

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

March 2026

Overview

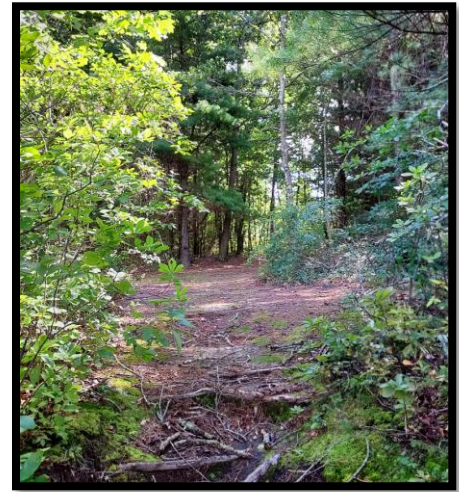
Section 22a-6v of the General Statutes of Connecticut requires the Commissioner of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection to submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to finance, revenue and bonding and to the State Bond 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

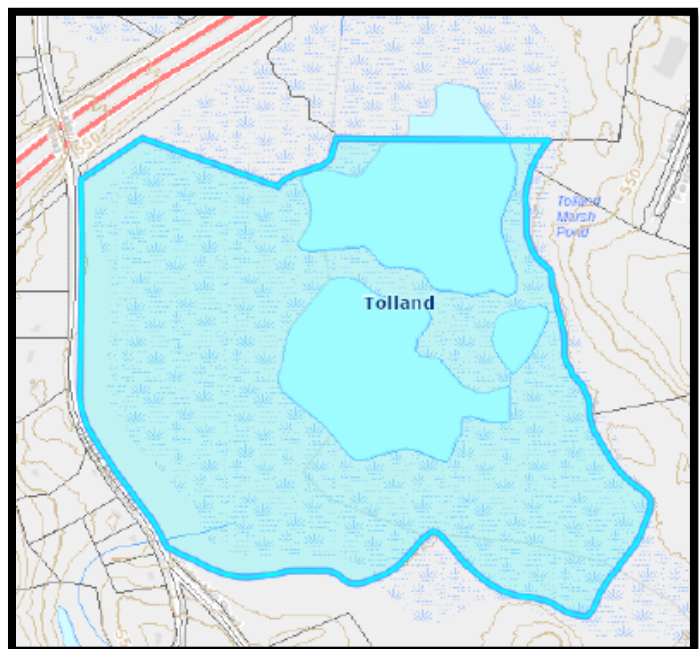
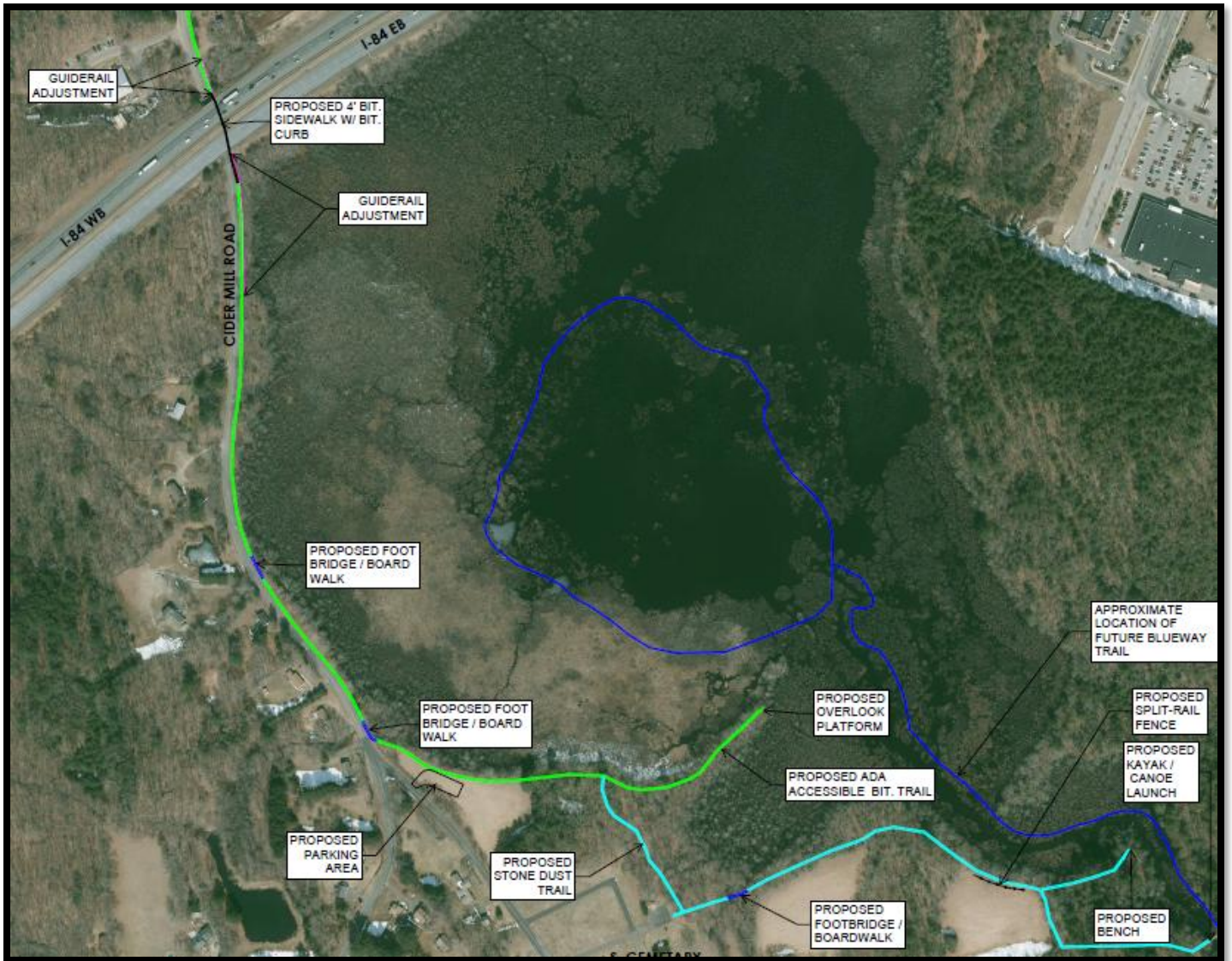
The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program provides grants to municipalities and private nonprofit land conservation organizations for the acquisition of open space land and to water companies to acquire land to be classified as Class I or Class II watershed land. The State of Connecticut 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. Three Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program grants were funded in March 2026. Additional information about the projects follows.

Sponsor	Project	Town	Acres Protected
Town of Tolland	Tolland Marsh	Tolland	93+/-
Wyndham Land Trust, Inc.	Abbott Property	Pomfret	371.8
The Nature Conservancy, Inc.	Granskog Property	Redding	102.259

Town of Tolland
Tolland Marsh, Tolland
90+/- Acres

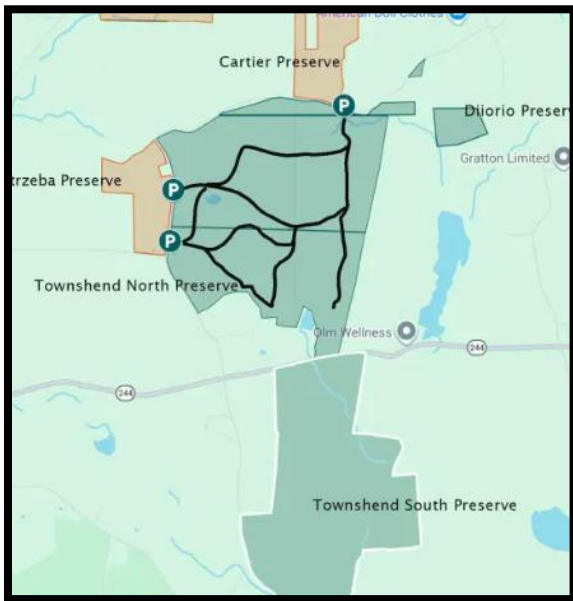


This acquisition is envisioned by the Town as the first phase in a broader plan to create the (new) Tolland Marsh Trail Network, a multi-use trail increasing outdoor recreation opportunities for area residents, including those in nearby high-density housing apartments and condominiums, connecting Crandall Park to municipal services including the library, Town Hall, Recreation Department, Senior Center and the Tolland Intermediate School, on and near the Tolland Green. This will expand resident and visitor use of municipal facilities and enhance passive recreational opportunities with extensive hiking trails, boardwalk style pedestrian bridges, and installation of a gravel parking lot. A blueway trail is planned along the Skungamaug River through the Tolland Marsh wetland complex with a small boat launch for non-motorized boating access and an ADA accessible bituminous trail. The Tolland Marsh complex includes a variety of wetland habitats including forested/shrub wetlands, emergent wetlands, and minor amounts of upland areas that border the marsh. The Class A Skungamaug River runs through this portion of the Tolland Marsh and feeds into the Tolland Marsh Pond, supporting water quality in the Willimantic River watershed. The project is within the Audubon CT “Bolton Range/Cockaponset” Important Bird Area. Preservation of this parcel will protect key habitat for numerous State listed wetland species, as well as migratory animals, and fish species.

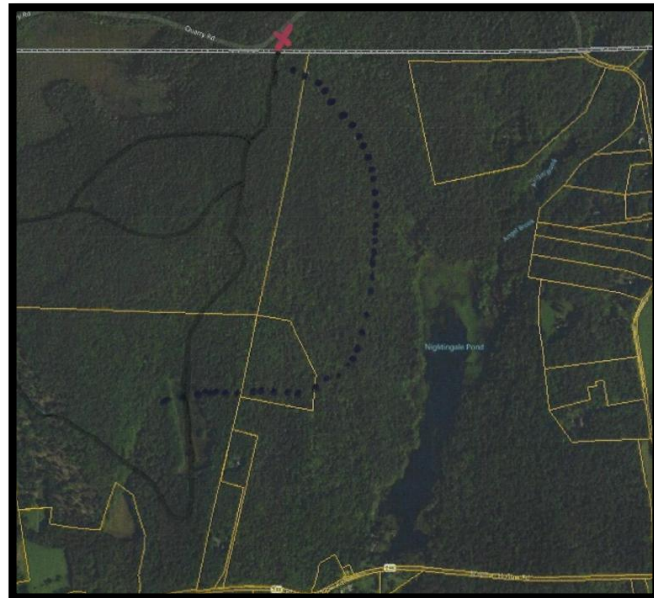


Wyndham Land Trust, Inc. (WLT)
Abbott Property, Pomfret
371.8 Acres

This forested tract is adjacent to roughly 1,200 acres of WLT conservation land and will be part of Nightingale Forest, a core forest large enough to support species that need expansive forested areas to successfully thrive. Species of birds like Black-throated Blue Warbler, Broad-winged Hawk and Scarlet Tanagers breed here. It contains over 2,900 feet of frontage on both sides of Nightingale Brook and over 3,400 feet of frontage on both sides of Angel Brook. With this acquisition, WLT will own about 75% of the frontage on Nightingale Brook. The entire property has been identified as having high resilience to climate change. The public will have access to a hiking trail that connects to trails on the adjacent 365-acre WLT Townshend North Preserve, with an existing parking area on Quarry Road in Woodstock. This property has been identified as highest importance for protection by the Town of Pomfret and WLT for years.



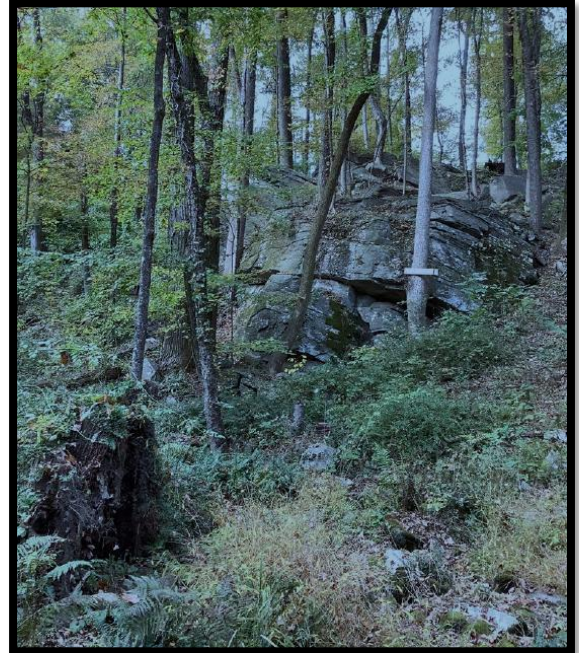
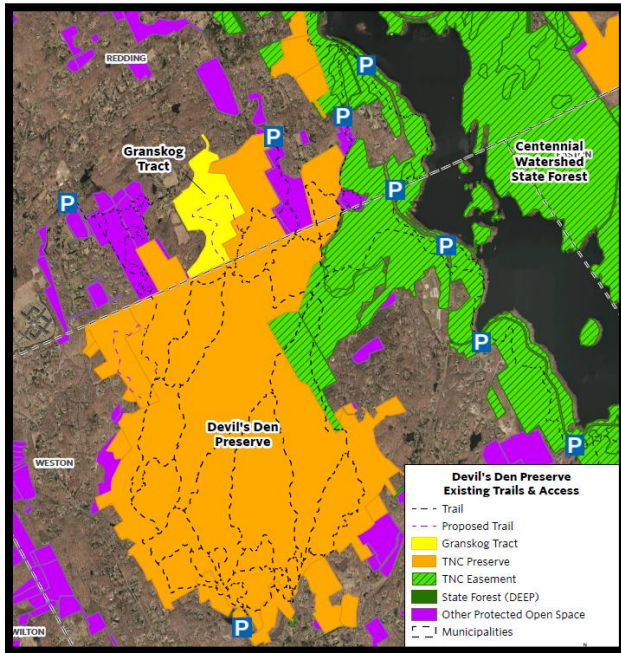
Nightingale Forest (Townshend North & South)



Public Access Trail connecting to Nightingale Forest



The Nature Conservancy, Inc. (TNC)
Granskog Property, Redding
102.259 Acres



This is the last, large undeveloped parcel adjacent to TNC's 1,833-acre Devil's Den Preserve (DDP), TNC's largest and most frequented preserve in CT with over 20 miles of trails in the "Saugatuck Core" of the Saugatuck Forest Lands. It is part of a 15,300-acre network of protected open space and contiguous forest with high conservation value including the Centennial Watershed SF, Aspetuck LT, Redding LT, Town of Weston, Town of Redding and Wildlife in Crisis properties. This acquisition will preserve forest and freshwater resources that buffer DDP from potential development and protect the integrity of important natural habitat and native species (500+ types of trees and wildflowers and 140 bird species). It is mostly wooded having above average traits resilient to climate change. There are four acres of open fields on the western boundary, areas of wetlands and rocky slope. The property is in the Saugatuck River Watershed, with half of the acreage in the public drinking water supply boundaries of the Saugatuck Reservoir. Maintaining a high percentage of forested land cover in the watershed and reservoir is critical to safeguarding the public water supply of the Greater Bridgeport service area, and boating, fishing and swimming in the Saugatuck River. TNC will create a loop trail that connects to DDP.



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 were two Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program closings in March 2026. Additional information about the projects follows.

Property Name	Town	Cooperators & Cost Share	State Share	Acres Protected	Purpose of Acquisition
Merante	Torrington	LWCF \$823,500	\$823,500	357.87	Addition to Sunnybrook State Park
Besheret LLC	Deep River	None	\$630,000	100.89	Addition to Cockaponset State Forest

Merante

Stoneridge Dr & Newfield St, Torrington

Sunnybrook State Park

357.87 Acres

The Merante property consists of 357.87 acres located at the southern end Sunnybrook State Park, with frontage on Newfield Road and Stoneridge Drive. This beautiful property is mainly forested and features a section of the east branch of the Naugatuck River. A small pond in the central portion of the land contains a heron rookery. The acquisition nearly doubles the size of the park and will provide passive recreational opportunities including hiking, fishing and birdwatching.





Besheret LLC
Cedar Lake Road, Deep River
Cockaponset State Forest
100.89 Acres

The Besheret LLC property consists of 100.89 acres of land located on the eastern side of Cedar Lake Road, across the street from Cockaponset State Forest. The property generally slopes downhill from the road frontage to a watercourse and large pond before sloping uphill at a fairly steep incline to a level plateau. The acquisition will help expand the forest, protect the watershed, and provide passive recreational opportunities including hiking, fishing and birdwatching.

