

Open Space Report to the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee and the State Bond Commission

August 2024

Overview

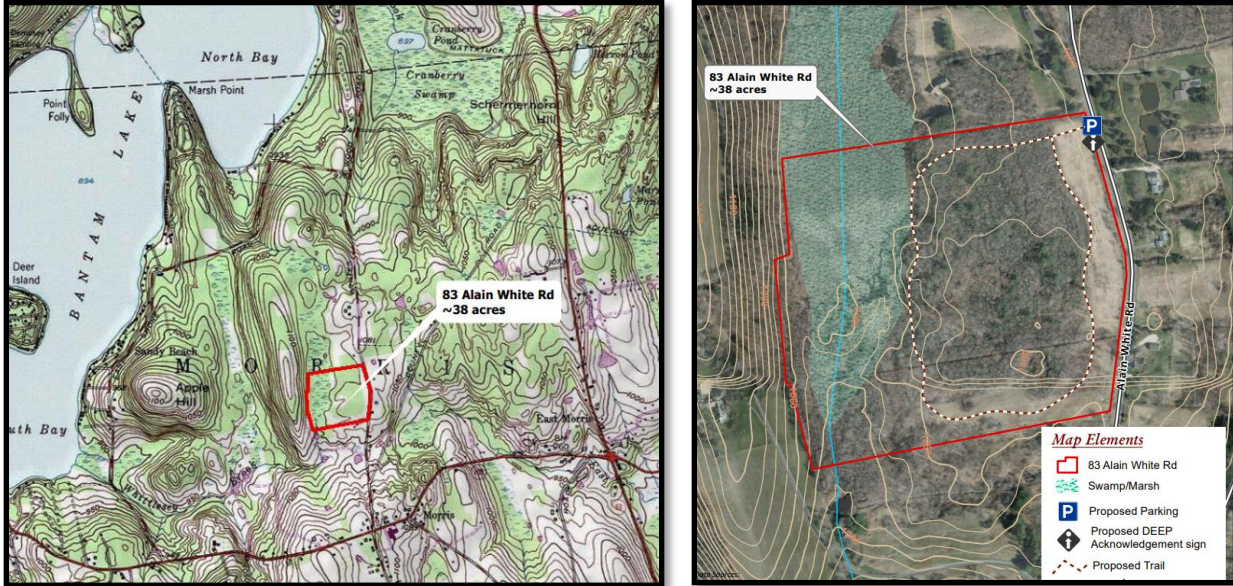
Section 22a-6v of the General Statutes of Connecticut requires the Commissioner of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection to submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to finance, revenue and bonding and to the State Bond Commission each month. The report provides information on the acquisition of land or interests in land by the state, a municipality, water company or nonprofit organization using funds authorized for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program established under Sections 7-131d and the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program established under Sections 23-73 to 23-79 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program provides grants to municipalities and private nonprofit land conservation organizations for the acquisition of open space land and to water companies to acquire land to be classified as Class I or Class II watershed land. The State of Connecticut receives a conservation and public access easement on property acquired to ensure that the property will be protected and available to residents of Connecticut as open space in perpetuity. One Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program grant was funded in August 2024. Additional information on the project follows.

Sponsor	Project	Town	Acres Protected
Morris Land Trust, Inc.	Humphrey Farm Reserve	Morris	37.006

Morris Land Trust, Inc. (MLT)
Humphrey Farm Reserve, Morris
18.33 Acres



This property is mostly forested with 6 acres of hay field/farmland, 14 acres of inland wetlands and the headwaters for Whittlesey Brook feeding Bantam Lake. Nestled among the open fields surrounding Bantam Lake, the diversity of land cover is capable of supporting wildlife nesting and foraging habitat. MLT will keep the fields open, implementing delayed mowing to help ground nesting birds and maintain early successional habitat. The property contains wood turtle habitat and wood turtles have been documented at the nearby 4,000-acre White Memorial Foundation conservation area. Surrounding parcels are mostly undeveloped and serve as a wildlife corridor. The Property has 1,200 feet of road frontage mostly occupied by hay fields. A public parking area will be added at the northeast corner of the parcel, and a public access loop trail will be created along the hay fields, for passive recreational activities.

This acquisition was a cooperative effort between MLT, DEEP and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, utilizing OSWA and Highlands Conservation Act grant funds.



Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program is the State of Connecticut’s primary program for the acquisition of lands for the beneficial use and enjoyment of the public as additions to the State’s system of parks, forests, wildlife, fisheries and natural resource management areas. The program acquires land that represents the ecological diversity of Connecticut, including natural features such as rivers, mountainous areas, coastal systems and their natural areas, in order to ensure the conservation of such land for recreational, scientific, educational, cultural and aesthetic purposes. There was one Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program closing in August 2024. Additional information about the project follows.

Property Name	Town(s)	Cooperators & Cost Share	State Share	Acres Protected	Purpose of Acquisition
Winchester Water	Winchester	USFWS Highlands grant - \$442,500 Private Funds - \$175,000 Landowner Donation - \$135,000	RNHTP - \$132,500	1,321.56	Permanent protection of the Crystal Lake and Rugg Brook Reservoirs and surrounding areas through a Conservation Easement

**Winchester Water property
Winchester
Conservation Easement
1,321.56 Acres**

One of Connecticut’s largest conservation projects in recent years, the Winchester Water property consists of 26 clustered and contiguous parcels of land totaling 1,321.555 +/- acres owned by the Town of Winchester that provide the town’s public drinking water supply. The property consists of forested uplands, unusual and prioritized terrestrial and wetland habitat types, rivers, streams, wetlands and two public drinking water reservoirs linked by an underground aqueduct.

The DEEP, with assistance from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, private funding, and a donation from the Town of Winchester were able to acquire a conservation easement to permanently protect the property from future development. The conservation easement is accessible by multiple points, including off Winchester Road, Rugg Brook Road, and Old Danbury Quarter Road. It includes both the Crystal Lake and Rugg Brook reservoirs.



The conservation easement will provide limited passive recreational opportunities, primarily around the western portion of the property. No public access will be permitted around the Crystal Lake reservoir.

