEP's permitting flow chart lays out the parallel paths of the permitting, public notice, and environmental justice processes, followed by a step-by-step description.
- Published an updated Public Participation Plan Form, providing detailed instructions for drafting Public Participation Plans.

This goal builds on an interagency collaboration to provide more information online about "Distressed Municipalities" — a designation that provides eligibility for certain important programs and grants.

Up Next:

DEEP will launch additional tools for the regulated community, in addition to gathering up and posting online all past and future EJ public participation plans and Community Environmental Benefit Agreements (CEBAs) produced pursuant to CGS section 22a-20a.

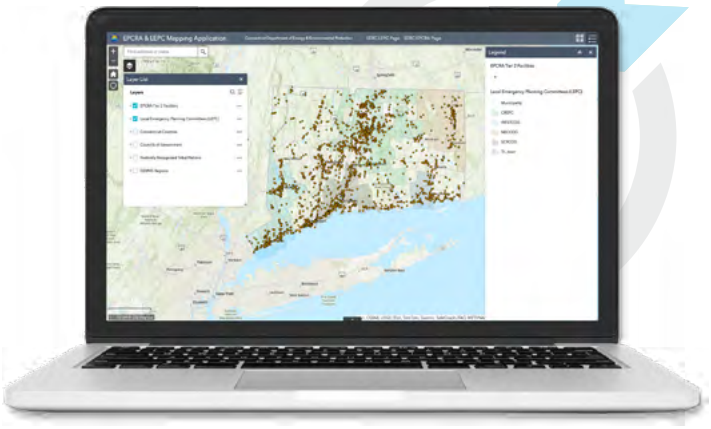
20BY26 GOAL 9:

ENHANCED PUBLIC RECORDS TRANSPARENCY

Goal 9 sets out a strategic vision for modernizing DEEP's record management and integrating this system with other IT systems.

DEEP's new Online Document Search Portal went live in April 2024, following the complete digitization of Remediation Division records in January. The new portal provides public access to a growing number of electronically available documents, including almost 10 million Remediation Division records. It's now faster and easier to search for multiple town or project names and to show more records returned, increasing from 500 to 1,000. In May 2024, we added a five-minute presentation about the portal's new features. Throughout Spring 2024 DEEP started preparing records and contracting so that its contractor can digitize even more records.

In Spring 2024, DEEP updated its FOIA webpage with search options and links to electronic documents, so that members of the public can more easily search for information. This page builds on DEEP's new GovQA website, which DEEP launched in April 2023. From January through June 2024, the agency received more than 550 requests through GovQA.



In Spring 2024, DEEP's Office of Emergency Response Planning and the State Emergency Response Commission (SERC) released an updated map viewer to display the Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) and chemical management facilities subject to the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA). Sharing information about these facilities helps communities be aware of them and advances emergency preparedness. The map is available on the SERC website and DEEP's GIS Open Data Website.

Up Next:

DEEP is digitizing the leaking underground storage tank (LUST) records and developing additional map viewers.

20BY26 GOAL 10:

EXPAND TOOLS FOR ONLINE SERVICES

Building off DEEP's Goal 9 work to enhance access to public records, DEEP's strategic IT vision in Goal 10 involves integration of e-payments, document submittal, e-filing of permits, and data management for pollution release areas.

Leveraging the state's cloud-based Business One Stop Salesforce platform, in Spring 2024, DEEP started designing the backbone and component pieces of an IT system that will support a new e-licensing platform and a new system to better manage all agency and public responsibilities related to pollution releases and cleanups. These systems will improve public access to essential information and documentation. This system will also ultimately support the implementation of the new Release-Based Cleanup Regulations (20BY26 Goal 1) and builds on the public access to information provided via the Releases Reported to DEEP Portal, which went live in July 2022.

IT PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Up Next:

DEEP will procure and design a new Adjudications System and replace the ez-File Portal with a new, more effective platform.

20BY26 GOAL 11:

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

In Goal 11, DEEP is speeding up key grant and contracting processes that it controls. DEEP administers roughly 35 individual grant programs from 14 different federal agencies totaling more than $300 million. These funds support agency operations and pass-through contracts to nonprofits, municipalities, and other grantees.

In Spring 2024, DEEP:

- Fully deployed planner boards across DEEP's three branches to ensure contracts avoid bottlenecks.
- Developed legal contract templates for individual grant programs to speed up drafting.
- Conducted contract process-mapping and training.

In Spring 2024, DEEP also made improvements to assist both potential applicants and recipients of DEEP grants:

- Hired a Federal Grants Policy Advisor who will advise DEEP on applying for federal pass-through grants and provide workshops and resources for nonprofits, municipalities, and others seeking grants administered by DEEP.
- Partnered with Sea Grant and Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) to offer 3 regional funding workshops, through DEEP's Climate Resilience, Non-point Source Pollution, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA), Urban Green and Community Garden (UGCG), Recreational Trails, and Urban Forestry programs.
- Provided webinars for awarded grantees about the contracting process and reporting requirements.
- Helped grantees use DocuSign for speedy electronic reviews and signatures.
- Transitioned to online grant applications for the Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) grant program.
- Developed eligibility maps to guide applicants towards the UCF grant programs that are best suited to their projects.
- Offered virtual walk-in sessions to receive feedback and assist grant applicants during the Request for Proposals phase, such as for the Recreational Trails and UCF programs.

Up Next:

Keep an eye out for more grant assistance tools and efficiencies!

20BY26 GOAL 12:

EXPAND DEEP CONCIERGE SERVICES TO MUNICIPALITIES AND SMALL BUSINESSES

In Goal 12, DEEP is broadening its Client Concierge Services to municipalities and small businesses.

In Spring 2024, the Office of Innovative Partnerships and Planning developed the Early Municipal Assistance (EMA) program and questionnaire tailored to assist municipalities with project planning and create direct access to DEEP staff. DEEP's EMA is just one of many resources that can be found on DEEP's new Municipal Hub webpage, launched in Spring 2024, where municipalities can connect with DEEP's Municipal Team, find options for funding opportunities, and explore DEEP's resources specifically geared towards municipal needs.

This winter and spring, DEEP's Municipal Team also has been connecting with our municipal partners at conferences, and it has been great to learn about community needs and projects and showcase the services DEEP has to offer. We also have been sharing ways in which people can say in touch:

- Emailing us at DEEP.Concierge@ct.gov
- Signing up and staying in touch through the Municipal Connections newsletter
- Submitting suggestions to improve DEEP's municipal services through our survey
- Following DEEP's Concierge email blasts for topics and opportunities directed at business and industry in the state.

Up Next:

Stay tuned for an updated, online Municipal Primer and DEEP Municipal Team visits to municipalities. Send suggestions for upcoming events where you'd like to see DEEP to DEEP.Concierge@ct.gov. Soon, DEEP will be sharing ways to better connect small businesses to permit assistance, compliance assistance, and funding sources.

20BY26 GOAL 13:

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITH DEEP

Through Goal 13, DEEP is deepening its engagement with stakeholders, with a focus on inclusivity and equity. Enhanced outreach and partnerships are fundamental to DEEP's success in serving its mission.

Released in June 2024, DEEP's new Contacts webpage ensures that all stakeholders can easily find the information they need or contact someone at DEEP that can help. It includes an updated directory of DEEP personnel, programmatic email inboxes for easier access to staff that can answer questions, and links to programmatic main pages. The agency also has added an email link on this page to help you report an outdated page or error. The agency's constant external outreach is only increasing with the historic levels of federal funding coming to Connecticut through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). In Winter and Spring 2024, DEEP was busy:

- Modernizing its communications with a new email marketing and public awareness platform, enhancing operational efficiency and more accurately disseminating relevant information to appropriate groups through organic list growth and audience segmentation.
- Conducting public surveys/listening sessions on the 2024-2029 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), at which thousands of Connecticut residents and outdoor enthusiasts commented.
- Increasing engagement of non-traditional stakeholders in reviewing and revising Connecticut's 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), the federally mandated blueprint for the conservation of fish, wildlife, rare plants, and their habitats.

Click to view the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Website

- Improving broadband access, adoption, and equity in underserved communities, with the goal of reaching universal access across the state. To achieve this, DEEP established many opportunities for residents and municipalities to connect on broadband access through meeting notices, meeting recordings, a dedicated **website**, a link to **subscribe to emails**, and other important resources. DEEP's Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program focuses on Multi-Dwelling Units in **Distressed Municipalities** where lack of service may be contested as part of the BEAD Challenge Process. DEEP assisted broadband service providers, local and tribal governments, and nonprofit organizations in submitting their Challenges on DEEP's **BEAD Program Challenge Process Portal**, with 535 challenges submitted from Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, New London, Sprague, Waterbury, Windham, and SCCOG (on behalf of Norwich).

DEEP'S OFFICE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND BROADBAND OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY:

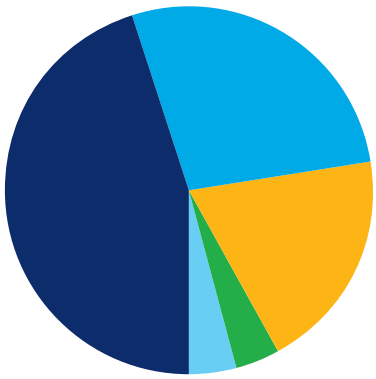
45.1% Municipalities

27.5% Program Info & Support Sessions

19.6% Community Organizations

3.9% Workforce & Utilities

3.9% Broadband Service Providers



Up Next:

- Create CTDEEP.News, a new centralized hub that will streamline access to our diverse information resources.
- Develop an Outreach and Engagement Guide with best practices that DEEP staff will use for outreach planning and tracking, gathering and digesting stakeholder feedback, and communicating consistently and successfully.
- Advance our new streamlined and inclusive **selection process** for Boards and Commissions.
- Kick off Bureau Open House events, where stakeholders can meet permitting and inspection staff, ask questions, and voice concerns. First up is the Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse (WPLR) Open House on July 30, 2024, from 10am–12pm in the auditorium at DEEP HQ, 79 Elm Street, Hartford.

20BY26 GOAL 14:

PERMITTING FOR DECARBONIZATION

In Goal 14, DEEP is exploring and implementing best practices to streamline renewable energy permitting and maximize investments in critical decarbonization efforts, including to meet decarbonation goals and follow plans, such as DEEP's 2021 Integrated Resources Plan.

In Spring 2024, DEEP assessed the challenges associated with site development for solar energy generation, which will be fundamental for projects to smoothly navigate the regulatory process, and created a hierarchy of siting considerations for developers:

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL ARRAY CONFIGURATIONS
Ground mounted, rooftop, canopy, whole or portion of site

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL STATE POLICY IMPACTS
State listed species, core forest, wetlands, stormwater management, water quality, farmland and other open space, environmental justice

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL COST IMPLICATIONS
Interconnection upgrades, rooftop/canopies, brownfield/landfills, uncleared land, cleared land

BALANCE TO FIND THE PREFERRED PROJECT SITE
Previously disturbed land (brownfields or landfills), underutilized industrial sites, rooftops/canopies, adequate hosting capacity

If you are seeking permit and regulatory assistance in establishing a renewable energy generations facility, please visit DEEP's website Permits Licenses Overview (ct.gov) and contact us at DEEP.Concierge@ct.gov. Additional guidance on Siting Solar in Connecticut is located on DEEP's STEPS webpage.

Up Next:

DEEP will be hosting a workshop to explore novel ideas around "permitting for decarbonization" and opportunities to collaborate on a regional level with representatives from the energy and environmental state agencies across the northeast. DEEP also is working to develop a renewable energy suitability siting tool and establish partnerships for mapping collaboration.

20BY26 GOAL 15:

TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING AVAILABLE FEDERAL & STATE FUNDING

In Goal 15, DEEP is focused on leveraging vital federal and state incentives and funding to expand clean energy, energy efficiency, broadband, and reduction of greenhouse gases, among other environmental priorities, and sharing this information broadly with residents and businesses.

The BIL and IRA together have brought $363 million to DEEP as of May 9, 2024. To promote public understanding around these grants, DEEP has launched an online transparency dashboard.

Up Next:

DEEP will update its webpage showing available grant opportunities. It also will continue working with interested stakeholders to develop a tool that will more easily connect applicants (nonprofits, municipalities, tribes, and others) with the available state, local, and federal energy and broadband incentives and funding opportunities.

20BY26 GOAL 16:

DEEP PARTNERSHIPS WITH PRIVATE ENTITIES IN STATE PARKS

In Goal 16, DEEP aims to build upon existing private sector partnerships to further elevate outdoor recreation experiences, enhance tourism destinations, provide equitable access to State Parks, and support the economy.

In Winter 2024, Governor Lamont joined DEEP to announce the new Office of Outdoor Industry & Experience, charged with building upon existing partnerships with the private sector to enhance outdoor recreation in Connecticut State Parks. In Spring 2024, DEEP finished public outreach and engagement on the Partnership in Park Request for Information (RFI). DEEP conducted outreach to a wide range of businesses, agencies, and nonprofits, and the RFI submission window closed on April 30, 2024, with 45 concepts submitted.

Up Next:

DEEP is in the process of evaluating the concepts received and looks forward to sharing the next steps with DEEP's stakeholders in the early fall, after the peak recreations season concludes.

20BY26 GOAL 17:

IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF NDDB REVIEW

DEEP's Goal 17 aims at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB) review process for all stakeholders.

Our 20BY20 initiative made significant upgrades that resulted in a new **Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB)** system that allows digital submission and automatic determinations for many **NDDB review requests** (NDDB staff biologists conduct the more in-depth, technically complex reviews). DEEP has recently hired two additional staff members to help improve response and review times. DEEP now is setting a goal of strengthening the efficiency and predictability of NDDB reviews, including by:

- Identifying sub-optimal components of the Environmental Review Request submission and review process.
- Identifying highest priority needs to achieve programmatic goals. Target completion Q3 2025.
- Soliciting feedback from a variety of stakeholder types, including but not limited to the regulated community, the conservation community, and experts in the professional biological sciences community, regarding what they would deem efficient and effective environmental review. Target completion Q3 2025.
- Using information gleaned from the above, prepare a list of process and conservation outcome improvements, and a realistic timeframe for implementation. Target completion Q4 2025.

20BY26 GOAL 18:

ENHANCING DAM SAFETY THROUGH IMPROVED PERMITTING FOR REPAIR AND REMOVAL

Connecticut hosts the highest number of dams per river mile in the country, most of which are privately owned and many of which serve an important role for water supply, recreation, energy production or multiple beneficial uses.

In addition, many of these dams are a legacy of Connecticut's industrial past and may no longer serve a beneficial use. Regardless of a dam's use, it is critical that they are maintained in a safe condition and, given the importance of dam safety to so many aspects of public safety and environmental and ecological health, DEEP is working to Enhance Dam Safety as Goal 18.

This goal builds on a proposal by the Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA). We are grateful to these stakeholders, many private dam owners throughout Connecticut, and others, who care about protecting our drinking water supplies, maintaining public safety, improving climate resiliency, making needed repairs to dams, and removing dams where stakeholders, owners, and communities seek such an action. DEEP shares these objectives and commits to process improvement through Goal 18, which will result in reducing costs for water company customers, reducing delays in making needed upgrades and minor repairs, and reducing budgetary issues caused by delays. These changes will also ensure that dam owners can make required stream flow releases that improve ecological and human health, as well as water quality – a win for all interests.

To advance this process improvement, DEEP will:

- Initiate an advisory group, including CWWA, water industry professionals, members of the River Restoration Network, and other interested stakeholders, to provide recommendations on expanding the types of activities that may expedite the permit process under a General Permit and streamline permitting where dam removal is sought.
- Analyze all DEEP-controlled dams to evaluate the potential for hydroelectricity generation, including potential generating capacity, interconnection, dam quality, and fish passage.
- Develop sediment management guidelines–from sampling to dredging to upland beneficial reuse–to increase permitting clarity and assistance where dam projects require sediment management.

20BY26 GOAL 19:

ESTABLISH EQUITY HUBS

Through Goal 19 of 20BY26, DEEP will establish Equity Hubs to provide community-based services and support related to DEEP's programs and initiatives in communities that face environmental and public heath burdens and are economically distressed.

These Equity Hubs will build DEEP's capacity to listen and engage so that the agency's work is inclusive and linked to on the ground realities. Equity Hubs will address several key challenges, needs, and opportunities facing environmental justice communities most impacted and vulnerable due to climate change and past histories of environmental disadvantage, including addressing health disparities, improving access to clean energy and efficient technologies, fostering community resilience through education and engagement, and ensuring equitable resource distribution and support. For example, hubs can facilitate guided nature tours, host funding workshops, share air quality data, support EV and E-bike outreach, distribute energy-efficient appliances, create weatherization campaigns, and assist with energy efficiency grants.

They will also help build capacity at the local level and position disadvantaged communities to participate in and benefit from meeting the ambitious and urgent climate-related targets set by state statutes, such as the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA). Finally, greater benefits and efficiencies will flow from enlisting experienced community organizations to lead as DEEP continues to expand its environmental justice initiatives and priorities and seeks to follow the federal Justice40 targets of sending 40% of the benefits associated with federal investments to disadvantaged communities. Next steps include soliciting more extensive feedback from stakeholders on the concept of the hubs and then issuing a Request for Qualifications for partners we can work with to get these hubs underway.

20BY26 GOAL 20:

DEVELOP A METRICS DASHBOARD

Goal 20 in 20BY26 will make DEEP's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and reach the state's carbon reduction goals by 2040 more transparent with a new Metrics Dashboard.

Stakeholders in Bridgeport and at the Naugatuck Valley Council of Government suggested that we create a goal to support transparency in the energy, waste, and climate mitigation sectors. DEEP will seek to highlight metrics in these sectors in an online dashboard that displays need-to-know information, such as:

- The level of emissions in the state
- How many EVs Connecticut residents drive
- How many charging stations are available
- The battery storage and solar capacities of systems in state
- How much tonnage of waste is diverted by municipal food scrap programs
- How much are we recycling, and
- How many acres of urban tree cover protect our cities.

To communicate with stakeholders, DEEP will share more information on **opportunities for stakeholder engagement** on this metrics dashboard, including the **Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3)** with quarterly public meetings and work to update the state's **2015 waste characterization study** as part of DEEP's **Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy**. We hope that sharing this information will raise awareness and empower residents to join DEEP's mission.

Connecticut Department of Energy &
Environmental Protection

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We hope you enjoyed this inaugural results report. We are eager to get started on the stakeholder-inspired four new goals and look forward to updating you in future progress reports. As always, please email DEEP.20BY26@ct.gov with any feedback, and please sign up for updates and future reports.