

Connecticut State Open Space 2020 Annual Report

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection



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



Winter Wonderland — John M. Joy
Photo taken at Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary, protected by Oxford Land Trust. One of the winners of the 2020 Annual Diana Atwood Johnson OSHA Photo Contest, held in partnership with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council.

Acknowledgements

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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 2020, DEEP and its Partners together held a combined 511,909 acres as public open space, or 76.04 percent towards achieving the total statewide open space acquisition goal.

To reach their goals, DEEP must acquire 58,508 acres and DEEP's Partners must acquire 102,739 acres to reach their open space targets.

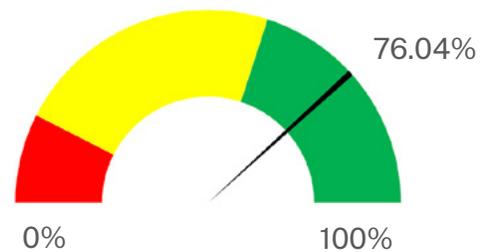
State (DEEP) Open Space:

As of December 31, 2020 DEEP held an estimated 262,068 acres of land in its system of Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management and water access areas, or 81.75 percent of its open space goal. Of this, approximately 239,128 acres have been acquired in fee title. Acquisition of less-than-fee interests are atypical and include the purchase of conservation easements and restrictions.

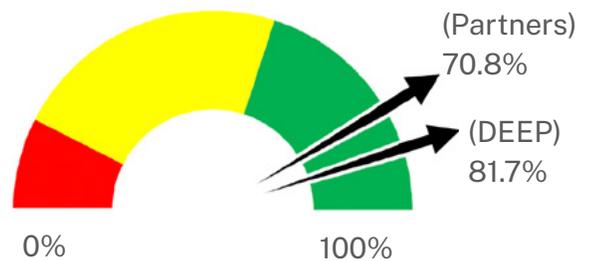
Partner-held Open Space:

As of December 31, 2020, DEEP conservatively estimates that its Partners held 249,841 acres, or 70.85 percent, of their share of the statewide open space goal. Of this, non-profit land conservation organizations held about 67,449 acres, municipalities held 84,242 acres, and water companies held 97,775 acres as open space.

2020 Status Statewide Open Space



Total: 511,909 ac.
Need: 161,301 ac.



DEEP-held: 262,068 ac.
Need: 58,508 ac.

Partner-held: 249,841 ac.
Need: 102,739 ac.

Front cover: John M. Joy Rockhouse Winter Wonderland - Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary, Oxford
Oxford's Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary. Sunrise ride on a snowy morning, on the Red/White trail maintained by the Oxford High School Youth Conservation Corps and the Housatonic Valley Chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association. (Birmingham Water and/or Von Wettberg grants.)

2020 Statewide Open Space Land Acquisitions

In 2020, DEEP acquired 1,614.5 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. These lands were acquired with generous assistance from federal and private funding sources and private donations, leveraging about \$1.81 for every State dollar spent (**Appendix A**).

With over \$3 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 17 projects, protecting 1,175 acres in 14 towns across the state (**Appendix B**).

DEEP Land Acquisitions:

18	1614.5	\$1.81
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:

17	1,175	\$3.41 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:

50,000+ acres preserved as open space under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program.

37,000+ acres protected by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies under the **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program**.

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

\$133+ million provided in State funding to partners under the **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program**.

New Fishing Access Added on the Housatonic River

In December of 2020, over 2 acres of new river frontage property were added along the upper section of the Housatonic River. Using the GE Housatonic River Natural Resources Damages Settlement Agreement Fund, this parcel was purchased from the Housatonic Temple Association in North Canaan. Once the buildings are cleared, the area is to provide public access to the river for fishing and other recreation, possibly including a car top boating access point.



2020 DEEP Open Space Acquisition Actions

State Property Acquisition Review

DEEP evaluated 17 properties covering over 1,900 acres eligible for State purchase through the **Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program**. There are currently over 100 properties covering thousands of acres that have been reviewed and approved for acquisition. Statewide trends saw an increase in demand for property, favoring the sellers and making the acquisition of larger parcels more competitive. Furthermore, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic constrained the number of properties that could be acquired. DEEP was forced to place priority on only the highest priority acquisitions.

Mono Pond State Park Reserve More than Doubles in Size Through RNHTP Acquisitions.

2020 saw a landmark acquisition of the Markell and Inzinga properties in Columbia and Lebanon, more than doubling the size of Mono Pond State Park, and connecting it to the nearby Air Line State Park Trail. The project to acquire the Markell and Inzinga properties, roughly 303 and 99 acres respectively, was a collaborative effort between Federal, State, and municipal forces, as well as the Trust for Public Land.

The Markell Property is a key linkage in a nearly pristine habitat corridor situated between two State Parks and over 200 acres of preserved farmland. It contains a mixed hardwood forest with a series of wetland areas providing habitat for migratory bird species, amphibians, and forest dwelling mammals.

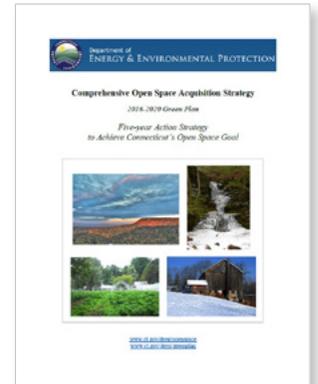
The Inzinga Property is almost entirely forested, contains productive wetlands, is part of the Mint Brook corridor feeding the Salmon River watershed, and has incredible scenic and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Together the two acquisitions add over five miles of interconnected trails, including a series of old carriage roads lined with stonewalls, remnants of an 1820's settlement that was abandoned in the early 20th century.



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. The plan contains additional information about existing open space in the state, grant funding programs, and more.



Looking Ahead — Revising the Green Plan

Required by statute, DEEP is preparing to revise the Green Plan to provide the State and its land conservation partners with an updated assessment of open space since its last version, including progress towards implementing the 5-Year Action Strategy and reaching the 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 Lamont's Executive Order No. 3 on September 3, 2019.

COMING SOON!

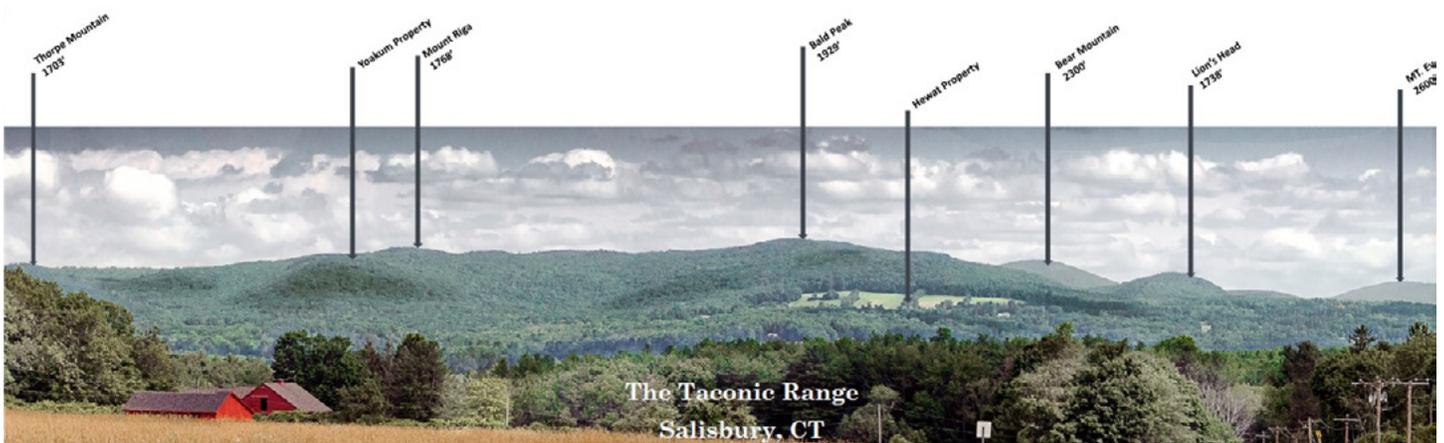
DEEP needs to hear from all stakeholders to develop a planning document that will be the highest value for the State of Connecticut, municipalities, regional planning agencies, land conservation organizations, and the public. Visit www.ct.gov/deep/greenplan to view or download the current Green Plan and look for news and information on how you can provide comments on how to use or improve the next Green Plan.

2020 State Assistance to Land Conservation Partners: OSPA

The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA)

In 2020, 17 projects were financially completed with over \$3.41 million in assistance from the State **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program** (OSWA), permanently protecting 1,175 acres (Appendix B). In the fall of 2020, DEEP announced grant awards totaling \$6.64 million to support protecting another 3,196.6 acres and 31 open space projects submitted to the 23rd grant round (Appendix C). DEEP subsequently opened the 24th grant round and will announce those awards in the fall of 2021. 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.



Yoakum: Mountains, Trout Streams, and Pristine Forest Protected in Salisbury

The 241,170 acre Yoakum Core Forest in Salisbury is located in one of the largest forest blocks (more than 14,000 acres) in the CT-MA-NY region of western New England. The property has ridgelines and several secondary summits of Mount Riga, 600 linear feet along Pettee Brook, a pristine trout stream. The property provides hiking trails and habitat for a rich variety of wildlife, with two types of rare natural communities (acidic rocky summit/outcrop) and four rare species (timber rattlesnake, golden-winged warbler, cerulean warbler, and yellow banded bumblebee). This project was a cooperative effort between DEEP, the Salisbury Association, Inc., and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service Highlands Conservation Act.

2020 State Assistance to Land Conservation Partners: UGCG

The Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG)

In 2020, five (5) municipalities were awarded a total \$701,039 in funding from the State Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) to maintain publicly available green spaces and community gardens (**table below**).

Since 2007, this program initiative has provided over \$1.5 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 may be used towards small garden tool sheds, designing ADA accessible pathways, and procuring materials for garden beds for use by children, people with disabilities, and senior citizens.

Municipal Sponsor	UGCG Project	Grant Award
City of New Haven	Mill River Trail Enhancements	\$50,000
City of Hartford	Affleck Street Community Garden	\$6,900
Town of Windham	Lauter Park Community Gardens	\$69,139
City of Stamford	Community Open Air Pavilion Project	\$175,000
City of Meriden	Portion of Meriden Green Expansion	\$400,000
Total:		\$701,039

Lauter Park Community Gardens in Windham



The Lauter Park community gardens in Willimantic are used and tended by local residents and volunteers, with a portion of fresh produce grown being donated to local kitchens and other places to fight urban food scarcity and insecurity. With the aid of UGCG grants, the Town of Windham and its non-profit project co-sponsor, GROW Windham, plan to enhance the community gardens at Lauter Park, constructing additional shared raised beds and educational class space.



Federal Land Acquisition Grant Programs

In the acquisition of new properties for public use and benefit, DEEP makes use of available Federal grant programs to further leverage State bond funding. Staff at the Department's Unit of Land Acquisition and Management weaves these complementary funding programs, finding parcels which match multiple values criteria, and guiding prospective sellers through the State and Federal land purchasing processes.

The Highlands Conservation Act

The Highlands Conservation Act Grant Program, administered through the US Fish and Wildlife Service, provides 50% matching funds to DEEP or its partners for the acquisition of lands within the Highlands region of Connecticut. The conservation of lands within this region helps preserve core forest habitat, supporting thriving wildlife populations, protect clean drinking water resources, and provide abundant recreational opportunities for the public.



This grant program is an increasingly important asset for DEEP acquisitions within Connecticut's share of the region. Since its inception in 2004, DEEP and its Partners have utilized over \$5,250,000 in funding to protect 2944 acres of open space within the Connecticut Highlands region. In 2020, DEEP managed to leverage \$131,500 in Highlands funds for the purchase of a conservation easement over 95.5 acres owned by the Town of Goshen (**Appendix A**). In addition, Highlands funds were paired with the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grand Program (OSWA) for the purchase of four properties by DEEP's land acquisition partners (**Appendix B**). In total, \$829,000 of Highlands funds were leveraged for DEEP's partners to acquire and protect 484.98 acres of open space.

The George Dudley Seymour Trust Fund

The George Dudley Seymour Trust Fund was created to help the state buy lands for public outdoor recreation and education. These funds are requested to supplement Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program funding for the purchase of such lands. In 2020, DEEP received \$200,000 from this fund to acquire one property (**Appendix A**), resulting in a 25.06 acre addition to Pachaug State Forest in North Stonington.

Pittman-Robertson Act

Enacted in 1937, the Pittman-Robertson Act, makes tax revenue from firearm and ammunition sales available for use by State Fish and Game Agencies for wildlife conservation efforts. In 2020, DEEP leveraged \$2,015,000 in funding to acquire three properties (**Appendix A**), protecting over 510 acres of open space for wildlife conservation and recreation.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Enacted in 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides a 50% match in federal funding for state acquisition projects, and has helped to secure parks, wildlife refuges, rivers, lakes, and community areas across the entire country. In 2020, three properties were acquired with assistance from the LWCF, and are included within the acquisitions for the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program (**Appendix A**). In total, \$664,250 in federal funding was leveraged to acquire over 511 acres in additions to Connecticut's State Forests and Parks.

2020 State Land Encroachment Resolutions

DEEP established and follows an Encroachment Enforcement Response Policy in an effort to preserve and protect lands held in public trust as protected open space. Public Act 06-89 was enacted to better protect public open space by allowing the Department to seek relief and penalize those who encroach upon it. Encroachment means to conduct an activity that damages or alters the land, vegetation, or other features without appropriate permission. The act applies to all publicly held open space, including any land in which the State, municipalities, or a nonprofit land conservation organization holds a conservation easement interest. Under this act, encroachers can be directed to restore, and/or or pay for the restoration of, affected open space areas. Cases of knowing and willful violation can have further damages charged equal to five times the cost of restoration.

In cooperation with other Divisions across the agency, staff at DEEP's Land Acquisition and Management Unit actively assists with identifying, documenting, and addressing known encroachments at lands held as open space by DEEP. DEEP has successfully resolved many of these encroachments. In 2020, notable effort towards encroachment resolutions included work to address unauthorized tree fellings, fence installations, and debris dumping at State Park and Forest lands.

What's an Encroachment on State Land? For example ...



Unauthorized Construction

- Sheds, docks, fences, other structures;
- Building or improving trails, roads, driveways;
- Landscaping;
- Utilities



Alterations

- Destroying or moving stone walls;
- Cutting trees;
- Clearing vegetation;
- Moving or removing boundary markers



Storage/Dumping

- Leaving vehicles;
- Tool depots;
- Material storage;
- Trash or debris piles

Appendix A

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020

Property Name	Town	Fee Acres	Easement Restriction or R.O.W.	State Share	Cooperator Share	Cooperator	Purpose of Acquisition
Baxter	Willington	31.29	N/A	\$0	\$51,000*	William & Patricia Baxter; Goeller Trust	Addition to Kollar WMA
Mellon	Lyme	152.53	N/A	\$0	\$822,000*	Timothy Mellon	Addition to Nehantic State Forest
St. Germaine	Bozrah, Lebanon, Franklin	124.48	N/A	\$0	\$363,000	USFWS (Pittman-Robertson Act)	Addition to Pease Brook WMA
Motherway	North Stonington	25.06	N/A	\$0	\$200,000	George Dudley Seymour Trust	Addition to Pachaug State Forest
Zito Builders	East Haddam	92.83	N/A	\$157,500	\$167,500	USNPS (LWCF); Eight Mile River Wild and Scenic Watershed Coordinating Committee	Addition to Devil's Hopyard State Park
Robinson & Lewis	Canterbury	15.69	N/A	\$94,250	\$94,250	USNPS (LWCF)	Addition to Quinebaug River WMA
Sleeping Giant State Park Association	Hamden	13.26	N/A	\$192,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Sleeping Giant State Park
Fracchi Property (Phase II)	Hebron	178.83	N/A	\$0	\$720,000	USFWS (Pittman-Robertson Act)	Addition to Bishop's Swamp WMA
BMC Land Management	Deep River	12.5	N/A	\$0	\$200,400	BMC Land Management	Addition to Cockaponset State Forest

* approximate fair market value of donated property

Appendix A (Continued)

State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Acquisitions January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020

Property Name	Town	Fee Acres	Easement Restriction or R.O.W.	State Share	Cooperator Share	Cooperator	Purpose of Acquisition
Markell	Columbia and Lebanon	303.1	N/A	\$278,980	\$347,500	USNPS (LWCF); Town of Columbia; Town of Lebanon	Addition to Mono Pond SP
Inzinga	Columbia	99.5	N/A	\$70,870	\$130,000	USNPS (LWCF); Town of Columbia	Addition to Mono Pond SP
Molodich	Sterling	103.26	N/A	\$350,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Pachaug SF
Raccio Properties	Hamden	18.86	N/A	\$75,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to West Rock Ridge SP
Thompson	Lyme	85.36	N/A	\$310,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to Nehantic SF
Stephens & Corsi	Hamden	52.73	N/A	\$550,000	\$0	N/A	Addition to West Rock Ridge SP
Lord	Marlborough	207.68	N/A	\$0	\$932,000	USFWS (Pittman-Robertson Act)	Addition to Salmon River SF
Town of Goshen	Goshen	0	95.48	\$0	\$263,000	USFWS (Highlands); Town of Goshen	Conservation Easement
Housatonic Temple Association	North Canaan	2.03	N/A	\$0	\$140,000	GE Housatonic River Natural Resources Damages Settlement Agreement Fund	New Housatonic River Water Access
Total		1,614.47		\$2,078,600	\$3,752,750		

Appendix B

State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants Financially Completed by DEEP

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	Grant Amount
City of Meriden	Rogoz Property	Berlin	21.70	\$27,690
Watertown Land Trust	Franson Farmland	Watertown	24.80	\$119,250
Guilford Land Conservation Trust	Interior Westwoods Parcel	Guilford	32.20	\$162,500
Canton Land Conservation Trust	45 West Road Rear	Canton	12.10	\$27,500
Avalonia Land Conservancy	Atkinson & Dirlam Properties	Ledyard	228.40	\$697,775
Salisbury Association	Pope Property	Salisbury	78.99	\$136,500
Salisbury Association	Yoakum Property	Salisbury	241.17	\$650,000 (+ \$250,000 Highlands)
Deep River Land Trust	Pratt Cove Marsh	Deep River	8.07	\$104,000
East Haddam Land Trust	Sakolsky	East Haddam	23.23	\$17,500
East Haddam Land Trust	Nichols	East Haddam	86.66	\$170,000
Town of Mansfield	Simpson Family Property	Mansfield	114.65	\$207,000
Sharon Land Trust	D'Alton Property	Sharon	70.37	\$240,000 (+ \$243,500 Highlands)
Cornwall Conservation Trust	Furnace Brook Preserve	Cornwall	107.33	\$404,300 (+ \$155,500 Highlands)
South Central CT Regional Water Authority	Hendrickson Property	Hamden & Bethany	6.67	\$19,600
East Lyme Land Trust	Pattagansett River Watershed Property	East Lyme	37.99	\$179,200
South Central CT Regional Water Authority	DePodesta Property	Hamden	14.05	\$25,000
Cornwall Conservation Trust	Red Mountain Galucci Preserve	Cornwall	66.11	\$225,000 (+ \$180,000 Highlands)
Total			1,174.50	\$3,412,815

Appendix C

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

Project Sponsor	Project Name	Town	Acres	Grant Amount
Norfolk Land Trust	Kopp Property	Norfolk	235	\$328,000
Salisbury Association	Belter Lime Rock Property	Salisbury	114	\$250,000
Colebrook Land Conservancy	Sandy Brook Forest Preserve	Colebrook	146.86	117600
Steep Rock Association, Inc.	Cook Preserve	Washington	65.34	376000
Warren Land Trust, Inc.	Cunningham Road Property	Warren	248	\$400,000
Aspetuck Land Trust, Inc.	18 South Park Avenue Property	Easton	18.7	\$188,000
Sharon Land Trust, Inc.	Von Ahn Farm Property	Sharon	168	\$400,000
Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy, Ripley Inc.	Williams Property, Horse Show Meadow	Litchfield	38.73	\$310,000
Warren Land Trust, Inc.	Tanner Farm Property	Warren	201	\$400,000
Salem Land Trust, Inc.	Ransom Brook House, LLC Property	Salem	55.85	\$66,300
Wyndham Land Trust, Inc.	Townshend Property	Pomfret and Woodstock	355.22	\$234,000
Steep Rock Association, Inc.	Bantam Preserve	Washington	33.17	\$166,500
Steep Rock Association, Inc.	Mount Tom Preserve	Washington	73	\$193,500
Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc.	Music Mountain	Cornwall	98	\$109,500
Guilford Land Conservation Trust, Inc.	Bartlett Land Preserve/Bluff Head Property	Guilford	80	\$127,500
Aspetuck Land Trust, Inc.	Fratelli Zeta Acquisition	Wilton	11.56	\$34,500
Bethany Land Trust, Inc.	Van Epps Preserve	Bethany	6.9	\$23,850
East Lyme Land Trust, Inc.	Pattagansett River Preserve	East Lyme	132	\$400,000
Total			2,081.4	\$4,125,250