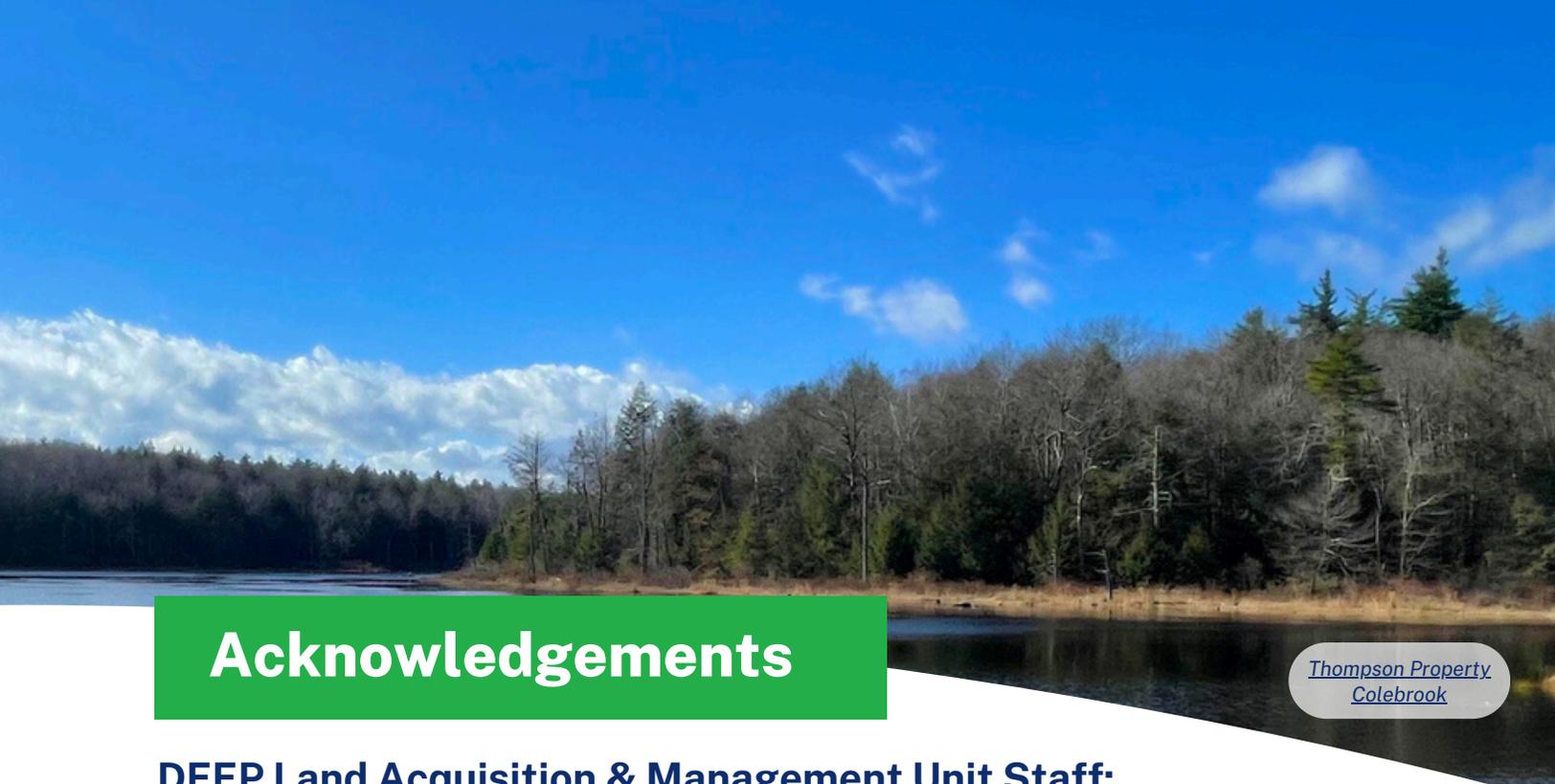




Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

Connecticut Open Space 2024 Annual Report

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



Acknowledgements

[Thompson Property
Colebrook](#)

DEEP Land Acquisition & Management Unit Staff:

- Lindsay Suhr — Office Director
- Brian Florek — Supervisor of Surveys and Mapping
- Allyson Clarke — Property Agent
- Matthew Starr — Property Agent
- Jamie Sydoriak — Environmental Analyst
- Dr. Cameron Clegg — Environmental Analyst
- Steven Perry — Environmental Analyst

State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board:

- Amy Blaymore Paterson (Chair) - Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council
- Andy Bicking - Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association
- Elanah Sherman - Representing the Interests of People with Disabilities
- Joe Welsh - Aquarion Water Company
- John Piscopo - State Representative, Connecticut House District 76
- John Triana - Real Estate Manager, South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
- Joseph Gresko - State Representative, Connecticut House District 121
- Karen Burnaska - Watershed Lands Advocate
- Linda Francois - Director and President, Bethany Land Trust
- Michelle Royce Williams - Vice President, Connecticut Water
- Rebecca Dahl - Planning Analyst, Office of Policy and Management
- Tim Abbott - Regional Conservation and Greenprint Director, Housatonic Valley Association
- Walker Holmes - Connecticut State Director, The Trust for Public Land

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). 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).

Though we have not yet reached the 21% goal, acquisitions in 2024 was a significant step forward. To reach the 21% threshold, an additional 153,274 acres across the state needs to be acquired as open space.

State (DEEP) Open Space:

As of December 31, 2024, DEEP held an estimated 265,149 acres of land in its system of Parks, Forests, Wildlife Management and water access areas, or 82.7% of its open space goal. Of this, more than three-quarters have been acquired in fee title. Acquisition of less-than-fee interests are atypical and include the purchase of conservation easements and restrictions.

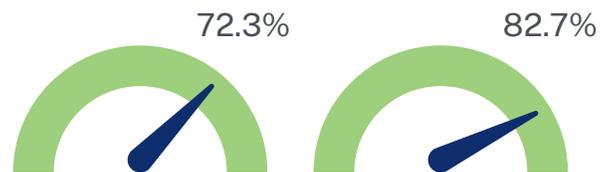
Partner-held Open Space:

As of December 31, 2024, DEEP conservatively estimates that its Partners held 254,787 acres, or 72.3 percent, of their share of the statewide open space goal. This is a conservative estimate because in the last 20 years, DEEP has only been collecting data on private and municipal land acquisition supported by DEEP. In the coming years, DEEP will work with a variety of stakeholders to comprehensively inventory private and municipal conservation land and easements.

2024 Status Statewide Open Space



Total: 519,936 ac.
Need: 153,274 ac.



PARTNERS

DEEP

DEEP-held: 265,149 ac.
Need: 55,427 ac.

Partner-held: 254,787 ac.
Need: 97,847 ac.

2024 Statewide Open Space Land Acquisitions

In 2024, DEEP acquired 1,897+ 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 (Appendix A). These lands were acquired with generous assistance from federal and private funding sources, including three donations from private landowners. On average DEEP spent \$594.24 per acquired acre, and every dollar invested by the state yielded \$1.28 in external funding. With over \$7.2 million in funding assistance from DEEP’s Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies were able to complete 16 projects, protecting 1,104+ acres in 18 towns across the state (Appendix B).

DEEP Land Acquisitions:

7	1,897+	\$1.28
Properties acquired for new State open space	Acres of open space protected by the State	Match dollars leveraged for every State dollar spent

State Funding to Partners:

16	1104+	\$7.23 m
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

53,500+ acres

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

42,500+ acres

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

645 + Partner Projects

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

\$150+ million

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

With \$300,000 in funding from the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, The Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., secured a 159.42-acre forested property in the Towns of Bozrah and Montville. This property, referred to as the Glemboski-Ous Property, expands a conservation corridor anchored by Milo Light Preserve protected by the Nature Conservancy, Inc. While it is primarily forested, this property also features scrub-shrub wetlands, large glacial erratics, vernal pools, wetlands and stone cairns. This property also contains several of the key habitats identified in the CT DEEP 2015 Wildlife Action Plan, and Avalonia Land Conservancy has noted several of Connecticut’s at-risk species within the 159-acres such as the Yellow-breasted Chat, the Brindle Shiner, and the Eastern Box Turtle.



2024 DEEP Open Space Acquisition Actions

State Property Acquisition Review

In 2024, DEEP evaluated 32 properties covering over 1,700 acres eligible for State purchase through the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program. There is a current backlog of over 100 properties covering approximately 7,200 acres that have been reviewed and approved for acquisition. Statewide real estate transaction trends saw an increase in demand for property sales, especially in rural and suburban areas, favoring sellers and making State acquisitions of larger parcels for open space very competitive.

Federal Partnership Protects Over 475 Acres of New Public Open Space, Doubling the Size of Algonquin State Forest

A spectacular, 475-acre undeveloped property in Colebrook was purchased by DEEP with \$695,000 in federal assistance from a United States Fish and Wildlife Service Highlands Conservation Act grant. The Highlands Conservation Act program provides funding for the acquisition of lands or interest in land valuable for protection of water, forest, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources within the designated “Highlands Region” - states of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Added to the Goshen Wildlife Management Area, this property is ideally located near the center of town and expands opportunities for natural outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing.

This acquisition consists of two parcels totaling 475 acres — 410 acres east and 65 acres west of Simons Pond Road — near the Massachusetts state line. The project more than doubles this portion of Algonquin State Forest, securing a large, unfragmented block of interior forest that safeguards water quality and strengthens wildlife corridors. The property will offer passive recreation opportunities, including hiking and birdwatching.



The Green Plan: Connecticut's Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy

In 1997, the General Assembly recognized the environmental threat posed by changes in land use and set statewide acreage goals for land protection. In 2001, in partnership with municipalities and a wide variety of conservation organizations, DEEP developed the first Green Plan to guide land conservation efforts statewide. There have been several iterations of this plan over the years, each one building on past accomplishments and incorporating the latest innovations and opportunities. The last Green Plan was completed in 2016 with an expiration in 2020. With the onset of COVID-19 and a large percentage of DEEP's staff retiring between 2019 and 2022, the development of a new plan has been delayed.

Looking Ahead — Revising the Green Plan

The Land Acquisition and Management Office worked with internal collaborators, external partners and other State agencies in 2023 to develop a comprehensive open space definition to be used for the next iteration of the Green Plan.

In early 2024, staff worked with the State GIS office to perform an initial assessment of open space across Connecticut based on the new definition. The next Green Plan will be goal oriented and supported by a consultant-led inventory of municipal and private acquisitions. This inventory will help DEEP understand where we have been successful, but more importantly, where and how future acquisitions can support the quality and accessibility of open spaces.



2024 State Assistance: (“OSWA”) Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

OSWA provides grants to municipalities and nonprofit 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. Through this program, 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. To help DEEP support its partners reach their open space goals, the State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board convenes monthly 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.

In 2024, 16 projects were financially completed with over \$7.23 million in assistance from the OSWA Grant Program, permanently protecting 1,104 acres. Additionally, DEEP announced 17 grant awards totaling over \$14.8 million to conserve another 2,626 acres of open space (Appendix C). DEEP subsequently opened the 27th grant round and will announce those awards in the spring of 2025. OSWA leverages State, local and private funds to create a cooperative open space acquisition program.

Over 1,000 acres from the Townshend Family Property protected by the Wyndham Land Trust



Since 2019, Wyndham Land Trust, Incorporated (WLT), has made efforts to protect the Townshend Family property as part of the Nightingale Forest Preserve. In four separate acquisitions, the WLT has permanently protected just over 1,000 acres. With DEEP funding assistance through the OSWA Grant in 2021 and 2024, the WLT was able to protect 354 and 220 acres, respectively.

The newly protected 220-acre addition features a dammed pond and headwaters to Nightingale Brook which drains into Mashamoquet Brook. The property is situated within a 4,000-acre forest block and major wildlife corridor, capable of supporting at least 20 species of greatest conservation concern and expands destinations for bird watchers seeking hard-to-find species inhabiting mature forest, such as Black-throated Blue Warblers and Broad-winged Hawks.

A local historian and curriculum specialist for the NAACP Windham/Willimantic Branch researched the lives of enslaved people who lived and worked on these tracts during the 1700's. This acquisition ensures the land remains accessible to historians and the State Office of Archaeology for further research of enslaved history.

2024 State Assistance: (“UGCG”)

Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program

The Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) is a matching, competitive subset of funding through the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program to create, improve, or expand community green spaces. Funding is typically used to install new plantings, community gardens, and pathways or to construct rain gardens, bioswales, and other climate adaptation features. Funding is available to municipalities and non-profit organizations for projects in distressed municipalities, targeted investment communities, and environmental justice communities. UGCG has funded projects large and small, from a \$500,000 award for multi-use trail enhancements to a \$10,000 award to replace planter boxes at a 0.25-acre community garden. UGCG recognizes the positive impacts of small and local community-based non-profits who may find themselves discouraged from applying to other grant programs due to their administrative complexity. To that end, the UGCG grant process, from application to post-award compliance, has been made as accessible as possible.

In 2024, two municipalities were awarded a total of \$343,015 in Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) funding from the round that closed in November 2023.

Since 2007, this program initiative has provided over \$3 million in grants to eligible cities and towns across Connecticut. Addressing multiple open space needs in densely populated areas, these grants help renovate municipally-owned lots into new or enhanced green spaces for recreation and local food production in urban neighborhoods. Among other improvements, grants can be used to towards small garden tool sheds, designing ADA-accessible walkways, and procuring materials for garden beds for use by children, people with disabilities, and senior citizens.

Municipal Applicant	UGCG Project	Grant Award
Town of Stratford	Access Road Arboretum	\$281,840
Town of Thomaston	Seth Thomas Park Revitalization	\$61,175
Total		\$343,015

Stratford Access Road Arboretum Conceptual Site Plans
 Prepared by SLR on behalf of the Town of Stratford



The Future of UGCG: 2024 & Beyond

Due to an important statutory change, 2024 marked the first-year non-profit organizations were eligible for UGCG funding. For the round that closed in November 2024, four non-profit organizations and two municipalities were awarded more than \$720,000 to create and enhance six new community greenspaces.

Applicant & Municipality	UGCG Project	Grant Award
Friends of Tarrywile Park, Danbury*	Restoring Tarrywile Park	\$63,026
Riverfront Recapture, Hartford*	Marfuggi Riverwalk Enhancements	\$517,519
New Britain ROOTS, New Britain*	Chapman Street Community Garden Revitalization	\$15,000
Gather New Haven, New Haven*	Community Garden and Nature Preserve Improvements	\$92,975
Town of Preston	Preston Raid Garden	\$15,000
Town of Vernon	Vernon Community Giving Garden	\$21,682
Total		\$725,353

*Indicates an award to a non-profit organization



[Restoring Tarrywile Park.](#)
[Friends of Tarrywile Park in Danbury.](#)

Throughout 2024, DEEP conducted comprehensive outreach to Regional Planning Agencies, conservation groups, environmental justice advocates, and community-based nonprofits. Simultaneously, statutory changes were passed that authorized non-profit applicants and simplified the application and post-award compliance process to better accommodate groups without professional staff. These efforts, supported by feedback from an array of stakeholders, will be continued in 2025.

APPENDIX A

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2024

Property Name	Location	Fee Acreage	Easement or R.O.W. Acreage	State Share	Match Share	Cooperators	Purpose of Acquisition
Palmer	Haddam	0.92	N/A	\$0	\$0	N/A	Addition to George Dudley Seymour State Park
Pagano	East Haven	3.4	N/A	\$0	\$0	N/A	Addition to East Haven Wildlife Management Area
Morehouse-Tenenbaum	Sprague	28.43	N/A	\$140,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Mohegan State Forest
Bartlett	Colchester	62.7	N/A	\$160,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Salmon River State Forest
Winchester Water	Winchester	N/A	1321.56	\$132,500	\$752,500	USFWS, Private Funds, Landowner Donation	Crystal Lake and Rugg Brook Reservoirs and Surrounding Areas
Thompson	Colebrook	475.37	N/A	\$695,000	\$695,000	USFWS	Addition to Algonquin State Forest
White	Stafford	4.99	N/A	\$0	\$0	N/A	Addition to Nipmuck State Forest
Total:		575.81	1321.56	\$1,127,500	\$1,447,500		

APPENDIX B

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants Completed January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2024

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town(s)	Acreage	OSWA Grant Amount	Highlands Grant Amount
The Nature Conservancy, Inc.	Weston Farms Property	Weston	77.163	\$602,000	N/A
Norfolk Land Trust, Inc.	Lovers Land (Borden) Property	Norfolk	83.742	\$201,000	\$123,000
Stamford Land Conservation Trust, Inc.	Margaret Lang & Arthur Altschul Trust Properties	Stamford	64.264	\$2,250,000	N/A
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Glemboski - Ous Property	Bozrah & Montville	159.42	\$300,000	N/A
Steep Rock Association, Inc.	Maricostas Preserve Expansion - Pinnacle Cliffs Property	Washington	30.462	\$406,250	\$156,250
Town of Windsor	Mill Brook Open Space	Windsor	93.97	\$1,086,000	N/A
Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy, Inc.	Ledges Preserve	Brookfield	45.288	\$325,000	\$125,000
City of Middletown	Majestic Oaks Property	Middletown & Durham	83.659	\$372,000	N/A
Madison Land Conservation Trust, Inc.	Birch Branch Meadow	Madison	29.388	\$585,000	N/A
Salem Land Trust, Inc.	Stahlschmidt Preserve Project	Salem	47.523	\$139,750	N/A
Wyndham Land Trust, Inc.	Townshend Phase IV	Pomfret	220.57	\$354,120	N/A
Morris Land Trust, Inc.	Humphrey Farm Reserve	Morris	37.006	\$240,500	\$92,500
East Haddam Land Trust, Inc.	Mangano-Mazella Farm Preserve	East Haddam	123.65	\$321,100	N/A
Winchester Land Trust, Inc.	Cannavo Springs Watershed Property	Winsted	20.894	\$90,000	\$18,000
North Branford Land Conservation Trust, Inc.	Beech Street & Poms Lane Properties	North Branford	36.682	\$385,450	N/A
Town of Guilford	East River Preserve Northern Inholding	Guilford	27.65	\$174,200	N/A
Total:			1104.17	\$7,230,370	\$514,750

APPENDIX C

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants 2024 Grant Awards Announced

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	OSWA Grant Amount
Winchester Land Trust, Inc.	Laurel Ridge	Winchester	507	\$1,650,000
Groton Open Space Association, Inc.	Center Groton Preserve	Groton	89	\$321,000
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Wagner Property	Norwich	101.47	\$442,500
Northwest CT Land Conservancy, Inc.	Milde Farm	Litchfield & Torrington	650.28	\$4,011,290
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Rowley	Ledyard	223.47	\$409,500
Northwest CT Land Conservancy, Inc.	Glen Brook	Sherman	117.235	\$965,250
Warren Land Trust, Inc.	Mountain Lake Road	Warren	151.8	\$1,625,000
Salisbury Association, Inc.	Tom's Hill	Salisbury	297	\$1,502,500
Town of Tolland	Tolland Marsh	Tolland	100	\$87,750
South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority	Bis Property	Cheshire	70	\$188,500
Litchfield Land Trust, Inc.	Putnam Property	Litchfield	104.84	\$422,500
Aton Forest, Inc.	Haskell Property	Colebrook	40	\$117,000
Aspetuck Land Trust, Inc. & Town of Monroe	Benedict Property	Monroe	65	\$1,803,750
Southbury Land Trust, Inc.	Silver Beech Property	Southbury	5.95	\$130,000
Old Lyme Land Trust, Inc.	188 Four Mile River Road	Old Lyme	42.43	\$248,300
Aspetuck Land Trust, Inc.	Bellknap II	Weston	20.76	\$521,300
Town of Wallingford	138 Williams Road	Wallingford	40.7	\$435,500
Total:			2626.94	\$14,881,640