

FOREST PRACTICES ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

March 4, 2026

Members present: Christopher Martin, Rosa Goldman, Brennan Sheahan, Barbara Kelly, Lindsay Cannavo, Joan Nichols (left at 11am), Mike Ferrucci (left at 11am), Vanessa Daye (joined at 9:15)

Members absent: Dr. Mark Ashton, Bruce Spaman

Guests: Nick Zito (DEEP Forestry), Sheila Hoefle (DEEP Forestry-recorder)

Review and vote to approve March 5 and October 29, 2025, meeting minutes. Minutes approved as written, Brennan made the motion to approve the minutes, Joan seconded. Unanimously passed.

2026 Legislative Update

No major concerns have been identified for forestry or conservation. The DEEP legislative review team monitors proposed bills. Nick and Chris are on that team.

SB 319 Leaf blower legislation has been reintroduced. DEEP, DAS, and DOT are on record as opposing the legislation as currently written. Emergency response provisions have been included in this year's version, to address wildfire suppression concerns from last year.

HB 5152 modernizes Connecticut's wildfire laws by aligning fire danger categories across statutes and with other states. Gives DEEP clearer authority to impose open flame bans on state lands and enables the Governor to tailor woodland closures and burn restrictions more precisely, and updates outdated burn ban penalties to strengthen deterrence. The proposed bill will also allow deadline flexibility for volunteer fire department reimbursement during emergencies. Together, these changes improve the state's ability to prevent and manage high risk wildfire conditions.

HB5347 would require DAS to create a plan by 2027 to translate essential state agency forms and applications into the 12 most common non-English languages. This would ensure access to services, benefits and records for people with limited English proficiency.

SB13 updates how CT reimburses towns for state-owned forest land when calculating PILOT payments. This change will give heavily forested towns with more than half their land owned by the state a fairer payment, since they lose tax revenue due to state ownership. This particularly pertains to Voluntown, CT.

SB 82 occupational licensing legislation eliminating or capping licensing and renewal fees. This would not affect forest practitioner certification or arborist licensing.

HB5397 would give town the authority to regulate stone walls. This could affect forestry operations if a town indicates that a stone wall cannot be disturbed within the town ROW.

HB5334 The group discussed concerns regarding the identification and regulation of riparian areas. Particularly when they are defined solely by soil type. A similar bill was introduced in 2025, leading to the creation of a task force to study vegetated riparian buffers. DEEP has several concerns with the Bill as currently written.

PA 25-12, passed last year, established a working group to develop recommendations for protecting vegetated riparian buffers. The final report was due January 15, 2026. Joan, who served in the task force, informed the board that the report has not yet been completed. Members expressed disappointment given the issue's importance. The task force included representatives from DEEP, DOT, OPM, municipal inland wetland commissions, homebuilders, and the Farm Bureau.

HB 5334 seeks to strengthen the protection and preservation of riparian areas. However, several concerns were raised about the bill's current language. One issue is the proposal to add vegetation to the definition of "material," which could result in prohibitions on removing trees or brush within riparian areas. This may complicate forest management activities that are essential for long-term forest resiliency.

The bill also expands the definition of riparian areas. While forestry is currently considered an "as-of-right" activity that does not require local inland wetlands permit the proposed changes could change that status. Joan emphasized the importance of maintaining forestry activities as an as-of-right activity during the working group discussions. Property owners and forest managers cannot independently determine whether an activity qualifies as as-of-right; they must request a jurisdictional ruling from the local inland wetlands agency.

DEEP has submitted testimony on this year's bill supporting the concept but raising several concerns. There was also a request for additional funding to support DEEP's training of inland wetland agents and commission members. It was noted that PA25-73 requires all IWA members to now undergo training during their term.

Mike provided an update on CFPA's conservation agenda. He shared that CFPA has a long history, over 100 years, of publishing legislative priorities. He highlighted that forestry has a stronger presence this year than it has in some time. He pointed to the Passport to the Parks program as an example of CFPA's success in influencing legislative action.

CFPA is advocating funding to expand DEEP survey crews to better address encroachments on state lands. Mike emphasized shifting DEEP's focus from acquiring new land to properly managing existing state-owned properties. He also identified the need for increased Forestry Division staffing and additional support for urban forestry. He encouraged board

members to share any unmet legislative or funding needs for CFPA to consider in future priority-setting.

USDA FS Skidder Bridge Grant Update – Connecticut has received a USDA Forest Service grant to establish a temporary bridge/mat rental program to support forestry operations. These bridges/mats allow loggers to cross streams/wetlands without damaging the stream beds or riparian areas.

DEEP is developing and executing a Professional Services Agreement with Timpro to administer the program.

There is concern about a new federal grant provision that applies to both newly awarded grants and amendments or extensions of existing grants. The provision allows the federal government to reclaim unspent funds if it is determined that the grant objectives do not align with the Administration's priorities. Members noted that this creates uncertainty and could increase the associated administrative work leading to some organizations reconsidering applying for new grants or adding additional funding to their applications.

Chris shared that DEEP's Environmental Quality branch had unexpended funds recalled mid-project under this provision. This reinforced the concerns about financial stability.

Forest Practices Notification Form Update – the form is now complete with logos. Nick will distribute the final draft version to the board for review. CACWIC did not provide its approval despite Barbara's efforts. The updated form should reduce confusion and provide all municipalities with the same information.

CEU Regulation Change Discussion - The proposed regulations are not yet posted on the e-Regs website. The package is currently with the Governor's Office. The next steps in the process will be issuing a Notice of Intent followed by a public hearing. Once the hearing date is set the members of the Forest Practices Advisory Board and Timpro will be notified.

Proposed changes to CEUs were reviewed. The revision would align the system with SAF's model. CEUs would no longer be issued as a "3 hours = 1 CEU" but would move to a one to one structure. The total number of required CEUs would be adjusted accordingly. Licenses would be extended to a five-year cycle.

CEU categories will also be updated to Category 1 and Category 2. Category 1 is currently approved CEUs. Category 2 is for activities such as serving on a forestry-related board or commission. Category 2 will only be allowed for one-third of the total required credits.

eLicensing Update – It took a year to build out the forest practitioner certification portion of the eLicensing system. Some initial concerns were expected, particularly for practitioners who are not technologically experienced.

The most common complaint has been the process for uploading CEUs, which are organized by course number. Another concern is that the previous directory no longer exists in the old form. Users can look up individual practitioners or generate a roster of all practitioners.

Joan shared that the training videos, how-to guides and emails have been very helpful.

Nick will share updates that are sent to certified practitioners to board members too.

FPAB Vacancies – There are currently no vacancies on the board. Chris apologized to Vanessa for the delay in listing her on the website and formally announced her appointment to the board. Vanessa introduced herself and members went around the room to do the same. Vanessa serves as the CLCC Community Conservation Coordinator, building relationships with land trusts and community organizations. Her background includes consulting work and experience at the NY Botanical Garden.

Chris mentioned that there has been an uptick in avian flu cases. CT agencies are coordinating a response. Chris noted that if a major poultry farm is affected that hundreds of tons of woodchips will be required for composting efforts.

Forest Practitioner Exams – Exams for all certification levels will be offered annually in March, May and October.

Enforcement Action – The CT River State Park encroachment trail has been postponed.

DEEP Legal is working on determining the next steps for the Bloomfield Flood Control Area #3 following the August site visit. Work continues negotiating a restoration plan for Lamentation Mountain State Park. A warning was issued to an individual operating close to the allowable volume threshold.

Municipal FPA regs – East Haddam is the final town out of compliance with FPA regulations. DEEP is waiting for their proposed updates. Bozrah, Sprague, and Lebanon are using a form that is not relevant to determine whether an activity is regulated. Nick is meeting with the Bozrah Wetlands Commission in April. A commissioner expressed confusion about how regulations apply. The same agent also represents Sprague. Nick will provide all towns using forms that have issues with the new DEEP endorsed form upon full endorsement. Nick has developed a flow chart (see page 5) outlining the jurisdictional ruling process to help practitioners determine when an application is required.

Division of Forestry Staffing – The Forestry Division currently has two vacancies. One vacancy is an EP Forester 1 position in the State Lands Management Program, interviews are complete and an offer to a candidate is expected soon.

The second vacancy is the program lead/supervisor for the Forest Protection Program. This position will be filled as Program Specialist removing the requirement for CT certified forester certification. The revised job title is expected to attract a broader pool of applicants.

Additional Items of Interest

PA490 Forest Land Valuation – PA490 land is assessed at current use value which is intentionally lower than fair market value to keep forest land ownership affordable. PA490 values are updated every five years. The 2020 forest land value was \$390 per acre. The 2025 value dropped to \$200 per acre, reflecting declines in standing timber value. Because farmland values increased sharply under the same update, Governor Lamont directed the values to revert to the 2020 rates. A working group was formed and will collaborate with state agencies and stakeholders to address the issue and recommend a solution.

Meeting adjourned at 11:34am.

Timber Harvest Permitting Flow Chart

