



Department of  
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

# *Land Conservation in Connecticut*

## *2016 Annual Report*

Prepared in accordance with  
Section 23-8(b) of the General Statutes



## I. Status of Connecticut's Open Space Goal

**R**ecognizing the threat of loss or degradation of natural resources to land-use change and development, the General Assembly set a goal of preserving 21% of Connecticut's land as public open space (CGS Section 23-8). The State's Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan set a target to meet this goal by year 2023. With a total landmass of 3,205,760 acres, to have 21% of Connecticut's land preserved as open space requires 673,210 acres to be protected. Of the total open space goal, the general statute states that:

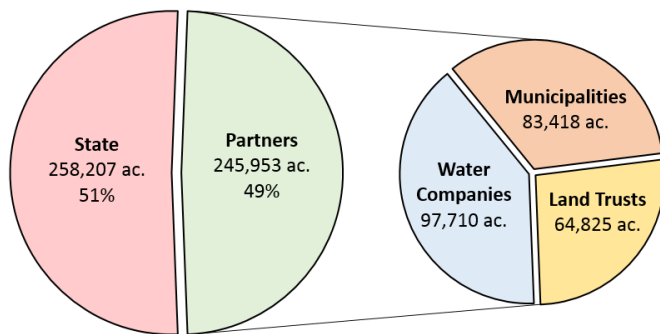
- 10% (320,576 acres) shall be held by the State of Connecticut (DEEP), and
- 11% (352,634 acres) shall be held by DEEP's land conservation Partners (municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies).

### *State-owned Open Space:*

As of December 2016, DEEP held an estimated **258,207 acres, or 80.5 percent**, of its statutory goal as open space land in its system of Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management and water access areas. Of this, approximately 237,671 acres have been acquired in fee title. Acquisition of less-than-fee interests are atypical and include the purchase of easements and conservation restrictions.

### *Partner-held Open Space:*

DEEP conservatively estimates that its Partners held **245,953 acres, or 69.7 percent**, of their statutory open space goal at the end of 2016. The Department estimates that non-profit land conservation organizations held 64,825 acres, municipalities held 83,418 acres, and water companies held 97,710 acres as open space.

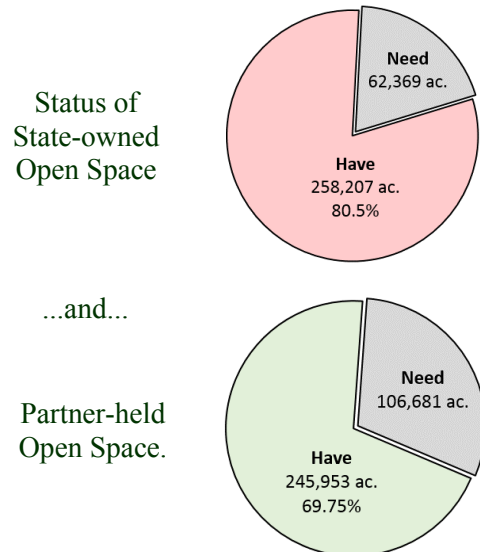


Estimated Ownership of Open Space in Connecticut

### *To Meet Connecticut's Open Space Goal:*

As of December 2016, DEEP and its Partners held a combined **504,161 acres** as open space, together being **74.5 percent** of the way toward achieving the statewide open space acquisition goal.

To reach its statutory share of the total open space acquisition goal, **DEEP must acquire 62,369 acres**, or an additional 8,910 acres each year for the next 7 years. For DEEP's Partners to reach their open space target, DEEP must encourage the acquisition of **106,681 acres by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies**, or 15,240 acres per year for the next 7 years.



**Front cover:** Peaceful Hill Farm in East Hampton, a 35-acre property protected in 2005 under USDA Forest Legacy Program easement. Photo by Dan Perrachio.

## II. 2016 Land Acquisitions

In 2016, DEEP acquired 591 acres of land in fee under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program, the primary vehicle for adding land to the State’s system of Parks, Forests, Wildlife areas, water access areas, and other open spaces. Of the 14 properties acquired this year, one was a private donation and five were purchased with matching assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pittman-Robertson Act Fund (Appendix A).

With over \$8 million in funding assistance from the State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority together closed on 27 projects, protecting over 2,000 acres in 26 towns (Appendix B).

### DEEP Land Acquisitions:

### State Assistance to Partners:

<b>14</b>	<b>591.25</b>	<b>\$1.41</b>
Properties acquired for new State open space	Acres of open space protected by the State	Match dollars leveraged for every State dollar spent

<b>27</b>	<b>2,238</b>	<b>\$8.72 million</b>
Partner projects completed under the State’s open space grant program	Acres protected by Partners under the State’s open space grant program	Grant funding assistance to Partners from the State

### *Since 1998:*

<b>47,000 + acres</b>	Land preserved as open space under the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program
<b>32,000+ acres</b>	Land protected by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies under the State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program.
<b>500+</b>	Number of Partner projects reviewed and approved for funding under the State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program
<b>\$125+ million</b>	State funding provided to partners under the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

### *Trinity Forest Preserve in Cornwall*

In April 2016, the Cornwall Conservation Trust acquired over 300 acres of undisturbed forest block to create the Trinity Forest Preserve, with \$464,750 in partial funding from a State Open Space grant.

The Trinity Forest stretches from the Housatonic River south of West Cornwall to Dibble Hill Road on Green Mountain to the east. The property is one of the most important conservation areas in the state, and has impressive topographical, water, and other natural resource features. It serves to protect the Housatonic River watershed, critical habitats, and the rural aesthetic of northwestern Connecticut.



© Cornwall Conservation Trust

### III. 2016 Department Actions

- State Property Acquisition Review:

DEEP evaluated **40 properties covering over 3,700 acres** eligible for State purchase through the [Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program](#) in 2016. There are currently over 100 properties covering thousands of acres that have been reviewed and approved for acquisition, but DEEP lacks the funding necessary to move forward. The current real estate market favors buyers of open space due to a stall in new housing construction, but limited funding for open space is available to take advantage of many of these opportunities.

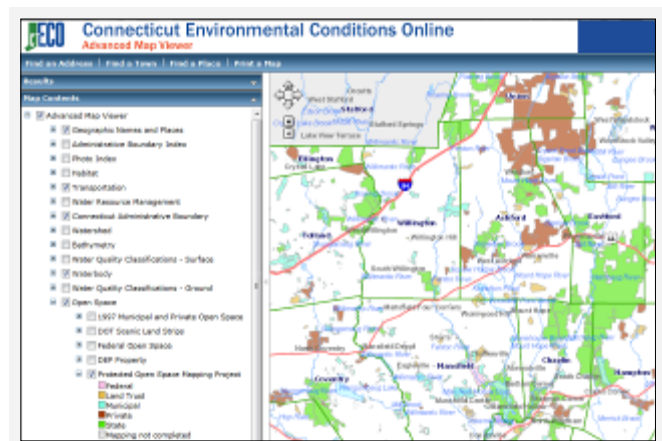
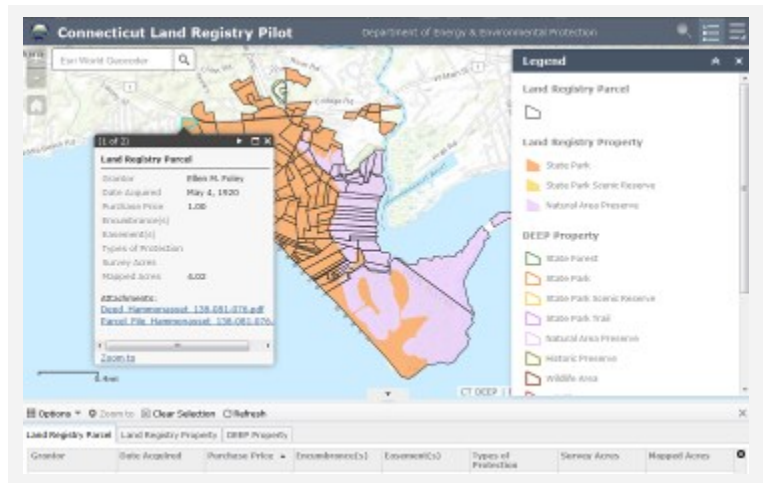
- Statewide Open Space Mapping and Inventory:

With assistance through a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, DEEP hired seasonal staff in 2016 to populate the state's [Public Use and Benefit Land Registry](#) pilot (Land Registry). DEEP also initiated a partnership with Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) to train students in using geographic information system tools and to continue populating Land Registry parcel information.

Parcels were created and populated for several **State Wildlife Management Areas**, well as for previously **awarded State open space grants**.

Over the last several years, DEEP has partnered with the University of Connecticut, The Trust for Public Land, and now ECSU to produce a GIS datalayer of more than 500 conservation projects funded under the State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant program.

To eventually be hosted by [Connecticut Environmental Conditions Online](#) and added to the Land Registry, digitized grant-funded open space parcels will be quality checked prior to being released for public viewing.



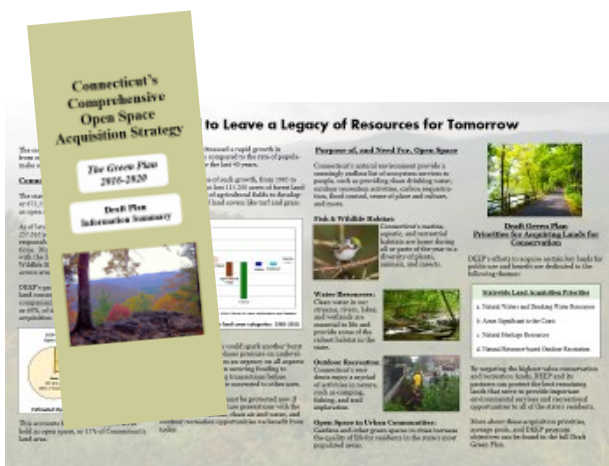
DEEP launched the Land Registry in 2015 to inventory and eventually show all existing protected open space in Connecticut, pursuant to Public Act. Modeled from other national protected area databases, the Land Registry is capable of providing information for lands owned by DEEP, other state agencies, municipalities, and land conservation organizations. The Land Registry allows users to browse state-owned lands and research, view, and download copies of parcel information, including deeds, surveys, and management plans. Greater levels of detail are available as the map zoom level is increased.

As more parcel data is added, completing the Land Registry should accelerate land conservation by aiding open space and grant funding planning, engaging conservation partners, and providing a more comprehensive and transparent database.

### III. 2016 Department Actions

- Connecticut’s Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy (the Green Plan):

DEEP worked closely with stakeholders in 2016 to finalize the revised Green Plan for public release and online publication. [The Green Plan](#) is a statewide planning document developed by DEEP in partnership with municipalities and numerous conservation organizations to guide land acquisitions towards achieving the state’s open space goal.



DEEP debuted a draft of the Green Plan to the public at the [Connecticut Land Conservation Council’s](#) annual meeting in March 2016. Concomitantly, a public comment period was opened and the draft Plan made available for viewing and downloading. Revisions to the Plan were then made based on comments received by the public and the State’s land conservation partners.

Prior to this report’s publication, DEEP released the final Green Plan on February 14, 2017. The press release can be read by clicking [here](#).

A new feature to the Action Strategy which should drive the protection of lands key for watershed and coastal resources, fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, and buffers to climate change. This Action Strategy sets priorities and target acreages for land acquisition through year 2020, such as large forest blocks, trail linkages, and tidal marsh upland migration areas. Readers can gain additional information throughout the plan on existing open space in the state, grant funding programs, and more.

#### Implementing the Green Plan:

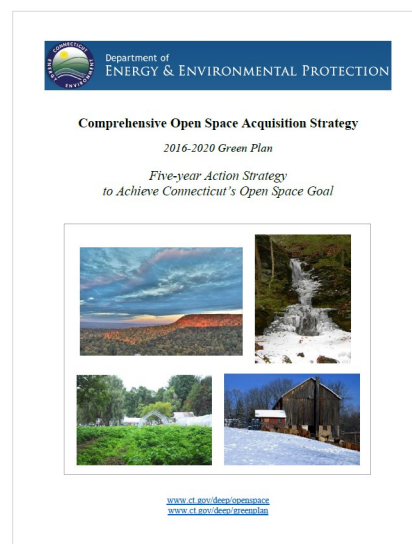
The Green Plan sets for DEEP several land acquisition goals through 2020. While focusing on securing acquisition funding to protect lands of high conservation priority, in 2017 DEEP will also work on the following program actions towards implementing the Plan:

- Establishing methods to in-take and track State and Partner acquisitions that conform with the Green Plan’s targeted land cover types and acreages; and
- Revising the State’s main land acquisition and open space grant program standard evaluation procedures to conform with the Green Plan’s priorities.

#### **Thank You, Partners!**

DEEP thanks its State, local, and non-profit land conservation organization partners for their guidance and review as it improved and finalized the Green Plan. A special thank-you goes to the State’s Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board for its guidance and input into the revised Green Plan and its commitment to partner and public outreach.

A new feature to the Green Plan is a 5-year





## IV. 2016 State Assistance to Land Conservation Partners

In 2016, **27 projects** were financially completed with over **\$8.7 million** in assistance from the State's [Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program](#) (OSWA), permanently **protecting 2,238 acres** in 26 towns (Appendix B).

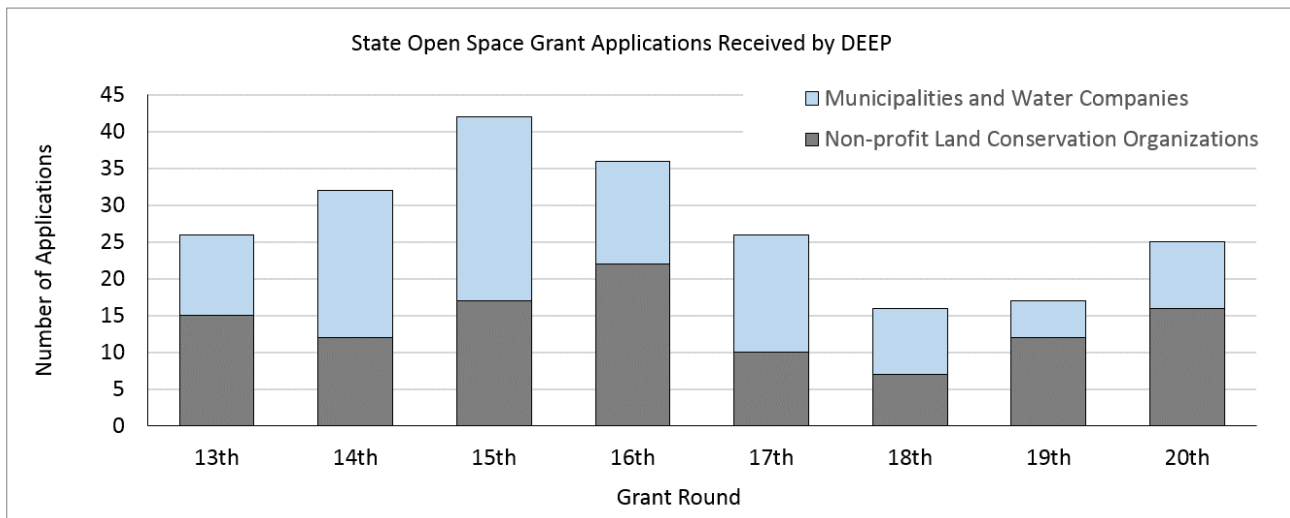
The 20th competitive OSWA grant round was opened in the fall of 2016. The Department received **25 application submissions**, up from 16 and 17 submissions in the previous two rounds (see figure below). Final awards will be announced in the fall of 2017.

### Program Purpose

OSWA leverages State, local, and private funds to create a cooperative open space acquisition program. OSWA provides grants to municipalities and non-profit land conservation organizations for the acquisition of open space land, and to water companies for the acquisition of Class I and Class II watershed land.

In exchange for grants, DEEP receives a conservation and public access easement over the property acquired to ensure that it is protected and available to residents as open space forever. Class I watershed land is sometimes exempt from the public access requirement for public health reasons. DEEP is willing to accept limited public access (at the discretion of the Commissioner) when a conservation easement is purchased on land where it would be disruptive of active agricultural activity.

To help DEEP support its partners in reaching their open space goals, the State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board convenes several times a year to review OSWA project selection criteria, policies, and procedures. The Review Board also makes State open space program funding recommendations to the Bond Commission each year.



### The Urban Garden and Community Green Grant Program

Two cities were awarded a total of **\$49,191 in funding** from the State Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) to continue maintaining local green spaces and community gardens: Hartford's Bankside Grove Pope Park and New Haven Farm's Ferry Street Gardens. The previous grant round awarded 4 cities with **\$201,155** in UGCG funding.

Since 2007, the program has provided over \$1 million in grants in cities including Bridgeport, Enfield, Hartford, New London, Putnam, and Norwalk. UGCG grants help to address multiple open space needs in densely populated areas. The grants are designed to help renovate municipally-owned lands into new or enhanced green spaces for recreation and local food production in city neighborhoods. Among other amenities, grants can be used to fund greenhouses, ADA-accessible walkways, and raised-bed gardens for use by children, the disabled, and senior citizens.

## **V. 2017 Acquisitions Agenda**

To make progress on Connecticut's statutory open space goals and objectives, through 2017 DEEP will:

- Encourage land conservation partners to implement the new, action-oriented 2016-2020 Green Plan;
- Continue populating the Public Use and Benefit Land Registry pilot mapping database;
- Help land conservation partners to plan for their open space projects by continuing to announce State open grant rounds at the same time each September and awardees in the following fall;
- Help conservation partners in cities to initiate their projects by announcing State Urban Green and Community Garden Grant awardees before the following fall of application submittals in the spring; and
- Continue closing on active property acquisitions using currently available resources.

As State Bond funds become available, DEEP will continue to evaluate and acquire lands through remaining Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program funding and supplemental funding opportunities:

**USFS Forest Legacy Program**: *provides funds to protect private forestland at risk of development through the purchase of conservation easements and land in fee*

In 2015, DEEP was approved for \$4.42 million in funding for the Whip-Poor-Will Woods Project, which will protect over 1,553 acres on 7 tracts of land in northeast Connecticut. The Department is in various stages of acquiring easements on the tracts.

**USFS Highlands Conservation Act Fund**: *provides funds for the purchase of conservation easements and land in fee in the "Highlands" area of northwest Connecticut*

In 2016, DEEP was approved for \$2.42 million to purchase conservation lands in the "Head of the Highlands" project area. The Department is in various stages of acquiring easements or land in fee in the area.

**USNPS Land and Water Conservation Fund**: *provides funding for the purchase of lands for conservation as well as the purchase and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities*

Connecticut was apportioned \$1,421,649 in Federal Fiscal Year 2016, but DEEP has not yet committed any funding because of it must satisfy a 50% non-federal funding match requirement.

**USFWS Pittman-Robertson Act Fund**: *also known as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, provides funding for the restoration, rehabilitation, and improvement of wildlife habitat*

In early 2017, DEEP expects to close on about 100 acres in Ledyard and to submit requests for about \$1,465,000 to purchase lands in Voluntown and Norfolk. The Department is planning additional requests for properties across the state.

**George Dudley Seymour Trust Fund**: *created by the noted New Haven lawyer, historian, and urban planner to help the state buy lands for public outdoor recreation and education*

Each year, DEEP submits requesting for funds to use towards properties throughout the state, including the purchase of 23.7 acres to be added to the Quinnipiac River State Park in North Haven in early 2017.

Appendix A  
 State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions  
 January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016

Property Name	Town	Fee Acreage	Easement Restriction or R.O.W.	State Cost	Cooperator Share	Cooperator	Purpose of Acquisition
Strong	Oxford	5.62	NA	\$0	\$144,300*	Estate of Miriam Strong	Donated addition to Southford Falls State Park
O'Toole	North Stonington	0.35	NA	\$20,000	NA	NA	In-holding closure in Pachaug State Forest
Kennedy	Hamden	20.06	NA	\$44,000	NA	NA	Addition to West Rock Ridge State Park
Ruopp	New Fairfield	3.02	NA	\$10,000	NA	NA	In-holding closure in Pootatuck State Forest
Cianci	Pomfret	53.50	NA	\$230,000	NA	NA	Addition to Mashamoquet Brook State Park
Prospect Hill Associates, LLP	Colchester	108.65	NA	\$0	\$450,000	USFWS, Pittman-Robertson Fund	Addition to Meadow Brook Wildlife Management Area
Kuzyk	Voluntown	15.97	NA	\$120,000	NA	NA	Addition to Pachaug State Forest
Kuiaski	Haddam	39.75	NA	\$200,000	\$0	NA	Addition to Cockaponset State Forest
Del Russo	Portland	102.97	NA	\$590,000	NA	NA	Addition to Meshomasic State Forest
Soltes	Cornwall	55.65	NA	\$0	\$250,000	USFWS, Pittman-Robertson Fund	Addition to Wyentenok State Forest
Zachem	Ledyard	54.24	NA	\$0	\$300,000	USFWS, Pittman-Robertson Fund	Addition to Rose Hill Wildlife Management Area
Newtown Fish & Game Club, Inc.	Canaan	85.53	NA	\$0	\$315,000	USFWS, Pittman-Robertson Fund	Addition to Robbins Swamp Wildlife Management Area
Gray	North Stonington	15.16	NA	\$100,000	NA	NA	Addition to Pachaug State Forest
White	North Stonington	30.79	NA	\$0	\$396,000	USFWS, Pittman-Robertson Fund	Addition to Assekonk Swamp Wildlife Management Area
<b>Totals</b>		<b>591.25</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$1,314,000</b>	<b>\$1,855,300</b>		

\* approximate fair market value of donated property.



Appendix B  
 Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition  
 Grants Financially Completed  
 January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016

Applicant Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres Protected	State Grant Amount
Town of Colchester	Moroch Property	Colchester	10.21	\$33,183
Town of Sprague	Robinson Property	Franklin/Sprague	125.62	\$180,000
South Central CT Regional Water Authority	Dandio Property	Guilford	60.81	\$396,500
Town of Berlin	Chotkowski Property	Berlin	71.10	\$500,000
Town of Westbrook	Horse Hill Woods Phase II	Westbrook	185.84	\$650,000
Northern Connecticut Land Trust	Culver Woods	Stafford	113.20	\$273,000
Town of Burlington	Taine Mountain Preserve II	Burlington	105.08	\$520,000
Cornwall Conservation Trust	Cooley Farm (easement)	Cornwall	83.55	\$450,000
Cornwall Conservation Trust	Trinity Camp	Cornwall	304.59	\$464,750
Town of Hebron	Millstream Road Property	Hebron	19.03	\$110,500
South Central CT Regional Water Authority	Lorman Property	Killingworth	64.88	\$335,000
Connecticut Farmland Trust	Gunther Farm	Tolland/Vernon	19.72	\$350,000
Town of Mansfield	Meadowbrook Lane Property	Mansfield	58.20	\$243,750
Guilford Land Conservation Trust	Westwoods North Property	Guilford	15.20	\$85,100
Town of Glastonbury	Somers Property	Glastonbury	24.24	\$233,025
Town of Woodbury	Former Aquarion Water Co. land	Woodbury	245.50	\$1,500,000
Town of Hampton	Edwards Preserve	Hampton	6.45	\$22,750
Town of East Haddam	Zeleznick Property	East Haddam	19.42	\$78,000
Old Lyme Land Trust	106 Four Mile River Road	Old Lyme	40.76	\$162,500
Town of Redding and Redding Land Trust	Biehn Property	Redding	34.70	\$170,000
New Roxbury Land Trust	Manchester Property	Union	83.94	\$146,500
Town of Hamden	100 Brooksvale Avenue, Rear	Hamden	15.42	\$67,500
Town of East Haddam	Lena Property	East Haddam	209.27	\$487,500
New England Forestry Foundation	Gurley Brook Preserve	East Lyme	166.20	\$500,000
Goshen Land Trust	Fisher Property	Goshen	127.33	\$382,500
Town of Farmington	Lot 8, Collinsville Road	Farmington	11.00	\$69,875
Town of Southington	1081 East Street	Southington	17.61	\$312,000
<b>Totals</b>			<b>2,238.87</b>	<b>\$8,723,933</b>