



Department of
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy

2016-2020 Green Plan

Section IV. Land Conservation Funding Programs in Connecticut

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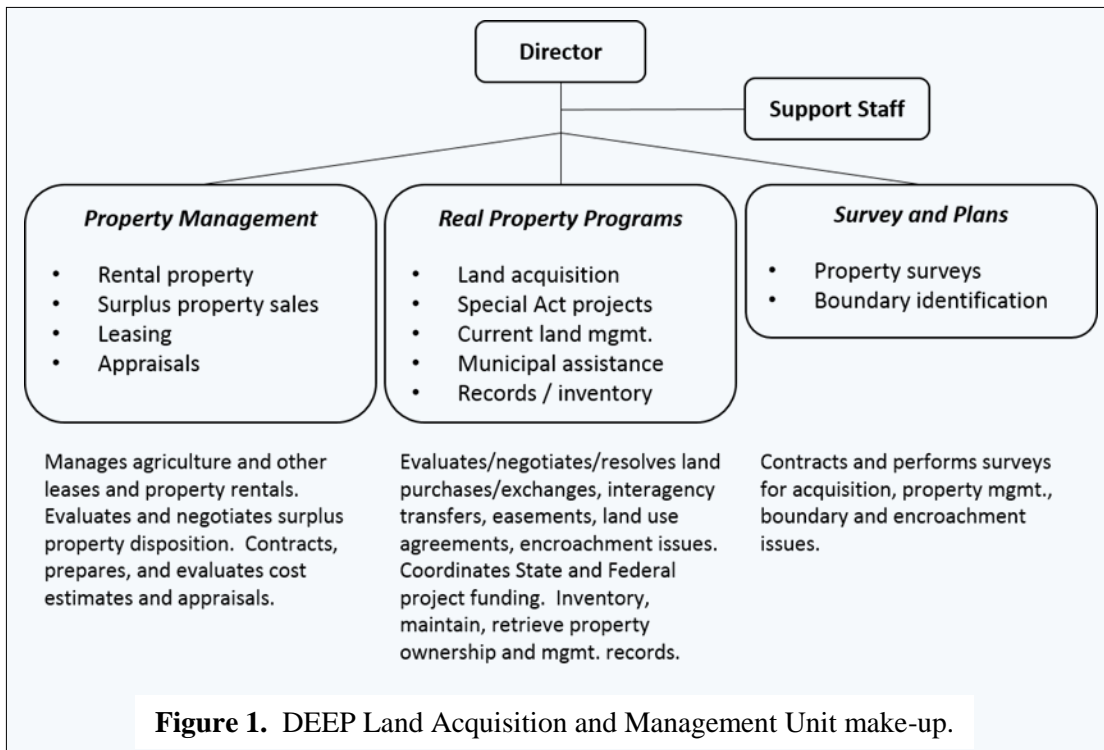
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IV. Land Conservation Funding Programs in Connecticut

There are three primary land acquisition programs administered by the State of Connecticut. Two of these programs are administered by DEEP while the other is through the State Department of Agriculture. The principle goal of each program is the conservation of undeveloped land. Within the Office of Constituent Affairs and Land Management, DEEP’s Land Acquisition and Management Unit (LAM) implements the agency’s open space policies and programs (Figure 1).



A. State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

The [Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program](#) (RNHTP) is DEEP’s main program for purchasing or conserving lands that add to the State’s system of Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Management Areas for conservation and public use and benefit. The program was established as a pilot project in 1986 with a \$2 million bond authorization and has since become permanent.

The purpose of the RNHTP is to acquire lands that represent the ecological diversity of Connecticut, including natural features such as rivers, mountains, coastal systems, and other natural areas, in order to ensure the preservation and conservation of such land for recreational, scientific, educational, cultural, and aesthetic purposes²⁴.

Between 2007 and 2015, about 5,865 acres in 46 towns were protected through the RNHTP (Table 1). Matching contributions by federal agencies, municipalities, and private and non-profit organizations saved the state over \$16 million in acquisition costs during this time.

Table 1. Summary of projects acquired by DEEP under the State Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program between 2007 and 2015. Acreages are for fee simple acquisitions and easements or right of ways are not included. Cooperator share includes the value of land donated to the State for open space conservation.

Year	Projects	Fee Acres	State Cost	Cooperator Share	Cost per Acre	Average Parcel Size (ac)
2007	21	854.72	\$4,293,205	\$450,000	\$5,549	40.70
2008	18	1,300.84	\$16,537,573	\$1,441,879	\$13,821	72.27
2009	4	118.62	\$270,000	\$1,059,620	\$11,209	29.66
2010	4	63.72	\$57,250	\$620,485	\$10,636	15.93
2011	9	557.63	\$6,436,750	\$1,248,250	\$13,782	61.96
2012	8	327.73	\$100,000	\$1,040,750	\$3,481	40.97
2013	6	467.24	\$27,862	\$2,045,138	\$4,437	77.87
2014	8	367.55	\$0	\$1,875,190	\$5,102	45.94
2015	13	1,807.19	\$4,737,000	\$10,528,408	\$8,447	139.01
Totals	91	5,865.25	\$32,429,640	\$16,788,175	\$8,997	64.45

²⁴ (CGS) Sec. 23-73

The State's land acquisition process under the RNHTP occurs through purchase or private donation in several ways including fee simple and easements for access, use, and/or conservation. While there are other land protection methods available, such as the right of first refusal, land exchanges with other public agencies or private non-profit organizations, or the transfer of development rights, these are less frequently used by DEEP.

A potential property for acquisition by the State must be for sale on the open market or the property owner must have expressed interest in the sale or donation of the property. As parcels of land are made available by willing sellers, DEEP assesses their compatibility with the framework and open space priorities established in the Green Plan. A property acquired under the RNHTP should possess one or more of the following:

1. High value for recreation, forestry, fishery, or wildlife conservation, especially if it is near a population center;
2. A prime natural feature of the Connecticut landscape, such as a major river, its tributaries and watershed, mountainous territory, an inland or coastal wetland, a significant littoral or estuarine or aquatic site, or any other important geologic feature;
3. Habitat for native plant or animal species listed as threatened or endangered or of special concern, particularly areas identified as essential habitat for such species;
4. A relatively undisturbed outstanding example of a native ecological community which is now uncommon; or
5. Is threatened with conversion to incompatible uses or contains sacred sites or archaeological sites of state or national importance.

Using a statewide acquisition priority rating system, potential properties for acquisition under the RNHTP are reviewed by a representative panel of experts on water resources, recreation, fisheries, and wildlife throughout the agency to fully evaluate and weight the conservation attributes of each individual parcel.

This rating system, which ranks parcels on a number of factors, such as the factors above, the value and cost, and whether the proposed acquisition borders existing state property, provides the most objective means possible of ensuring that DEEP acquires the most important ecological and recreational places. Properties that service two or more functions rank highly on the rating system.

DEEP relies on bond funding to sustain land acquisitions for open space. Since 1998, the State Bond Commission has allocated more than \$177 million towards the RNHTP. Yearly funding levels for the RNHTP peaked from 2000-2002 following the year the statutory goal to protect 21 percent of the state was established, but have diminished since (Figure 2).

As a result of declining funding allocations for DEEP land acquisitions, the State has had difficulties keeping on track to reaching its share of responsibility for Connecticut's total open space goal. Securing continual funding for the RNHTP will remain a priority for DEEP. Reaching Connecticut's open space goals will require effective cooperation among all land use planning and conservation partners to leverage resources.

With the adoption of this Green Plan, and as discussed in Section VI, DEEP will be working to evaluate lands of high-conservation or recreational value. Equipped with this information, DEEP can be more proactive and will seek to contact land owners to determine if they are interested in selling their land for conservation purposes.

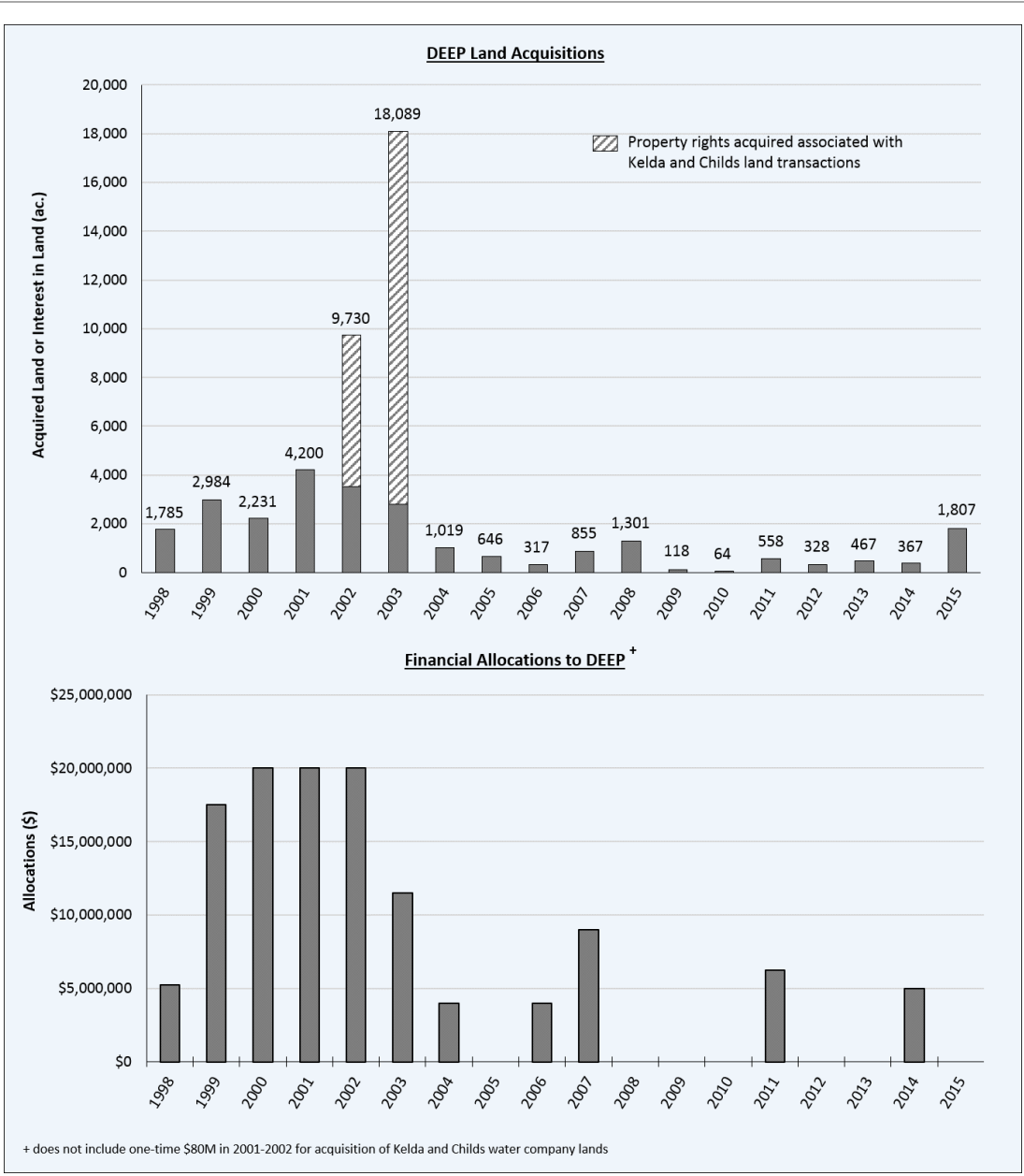


Figure 2. DEEP annual acquisitions for conservation (top) and State financial allocations (bottom) under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program since 1998. Acreage includes fee simple and conservation easement acquisitions.

I. Cooperators Provision of the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

Partnering with cooperators, including municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, utility companies, and federal and other State agencies, is beneficial to the State for acquiring lands for open space purposes. Cost-sharing cooperators allow DEEP to reduce property acquisition expenses through a statutory provision²⁵ of the RNHTP that requires a minimum investment from cooperators before the state enters into such agreements.

Designed to stretch State funding for new acquisitions and reduce stewardship costs, the Cooperators provision offers a mutual benefit between the State and one or more of its land conservation partners. When the State and a partner (e.g., a municipality or land trust) have a common desire to protect a certain property but either may not have the resources available to do so, this provision allows the State to enter into stewardship agreements between partners, thus sharing the costs of acquisition and land management.

The responsibility for managing properties acquired in this manner is negotiated between DEEP and the contributing partner(s) involved in the transaction, however, the property is owned by the State. In the case of land donations to the State, a cooperator may steward the property while the State maintains ownership. For example, under a stewardship agreement, the Town of Columbia and DEEP jointly manage Mono Pond for natural resource conservation and public passive recreation.

With an understanding that DEEP seeks to actively maintain lands for certain uses such as passive recreation and wildlife habitat, contributing partners must enter into a reasonable management agreement with DEEP regarding specific recreational and other activities allowed on a property bought under the provision program.

²⁵ (CGS) Sec. 23-79

Unique Conservation Partnerships in Connecticut
Coalition Conserves Coastal Grasslands in Stonington

Land conservationists led by DEEP and the Avalonia Land Conservancy worked with the Crowley family to jointly acquire a 16-acre coastal grassland on Wequetequock Cove in the Town of Stonington. The property is adjacent to DEEP's Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, Connecticut's largest and most ecologically significant coastal wildlife management area. The grassland was part of the Crowley family's dairy farm which ceased operation in 1958.

DEEP's coastal land conservation planning process identified the Crowley property in 2005 as an acquisition priority to enhance the protection of Barn Island WMA. The grassland was acquired in 2011, and abuts 48 acres of saltmarsh and coastal forest that was acquired from the Crowley family and added to Barn Island WMA in 2009.

The property's \$1,512,500 purchase price was largely funded by a \$705,000 grant from the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service Grassland Reserve Program (now the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program), which requires the property to be maintained as grassland and at times of the year that allow ground-nesting birds to nest successfully. Contributions from an additional eight partnering organizations included DEEP, Avalonia Land Conservancy, Stonington Land Trust, Town of Stonington Conservation Commission, New Haven Bird Club, Connecticut Ornithological Society, Audubon Connecticut, and Sarah Ann Martin Trust.

The collective efforts of these partners permanently protected important lands that provide critical breeding habitat for declining, state-listed songbirds such as the bobolink and saltmarsh sparrow. Connecticut's tidal marshes are home to half of the world's only breeding population of saltmarsh sparrows. Part of a larger 350-acre tidal marsh complex, the property includes the fringes of a 21-acre saltmarsh that is slowly migrating upland into the field in response to sea-level rise at Fishers Island Sound.

Because of the rapid loss of suitable breeding habitat as a result of sea-level rise along the eastern seaboard, the saltmarsh sparrow has been targeted as a conservation priority and may be proposed for federal species conservation listing in the near future.

B. State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

The DEEP-administered [Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program](#) (OSWA) leverages state, local, and private funds to create a cooperative open space acquisition program for Connecticut. This program was initiated in 1998 after the General Assembly followed through with a recommendation made by the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on Open Space, which was organized to examine ways to achieve the then-new state open space goal.

Through OSWA, DEEP awards grants to municipalities and land trusts for the acquisition of open space and to water companies for the acquisition of Class I and II watershed lands²⁶. OSWA is funded by state bonding and the Community Investment Act, a program enacted in 2005 with the passage of [Public Act No. 228](#) to create a dedicated funding source to support four public policy priorities: open space, agricultural preservation, historic preservation, and affordable housing.

Since 1998, DEEP has awarded over \$120 million in open space grant funding towards the protection of over 32,000 acres and 18 urban green and community gardens in 130 cities and towns. Between 2007 and 2015, nearly 13,000 acres in over 51 towns were protected with over \$53 million in funding from OSWA (Table 2). Over 100 acres were protected nearby urban communities, thereby providing public open space access to Connecticut’s more densely populated places.

²⁶ (CGS) Sec. 7-131d

Table 2. Summary of projects closed under the State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program: 2007-2015.			
Year	Projects Closed	Acres Protected	Grant Amount
2007	31	1,720.79	\$6,965,235
2008	43	1,909.36	\$11,085,820
2009	17	1,452.99	\$5,799,228
2010	26	1,316.01	\$6,887,200
2011	23	1,603.67	\$7,560,342
2012	11	740.33	\$2,045,478
2013	15	1,230.88	\$2,896,150
2014	16	1,541.53	\$3,807,960
2015	19	1,424.46	\$6,098,633
Totals	201	12,940.02	\$53,145,779

In return for grants, the State of Connecticut receives a permanent conservation and public access easement on property acquired through OSWA to ensure that the property is protected and available to residents as open space in perpetuity. Where development rights are to be purchased, the State will become an equal holder of those rights as a substitute for the easement. In the case of land acquired for water supply protection, a water company may jointly hold an easement with the State or a non-profit organization.

Class I watershed land is sometimes exempt from the public access requirement for health and safety reasons. DEEP is also willing to accept limited public access, at the discretion of the Commissioner, when a conservation easement is purchased on land where general public access would be disruptive of agricultural activity.

The OSWA provides municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies with up to 65 percent of either fair market value of development rights or purchase price for property. Projects in distressed municipalities²⁷ or targeted investment communities are provided up to 75 percent of the purchase price (Table 3).

²⁷ Defined in (CGS) Sec. 32-9p(b). A current listing of these communities can be found [here](#).

The passage of [Public Act No. 15-23](#) expanded DEEP's grant awarding policies. Any potential award grantee may use an OSWA grant and a federal grant to fund up to 90 percent of the total cost of fair market value of a project acquisition. When certain conditions exist, the Commissioner may authorize a grantee to use OSWA grant funding and any funds made available by the federal government to fund 100 percent of the fair market value of a project²⁸.

Grants under OSWA are made for the purchase of land that is one or more of the following:

1. Valuable for recreation, forestry, fishing, conservation of wildlife or natural resources;
2. A prime natural feature of the state's landscape, including, but not limited to, a shoreline, a river, its tributaries and watershed, an aquifer, mountainous territory, ridgelines, an inland or coastal wetland, a significant littoral or estuarine or aquatic site or other important geological feature;
3. Habitat for native plant or animal species listed as threatened, endangered or of special concern;
4. A relatively undisturbed outstanding example of a native ecological community which is now uncommon;
5. Important for enhancing and conserving water quality;
6. Valuable for preserving local agricultural heritage; or
7. For cases involving water companies, eligible to be classified as Class I or Class II watershed land.

²⁸ (CGS) Section 7-131g(c)

Table 3. DEEP approval of Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grants.

Grant Sponsor	Acquisition Purpose	Grant Amount Not to Exceed*
Municipality	Open space	65% of fair market value
Municipality	Class I & Class II water supply	65% of fair market value
Distressed municipality or targeted investment community +	Open space	75% of fair market value
Distressed municipality or targeted investment community +	Resource enhancement or protection	50% of cost of such work
Nonprofit land conservation organization	Open space or watershed protection	65% of fair market value
Non-profit land conservation organization and water company (If land is located within a distressed or targeted community)	Open space or watershed protection	75% of fair market value
Water Company	Class I & Class II water supply	65% of fair market value

* Represent the maximum grant award. Awards may be reduced to a lesser percentage or may be reduced to not exceed an administrative cap.

+ A current listing of these communities is found [here](#).

Urban Green and Community Garden Grants

Due to a renewed focus on urban green space and community gardens, distressed municipalities and targeted investment communities are eligible to receive grants to develop or enhance urban open space for public enjoyment and/or environmental education. The promotion of open space in an urban setting may include but it may not be limited to the development of a community garden or reclaiming and enhancing existing open space to allow public use.

Awards are given to those projects that demonstrate the highest ability to benefit urban communities in close proximity to population centers. Since 2007, UGCG has granted over \$1 million in cities including Bridgeport, Bristol, Enfield, Hamden, Hartford, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Putnam, South Norwalk, and Windham. These grants funded the creation or enhancement of education centers, greenhouses, and ADA-accessible walkways and raised bed gardens for children, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens.

Every project completed with funding assistance from OSWA and the Urban Green and Community Garden Grant programs contribute to the conservation of environmental and cultural resources, ensure universal access whenever possible, and enhance the quality of life of the state and local communities.

I. The Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board

Established by statute and commissioned by the General Assembly, the Recreational and Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board (Review Board) plays a supportive role in advancing the State towards its open space goals²⁹. The Review Board convenes several times a year to review DEEP grant selection criteria and policies, provide guidance and review of land protection strategies including the Green Plan, and make recommendations to the Commissioner on funding open space grant proposals.

The Review Board also evaluates on an on-going basis the current cost-sharing formula for open space grants and the rules regarding eligibility for the State Urban Green and Community Garden grant program. The purpose of these evaluations is to ensure that important open space conservation projects are not lost to an inability for partners to fund the required local cost-share match.

Lastly, by promoting public participation and investigating the State's conveyance process, the Review Board also serves to ensure that dedicated state-owned open space lands are protected and maintained as lands of high conservation value for natural resource and public use and benefit.

²⁹ (CGS) Sec. 7-131e(b)

C. Federal Land Acquisition Funding Programs

The federal programs discussed below are only a sample of the funding assistance programs that exist to aid the State and its land conservation partners in open space acquisition.

All programs are subject to final congressional appropriations action. DEEP encourages its partners to explore these funding opportunities and more.

Because application requirements may differ among programs, should DEEP's partners choose to apply for federal funding in addition to a State open space grant, they should make sure they understand and fulfill any requirements necessary for those programs, as well as those for the State open space grant.

Partners should also exercise caution to ensure that acceptance of federal funding would not place a restriction on the property that could be in conflict with the State's conservation and public access easement requirements.

Caps Raised for Open Space Projects Funded by Combined State and Federal Grants

Historically, under the State's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, the combined amount of federal and state funds used to acquire open space land could not exceed 70 percent of the total cost of fair market value of an acquisition project.

With the passage of new legislation in 2015, should an awardee of a state grant have the opportunity to combine their grant funds with a federal grant award, the total grant, i.e., the combined amount of federal and state funds, can fund up to 90 percent of the total cost of a project.

Moreover, when certain conditions exist, DEEP may authorize a grantee to use grant funding and any funds made available by the federal government to fund 100 percent of the fair market value of a project.

These new caps should encourage DEEP's conservation partners to pursue federal grant matching dollars and help them reach their portion of the state open space goal.

I. Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program

Organization / Agency: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (NOAA-OCRM), administered by DEEP's Office of Long Island Sound Programs.

Program Purpose: To protect important coastal and estuarine areas that have significant conservation, recreation, ecological, historical, or aesthetic values, or that are threatened by conversion from their natural or recreational state to other uses, giving priority to lands which can be effectively managed and protected and that have significant ecological value³⁰.

Eligibility: Available program funds are administered through a competitive state grant program. In order to receive CELCP coastal land acquisition funding through the state grant program, coastal states are expected to:

- Develop a [State CELCP Plan](#) for approval by NOAA-OCRM;
- Solicit land acquisition project proposals from stakeholders (e.g., coastal municipalities, land trusts, state agencies) consistent with the conservation priorities outlined in its CELCP Plan;
- Nominate its highest priority coastal land acquisition projects for review by a national project review selection committee; and
- Successfully compete with other coastal state land acquisition project proposals pursuant to a national review committee's ranking process.

Success in Connecticut:

The East River Marsh Complex is an estuarine embayment within the Long Island Sound estuary, one of only 28 estuaries with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program. In 2009, the Town of Guilford purchased approximately 631 acres of open space within this complex, completing one of the largest coastal land projects in the history of the State's coastal management program.

Now known as the East River Preserve, the purchase was significant not only for its size, but also for the protection of coastal forest, inland wetlands, tidal marshes, open fields, and passive recreational use along the East River. Of the 631 acres, 48 acres are protected under two conservation easements jointly held by DEEP. The property was acquired with the assistance of a \$3 million grant from the federal CELCP.

³⁰ Public Law 107-77

II. Long Island Sound Study Program

Organization / Agency: A partnership among the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the States of Connecticut and New York.

Program Purpose: The [Long Island Sound Study](#) (LISS) administers several grant programs aimed at uniting a wide range of government agencies, universities, businesses, and community groups in protecting the Sound, giving priority to issues surrounding coastal and estuarine land acquisition and restoration, management planning, water quality monitoring, and public involvement and education.

Eligibility: Depends on the specific LISS grant program, but all projects must implement the goals and recommendations contained in the [Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan for Long Island Sound](#). For example, for the Futures Fund, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and state, tribal, and local governments are allowed to apply.

Success in Connecticut:

Table 4. Selected State land acquisitions made with assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Long Island Sound Study grants.*					
Year Purchased	Property Name	Town	Grant Award	Acres	Purpose of Acquisition
2009	Crowley I	Stonington	\$650,000	48	Addition to Barn Island Wildlife Management Area
2010	Sheep Farm and Fort Hill Brook Ecosystem Preservation	Groton	\$82,200	63	Cultural heritage and wildlife habitat protection
2010	Griswold Airport	Madison	\$260,000	17	Adjacent with tidal wetlands at Hammonasset Beach State Park
2011	Matson	Stonington	\$250,000	6	Addition to Barn Island Wildlife Management Area
2013	Hansell / Olsen	Voluntown / North Stonington	\$172,138	101	Addition to Pachaug State Forest
2013	Sciongay	Westbrook and Clinton	\$1,200,000	149	Long Island Sound and public water access protection

* Title to properties acquired not necessarily held by DEEP.

III. Highland Conservation Act Grant Program

Organization / Agency: The U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service, administered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Program Purpose: The [Highland Conservation Act](#) provides funding for the acquisition of lands or interest in land that are important for the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources of the Highlands Region in the states of Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The Connecticut Highlands is a triangle around the northwest corner bounded by the state lines to the west and north, from Torrington to Danbury.

Eligibility: The Highland states, or any agency or department of any Highlands state with authority to own and manage land for conservation purposes, may apply to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for acquisition project funding. Applicants may submit individually or jointly for partnership projects. Projects must be consistent with areas identified in the [Connecticut and Pennsylvania 2010 Update](#) as having high resource value.

Success in Connecticut:

Table 5 lists completed acquisition projects in Connecticut which were funded in part by the Highland Conservation Act grants. No funding was allocated for any Highland states in federal fiscal years 2011, 2013, or 2014. In 2015, DEEP was approved for \$750,000 from the program, which the agency is currently allocating towards the acquisitions of the Benton Hill Preserve in Sharon and the West Aspetuck Wetlands in Kent. In various stages of the acquisition process from negotiation to closing, these properties are both located within the program’s “Head of the Highlands Project Area.” DEEP continues to prepare high-ranking projects for future grant application submissions.

Year Purchased	Project Name	Town	Acres	Fee or Easement	Grant Award	Total Purchase Price
2008	Deluca	Cannan and Cornwall	308	Fee	\$492,750	\$3,300,000
2008	Naromi	Sherman	80	Easement	\$246,100	\$746,100
2009	Ethel Walker	Simsbury	49	Easement	\$241,666	\$1,890,000
2010	Girl Scout Camp Iwatka	Norfolk	317	Easement	\$157,500	\$315,000
2010	Erich Woods	Winchester	261	Easement	\$170,100	\$910,000
2014	Girl Scout Camp Francis	Kent	249	Easement	\$520,000	\$1,040,000

IV. Land and Water Conservation Fund

Organization / Agency: The U.S. National Park Service, administered by DEEP.

Program Purpose: Provides matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities (as well as funding for shared federal land acquisition and conservation strategies).

The program is intended to create and maintain high quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the nation. States are required to spend their allotted amounts within three years, otherwise it is returned to the federal government for other uses.

Eligibility: When federal funding is authorized, states including Connecticut receive an annual allocation of grant funds based on a national formula. An Open Project Selection Process is developed by States in order to solicit, rank, and select projects within their borders for nomination to the highly competitive project selection cycle.

To be eligible for grants, States must prepare and regularly update a statewide recreation plan. Connecticut's [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#) was submitted to the National Park Service in 2011.

Success in Connecticut:

Since 1965, the NPS has awarded Connecticut over \$64.3 million in Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants. In 2008, DEEP purchased approximately 143 acres at the former Sunrise Resort in East Haddam with over \$1.9 million in grant funding from the LWCF. The property would become an addition to Machimoodus State Park and protects over 4,700 feet of additional frontage along the Salmon River.

Connecticut's LWCF grant balance in 2013 (\$2,084,408) was used towards the purchase of land or interest in land in 2014 and 2015: "The Preserve," (\$1,400,000) a nearly 1,000-acre coastal forest that DEEP, the Town of Old Saybrook, The Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, the Essex Land Trust, and other conservation groups collaborated to protect, and the Saner Property in Marlborough (\$684,408). The Saner Property, purchased in fee and added to the Salmon River State Forest, provides recreational opportunities and protection of a major river tributary.

V. Recreational Trails Program

Organization/Agency: The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, administered through DEEP’s Parks Division.

DEEP expanded the scope of its [Recreational Trails Program](#) (RTP) under terms of Public Act 15-190, which allowed the agency to provide funding for a full range of multi-use trails and greenways projects. This legislation also expanded eligibility for grants so that non-profit organizations are able to receive funds under this program.

Program Purpose: Funds awarded through this program may be used for locally supported trails and trail systems, bikeways, and multiuse paths, including the creation of trails and pathways accessible to authorized motorized vehicle users and people with disabilities. Grant money can be allocated for a variety of purposes, including planning, design, land acquisition, construction, and publications for bikeways, walkways, and greenways, as well as for equipment and trail amenities, such as parking lots, toilet buildings, signs, and benches.

Eligibility: Awards may be made to any private non-profit organization, municipality, federal agency, or tribal government. Grant applications are reviewed by and selected for award by the Connecticut Greenways Council.

Success in Connecticut:

In early 2016, DEEP awarded \$5.8 million for [38 projects](#) to build, expand, or enhance greenways and multi-use trails through its most recent RTP grant round. Table 6 shows a selection of RTP grants made by DEEP to various non-profit groups and a municipality. Additional funded projects can be found by visiting DEEP’s RTP webpage.

Table 6. Recent grants awarded by DEEP under the U.S. Federal Highway Administration’s National Recreational Trails Program.					
Applicant	Year	Project	Federal Share	State/ Local Share	Total Project Cost
Town of Cheshire	2010	3,500-ft extension of the Farmington Canal Trail / East Coast Greenway	\$250,000	\$1,425,000	\$1,675,000
Save Ocean Beach, Inc.	2011	Installation of a 1,000-ft. ADA-compliant connector trail along Alewife Cove	\$43,320	\$10,830	\$54,150
The Last Green Valley, Inc.	2011	To design a network of accessible “blueway” waterfront trails	\$87,100	\$21,775	\$108,875
Town of Colchester	2012	For Airline State Park Trail trailhead parking lot and driveway improvements	\$20,000	\$5,000	\$25,000

D. Working Farm and Forest Programs

I. Forest Legacy Program

Organization / Agency: The U.S. Forest Service, administered through DEEP's Forestry Division with assistance from Land Acquisition and Management Unit.

Program Purpose: Protects working forest lands from conversion to non-forest uses by assisting landowners in placing conservation easement restrictions on their forests, and on the rare occasion, for the purchase of forest land outright.

Eligibility: Property must be a working forest that protects water quality, wildlife habitat, forest products, outdoor recreation, and other public benefits within a designated Forest Legacy Area, threatened by development or conversion to non-forest uses, abut or in close proximity to existing protected spaces, have other unique qualities such as a viewshed or known population of rare, threatened, or endangered species.

The USFS may fund up to 75% of program costs, with at least 25% coming from private, state or local sources (USFS 2014). Projects must have a Forest Stewardship Plan in place before an acquisition closing.

Success in Connecticut:

In addition to the projects listed in the Table 7, DEEP's Forestry Division was approved for the allocation of \$4.42 million in grants during 2015 and 2016 towards the purchase of conservation easements over 1,553 acres of land which comprise the "Whip-Poor-Will Woods Tract." This landscape-scale conservation effort by seven private landowners will increase protected land in the Stafford, Connecticut area by 10 percent, expanding on the existing abutting, or indirectly abutting, 12,960 acres of protected lands. DEEP is currently in various stages of acquiring the seven properties of the Whip-Poor-Will Woods Tract.

Table 7. Completed USFS-Forest Legacy Tracts in Connecticut as of September 30, 2014.

Tract Name	Year Acquired	Fee or Easement	Acres	Purchase Price	Federal Payment Amount
Maplewood Farm	1995	Easement	172	\$210,000	\$210,000
Great Mountain Forest (2 tracts)	2003	Fee & Easement	5,528	\$5,453,000	4,089,000
Housatonic	2000	Fee	204	\$410,000	\$0
Skiff Mountain (6 tracts)	2009	Easement	705	\$8,445,000	\$1,733,000
Pootatuck	2005	Fee	45	\$312,000	\$0
Nepaug	1999	Fee	27	\$45,000	\$0
Mattatuck	1999	Fee	55	\$170,000	\$0
Naugatuck	1999	Fee	27	\$85,000	\$0
Shenipsit	2000	Fee	311	\$597,000	\$0
Salmon River	2000	Fee	158	\$315,000	\$0
Meshomasic (3 tracts)	1999-2000	Fee	128	\$260,000	\$0
Peaceful Hill	2005	Easement	35	\$217,000	\$163,000
Pine Brook	1999	Easement	126	\$100,000	\$100,000
Stonehouse Brook (7 tracts)	2005	Easement	478	\$795,000	\$596,000
Pogmore	1995	Easement	53	\$80,000	\$80,000
Tulmeadow Farm	2011	Easement	73	\$2,830,000	\$1,415,000
Totals:			8,125	\$20,324,000	\$8,386,000

II. Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs

The following are selected programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) agency to enhance and protect farmland, forestland, and other lands for food production and environmental conservation and benefit.

A. Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Program Purpose: Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the [Regional Conservation Partnership Program \(RCPP\)](#) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It is not a grant program, but promotes coordination between NRCS and partners to deliver assistance to agricultural producers and private landowners.

Assistance is delivered in accordance with the rules of the NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#), and [Healthy Forests Reserve Program \(HFRP\)](#); and in certain areas, the Watershed Operations and Flood Prevention Program.

Applicants identify the specific conservation activity and the appropriate covered program for outcome delivery. For example, to achieve wildlife habitat and agricultural viability objectives, easements through ACEP may be the appropriate program, or in combination with EQIP and CSP. Upon selection of final proposals, NRCS works with lead partners to develop and finalize Partnership Agreements to resource and achieve objectives.

Eligibility: A range of partners are eligible to submit proposals, including agricultural or silvicultural producers, an institution of higher education, or non-profit organization with a history of working with producers. Successful RCPP proposals will bring an array of financial and technical capabilities to projects, will demonstrate experience with working effectively and collaboratively with agricultural producers and private forest landowners, and will present innovative, sustainable, and measurable approaches to achieving conservation goals.

Success in Connecticut:

Table 8. Projects with partners or lead partners in Connecticut and funding under the USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

Funding Year	Project Name	Lead Partner	Number of Partners	NRCS Investment
2015/16	Path to Reduce Pathogens in CT Agricultural Runoff	University of Connecticut	4	\$669,000
2015/16	The Young Forest Initiative for At-Risk Species	Wildlife Management Institute	12	\$5,200,000
2014/15	Long Island Sound Watershed RCPP	Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation	7	\$10,000,000
2014/15	Achieving Agricultural Water Security in Connecticut Through RCPP	University of Connecticut	7	\$400,000
2014/15	Improving Soil Health & Water Quality in the Thames River Watershed	The Last Green Valley, Inc.	4	\$400,000
Total				\$16,669,000

B. Healthy Forests Reserve Program

Program Purpose: [The Healthy Forests Reserve Program](#) (HFRP) assists landowners, on a voluntary basis, in restoring, enhancing, and protecting forestland resources on private lands through easements, 30-year contracts and 10-year cost-share agreements. The objectives of HFRP are to promote the recovery of endangered and threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act, improve plant and animal biodiversity, and enhance carbon sequestration.

Eligibility: Applicants can enroll into 10-year forestland restoration agreements and 30-year or permanent easements for specific conservation actions. Applicants must provide proof of land ownership, or a tenant must provide written concurrence from their landowner of tenancy, for the period of the program restoration agreement or conservation easement.

Cost-Share: NRCS may contribute up to 100% of the fair market value of the land enrolled during the period the land is subject to a conservation easement, less the fair market value of the land encumbered by the easement.

C. Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Program Purpose: The [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) consolidated three former NRCS programs with the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill: the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Grassland Reserve Program (NRCS 2014). It provides financial and technical assistance to purchase conservation easements that protect active agricultural lands and wetland conservation values.

Eligibility: Applicants must have farmland, wetland, or grassland protection plans in place, and they enter into cooperative agreements with the NRCS for the management of these lands. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component of the program, NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments, and private non-profit organizations protect active agricultural lands. Land eligible for agricultural easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and non-industrial private forest land.

Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps restore, protect, and enhance enrolled wetlands for the enhancement of wildlife habitat, water quality, and opportunities for educational and passive recreational activities. There are several easement and compensation options available for private landowners and Indian tribes to protect wetlands. Additionally, NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement, including appraisal, survey, and recording fees.

Cost-Share: Under the Agricultural Land component, NRCS may contribute up to 50% of the fair market value of a conservation easement.

IV. Connecticut State Farmland Preservation Program

Organization / Agency: The Connecticut State Department of Agriculture.

Program Purpose: Protects active farms with the best and most productive agricultural land. It also leases to farmers state-owned agricultural lands with the cooperation of other agencies that may have custody and control of such lands.

Eligibility: Among other criteria, private landowners may apply if their property is an active farm operation, includes a minimum of 30 acres of cropland or is adjacent to a larger parcel, meets a minimum criteria for amount of prime and important farmland soils, and is nearby other active farms. The state may pay up to 100% of the value of the property's development rights, and applicants must meet requirements of the program if federal funding will be used as part of the sale.

Success in Connecticut:

As of December 2015, the Farmland Preservation Program has helped the Department of Agriculture acquire the development rights over more than 41,500 acres on 315 farms. Between 2007 and 2013, 69 farms and over 8,000 acres of active and productive farmland were protected (Table 9). More than half of the lands protected have soils classified as prime and important farmland soils.

Year	Number of Farms	Acres	Cost
2007	11	1,186	\$5,504,372
2008	7	675	\$3,785,198
2009	10	1,370	\$7,179,659
2010	15	1,228	\$6,955,585
2011	16	1,969	\$11,922,061
2012	5	610	\$4,165,574
2013	5	1,170	\$2,738,178
Totals	69	8,208	\$42,250,627