



Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

Connecticut Open Space 2025 Annual Report

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



Acknowledgements

[Red-tailed Hawk by Annmarie Goenne](#)
Winner of the Wildlife Category of the
2025 Diana Atwood Johnson OSWA Photo
Contest, held in partnership with the
Connecticut Land Conservation Council.

DEEP Land Acquisition & Management Unit Staff:

- Lindsay Suhr — Office Director
- Brian Florek — Supervisor of Surveys and Mapping
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- Matthew Starr — Property Agent
- Jamie Sydoriak — Environmental Analyst
- Dr. Cameron Clegg — Environmental Analyst
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State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board:

- Amy Paterson (Chair) — Executive Director, Connecticut Land Conservation Council
- Andy Bicking — Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association
- Andrew Inorio — Representative for the LiUNA Local Union 455
- 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, Esq. — Director and President, Bethany Land Trust
- MD Rahman — Senate Deputy President Pro Tempore, Connecticut Senate District 04
- Michelle Royce Williams — Vice President, Connecticut Water
- Rebecca Dahl — Planning Analyst, Office of Policy and Management
- Ronald Napoli — State Representative, CT House District 073
- 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 2025 was a significant step forward. To reach the 21% threshold, an additional 150,812 acres across the state needs to be acquired as open space.

State (DEEP) Open Space:

As of December 31, 2025, DEEP held an estimated 265,830.67 acres of land in its system of Parks, Forests, Wildlife Management and water access areas, or 82.9% 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, 2025, DEEP conservatively estimates that its Partners held 256,568.94 acres, or 72.7 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.

2025 Status Statewide Open Space



DEEP-held: 265,830 ac.
Need: 54,746 ac.

Partner-held: 256,568 ac.
Need: 96,066 ac.

2025 Statewide Open Space Land Acquisitions

In 2025, DEEP acquired 681+ 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 two donations from private landowners. On average DEEP spent \$1,744.98 per acquired acre, and every dollar invested by the state yielded \$2.75 in external funding. With over \$8.7 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 1,793+ acres in 18 towns across the state (Appendix B).

DEEP Land Acquisitions:

5	681+	\$2.75
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	1793+	\$8.7 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

54,000+ acres

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

44,000+ acres

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

660+ Partner Projects

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

\$158+ million

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

Middlesex Land Trust, Inc., was awarded \$364,000 in funding from the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, to protect 145.08 acres of forest and wetlands named the Meshomasic Rattlesnakes Brook Preserve. This large preserve is conveniently located between a large tract of the Meshomasic State Forest and the Town of Portland’s Rattlesnake Brook Preserve. This DEEP-supported acquisition protects the area’s water quality and habitats while expanding the passive recreational opportunities with new hiking trails, bird watching, fishing, and improved hunting access.



2025 DEEP Open Space Acquisition Actions

State Property Acquisition Review

In 2025, DEEP evaluated 27 properties covering over 1,100 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.

New 643-acre Wildlife Management Area Protected in Killingly

This acquisition, dubbed by CT DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes as “a landmark achievement for environmental conservation in Connecticut” added 643 acres of wildlife habitat to CT DEEP’s protection. This property purchase was largely funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pittman-Robertson Grant. The Pittman Robertson Grant Program, built from the Pittman Robertson Act of 1937, provides federal grant funding to state fish and wildlife agencies for habitat restoration, wildlife research, and hunter education programs.

The coldwater basin property includes forests, wetlands, and four lakes ranging from 7 to 41 acres in size, the largest of which is Lake Albert. All four lakes are interconnected by the wetlands on the property that allow the lakes to drain to Quanduck Brook .

The large amount of wetlands supports migratory waterfowl populations, various reptilian and amphibian populations, and wild brook trout which makes this an ideal location for future hunting and fishing along with many other passive recreational uses such as bird-watching, hiking, and wildlife photography.



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 supported by a consultant-led inventory of municipal and private acquisitions so we can understand where we have been successful, but more importantly, where and how future acquisitions can support the quality and accessibility of open spaces.

In late 2025, staff received approval to send requests for proposals to various GIS specialists to develop the inventory of municipal and private open space acquisitions as well as perform inventory quality checks on CT DEEP's current open space inventory and digitize Open Space and Watershed Land Grants and Conservation Easements.

2025 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 2025, 16 projects were financially completed with over \$8.7 million in assistance from the OSWA Grant Program, permanently protecting 1,793+ acres. Additionally, DEEP announced 25 grant awards totaling over \$13.5 million to conserve another 2,272+ acres of open space (Appendix C). DEEP subsequently opened the 28th grant round and will announce those awards in the spring of 2026. OSWA leverages State, local and private funds to create a cooperative open space acquisition program.

Conservation Attempts Finally Successful in Winchester

After years and multiple attempts by different organizations including DEEP, the Winchester Land Trust, Inc., was finally able to secure the 507+ acre tract of land known as Laurel Ridge. This acquisition was supported by both the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program and the federal Highlands Conservation Act Grant funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Laurel Ridge features a long, forested ridge and beautiful viewsheds from both east and west. Streams from within the property feed into Highland Lake and the Still River, eventually feeding into the Farmington River.

Laurel Ridge includes 426 acres of core forest within the property, further adding to protected lands in the area such as DEEP-owned Burr Pond State Park, Platt Hill State Park Scenic Reserve, Highland Lake Water Access, and Paugnut State Forest. Winchester Land Trust also protects smaller parcels of land nearby including the Long Pond Ridge, Carey Point, and Steven’s Preserve.

Within the property are remnants of a demolished flour mill from the 1700s which Winchester Land Trust will install educational signage to highlight the cultural and historical significance of the remains.



2025 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. Since 2007, over \$3.4 m in funding has been used by 22 municipalities to complete projects that include the installation of new plantings, community gardens, access paths, rain gardens, bioswales, and other climate change adaptations. Funding is available to municipalities and non-profit organizations for projects located in distressed municipalities, targeted investment communities, and environmental justice communities.

Since 2007, UGCG has helped 22 MUNICIPALITIES complete 50 PROJECTS with \$3.4+ MILLION in funding assistance

In 2025, two municipalities and four non-profit organizations were awarded a total of \$725,353 in Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) funding from the round that closed in November 2024 (table below). In the funding round that closed December 2025, DEEP received a record number of 20 applications with \$3.2+ million in funding requests. Awards will be announced in spring of 2026.

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	Preston Raid Garden	\$15,000
Town of Vernon	Vernon	Vernon Community Giving Garden	\$21,682
Total:			\$725,353

APPENDIX A

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025

Property Name	Location	Fee Acreage	State Share	Match Share	Cooperators	Purpose of Acquisition
Tri-Lakes	Killingly	642.9	\$1,037,500	\$3,108,750	USFWS Pittman- Robertson	New Wildlife Management Area
Town of Hamden	Hamden	12.71	\$130,000	\$160,000	George Dudley Seymour Trust	Addition to West Rock Ridge State Park
Jacobs	Woodbridge	6.19	\$22,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to West Rock Ridge State Park
Ayer	Franklin	13.87	\$0	\$0	N/A	Addition to Franklin WMA
Hamden Historical Society	Hamden	6	\$0	\$0	N/A	Addition to West Rock Ridge State Park
Total:		681.67	\$1,189,500	\$3,268,750		

APPENDIX B

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants Completed January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acreage	OSWA Grant Amount	Highlands Grant Amount
Aspetuck Land Trust, Inc.	Fratelli Zeta Acquisition	Wilton	11.533	\$34,500	N/A
Town of Bethany	Simpson Preserve	Bethany	50.886	\$248,300	N/A
Town of Hamden	370 Brooksvale Rear	Hamden	41.993	\$432,250	N/A
Aton Forest, Inc.	Haskell Property	Colebrook	39.951	\$117,000	\$45,000
Litchfield Land Trust, Inc.	Putnam Property	Litchfield	105.35	\$422,500	\$162,500
Middlesex Land Trust, Inc.	Meshomasic Rattlesnake Brook Preserve	Portland & East Hampton	145.08	\$364,000	N/A
Borough of Naugatuck	Wilmot Property	Naugatuck	45.184	\$135,000	N/A
The Salisbury Association, Inc.	Tom's Hill	Salisbury	275.6	\$1,592,500	\$612,500
Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy, Inc.	Glen Brook Property	Sherman & Milford	117.26	\$965,250	\$371,250
Southbury Land Trust, Inc.	Silver Beech Property	Southbury	5.199	\$121,485	N/A
Town of Plainville	Valley Water Property	Plainville	47.9	\$325,000	N/A
Winchester Land Trust, Inc.	Laurel Ridge Property	Winchester	507.22	\$1,650,000	\$330,000
Town of East Haddam	Hayward Property	East Haddam	102.73	\$96,900	N/A
South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority	Bis Property	Cheshire & Prospect	77.97	\$188,500	N/A
Warren Land Trust, Inc.	Mountain Lake Road	Warren	149.62	\$1,625,000	\$1,152,250
Warren Land Trust, Inc.	Tanner Farm	Warren	70	\$400,000	\$603,000
Total:			1793.47	\$8,718,185	\$3,276,500

APPENDIX C

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants 2025 Grant Awards Announced

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acreage	OSWA Grant Amount
City of Bristol	Hoppers-Birge Pond Preserve Expansion	Bristol	10.69	\$420,000
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Shiloh Preserve	New London	22.85	\$195,000
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. & The Trust for Public Land	Camp Laurel	Lebanon	352.89	\$1,365,000
Northwest CT Land Conservancy, Inc.	Surdan Mountain	Sharon	49.26	\$1,381,250
Warren Land Trust, Inc.	Sackett Preserve	Warren	135	\$479,375
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Raymond & Althea Main Conservation Area	Ledyard	30.3	\$182,000
Town of Guilford	East River Preserve - West Side	Guilford	20	\$1,592,500
Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust, Inc.	Puhlick Woods	Lebanon	178	\$637,650
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Gary Kincaid Property	North Stonington	100	\$300,000
Kent Land Trust, Inc.	Halsted Lovig Property	Kent	62.2	\$422,500
The Trust for Public Land (Community Land Trust TBD)	Sterling Street Sanctuary	Hartford	1.2	\$172,500
Roxbury Land Trust	Weinberg Property	Roxbury	191	\$929,500
The Salisbury Association, Inc.	Miles Mountain	Salisbury	163.59	\$886,600
Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc.	Cobble Forest	Cornwall	41.78	\$122,200
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Harlow Conservation Area	Waterford	165.3	\$552,500
Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc.	Furnace Brook Forest	Cornwall	90	\$195,000
East Haddam Land Trust, Inc.	R. Smith Connection	East Haddam	14.12	\$70,200
Steep Rock Association	Hidden Valley Expansion: Cornell Parcels	Washington	125.44	\$1,957,800

APPENDIX C

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants 2025 Grant Awards Announced (continued)

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acreage	OSWA Grant Amount
Aspetuck Land Trust	Pointdexter Preserve Addition	Easton	3.57	\$182,250
Wyndham Land Trust, Inc.	Abbott Property	Pomfret	380	\$633,100
Clinton Land Conservation Trust	Killingworth Turnpike Open Space (Greystone)	Clinton	23.57	\$103,350
Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.	Victor & Murray Czczotka & Lucy Lefevre	Griswold	28.13	\$161,250
Guilford Land Conservation Trust	Westwoods West	Guilford	33.46	\$412,750
Town of Berlin	Fontanella Property	Berlin	15.74	\$61,750
Wolcott Land Conservation Trust	Edward & Adelaide Piteo Preserve	Wolcott	34.63	\$104,000
Total:			2272.72	\$13,520,025



Laurel Ridge
Winchester Land Trust, Inc.