



Department of
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Connecticut State Open Space 2019 Annual Report

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

Acknowledgements

Greetings,

2019 has proven to be another successful year for land conservation in Connecticut. DEEP staff worked tirelessly to protect over one thousand acres of open space for recreation and natural resource protection including a 246 acre addition to Devils Hopyard State Park and an additional 149 acres of conserved wildlife habitat at the Roraback Wildlife Management Area in Griswold. DEEP assisted its land conservation partners in protecting over 400 acres of open space through its Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) Program. 2019 was the most competitive OSWA grant round to date. DEEP awarded over \$9,000,000 dollars to 24 of its partners which will protect over 2,400 acres of open space for public benefit.

During a time when we are all adjusting to social distancing , it's more important than ever that the public have access to outdoor recreational opportunities. With the continued work of the Department and its support from Governor Lamont and its local and federal partners, we will continue to work diligently toward our goal of protecting 21% of Connecticut's land base as public open space so that residents have access to safe, outdoor recreational opportunities close to home.

Sincerely,

Katherine S. Dykes

DEEP Staff

Nicole Lugli - Office Director
Robert Hannon - Supervisor
Brian Florek - Supervisor of Surveying
Allyson Clarke - Property Agent
Matthew Starr - Property Agent
Holly Lalime - Property Agent



Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board

Amy Paterson (Co-Chair) - Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council
Eric Hammerling (Co-Chair) - Executive Director, Connecticut Forest and Park Association
Tim Abbott - Regional Conservation and Greenprint Director, Housatonic Valley Association
Karen Burnaska - River Watersheds Regions Conservation
Linda Francois - Director and President, Bethany Land Trust
Joseph Gresko - State Representative, Connecticut House District 121
Walker Holmes - Connecticut State Director, The trust for Public Land
John Triana - Real Estate Manager, South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Elanah Sherman - Spokesperson for persons with disabilities
Joe Welsh - Aquarion Water Company

Connecticut's Open Space Goal

Recognizing 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 base as public open space (CGS Section 23-8). The Connecticut Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan set a target to meet this goal by year 2023. To reach this goal, **673,210 acres** across the state needs to be acquired as open space. Of the total open space goal:

- **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).

At the end of 2019, DEEP and its Partners together held a combined 510,250 acres as public open space, or 75.79 percent towards achieving the total statewide open space acquisition goal.

To reach their goals, DEEP must acquire 59,280 acres and DEEP's Partners must acquire 103,681 acres to reach their open space targets.

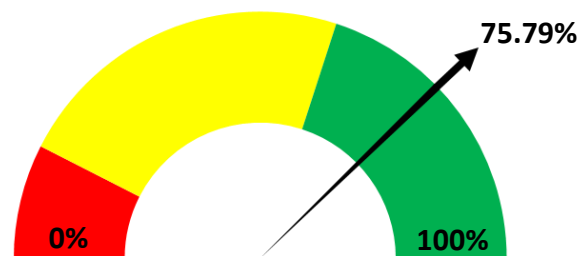
State (DEEP) Open Space:

As of December 31, 2019, DEEP held an estimated 261,296 acres of land in its system of Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management and water access areas, or 81.5 percent of its open space goal. Of this, approximately 239,971 acres have been acquired in fee title. Acquisition of less-than-fee interests are atypical and include the purchase of conservation easements and restrictions.

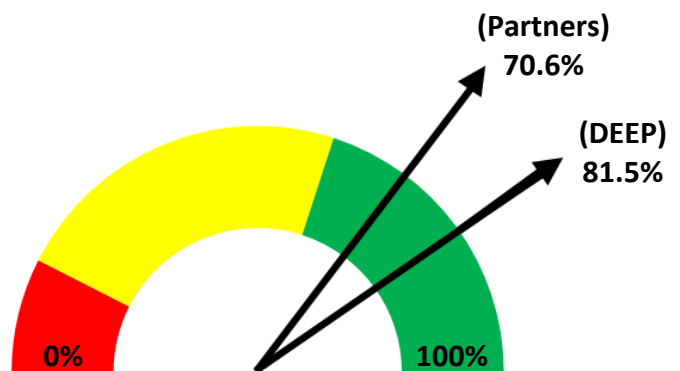
Partner-held Open Space:

As of December 31, 2019, DEEP conservatively estimates that its partners held 248,953 acres, or 70.6 percent of their share of the statewide open space goal. Of this, non-profit land conservation organizations held about 66,432 acres, municipalities held 84,106 acres, and water companies held 98,415 acres as open space.

2019 Status Statewide Open Space



Total: 510,250 ac.
Need: 162,960 ac.



DEEP-held: 261,296ac.
Need: 59,280 ac.

Partner-held: 248,953 ac.
Need: 103,681 ac.

Front cover: "Big Bluestem Hurlbut Field" by Shelley Harms, one of three winners of the 3rd Annual Diana Atwood Johnson OSWA Photo Contest, held in partnership with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council. Hurlbut Field is a 38 acre property containing grassland and a forest that slopes down to Lake Winchester. The Winchester Land Trust purchased the property in 2009 with help from an OSWA grant.

2019 Statewide Open Space & Land Acquisitions

In 2019, DEEP acquired 788 acres of land 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. DEEP acquired conservation easements on 843 acres through the Forest Preservation Act and USFWS Highlands Act programs. These lands were acquired with generous assistance from federal and private funding sources and private donations, leveraging about \$4.13 for every State dollar spent (**Appendix A**).

With over \$2.5 million in funding assistance from DEEP’s Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and a water company were able to complete 9 projects, protecting 434.82 acres in 10 towns across the state (**Appendix B**).

DEEP Land Acquisitions:

State Funding to Partners:

16	1,631.48	\$4.13
Properties acquired for new State open space	Acres of open space protected by the State	Match dollars leveraged for every State dollar spent

9	434.82	\$2.5 million
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

SINCE 1998

49,000+ acres

preserved as open space under the **Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program**.

36,000+ acres

protected by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies under the **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program**.

575+ Partner Projects

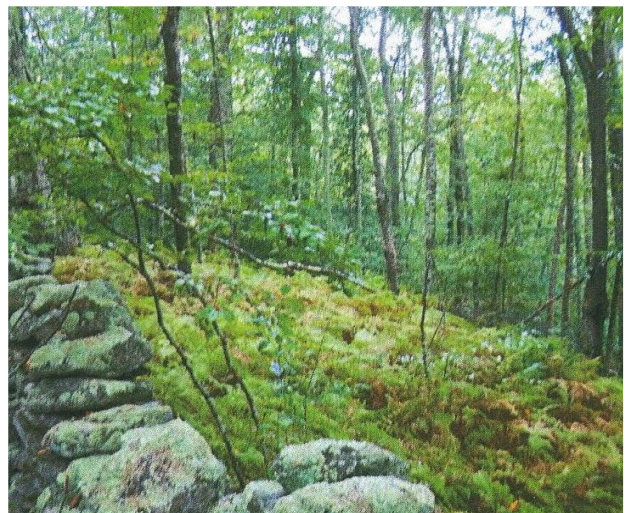
reviewed and approved for funding under the **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program**.

\$130+ million

provided in State funding to partners under the **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program**.

New Land added to Pachaug State Forest

In 2019, DEEP acquired this valuable acquisition as an addition to DEEP’s Billings Lake. The property adds 1 mile of gravel road to over 2,400 acres of Pachaug State Forest in Griswold, Voluntown, and North Stonington. The property has unique steep slopes and rocky outcroppings near its eastern boundary. It has potential for box turtle habitat, supports state-imperiled pitch pine tree communities, and contains locally-uncommon, sugar maple-dominated forest stands. The property also has historical, pre-colonial features including short stone walls, a stone fireplace, rock cairns, and a glacial erratic showing evidence of being manipulated by people with stone tools.



2019 DEEP Open Space Acquisition Actions

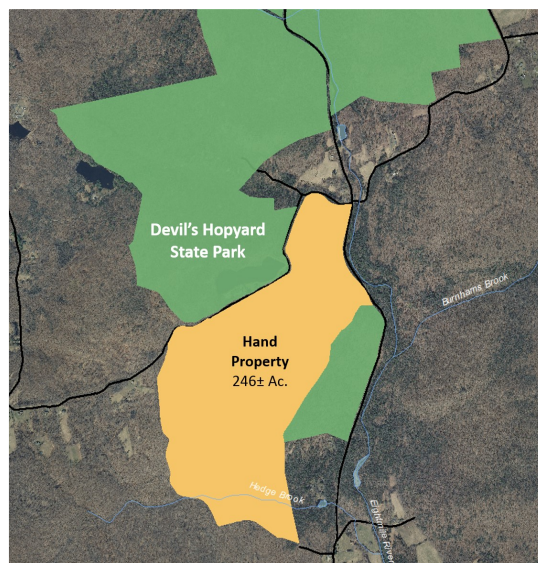
State Property Acquisition Review

DEEP evaluated **50 properties covering over 4,200 acres** eligible for State purchase through the [Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program](#) (RNHTP). There are currently over 150 properties covering thousands of acres that have been reviewed and approved for acquisition, but DEEP lacks the funding necessary to acquire all available properties. The current real estate market favors buyers of open space due to a stall in new housing construction. Additional funding for the program will allow DEEP to access and leverage federal and private funding sources in order to take advantage of these opportunities.

DEEP Adds 246 Acres to Devils Hopyard State Park with Assistance from the Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 2019, DEEP purchased the Hand Property, a 246 acre parcel abutting the southern boundary of Devil's Hopyard State Park. Fifty percent of the property's fair market value was paid for by the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This program is administered by the National Park Service and provides funding to states for the protection and enhancement of recreational resources.

The property is located within the federally-recognized Eight Mile River Wild and Scenic Watershed. It abuts several other protected open space properties including The Nature Conservancy's Burnham-Brook Preserve and the Town of East Haddam's Lena Property. The property can be accessed by an old cart path on Mitchell Road that meanders past a sizeable vernal pool, across pastureland, and along stone walls leading to a scenic lookout. The summit is an outcrop of metamorphic bedrock that faces southeast, affording views of the Eight Mile River Valley. This property features multiple resource values and outdoor recreational uses, such as hiking, hunting, wildlife viewing, fishing, and more.



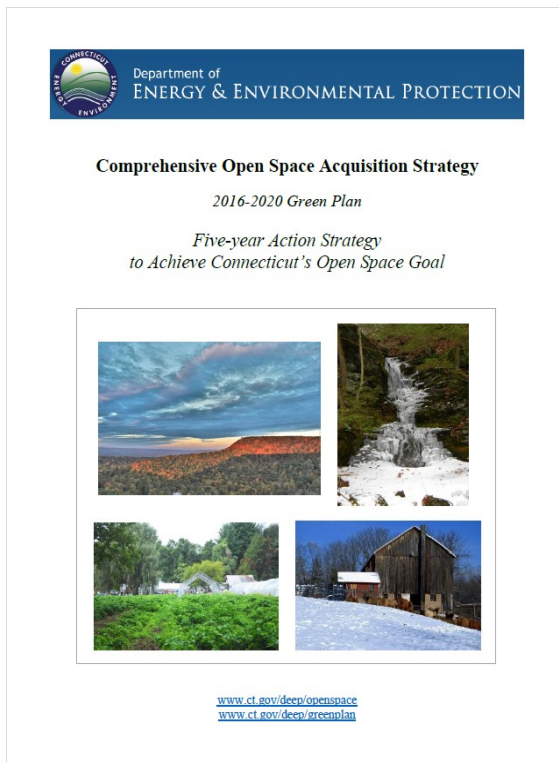
DEEP Protects 730 Acres of Forestland in Stafford Through the Forest Legacy Program

DEEP worked closely with Jill Ann Hubbell to purchase and acquire a Forest Legacy Conservation Easement over 752 acres owned by Ms. Hubbell. The property, which will still be privately owned by Ms. Hubbell, is the largest of several properties within Connecticut's designated Whip-poor-will Woods Forest Legacy Project Area in Stafford. The land is now forever protected in its existing natural and forested condition, preserving high-priority scenic, cultural, riparian, fish and wildlife habitat, and other ecological and recreational values. The land will also be available for sustainable timber harvest practices, further meeting objectives of the US Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program.



[The Green Plan - Connecticut's Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy](#)

[The Green Plan](#) was released by DEEP in 2017 as a statewide planning document developed in partnership with municipalities and numerous conservation organizations to guide land acquisitions towards achieving the state's open space goal. The Green Plan includes a **5-year 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. The 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.



"Anstett Property" by Gina White, one of three winners of the 3rd Annual Diana Atwood Johnson OSPA Photo Contest. The 78 acre Anstett Property was purchased by the Goshen Land Trust in 2012 with assistance from an OSPA Grant. Forest land located on the eastern part of the property is home to abundant wildlife, as well as hiking trails and bird watching.

[Looking Ahead—Green Plan 2021-2026](#)

As required by statute, DEEP will soon revise the Green Plan to provide an updated assessment of statewide open space since its last version, including progress towards implementing the 5-year action plan and reaching Connecticut's goal of protecting 673,210 acres.

This updated plan will take into consideration the recommendations from the Governor's Council on Climate Change in their revised statewide *Adaptation and Resiliency Plan for Connecticut* as well as the state's progress on the implementation of the strategies identified in *Building a Low Carbon Future for Connecticut: Achieving a 45% GHG reduction by 2030*. The GC3 was re-established and expanded by Governor Ned Lamont's Executive Order No. 3 on September 3, 2019.

[Coming Soon!](#)

DEEP needs to hear from all stakeholders to develop a planning document that will be the highest value for the State of Connecticut, municipalities, regional planning agencies, land conservation organizations, and the public. View or download the Green Plan in its entirety or in sections by visiting www.ct.gov/deep/greenplan. Then, stay tuned to DEEP's webpage for news and information on how you can provide comments on how to use or improve the next Green Plan.

Statewide Open Space Mapping and Inventory

DEEP continued developing the [Public Use and Benefit Land Registry](#) pilot (Land Registry) through its ongoing partnership with Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) to train students in using geographic information system tools and populating Land Registry parcel information.

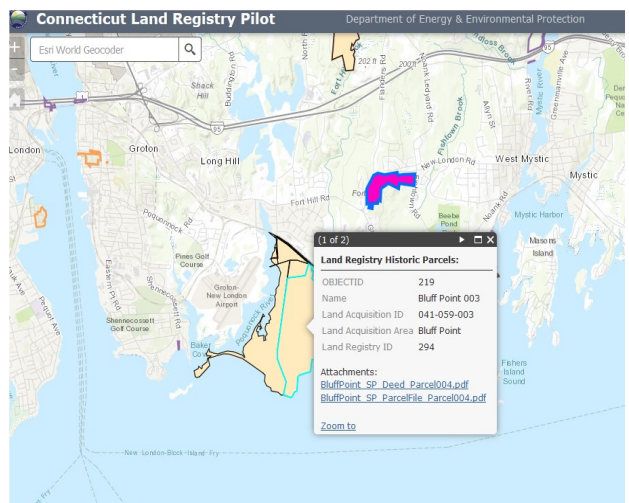
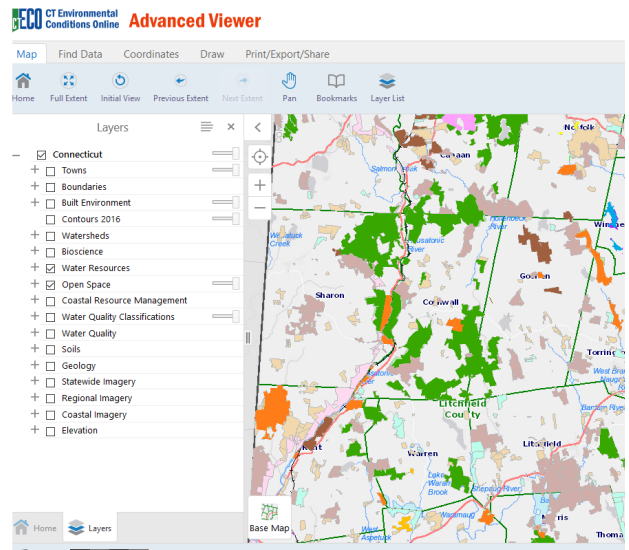
With continued funding assistance through a US Fish and Wildlife Service grant, DEEP-held Wildlife Management Areas are a focus of the parcel data population.

ECSU is also assisting DEEP in producing a GIS datalayer of more than 550 projects funded under the State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant program (OSWA).

To eventually be hosted by [Connecticut Environmental Conditions Online](#) and added to the Land Registry, digitized OSWA parcels are being quality checked prior to release 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.



“Sprague Land Preserve Beaver Dam Area” by David Heg, one of three winners of the 3rd Annual Diana Atwood Johnson OSWA Photo Contest. The Watson Property was purchased by the Friends of the Shetucket River Valley in 2012 with assistance from an OSWA grant. This 270 acre property is open to the public for passive recreation.



The Diana Atwood-Johnson Trust Property is Preserved in Perpetuity

In 2019, 12.8 acres of open space at 19-2 Mile Creek Road, Old Lyme was generously donated by Diana Atwood Johnson, late of Old Lyme, and will be preserved in her memory. Diana was passionate about land conservation, providing distinguished services to numerous boards and organizations throughout Connecticut. She will be fondly remembered for her valuable contributions to DEEP's Natural Heritage, Open Space, and Land Acquisition Review Board in her role as Chairperson for almost 19 years. She was also Chairperson of the Town of Old Lyme's Open Space Committee for 20 years and served on the boards of The Nature Conservancy, Inc. and The Trust For Public Land. Diana was the first person to donate a scenic easement to the State of Connecticut when the Connecticut River Gateway Commission was established in 1973. She will be forever remembered by the Town of Old Lyme and the State of Connecticut for her many achievements and philanthropic contributions to the conservation community.



The generous donation of the 12.8-acre Diana Atwood-Johnson Parcel to the State further provides an undeveloped buffer to riparian lands, protects the Connecticut River estuary ecosystem, and expands public water access for passive recreational and educational opportunities. It has 1,400 feet of frontage on the Black Hall River, located on the northerly side of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad and on the easterly side of Mile Creek Road. Access from Mile Creek Road is not yet available, but DEEP hopes to improve access soon.

This section of the Black Hall River at the junction of the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound is a top destination in the northeast for paddle boating, fishing, and bird and other wildlife observation. Located nearby to the southwest, at the convergence of the Black Hall River, the Connecticut River, and Long Island Sound, is DEEP's Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Management Area. DEEP's Great Island State Boat Launch is also located nearby on Route 156 to Smiths Neck Road. Additional seasonal kayak, paddle, and fishing rentals and guided tours can be found on Shore Road/Route 156.



2019 State Assistance to Land Conservation Partners

The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

In 2019, 9 projects were financially completed with over \$2.5 million in assistance from the State [Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program](#) (OSWA), permanently protecting 374.83 acres (**Appendix B**).

In January 2020, DEEP announced grant awards for its 22nd grant round totaling over \$9 million. These funds will protect 2,466 acres in 24 towns throughout the state (**Appendix C**).

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 recommendations to the Commissioner and others each year.

Niantic River Headwaters Community Forest (Phase II), New England Forestry Foundation, Inc.

In 2019, the New England Forestry Foundation Inc. purchased 33 acres of open space in the Town of East Lyme. The property was protected with \$305,500 in funding assistance from a State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant. This parcel further protects undeveloped, intact forestland within the Niantic River watershed and two high-quality watercourses, the Gurley and Latimer Brooks. It abuts the New England Forestry Foundation's (NEFF) 166-acre Gurley Brook Preserve and marks the successful completion of two phases of open space acquisitions by NEFF. The first acquisition phase was also completed using aid from a DEEP open space grant.

Partial funding for the second phase acquisition was received from the US Department of Agriculture's Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program. This federal program required open space land to be managed in accordance with a comprehensive plan. NEFF's primary land management objectives are to provide for conservation of forest habitat and natural resource-based recreational opportunities such as hiking, seasonal hunting, bird and wildlife watching, and wintertime cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.



The Urban Garden and Community Gardens Grant Program

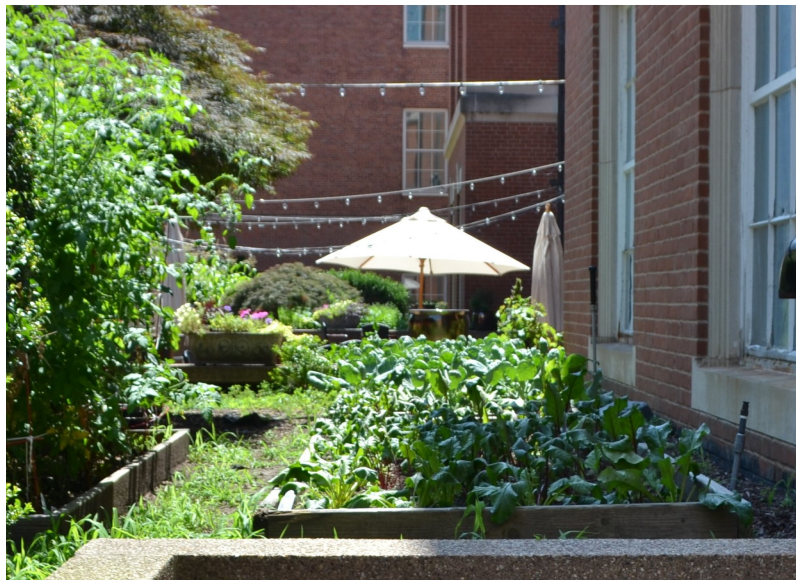
In 2019, one city was awarded a total of \$14,600 in funding from the State Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) (**table below**). The Department’s Urban Green and Community Gardens Grant Program provides funding assistance to develop or enhance urban open spaces for public enjoyment and environmental education. The program is available to towns designated pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes as a “distressed municipality” or “targeted investment community”. Towns often partner with local non-profit organizations on revitalization projects.

Since 2007, this financial aid program has provided over \$1 million in grants to cities including Bridgeport, Hartford, Enfield, Putnam, Norwalk, and New London. Addressing multiple open space needs in densely populated areas, these grants are designed to help renovate municipally-owned lands into new or enhanced green spaces for recreation and local food production in city neighborhoods.



Project Sponsor	Project Name	Grant Amount
Hartford & KNOX Inc.	Enfield Street Community Garden	\$14,600
Totals		\$14,600

[The City of Hartford and KNOX, Inc. Work Together to Green Up Hartford](#)



Supported by State Urban Garden and Community Garden grants awarded in 2017 and 2019, the City of Hartford and KNOX, Inc. transformed an empty lot at 122 Enfield Street into a haven for local food production. The 2017 grant helped fund the construction of an irrigation system and the newly awarded grant will help KNOX install more raised beds, including handicapped accessible beds. KNOX Inc. is a champion in the urban local food movement with a total of 23 community gardens that serve more than 400 local families by offering 300 or 625 square foot garden space rentals. They also offer free seeds, supplies and expertise.

Appendix A

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019

Property Name	Town	Fee Acres	Easement Restriction or R.O.W.	State Purchase Share	Cooperator Share	Cooperator	Purpose of Acquisition
Hand	East Haddam	246.83	NA	\$475,000	\$475,000	Land and Water Conservation Fund	Addition to Devil's Hopyard State Park
McTier & Ruyl	Haddam	24.63	NA	\$0	\$45,120	McTier & Ruyl	Donated addition to Higganum Reservoir State Park
Fracchia (Phase I)	Hebron	104.88	NA	\$0	\$520,000	USFWS, Pittman-Robertson Act Fund	Bishop's Swamp Wildlife Management Area
Alva V. Thomas Trust	Griswold	142.96	NA	\$335,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Roraback Wildlife Management Area
Cummings	Thomaston	24	NA	\$10,000	\$0	N/A	New Naugatuck River Water Access Area
Beard	Milford	24.58	NA	\$0	\$139,000	USFWS North American Wetland Conservation Act Fund	Addition to Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area
Thompson	Eastford, Pomfret	49.99	N/A	\$180,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Natchaug State Forest
Diana Atwood Johnson	Old Lyme	12.8	N/A	\$0	\$265,000*	Diana Atwood Johnson Trust	Estuary Protection/Public Water Access
Rand	Salisbury	3	111.1	\$0	\$1,000,000	USFWS Highlands Act	Watershed/ Forest Preservation & Addition to Mount Riga Sate Park

* estimated value of donated property

** estimated value of donated 3-acre parcel and partial donation value of conservation easement

Appendix A

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019

Property Name	Town	Fee Acres	Easement Restriction or R.O.W.	State Purchase Share	Cooperator Share	Cooperator	Purpose of Acquisition
Simmons	Plymouth	27.22	N/A	\$0	\$200,000	Simmons Family	Donated addition to Mattatuck State Forest
Linden	Barkhamsted	5.41	N/A	\$120,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to American Legion State Forest
Himmelstein	Lebanon	42.21	N/A	\$0	\$145,000	USFWS, Pittman Robertson Act Fund	Addition to Bartlett Brook Wildlife Management Area
Zachem	Ledyard	79.9	N/A	\$0	\$440,000	USFWS, Pittman Robertson Act Fund	Addition to Rose Hill Wildlife Management Area
Hubbell	Stafford	0	732	\$0	\$1,012,500—USFS Forest Legacy Act \$337,500*—Hubbell Family		Addition to Whip-poor-will Woods Project Area
Totals		788.41	843.01	\$1,432,500	\$2,271,610		

* estimated value of donated property

** estimated value of donated 3-acre parcel and partial donation value of conservation easement

Appendix B

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants
Financially Completed by DEEP
January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	Grant Amount
Steep Rock Association	Johnson Farm	Washington	51.63	\$866,500
Essex Land Trust	Doane Property	Essex, Deep River	18.60	\$166,950
Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc.	Matland/Tarradiddle Property	Cornwall	72.00	\$180,000
Colebrook Land Conservancy, Inc.	Deer Hill Property	Colebrook	74.10	\$81,000
Aspetuck Land Trust, Inc.	Belknap Property	Weston	38.34	\$165,497
Connecticut Farmland Trust, Inc.	Strong Family Farm	Vernon	48.32	\$650,000
New England Forestry Foundation	Niantic River Headwaters Community Forest	East Lyme	33.00	\$305,500
Avalonia Land Conservancy	Dutka Nature Preserve	Griswold	61.58	\$30,469
Naromi Land Trust	Eastman Parcel	Sherman	37.26	\$76,500
Totals			434.82	\$2,522,416

Appendix C

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program Grant Awards Announced January 2020

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	Grant Amount
Salisbury Association	Pope	Salisbury	78.99	\$136,500
Avalonia Land Conservancy	The Bond Property	Montville	669	\$2,340,000
Steep Rock Association	Hillside Farm	Washington, Woodbury	85	\$350,000
Aspetuck Land Trust	Fromson-Strassler Acquisition	Weston	85.86	\$625,000
City Of Bristol/Environmental Learning Center	Pigeon Hill Property	Bristol, Burlington	63.9	\$850,800
Groton Open Space Association	Sheep Farm South	Groton	103.49	\$600,000
Madison Land Conservation Trust	Dowd Hollow Preserve	Madison	114.47	\$480,000
Northern Conn. Land Trust	Wraight Property	Ellington	118.4	\$132,500
Town Of Westbrook	Toby Hill Viii	Westbrook	146.74	\$315,000
Cornwall Conservation Trust	Red Mountain (Gallucci) Preserve	Cornwall	72.5	\$225,000
South Central Conn. RWA	Depodesta Property	Hamden	14	\$25,000
Woodsmen Land Trust	Nehantic Nature Preserve	East Lyme, Montville	320	\$560,000
South Central Conn. RWA	Hendrickson Property	Hamden, Bethany	7.53	\$19,600
East Lyme Land Trust	Pattagansett River Watershed Preserve	East Lyme	38.7	\$179,200
Avalonia Land Conservancy	Maynard Farm	Ledyard	99.82	\$108,000
Manchester Land Conservation Trust	Lombardo Farm	Manchester	102	\$300,000
Berlin Land Trust	Lamentation Mountain	Middletown	47	\$63,450
Sharon Land Trust	D'Alton Property	Sharon	70.37	\$240,000
Town Of Pomfret	Frankfurter	Pomfret	125.64	\$187,250
The Nature Conservancy	Weston Farms	Weston	74.16	\$602,000
Wilton Land Conservation Trust	183 Ridgefield Road	Wilton	13.4	\$707,000
Town Of Stratford	North End Park Acquisition	Stratford	4.3	\$10,500
Town Of Southington	School Street/Marion Ave	Southington	5.5	\$82,600
Town Of Clinton	Lot #30 West Road	Clinton	5.2	\$7,000
Total			2465.97	\$9,146,400