



**Connecticut State Forest Action Plan  
5-Year Highlights Report  
2020 – 2025**

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*Cover Photo: Fall foliage on sugar maple near Reservoir 4 in Naugatuck State Forest – Credit: Gerard Milne, DEEP*

## Introduction

The Connecticut Forest Action Plan acts as a guide for the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and hopefully inspires others to improve and protect Connecticut's forest resources for future generations. Created in collaboration with many partners and stakeholders, the Connecticut Forest Action Plan aims to identify issues and prioritize important areas, values, and needs. The Connecticut Forest Action Plan analyzes the current conditions and trends of forests in Connecticut and lays out strategies and action steps to best plan for the future of the forested landscape.

States are required to update their Forest Action Plans every 10 years to be eligible for funding through the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act. States are also required to complete a review and highlights report every five years. This five-year highlights report looks at some of the accomplishments from the forestry community in Connecticut between 2020 and 2025.

Congress identified three National Priorities:

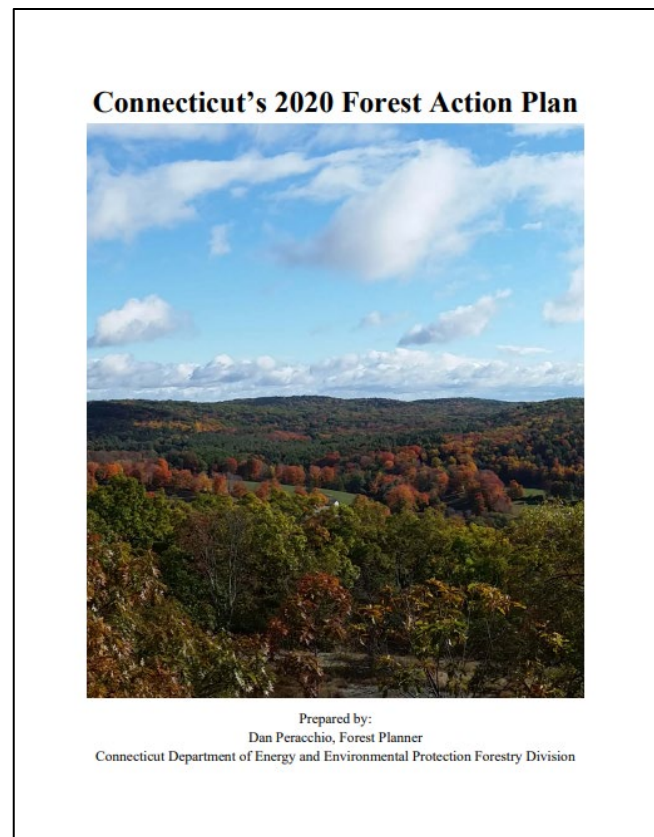
1. Conserve and manage working forest landscapes for multiple values and uses
2. Protect forests from threats
3. Enhance public benefits from trees and forests

Each accomplishment is tied to one or more of the National Priorities and each is labeled with the relevant priorities.

Highlights were provided from each of DEEP Forestry's programs, other DEEP programs, and partners. This is not an exhaustive list of accomplishments related to the Connecticut Forest Action Plan but provides some insight into what the forestry community in Connecticut has been doing for the last five years.

Although it is organized by program or partner, many of these highlights were collaborative efforts between many of the same groups. These partnerships have grown even stronger over the last five years, especially with additional funding sources like the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

You can review the [2020 Connecticut Forest Action Plan](#) at the link.



# Forest Protection

## Suppression and Response

The 2020 to 2025 period has been an active one for response. There were approximately 2,270 fires that reported during these years that burned 1,980 acres. It is estimated that approximately 60% of all fires that occur are reported. The State of CT received its first FEMA awarded Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) in the 2024 Fall season. Over 220 new wildfire starts occurred within 30 days October 20 to November 20th following the driest September/October period in Connecticut’s recorded history. Ironically this wildfire emergency immediately followed after an epic 10+ inch (within 24 hours) August “rain bomb” that occurred in the northwestern New Hven County causing loss of life and hundreds of lost and damaged structures and many millions of dollars damage to municipal and state infrastructure ([August 18th, 2024: Severe Flooding Disaster](#)).

Through the 2020 to 2025 period the [Connecticut Interstate Fire Crew \(CIFC\)](#) contributed to National Wildfire response with crews, modules, equipment, and specialized resources. An example being 2021 CIFC deployments to Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, Oregon, Idaho, and Washington and Alaska in 2025. Virtual assignments are also common. Additionally, Connecticut Forest Protection Staff routinely directly supports training for Rhode Island wildland firefighters as well as contributes to the Northeast Forest Fire Protection Compact Trainer Cadre. The State’s has actively supported national and Canadian firefighting efforts which proved invaluable when hundreds of qualified wildland fire fighters, equipment, and logistical expertise responded to Connecticut’s time of need during Fall 2024.



Figure 1 - Wildfire on Lamentation Mountain in October 2024 – Credit: Lindsey Sears

### **Relevant National Priorities: 2**

## Preparedness, Equipment, and Training

In 2020 and 2021 Connecticut put into service a new Type IV and VI engines using its unique relationship with the Department of Transportation (CT DOT). This critical assistance unfortunately came to an end due to retirements and shifting priorities within CT

DOT. We are grateful for this extremely beneficial service and opportunity to collaborate with a sister State Agency. In 2025 another Type VI was placed into service.

Also in 2021 the cooperative fire program introduced a new [Wildfire Reporting](#) app meant to assist DEEP Forestry improve the accuracy of Connecticut's wildland fire statistics. For internal dispatch purposes DEEP has launched a new notification system for in-State wildfire response and CIFIC mobilizations.

DEEP Forestry added a full-time Fire Control officer using Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding. This position aided with suppression, response, preparedness, and training, as well as developing the Community Wildfire Defense Program in Connecticut.



Figure 2 - 2025 Type 6 F550 with 300-gallon tank – Credit: Rich Schenk, DEEP

Training is likely the most significant component of the Forest Protection Program. Since January 1, 2020 the following classes have been conducted:

- S-130/S-190/L-180 - recruit class regiment - 5 classes (15 NWCG courses) with 112 students
- RT-130 - 7 Classes with 420 Students
- S-211 - 1 class with 16 students
- S-212 - 2 classes with 46 students
- S-131 - 1 class with 24 students
- L-280 - 1 class with 23 students
- Agency refresher CTRT-130 - 8 classes with 457 students
- Agency Fireline training (CT130/190)- 14 classes with 426 students

Total over 1500 students have been trained in wildfire suppression skills, tactics and leadership (excluding fire department trainings) trained.

### ***Relevant National Priorities: 2***

## **Community Mitigation and Hazard Fuels**

The Forest Protection program consistently supports 38 volunteer fire departments with grants and training and typically offers service to over 500 municipal fire fighters annually through approximately 75 fire prevention programs using Cooperative Fire funding. Thanks to Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funds, Community Wildfire Defense Funding contributes annually to outreach and assistance to communities developing [Community Fire Control Grants](#) with the addition of a new Fire Control Officer. During this five-year period, the Program conducted an online survey to fire departments assessing rural fire needs. The survey received an excellent response rate and highlighted the need for supporting training, wildfire response, and access to Federal grant funding. Annually the Agency conducts five to nine prescribed burns on Agency properties to combat invasive

plants, improve wildlife habitat, and exercise State staff's wildfire suppression skills. During the period 26 prescribed fire projects were conducted that treated 451 acres. Wildfire Risk Reduction project was initiated for the Pachaug State Forest and surrounding communities in 2020. This project focused on hardening critical control lines/fire roads by reducing bug kill timber in the areas adjacent areas via mechanical and Rx fire treatments.

**Relevant National Priorities: 2**

## Private and Municipal Lands

### Outreach Forester

DEEP Forestry created a new Outreach Forester position in late 2023, funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, to advance goals of the 2020 Connecticut Forest Action Plan. Working within the Private and Municipal Lands program, the Outreach Forester leads statewide education and communication efforts in collaboration with partners such as UConn Extension and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. The role develops digital and print materials, including the Forestry Division newsletter, webinars, trainings, and social media content covering topics like carbon sequestration, urban and community tree health, forest pests and diseases, and resilient forest management, while improving data management, branding, communication protocols, and technical assistance systems.

The Outreach Forester has expanded the division's presence at major educational and professional events, including Connecticut's Master Woodland Owner education program, Envirothon, Plant Science Day, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council Annual Conference, and Project Learning Tree, and supported communications during the Hawthorne Fire emergency. In its first two reporting years, the position directly engaged 1,531 landowners, professionals, and youth and helped facilitate more than 51 outreach events annually, significantly expanding forestry education, stewardship outreach, and participation in a \$5 million resilient forestry cost-share program.



*Figure 3 - Outreach Forester at a Master Woodland Manager educational event – Credit: Connecticut Forest and Park Association*

**Relevant National Priorities: 1, 2, 3**

## Landowner Support for Forest Resilience

Through an Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Forest Stewardship grant and associated sub-awards with partners (Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation and Connecticut Land Conservation Council), DEEP Forestry will pay over \$4.5 million to nonindustrial rural private, municipal, and land trust woodland owners for resilient forestry practice implementation statewide. This cost share program will achieve the goal of promoting a resilient forested landscape that promotes forest and landscape resilience, by leveraging existing initiatives and engaging target landowner demographics. At the time the awarded proposal was written, over 145 landowner contracts were expected to be executed through this program, enhancing forest health and resilience forestry practice implementation on over 13,500 acres throughout CT.

Sub-awards have been executed with project partners and associated landowner agreements and cost share guidelines have been developed. Outreach for these programs have commenced. While no financial reimbursement has been allocated, all three projects are progressing and nearing their first round of submissions.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

### **Websites:**

1. CSWC: [Connecticut Landowner Support for Forest Resilience Cost Share Program – CT Council on Soil and Water Conservation](#)
2. CLCC: [Announcing the Launch of the Climate-Smart Forest Stewardship Grant Program – Connecticut Land Conservation Council](#)
3. DEEP Urban and Community Forestry: [Resilient Forestry Practices Grant](#)

## PA-490 Current Use Tax Law Update

PA-490 Current Use Tax Law (PA 490) incentivizes the retention of forestland in Connecticut and contributes to the high quality of life experienced by CT residents. While the standards for classification of forestland are consistent throughout all of Connecticut's 169 municipalities, it is the responsibility of each municipality to oversee the program and ensure landowner compliance or enforce regulations when compliance lacks. DEEP Forestry's role in the tax incentive program is primarily to be a source of information and technical assistance to PA 490-qualified licensed forest practitioners, landowners, and municipal assessors.

Since 2020, state mandated PA-490 qualification trainings have been conducted by DEEP Forestry annually. This training is offered to all Connecticut-licensed forest practitioners interested in working for landowner hire to classify their woodlands as forest land under Connecticut General Statutes 12-107a-f.

Every five years the value of classified PA 490 forest land per acre is re-evaluated. The most recent reevaluation occurred on time in October 2025. The value of CT classified forest land is \$390/acre. As of October 10, 2025 with 83% of Connecticut municipalities reporting, a total of 475,647 acres are classified as forest land under PA-490 and are distributed across 9,120 parcels.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** [Classification of Land as Forest Land](#)

## State Lands Management

### Salvage Harvests in Housatonic State Forest

Spongy moth defoliation in 2021–2022 significantly impacted oak forests in northwestern Connecticut, affecting about 9,500 acres in the Housatonic State Forest and contributing to an estimated 45,773 damaged acres across Litchfield County according to the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES). In the most severely affected areas of Housatonic State Forest, overstory oak mortality reached up to 71%. Additional stressors from 2023–2024—including drought, insect pests such as the two-lined chestnut borer and red oak borer, and the root disease *Armillaria mellea*—accelerated oak decline and triggered stand-replacing disturbances in forests dominated by oak-hickory, oak–eastern white pine, and northern hardwood types with strong northern red oak presence.

In response, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Forestry Division collaborated with CAES to assess mortality, develop management strategies, and conduct public outreach tours beginning in 2023. By January 2026, foresters had initiated eight timber harvests covering 964 acres to salvage dead and dying trees, reduce wildfire fuel loads and safety hazards, improve forest age structure, and promote resilient native regeneration, while also implementing invasive plant control before and after harvests using both agency staff and private contractors.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

### Enhanced State Land Forest Management Plan Public Outreach

DEEP Forestry has implemented a new process for broad Forest Resource Management Plan review and public comment. This process was initiated to ensure a wide cross section of the citizens of Connecticut have access to, and comment opportunities for every Forest Resource Management Plan authored for DEEP State Lands. The process includes 4-phases; 1) internal multi-disciplinary review by DEEP Staff and associated program specialists, 2) a 60-day review by direct stakeholder groups, Town Officials, Boards & Commissions, 3) a 30-day broad public review period facilitated by a public notice internet posting, 4) final multidisciplinary review by DEEP leadership.

The process has resulted in more robust, early engagement by the stakeholder groups affected by forest management and the local communities. Outreach has facilitated connections between user-groups, Town governments, and State staff yielding early, fruitful conversations of on-the-ground management, and opportunities for State/Town collaboration. Improved communication has also resulted in a better understanding of the goals and objectives of forest management within the municipalities which host State Lands.

**Relevant National Priorities: 3**

### DEEP Sawmill Modernization

DEEP historically operated several sawmills at former Civilian Conservation Corps camp sites, but only one remains today at the former Camp Buck in Portland. This mill provides sustainably sourced lumber from DEEP state forests and parks to support public infrastructure at below-market cost. After decades of operating with outdated 1960s equipment, DEEP modernized the facility with a new mill building and updated machinery, including a circular sawmill, woodchipper, firewood processor, and debarker, improving safety, efficiency, and fiber utilization.

The mill processes about 130,000 board feet of oak and pine logs annually, mostly harvested within 20 miles through silvicultural projects that promote forest regeneration, tree quality, and wildlife habitat diversity. The lumber is used to produce items such as picnic tables, signage, gates, nesting boxes, fish ladders, trailer decking, and campground firewood, with about 65% supporting state park infrastructure and the rest used by DEEP divisions, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and other agencies. Products are certified under the Connecticut Grown program, reflecting sustainable forestry and local production, while modernization efforts also aim to utilize nearly 100% of wood fiber by repurposing by-products like sawdust, chips, and bark mulch.

**Relevant National Priorities: 1, 3**



Figure 4 - New head saw at DEEP sawmill – Credit: Nathan Piche, DEEP



Figure 5 - Portland sawmill logo and the Connecticut Grown logo branded onto sugar maple molding at DEEP's Western District Headquarters – Credit: DEEP

## Invasive Species Control Prioritization

DEEP foresters have prioritized treatments designed to control invasive, non-native plants that threaten the health and diversity of our forests. DEEP has led projects to control invasive plants using mechanical and or chemical treatments to reduce competition by 90% or more, treating over 740 acres during the last five years allowing native trees and shrubs to have better access to site resources for establishment and growth.



Figure 6 - Before (left) and after (right) invasive species treatment at Naugatuck State Forest – Credit: Gerard Milne, DEEP

### **Relevant National Priorities: 2**

## Advancing Markets for Producers Grant

DEEP Forestry was awarded an Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) grant from New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF). The grant will enable DEEP to perform up to 500-acres of timber stand improvement (TSI) treatments with the goal of improving forest health and accelerating the growth of commercial forest products. Implementation will enable earlier commercial stand entries and quicker availability of forest products to market in the treated stands.

TSI is critically important in Connecticut as regeneration trends often favor generalist species which yield less timber value. This work will increase chances of promoting more desirable species like, oaks, hickories, and white pine providing hard mast and cover and yielding more valuable forest products in subsequent commercial stand entries.

The work will create bid opportunities for logging contractors, foresters, and other private sector green businesses in Connecticut. Following implementation, treated stands will be restored to adequate stocking levels, experience increased growth rates, support a higher percentage of both ecologically and economically valuable species, and be available for commercial stand entries up to 20% sooner than untreated stands.

### **Relevant National Priorities: 1**

**Website:** [Advancing Markets for Producers New England Forestry Foundation](#)

## Acoustic Bat Monitoring

Bats provide vital ecosystem services but have experienced severe population declines since the emergence of White-nose syndrome in 2006, highlighting the need for coordinated conservation and management efforts. In Connecticut, collaboration between the DEEP Forestry and Wildlife Divisions has focused on balancing forest management with protection of vulnerable bat species such as the Northern long-eared bat.

Because much of the state is considered potential habitat and detailed survey data are limited, forest operations are typically restricted to outside the bats' active season. To improve decision-making, managers use acoustic monitoring technology that records species-specific echolocation calls, allowing efficient presence or probable absence assessments without intensive capture methods. Through this partnership, site-level surveys consistent with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidance are conducted before tree-cutting projects, enabling tailored management recommendations that reduce incidental harm while supporting forest health goals. Since 2024, DEEP foresters have sampled 46 sites that have been added to the ongoing sampling efforts by the Wildlife Division, expanding the statewide database for bat activity.

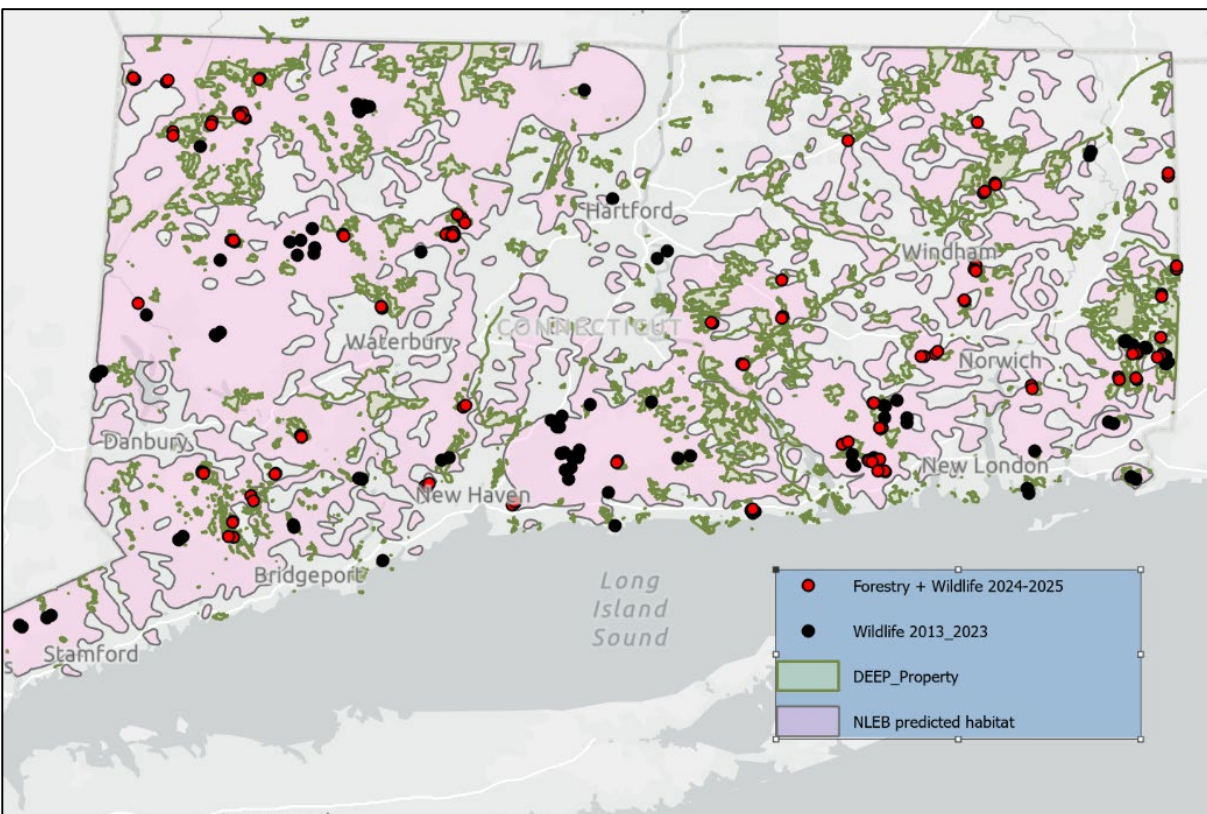


Figure 7 - Locations of bat acoustic detector deployments from 2013-2023 and 2024-2025.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1

**Website:** [Bat Acoustic Monitoring Program](#)

# Urban and Community Forestry

## Increasing Urban Tree Canopy by 5%

In 2023, Connecticut enacted Public Act 23-206, establishing a statewide goal to increase urban tree canopy by 5% by 2040 in environmental justice communities with less than 40% existing canopy cover. The legislation addresses the uneven distribution of tree cover by prioritizing communities with the greatest need for trees and the benefits that they provide. This policy provides a long-term framework to guide urban forestry investments, planning, and data collection across the state.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 3

**Website:** [PA 23-206](#)

## Investment and Grant Programs

At the time of the 2020 Connecticut Forest Action Plan, the Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) grant program was suspended due to insufficient funding. Since then, DEEP UCF successfully restored, expanded, and improved the program through nearly \$1 million from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, \$2.625 million from the Inflation Reduction Act, and additional funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Using these historic investments, DEEP UCF developed and administered five distinct sub-grant programs supporting a wide range of urban forestry initiatives, including tree planting and stewardship, workforce development, invasive species management, forest management planning, tree inventories, and forestry-focused outreach. Since 2020, 85 projects have been funded in 37 municipalities statewide. Capacity-building and technical assistance were embedded into each sub-grant, ensuring grantees received both financial and technical support to successfully implement projects.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 3

**Website:** [Urban Forestry Grant Accomplishments](#)



*Figure 8 - Groundwork Bridgeport workforce development and tree planting program crew planting a tree in a low-canopy cover neighborhood providing arboriculture training and career pathways for program participants – Credit: Les Welker, DEEP*

## Partnership Coordinator

At the time of the 2020 Connecticut Forest Action Plan, DEEP's Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program was staffed by a single full-time position. Since then, DEEP added a second full-time position, establishing both a UCF Coordinator and a Partnership Coordinator.

The Partnership Coordinator role has significantly expanded DEEP UCF's capacity to build statewide partnerships and provide technical assistance to municipalities and community groups. This support includes site visits, training and workshops, and assistance with community advocacy development, all of which improve urban forest management and help communities meet SOAP metrics through annual Community Accomplishment Reporting.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 3

## Forest Practices Act

### E-Licensing

The Forest Practices Act program is responsible for the examination, licensing and enforcement of the forest practitioner licensing requirements for foresters and loggers. In 2025 the program moved to an electronic licensing system allowing practitioners to apply for and maintain their licenses online. Approximately 350 individuals are licensed to perform commercial forest practices in the state. Changing to eLicensing will allow the single program staff to shift priorities away from tedious paperwork and focusing more on best management practices, legal compliance, and boosting the utilization and marketing of forest products.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** [elicense.ct.gov](https://elicense.ct.gov)

### Audit of Municipal Regulations

DEEP works closely with municipalities and the forest products industry to make sure each understands the requirements of laws applicable to forestry, so the operations are not unduly interrupted, and the environmental laws are abided by. The program has almost completed a state-wide audit of municipal regulations affecting commercial forest practices for compliance with state statutes. 19 of the 20 non-compliant towns have been brought into compliance. This has created additional, but more clarified regulations in five additional towns.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

## Certified Forest Practitioners and Continuing Education

Approximately 350 loggers and foresters are certified pursuant to the Forest Practices Act. Certification is primarily achieved through examination. The Forestry Division approved more than 450 continuing education workshops over the past five years and certified practitioners logged in more than 10,000 hours of continuing education (2,500 hours annually) on subjects such as safety, harvesting techniques, best management practices, silviculture, business practices, forest health, logger health and safety, forested wetlands and laws affecting forest practices.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

## Best Management Practices App

DEEP Forestry in collaboration with Tyler Tech and USDA Forest Service created and launched CT Best Management Practices (BMP) App in August 2025, which allows users to access the BMP Guide and estimate costs to install BMPs on operations with their mobile device.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** [Best Management Practices](#)

## Forested Wetland Soils Workshops

The Forestry Division worked with DEEP Land and Water Resources Division, NRCS, TIMPRO, UConn Extension to offer a well-attended series of workshops to loggers, foresters and municipalities about forested wetland soils. The workshop introduced BMPs and their installation and maintenance, as well as a review of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act Permitted Uses and Rights.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

## Forest Legacy Program

### Whip-poor-will Forest Legacy Project

The Whip-poor-will Woods Forest Legacy Project (WPWW) permanently protected, through conservation easements, 1,495 acres of mostly forestland across seven tracts owned by six landowners using more than \$2.8 million in Forest Legacy Program funding from the USDA Forest Service. The project was completed in 2022 and landowners provided more than \$875,000 in cost-share through bargain sales of the conservation easements.

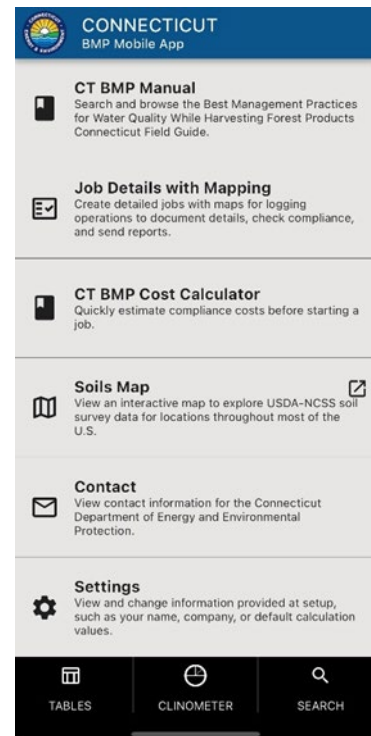


Figure 9 - Screenshot of the CT BMP App

WPWW conserves forestland abutting more than 13,000 acres of other protected open space that will make this area more resilient to climate change, provide wildlife habitat and clean drinking water, and supply sustainable forest products, including maple syrup. These benefits are shared with the entire community and future generations.

WPWW was awarded Connecticut Land Conservation Council's Excellence in Conservation Organization Award for Outstanding Project in 2022, recognizing the landscape scale of the project, as well as the commitment to conservation of the landowners and partners, including DEEP, USDA Forest Service, MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership, Norcross Wildlife Foundation, and Connecticut Land Conservation Council.

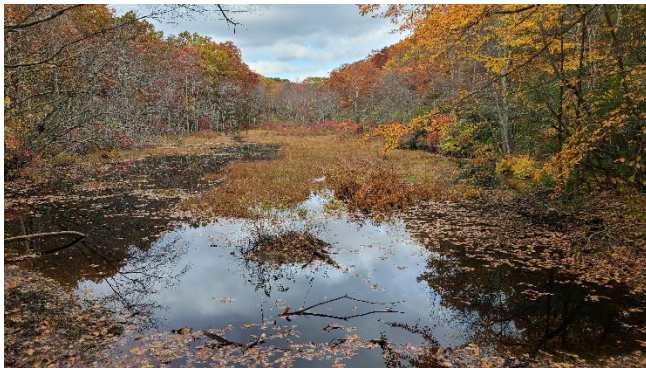


Figure 10 - (L) Wetland on WPWW project – Credit: Dan Peracchio, DEEP; (R) WPWW landowners at award ceremony – Credit: Yaw Darko, CLCC

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/forestry/legacy/forest-legacy-program-projects>

## Land Acquisition and Management

### Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

DEEP has protected over 4,700 acres of open space since 2021 through its Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program. This program combines annual State bond money with Federal sources of funding to protect land that gets added to the State's system of forests, state parks, wildlife management areas, etc.

An agency-wide committee meets quarterly to prioritize available parcels of land and identify sources of funding to cover acquisition costs. CT DEEP has successfully leveraged funding from Federal Pittman Robertson, Highlands Conservation Act, Land and Water Conservation Fund and more to protect land across the State.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** [The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program](#)



Figure 11 - (L) "Leatherman Caves" area addition to West Rock Ridge State Park; (R) Swamp area addition to Nipmuck State Forest. Credit for both: DEEP staff

## Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

DEEP has provided State bond funding to land trusts, water companies and municipalities across the state to protect over 7,100 acres of open space land since 2021.

Through DEEP's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, staff have successfully closed on 30 plus projects totaling over 25 million in grant funds for open space protection. DEEP has another 15 plus projects yet to close from that period that will protect another 2,000 plus acres of open space land.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** [The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program](#)

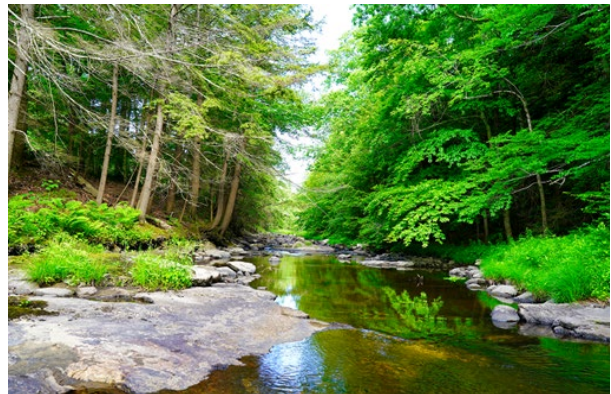


Figure 12 - (L) Overlook on Johnston Preserve in Lyme – Credit: Wendolyn Hill; (R) Sandy Brook Forest Preserve – Credit: Colebrook Land Conservancy

# Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station/Cooperative Forest Health Program

## Restoring Forest Health and Productivity Following Emerald Ash Borer

The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) established a network of monitoring plots in partnership with forest land managers across the state to evaluate how forests are changing in the aftermath of emerald ash borer invasion to inform management to restore forest health and productivity. This monitoring network included 81 plots in 27 currently unmanaged ash stands and 33 plots in 11 stands where ash was salvaged and invasive plants were controlled. At each of the plots, we characterized overstory, midstory, and understory forest structure and composition and measured environmental variables, including canopy transparency and soil conditions.

In the passively managed forest stands, ash mortality increased non-native plant cover while simultaneously reducing native tree regeneration, suggesting that forest composition is shifting towards a higher abundance of non-native plant species in the absence of proactive management. We are now analyzing the data collected from sites where ash was salvaged and invasive plants were controlled to assess whether these management practices are improving forest recovery following emerald ash borer invasion. Longer term, these plots will be used to assess whether the regenerating cohort of ash seedlings rebounds following the crash in the emerald ash borer population across the state.

### **Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3



*Figure 13 – (L) High ash mortality and invasive plant cover site in Salmon Rivier State Forest illustrating how emerald ash borer (EAB) can have long-term, cascading effects on forest health and productivity – Credit: CAES; (R) Ash salvage in Housatonic State Foerst two years post-harvest shows how proactive forest management to promote tree regeneration and reduce invasive plant cover following EAB can improve forest health and productivity – Credit: CAES*

## Rapid Assessment of Beech Leaf Disease Impacts

Beech leaf disease (BLD) is severely impacting virtually every beech in Connecticut. Yet, given the novelty of the disease, we still lack basic information about its effects on beech growth and mortality.

In 2023, CAES began annually monitoring the growth and mortality of approximately 2,500 beech trees at 16 sites from five long-term CAES studies to help fill this basic knowledge gap. This study involved a statewide rapid assessment to evaluate how tree size, canopy light exposure, co-occurrence with beech bark disease (BBD), and forest management history influences the effects of BLD on tree growth and mortality.

Initially, this data showed that subcanopy trees were more severely impacted than canopy trees, likely due to lower light availability. Similarly, beech trees that had been released through forest management activities sustained slightly higher growth rates than unreleased trees. Yet after two years, consistent, sharp declines in beech growth overwhelmed these small differences based on canopy position and forest management history. Three years after BLD detection, beech growth has virtually stagnated in all crown classes. Despite these severe impacts, we have not yet observed widespread beech mortality.

***Relevant National Priorities:*** 1, 2, 3

## Proactive Treatments in Urban and Community Forests Impacted by BLD

CAES initiated a study in collaboration with researchers and land managers in New Haven to test the effects of proactive forest management in urban and community parks severely impacted by BLD. Improving the health of urban forested natural areas has a disproportionately large impact on the wellbeing of Connecticut residents. However, these forests are also more susceptible to understory plant invasions and subsequent degradation following overstory beech decline than their rural counterparts. The goal of this project is to proactively manage these forests to ensure that they continue to provide important ecosystem services for future generations.

In 2025, we established 27 plots in 3 New Haven parks and conducted all baseline monitoring. Active forest management treatments will be implemented in 2026 and will include deer fencing, overstory beech removal, and beech treatments to mitigate BLD symptoms. Across all treatments, we will monitor changes in natural tree regeneration, forest structure, and understory plant community composition. Project sites include four heavily used parks in New Haven: East Rock Park (18 plots), Edgewood Park (6 plots), and Quarry Park (3 plots).

***Relevant National Priorities:*** 1, 2, 3

## Slash Walls to Enhance Tree Regeneration

Researchers evaluated the effects of pre-harvest tree characteristics and deer browsing on stump sprout growth at five slash-wall sites in southern New England. At 160 sample points, measurements were taken on 1,509 trees, including diameter, canopy position, and live crown ratio, and the number and height of stump sprouts were recorded after the first and second growing seasons. Sprouts inside slash walls grew taller and faster than those outside, particularly during the first year. By the end of the second year, sprout height was

substantially greater inside slash walls (e.g., northern red oak: 5.8 vs. 2.3 ft; sugar maple: 6.6 vs. 0.9 ft), though second-year growth was not related to parent tree metrics. Sprouting success also differed by location for some species, with higher proportions of live sprouts inside slash walls for northern red oak and pignut hickory, while red maple and yellow-poplar showed similarly high sprouting success regardless of treatment.



Figure 14 - CAES researcher measuring regeneration inside a slash wall at Nepaug Reservoir – Credit: Andrew Hubbard, MDC

This research demonstrates that slash walls can effectively reduce deer browsing and promote regeneration of native tree species and early-successional habitat. The findings have already influenced forest management on more than 100 acres in Connecticut, with organizations such as DEEP, Aquarion, and several land trusts implementing or considering the approach. By using onsite woody material to create physical barriers, slash walls help protect regenerating vegetation from overabundant deer populations.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2

**Website:** <https://cdnsiencepub.com/doi/full/10.1139/cjfr-2024-0318>

## Pre-commercial Crop Tree Release of White Oak Saplings

CAES researchers established three study areas in southern New England containing at least 50 white oak potential crop trees (PoCT) that were at least 2 meters tall. Before treatment, they measured each tree's diameter, height, live crown position, and canopy status, and recorded nearby competing trees. Each PoCT was randomly assigned either to a control group (no release) or to a release treatment where nearby competing trees with adjacent crowns were cut.

Tree growth and canopy position were monitored annually for five years.

Measurements included diameter growth and canopy

class, while crown measurements were scheduled every five years. The goal was to determine whether early release from competition would improve survival, growth, and the likelihood that trees remain in a favorable canopy position.

Results showed that releasing white oaks from competition improved their canopy status. Among trees initially in the upper canopy, 78% of released trees remained there compared to 50% of unreleased trees. For trees initially in intermediate canopy positions, 42% of released trees reached the upper canopy versus only 5% of controls. These findings support management efforts to conserve white oak, a declining species in the eastern United States that provides important ecological, economic, and cultural benefits.

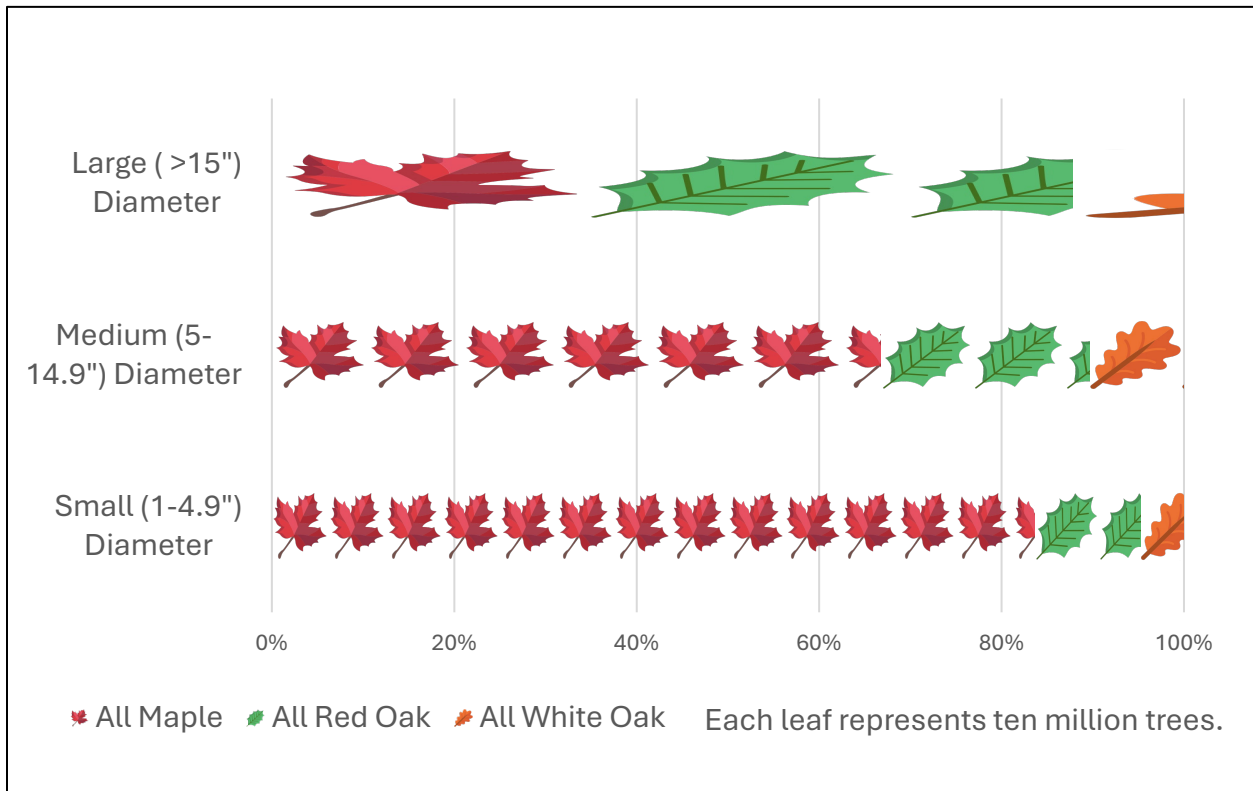
**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 3

### Sustaining Oak Forests Through Monitoring and Outreach

Connecticut's 12 native oak species are a cornerstone of the eastern deciduous forest ecosystem, supporting over 80 mammal and bird species and contributing significantly to the region's ecological and economic health. However, oaks face increasing threats from insect defoliation, drought, regeneration failure, and changing forest conditions, putting their long-term outlook in jeopardy (Figure 14).



Figure 15 - CAES researcher measures the diameter of a released white oak sapling - Credit: Joseph P. Barsky, CAES



Data Source: USDA Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis Program. Forest Inventory EVALIDator web-application Version 2.1.2. St. Paul, MN: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station

Figure 16 - Ratio and number of maple and oak trees across diameter classes in Connecticut.

To address these challenges, we conduct an annual acorn assessment across twelve study areas, monitoring 300 red oak and 275 white oak trees. This long-term dataset informs foresters on silvicultural timing and methods and wildlife biologists on population trends of oak-dependent species.

**Outreach:** Since this program was transferred to our agency in 2021, we have expanded outreach efforts to raise awareness and build public support for oak conservation. These include press releases and coverage in radio and television outlets, presentations at CAES Plant Science Day and other public forums, and targeted community engagement through educational events. Our findings have been presented professionally at: CAES Forest Health Workshops, Yale-Myers Summer Seminar Series, New England and National Society of American Foresters Conferences.

**Call to Action:** This growing recognition highlights the program’s value as a model for regional forest health monitoring and stakeholder collaboration. This initiative also offers a unique opportunity to bridge science, conservation, and public awareness, which can help ensure the long-term health of Connecticut’s oak forests and the ecosystems they support. Investing in this program will help ensure the resilience of oak forests, protect biodiversity, and foster informed stewardship of Connecticut’s natural



*Figure 17 - An image through the ocular lens of a pair of binoculars showing hundreds of acorns on the branches – Credit: Joseph P. Barsky, CAES*

landscapes. Additional resources would enhance monitoring and data analysis, develop educational tools and outreach platforms, and strengthen partnerships across scientific, public, and policy communities.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

## Audubon Connecticut

### Forester Training and Endorsement Program

Audubon’s Forester Training and Endorsement program is creating a national network of professional foresters who provide high-quality habitat for birds, at scale. This program is currently active in Connecticut, New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Foresters become endorsed by first completing an Audubon training (either in person or by watching recorded webinars), and then by submitting a sample prescription and two management plans that demonstrate their understanding of bird-friendly forestry concepts.

Since 2023, Audubon has hosted three in-person forester trainings in Connecticut at Great Mountain Forest, Yale-Myers Forest, and Belding WMA. Participants learn about forest bird habitat assessment at the stand and landscape scales, applying even- and uneven-aged silviculture for forest birds, and integrating bird habitat with co-benefits such as forest health, climate resiliency, water quality, and timber and non-timber forest products.

There are 8 endorsed foresters in Connecticut, with more in the process. From July 2023 to June 2025, Connecticut endorsed foresters wrote 21 bird-friendly management plans covering 5,180 acres, and supervised bird-friendly management practices on 519 acres. 57 people in Connecticut have completed the full training, with 34 of those being licensed foresters.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** <https://www.audubon.org/connecticut/projects/audubon-forester-training-and-endorsement-ct>

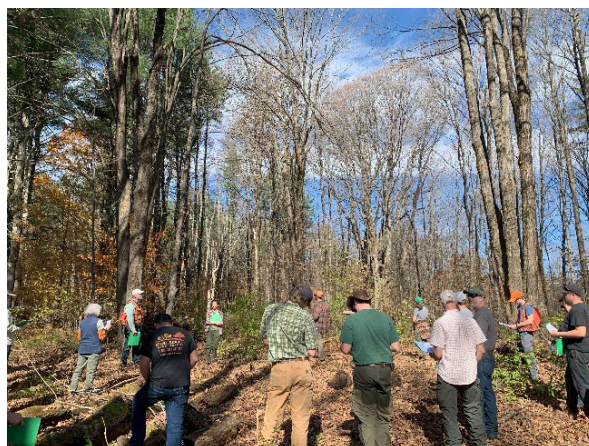


Figure 18 - (L) Forester training at Belding WMA – Credit: Rosa Goldman, Audubon; (R) Forester training at Great Mountain Forest – Credit: Suzanne Treyger, Audubon

## Bird-Friendly Maple Program

Through the Bird-Friendly Maple program, Audubon supports maple producers who are committed to managing their sugarbush to benefit forest birds. Maple producers receive a site visit from Audubon to assess current habitat conditions, and a Habitat Management Plan to help them manage their sugarbush for bird habitat. Enrolled producers agree to incorporate Audubon’s management recommendations into their existing goals for their sugarbush, and to implement practices to improve habitat for forest birds as well as overall forest health. Bird-Friendly Maple is currently active in Connecticut, New York, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin; and expanding soon into Minnesota and Pennsylvania.

In Connecticut, 16 maple producers and sugarbush managers have enrolled in Bird-Friendly Maple since the program began here in 2022, and the program continues to grow. Current participants collectively manage 211 acres of sugarbush, influencing a total combined parcel area of 25,297 acres.

Bird-Friendly Maple participants in Connecticut include commercial maple producers, land trusts and other nonprofits, educational and research forests, and state and municipal forestland. With this breadth of participation, the program reaches a wide audience through educational programming that Audubon puts on in collaboration with the various producers and participating organizations.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** <https://www.audubon.org/connecticut/projects/bird-friendly-maple-connecticut>



Figure 19 – (L) Junior Forest Technicians, Audubon, and DEEP foresters in front of the "Bird-Friendly Maple" sugarbush recognition sign at Upper Paugussett State Forest – Credit: Sharon Bruce, Audubon; (R) Bird-Friendly Maple walk at the recognized sugarbush at Mount Archer Woods which is tapped by Fat Stone Farm – Credit: Wendolyn Hill, Town of Lyme

## Forest Bird Habitat Assessments

Audubon provides technical assistance to landowners in the form of Forest Bird Habitat Assessments. These assessments are conducted by an Audubon forester or biologist, often in collaboration with the landowner's forester. The Habitat Assessment is a qualitative look at current habitat conditions on the property, and it also provides some management recommendations for enhancing those conditions to provide quality habitat to a full suite of forest birds. It is intended to serve as a companion to a comprehensive forest management plan.

Since 2021, Audubon Connecticut has conducted Habitat Assessments and other site visits to provide technical assistance on 4,631 acres. This includes the following projects, as well as other assessments and visits:

- Habitat Assessments for 22 landowners, covering 1,516 acres, in collaboration with The Last Green Valley in Northeast Connecticut and consulting foresters who wrote Forest Management Plans for each landowner as well.
- Habitat Assessments on 5 land trust properties, covering 1,913 acres, as part of a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant.
- Habitat Assessments on 4 land trust properties, covering 421 acres, as part of the Macedonia Forest Block Important Bird Area project in Northwest Connecticut, in collaboration with the Kent Land Trust.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** <https://www.audubon.org/connecticut/projects/forest-landowner-resources>

## Youth Conservation Programs

Each of Audubon's three Conservation Action Centers in Connecticut maintains youth conservation programs that engage high school and college students in forest conservation and bird habitat work:

### Bent of the River Audubon Center (Southbury):

- Since 2014, the Bent of the River has hosted a youth forestry summer program called Junior Forest Technicians. The Junior Forest Technician program addresses The Bent of the River's need for long-term forest and riparian habitat monitoring and management while serving the needs of our local high school students to participate in career training experiences. The students learn important forestry skills and work closely with field professionals.
- In Summer 2025, the Junior Forest Technicians, Audubon's Forest Program intern and foresters from Ferrucci and Walicki Forestry measured forest inventory plots to assess habitat for forest birds, using Wood Thrush as a priority species. This will evolve into a training project with land trusts and large landowners on habitat management for bird conservation goals that features the Wood Thrush as an umbrella species for addressing forest bird habitat needs.

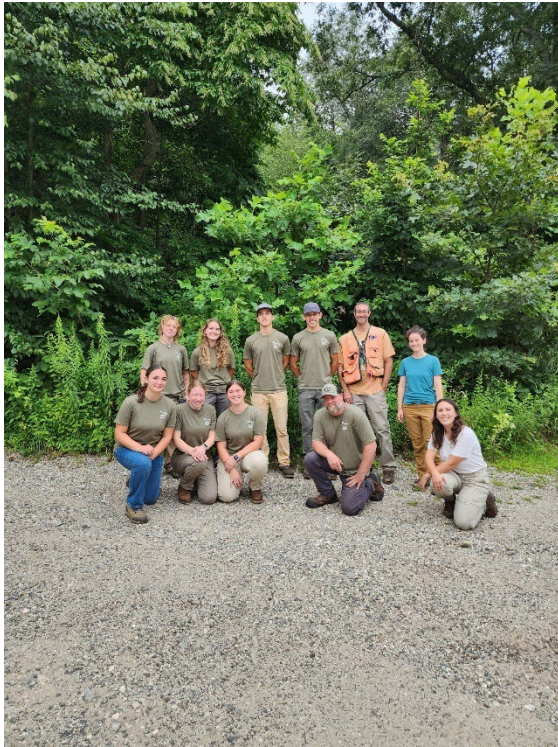
### Sharon Audubon Center (Sharon):

- Starting in 2023, a new college intern program included training in forest bird habitat assessments. Interns assisted with characterizing forest habitat for birds and invasive removal. There was 1 intern in summer 2023, and 4 each in 2024 and 2025.
- In summer 2025, the interns, along with Audubon's Forest Program intern, conducted forest inventories at the Sharon and Miles Sanctuaries to assess habitat for forest birds, using Wood Thrush as a priority species.

### Greenwich Audubon Center (Greenwich):

- In summer 2022, staff worked with a team of 6 high school students to complete mechanical removal of mugwort, common reed, Japanese knotweed, and several other invasive plant species across Audubon's 4-acre Oneida Sanctuary. This work has enabled subsequent coastal forest restoration efforts at Oneida, including the planting of 30 native trees and shrubs, with additional plantings anticipated during the 2026 calendar year.
- With a team of 6 high school interns, planted 40 native hardwood trees as part of an initiative to restore roughly 1 acre of open canopy forest. Trees were from a mixture of species, including northern red oak, swamp white oak, tulip poplar, and shellbark hickory. In partnership with the American Chestnut Foundation, the team was also able to plant 13 hybrid American chestnut seedlings as a part of this project.
- In July-August 2025, staff collaborated with a team of 7 high school and college interns to complete intensive mechanical removal of invasive plants at Audubon's Gimbel Sanctuary. This work, which was concentrated within a 0.65-acre area of former orchard, sets the stage for further restoration of native shrubland and forest edge habitat during the 2026 calendar year.

### **Relevant National Priorities: 1, 2, 3**



*Figure 20 – (L) Junior Forest Technicians, Audubon staff, and forester Eric Hansen assessed Wood Thrush habitat at the Bent of the River Sanctuary – Credit: Robin Ladouceur, Audubon; (R) Junior Forest Technicians measuring forest inventory plots at the Bent of the River Sanctuary – Credit: Robin Ladouceur, Audubon*

## Connecticut Forest and Park Association

### Connecticut Master Woodland Manager Program

The Connecticut Master Woodland Manager (MWM) program is a nationally recognized program that provides science-based learning opportunities to private woodland owners in a yearlong educational program. First established in 2021, the MWM program is a statewide educational effort that teaches woodland managers the knowledge and skills they need to manage their woodland based on the alignment of their values with the stewardship goals in Connecticut’s Forest Action Plan.

By the end of its fifth year in July 2026, the MWM program will have worked with 6 partner institutions and over 60 instructors to provide more than 230 separate programs spanning more than 700 hours. These programs focus on forest ecology and benefits, forest health, management solutions, and resources available to woodland owners and managers. Since 2021, we have engaged 229 diverse landowners, land managers, and educators for an average of more than 50 hours each. Additionally, every land manager who graduates from the program completes a woodland survey detailing how they will conserve, protect, and enhance the woodland they own or manage into the future.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

**Website:** <https://ctwoodlands.org/our-work/learn/adult-learners/master-woodland-manager/>



Figure 21 - (Top left) DEEP Wildlife staff discussing native habitat considerations with MWM students – Credit: J-Kohteen Photography; (top right) 2025-2026 MWM Kickoff with students, partners, and instructors – Credit: J-Kohteen Photography; (bottom left) MWM students learn about native tree species and tree health from DEEP staff – Credit: Julia Sonen, CFPA; (bottom right) Regional Water Authority staff shares details on the new slash wall with MWM students – Credit: Julia Sonen

## Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails and New England National Scenic Trail

CFPA has continued to work with other trail organizations, land trusts, towns, the state, and private landowners to protect and maintain Connecticut’s Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails and other trail systems in the state.

In recent years, major storms, fires, trail closures, and reroutes have significantly impacted the Blue-Blazed Trail System. Through ongoing funding and dedicated volunteer effort, we have built new trail segments, updated trail maps, and maintained trails to ensure continued recreational access across the system.

Specifically, on the three trails that make up the New England National Scenic Trail in Connecticut, we have surveyed trail infrastructure, completed important improvements, and engaged the public through two Artist-in-Residence programs along the trail.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 3

## Policy and Advocacy Work

CFPA were involved in the advocacy for 15 new State Park Maintainers supported through Passport to the Parks funding in FY 2024-25 budget, new incentives approved for municipalities to encourage private landowners hosting trails to make long-term commitments to public access (SB 998), and a new state goal of increasing urban tree canopy by 5% by 2040 in Connecticut cities and environmental justice communities (SB 896).

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 2, 3

## Great Mountain Forest

### Woodland Academy

The GMF Woodland Academy was launched in 2022 to address a critical gap in Connecticut's forestry landscape: the low percentage of private forestland that is actively and sustainably managed. Because the majority of Connecticut's forests are privately owned, improving landowner knowledge and engagement is essential to achieving the visions and goals of the Connecticut Forest Action Plan. Woodland Academy provides accessible, practical education that empowers forest owners to better understand, steward, and sustainably use their land.

The program offers a flexible series of workshops rather than a single long-term certification program. This structure allows landowners, nonprofit organizations, and municipal staff to participate in individual courses based on their interests, availability, and management goals. Workshop topics include forest ecology and ecosystem processes, interpretive skills, climate-smart forest stewardship practices, and sustainable forest-based uses such as wood products and ecotourism.

By lowering barriers to participation, the Woodland Academy reaches individuals who may not be able to commit to more intensive programs such as the Master Woodland Manager course. In addition to building technical knowledge, the program fosters peer-to-peer learning and partnerships among participants, helping to create a more connected and informed regional forestry community. Several workshops also provide continuing education credits for forestry and environmental professionals, further strengthening the capacity of Connecticut's forestry workforce.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 3

**Website:** <https://greatmountainforest.org/woodland-academy/>

## Timber Stand Improvement

Great Mountain Forest developed and implemented a targeted timber stand improvement (TSI) technique to address low species diversity resulting from past shelterwood and seed tree harvests. In several stands harvested approximately 20 years ago, regeneration was dominated by American beech and black birch, limiting ecological resilience and long-term management options. Forester Emeritus Jody Bronson initially developed and tested a pre-commercial thinning (PCT) approach on a small scale to intentionally redirect early forest competition toward healthier, more diverse future conditions.

Building on the success of this initial work, Great Mountain Forest scaled up the treatment to approximately 33 acres with support from the Connecticut Land Conservation Council's Climate Smart Land Stewardship Grant and the Climate Smart Farming: Agriculture and Forestry Grant, administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. The treatment selectively reduced tree density to favor healthy individuals and underrepresented species such as oak, tulip poplar, ash, and diverse birches, while limiting reliance on beech due to widespread disease impacts. Trees were spaced to increase light availability, shorten the competitive exclusion phase, and promote desirable growth traits aligned with climate resilience.



*Figure 22 - Matt Gallagher of Connwood Foresters, who implemented the treatment, shows a group the difference between the treated and untreated areas – Credit: Great Mountain Forest*

This TSI approach is distinguished by its intensity and intentional design. All trees other than selected crop trees were cut to fully release desired individuals and promote a new cohort of diverse seedlings in the understory. Trees were cut at approximately waist height to reduce the likelihood of viable resprouting, particularly from beech, and all cut stems were left on the forest floor. This created a dense “slash mat” that both protects regenerating seedlings from deer browse and contributes coarse woody material to the site. Together, these techniques represent a deliberate, climate-smart adaptation of traditional TSI, offering a replicable model for correcting low-diversity outcomes in shelterwood and seed tree systems while enhancing forest resilience.

### **Relevant National Priorities: 1**

**Website:** <https://greatmountainforest.org/future-forests-in-the-making-climate-smart-thinning-at-great-mountain-forest/>

# Connecticut Professional Timber Producers Association

## Outreach and Education

The Connecticut Professional Timber Producers Association (Timpro) recognized a need to educate the general public, and in particular, youth and young adults, about forestry, the forest products industry, and careers in natural resources. As a society, Connecticut residents have become increasingly removed from working lands and fundamental understandings of forestry, our natural resources, and those professionals who manage and steward working forestland.

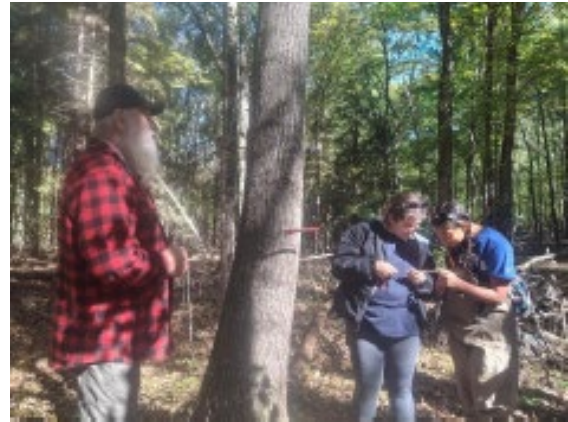
Timpro initiated an outreach program to educate primary, secondary, high school, and college students about forestry, the logging industry, and careers in natural resources. Through a dedicated group of volunteers, Timpro members have attended six high school career fairs and presented to seven individual natural resources classes.

Timpro members have taken the opportunity to participate in statewide and regional events such as the 100th Anniversary of Peoples State Forest, Ag Day at the Capitol, Connecticut Envirothon, UConn Extension Forestry Competition, Plant Science Day, and the Shelterwood Project hosted by the Northeastern Loggers Association at their annual equipment expo held in Bangor, Maine, and Essex Junction, Vermont.

Timpro also offers scholarships for high school seniors who are pursuing a career in the field of natural resources.

### **Relevant National Priorities:** 1, 3

*Figure 23 - (Top) Univ. of New Haven students using an increment borer – Credit: Joan Nichols; (middle) Logging equipment simulator at the 100<sup>th</sup> Celebration of Peoples State Forest – Credit: Joan Nichols; (bottom) Conn. College Environmental Science class in Conn. College Arboretum – Credit: Jennifer Pagach*



# University of Connecticut Extension

## Improving Water Quality through Community-Led Lot Revitalization

“Improving Water Quality in Hartford through Community-Led Lot Revitalization” was a place-based Extension and applied research initiative that advanced urban water quality outcomes by centering community knowledge, priorities, and stewardship. Funded by the U.S. Geological Survey through the Connecticut Institute of Water Resources, this project partnered with residents in Hartford neighborhoods experiencing long-standing environmental burdens associated with vacant and underutilized lots.

Through a series of bilingual workshops, learning stations, and participatory activities, community members co-identified local water concerns, sources of pollution, and feasible nature-based solutions (NBS). The project integrated accessible water quality education, green infrastructure concepts, and hands-on demonstrations to support informed decision-making while reducing extractive research dynamics. Youth and adults engaged directly with monitoring tools, visualizations, and storytelling activities that connected everyday experiences to watershed-scale processes.

The project resulted in an NBS demonstration project and both a final technical report and a public-facing impact report documenting outcomes, lessons learned, and transferable strategies for community-led environmental action. Beyond site-specific improvements, the initiative strengthened local capacity for environmental stewardship, informed municipal and organizational partners, and provided a replicable model for Extension-led water quality programming in urban contexts.

### Relevant National Priorities: 3

Website: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.35858.16325>



Figure 24 - (L) Design charrette at Hispanic Health Council; (R) Urban lot revitalization visual – Credit for both: Mayra Rodríguez, UConn



## Urban Forest Capacity Building

“Urban Forest Capacity Building” was a statewide initiative designed to strengthen municipal, organizational, and community capacity to advance urban and community forestry in Connecticut. Funded by DEEP Forestry’s Urban and Community Forestry Program, the project engaged six municipalities and a wide range of community-based organizations to address persistent challenges in the distribution of tree canopy and urban green space.

The initiative combined practitioner trainings, community visioning workshops, and bilingual educational materials to translate urban forestry science into actionable, locally relevant strategies. Participants explored tree data as well as urban heat and environmental indicators through visualizations and facilitated dialogue.

As a result, the project supported informed urban forest planning, improved grant readiness among local partners, and elevated community priorities within municipal forestry conversations. This project also produced one mini documentary, one photovoice exhibit, and one Urban & Community Forestry Toolkit for educational and capacity-building purposes. The capacity-building model of this project demonstrated how UConn can function as a bridge between state agencies, local governments, and communities, providing a transferable framework for advancing urban forestry.

### **Relevant National Priorities: 3**

**Website:** Documentary: <https://youtu.be/dDaUM563SUK?si=-OIonMDJeHMeWorh>;  
Exhibit: <https://s.uconn.edu/voicesofnature>; Toolkit: <https://s.uconn.edu/urbanforest>



Figure 25 - (Top) Community session in Willimantic; (bottom) Community session in Hartford – Credit both photos: Mayra Rodríguez, UConn

## Supporting Collaborative Forest Management

“Supporting Collaborative Forest Management” in Connecticut, implemented through the Connecticut Forest Collaborative, is a statewide, multi-year initiative designed to scale up forest stewardship across Connecticut’s predominantly private forest landscape. Funded by the USDA Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration Program, the project responds to growing threats to forest health—including fragmentation, invasive species, and climate stressors—by integrating science, technology, and community-driven stewardship.

This initiative brings together landowners, foresters, land trusts, nonprofits, municipalities, and educators through monitoring, restoration, education, and community engagement. Activities include GIS-based threat mapping, drone-assisted monitoring, invasive species identification, site-specific restoration design, native and historic tree distribution, and soil health guidance.

The central focus of this initiative is strengthening collaboration across property boundaries and organizational sectors. Through public outreach events, youth programs, applied demonstrations, etc., the project supports shared learning and builds a durable culture of informed forest stewardship. By documenting and advancing emerging, non-traditional private land management and co-governance models, the Connecticut Forest Collaborative provides a transferable framework for landscape-scale conservation grounded in both technical rigor and community engagement.

**Relevant National Priorities:** 3

**Website:** <https://s.uconn.edu/forestcollaborative>



Figure 26 - (L) Design charrette at FRESH New London; (R) Youth session at Keney Park Sustainability Project in Hartford – Credit for both: Mayra Rodríguez, UConn

## Co-Envisioning Urban Nature with Youth

“Co-Envisioning Urban Nature with Youth” was a participatory Extension and applied research effort that centered youth voices in the design, evaluation, and reimagining of urban green spaces. Working in partnership with youth-serving organizations in Connecticut, the project engaged youth in hands-on learning, community mapping, and

creative expression to articulate what safe, welcoming, and meaningful urban nature looks like from their perspectives.

Using tools such as photovoice, mapping exercises, environmental data collection, and facilitated dialogue, youth examined local environmental conditions including tree canopy, heat exposure, access to green space, and neighborhood infrastructure. The project emphasized experiential learning and civic skill-building, enabling participants to connect lived experience with spatial data and planning concepts. Youth-generated materials—including visual posters, narratives, and design concepts—were synthesized and shared with families, community partners, and municipal audiences, reshaping traditional engagement hierarchies.

The initiative strengthened youth leadership capacity while providing planners, Extension professionals, and community organizations with grounded insights into how urban greening initiatives can better reflect local values, safety concerns, and everyday use patterns. By positioning youth as knowledge holders and co-designers, the project offers a transferable model for integrating participatory methods into urban forestry, sustainability education, and community planning efforts.



Figure 27 - Youth brainstorm ideas to improve their community – Credit: Mayra Rodríguez, UConn

### Relevant National Priorities: 3

Website: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.20772.80000>

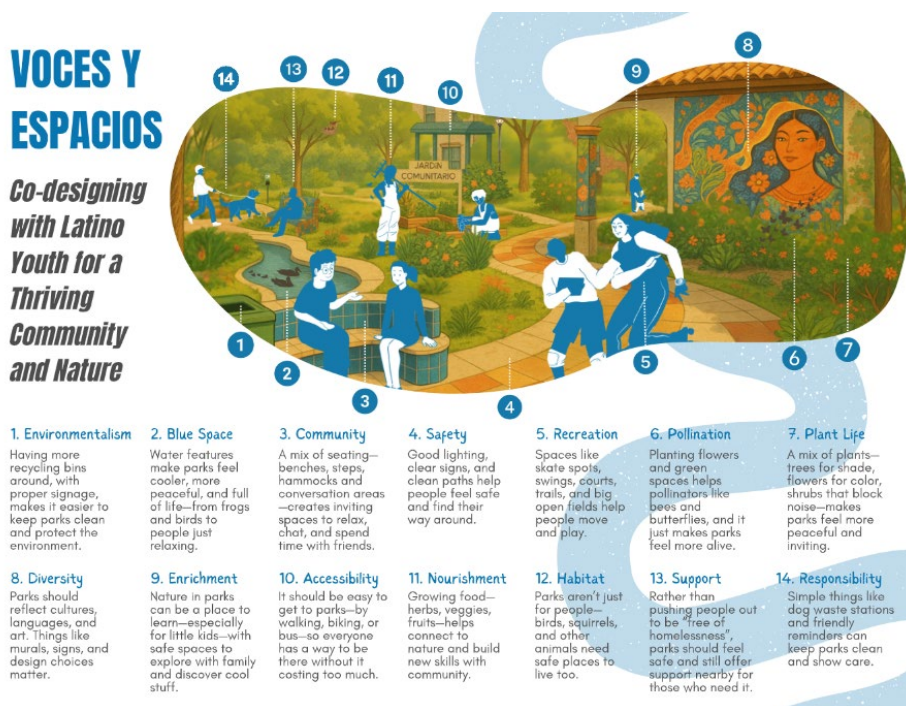


Figure 28 - A synthesis of youth ideas – Credit: Mayra Rodríguez, UConn