



August 20, 2025

Released by:

Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

CONNECTICUT STATE PARKS

PARTNERSHIPS IN PARKS

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)

No Submission Deadline – Submissions Will Be Accepted On a Rolling Basis Until Further Notice

Connecticut's 110 State Parks are vital to our quality of life and fuel a booming outdoor recreation economy. Managed by the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), these parks have seen visitation soar from under 10 million in 2019 to a projected 15.5 million in 2025.

Outdoor recreation in Connecticut now supports over 49,000 jobs and is the second-largest recreation economy in New England¹. This surge in public use has been matched by unprecedented investment—\$70.7 million since 2022 through Governor Lamont's [Restore CT State Parks](#) initiative.

Call for Strategic Partners: Reimagining Park Experiences

DEEP is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to gather ideas from businesses, non-profits, and stakeholders on new experiences, services, and amenities that enhance the outdoor recreation experience in Connecticut State Parks.

Responses will help DEEP:

- **Identify new types of experiences, services, and amenities** that potential partners could offer in Connecticut State Parks.

¹ <https://apps.bea.gov/data/special-topics/orsa/summary-sheets/ORSA%20-%20Connecticut.pdf>

- Assess if a **competitive Request for Proposals (RFP)** may be needed based on interest and feasibility.

Ready to Share Your Idea?

We'd love to hear from you! Download and complete the [Submission Template \(Appendix A\)](#), and email it to: **deep.partnershipsinparks@ct.gov** with the subject Line: *Parks RFI Submission: [Your Idea Title] – [Specific State Park(s)]*.

Before submitting a response to the RFI, review the requirements for the [Special Use License](#) program below. If your idea qualifies, skip the RFI and submit your idea directly to the SUL program.

Note: Submissions to this RFI are considered ideas—not formal proposals—and are not guaranteed to receive follow-up action or response from DEEP.

Partnership Structures

Under applicable state law and regulations, there are three common ways to formalize a partnership within CT State Parks.

1. [Special Use Licenses](#) (SUL). DEEP has authority under CGS 23-11 to permit requests for temporary Special Use of State Park or State Forest Recreational Lands when the request is for public purposes and is not in conflict with park or forest purposes. A SUL may be issued to expressly authorize public activities that are normally prohibited under certain provisions of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies 23-4.

If your idea clearly meets the criteria for a SUL, you are encouraged to apply directly through the SUL process rather than submitting a proposal to the RFI. SUL-eligible concepts do not need to be submitted through this RFI in order to be issued a SUL. To learn more, visit the [Special Use License website here](#) for more information, or connect directly with the program at deep.specialuse@ct.gov.

Special Use is authorized through a fee-based application process to ensure alignment with agency goals, facility operations, and public purposes. Special Use may include, but is not limited to, requests for fundraiser events, trail races, seasonal mobile food and beverage trucks, historical reenactments, rowing regattas, guided programming, and piloted partnerships.

2. **Concession Agreements or Leases.** These agreements are generally utilized to provide services to the public in or at a State-owned facility. The agreements must be awarded through a competitive bid process, and the structure of these agreements differs based on the level of complexity, timeframes, revenue, and proposed use.

3. **Educational Partnerships.** DEEP's Public Outreach programs such as No Child Left Inside (NCLI) and educator-based programs welcome ideas for partnerships that support current environmental education and historical interpretation offerings.

I. GOALS & CONSIDERATIONS

Through this RFI and subsequent steps, DEEP hopes to achieve several goals:

- **Elevate Outdoor Recreation & Visitor Experience:** DEEP is interested in exploring partnerships to provide additional services to elevate the public's experience in State Parks. These services could include locally sourced farmers' markets, paddle, bike or other outdoor recreation equipment rentals, guided experiences, "glamping" opportunities, cross country or downhill ski experiences, marinas, electric boat shares, and other outdoor recreation and cultural experiences.
- **Increase Access to the Outdoors:** DEEP seeks partnerships that support universal, adaptive, and ADA-compliant access to outdoor recreation, such as [all-terrain wheelchairs now found in CT State Parks](#). Many forms of outdoor recreation also require specific skills, equipment, or gear whose cost or unfamiliarity can be a barrier to participation. DEEP seeks partnerships that provide all State park visitors with equitable opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation experiences through guided experiences, equipment rental or share programs, and education. DEEP also seeks partnerships resulting in sustainable, greener operations in State Parks.
- **Expand Tourism Destinations:** State Parks are one of Connecticut's largest tourism attractions, and DEEP seeks to build on our success through partnerships that expand sustainable tourism opportunities and support local economic development.

In addition to these goals, DEEP has several key considerations in mind when reviewing RFI submissions:

- **Public Access:** DEEP is undertaking this initiative to improve the public's outdoor recreation experience and provide equitable access in State Parks, and therefore will not consider partnerships that "privatize" or restrict public use of or access to a State Park.
- **Sustainability:** DEEP is interested in partnerships that are consistent with our values of passive recreation, sustainability, protecting our natural resources. In some cases, outdoor recreation can impact the sensitive natural environments in State Parks. Partnerships may be able to meet visitor demand for those experiences in ways that help to better manage and mitigate those impacts. For example, services like guided tubing and canoe rentals can provide convenient, safe river access while reducing erosion of sensitive riparian zones and litter caused by unmanaged visitation.

- **Revenue Sharing:** DEEP is not seeking partnerships that create additional DEEP expenses or operational responsibilities. Instead, DEEP encourages ideas for revenue-sharing partnerships that result in financial benefit to the State, either through capital infrastructure investments and/or support to the [Passport to Parks](#) account, which funds park operations. (DEEP will also consider revenue neutral models that may be more appropriate for non-profit partnerships, such as those focused on ADA or adaptive access.)
- **Fiscal & Operational Dependability:** DEEP seeks to collaborate with stable, well-managed organizations that can demonstrate financial strength and operational capacity commensurate with the nature of the proposed partnership. For proposals seeking long-term commitments—particularly those that may involve the stewardship, care, or maintenance of DEEP-owned infrastructure, such as the buildings listed in Appendix B—DEEP will require clear evidence that the organization is financially and operationally well-established, capable, and qualified to serve as a reliable partner.
- **Complement DEEP Operations and Services:** DEEP is seeking partnerships that enhance and complement outdoor experiences currently offered State Parks and is not seeking to replace park operations provided by DEEP's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Nor is DEEP seeking partnerships that add to DEEP operational responsibilities, as noted above. An ideal partnership would achieve the goal of RFI without replacing or adding to current State Park responsibilities.

II. EXAMPLES OF TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS DEEP IS OPEN TO CONSIDERING

DEEP invites businesses, non-profits, and individuals to submit ideas for outdoor recreation services and experiences in Connecticut's 110 State Parks (see [State Park Finder Website](#) for details). This RFI is intentionally broad to encourage innovative and creative proposals.

To inspire submissions, DEEP has included a list of example ideas below. These are meant to guide applicants and illustrate the types of partnerships that may align with the RFI's goals.

This RFI does not replace existing partnerships. Current operators at DEEP facilities will continue under their existing agreements and do not need to respond to maintain current operations.

Elevate Outdoor Recreation & Visitor Experience

- Kayak/Canoe/Paddleboard Rentals
- Farmers' Markets in State Park or Campground
- Disk Golf
- Equestrian Experiences
- Bike or E-bike rentals (on bike paths where permitted)
- Gift & Gear Shops (using existing structures)

- Guided Outdoor Experiences
- Outdoor Gear Rental, Loan, or Share Programs (fishing, camping, etc.)
- Paddling Tours
- River Tubing or Rafting
- Guided Rock Climbing
- Bird Watching & Viewing
- Managed & Enhanced Trail Networks (cross-country ski, mountain bike, etc.)
- Outdoor Education/Nature Centers
- PFD/Life Jacket Loaner Programs
- Events such as Historic Reenactments, Interpretation, and Public History
- Food & Beverage

Provide Equitable & Sustainable Access to the Outdoors

- ADA and/or Adaptive Sports or Recreation (paddling, biking, etc.)
- All-Terrain Powered Wheelchairs (e.g., [those now found in CT State Parks](#))
- Programs or Experiences from Organization Focused on Providing Equitable Access to the Outdoors:
 - Outdoor Afro
 - Wounded Warrior Project
 - Latino Outdoors
 - Becoming An Outdoors Woman
 - Hike it Baby
 - Veteran's groups
- Parking Management/Fee Collection for Out-of-State Parking
- Electric Car or Boat Charging Stations

Tourism Destinations

- Outdoor Music Events or Venues
- Breweries/Distilleries/Wineries
- Restaurants/Eateries
- Cross-Country Ski Areas
- Event Coordination (weddings, etc.)
- Glamping or Other Short-Term Lodging

III. BOUNDARIES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

While DEEP is encouraging innovative ideas, the following boundaries are designed to prevent respondents from submitting ideas that are clearly outside the scope of consideration. Various restrictions also govern what kinds of projects can be implemented in State Parks.

- General recreational sports amenities (e.g., basketball courts, golf courses, pickleball/tennis courts, soccer fields) will not be considered, as they are incompatible with typical State Park recreation uses.
- This RFI is not intended to propose new State Park properties; it is focused on potential investments in existing parks.
- All proposed uses must comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws, including the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act and DEEP regulations.
- Food concessions in State Parks are subject to Connecticut law, which gives priority to clients of Department of Aging and Disability Services who have sight impairments. If no such vendor is available, the opportunity may be opened through a competitive process.
- Alcoholic beverages are [prohibited in 20 State Parks](#), as well as on state beaches and boardwalks. See Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies §§ 23-4-1 to 23-4-5 for other restricted uses.

IV. EXAMPLES OF CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS

Connecticut State Parks currently partners with the following organizations:

- Canoe & Kayak Rentals (* licensed through Special Use in the original RFI):
 - [Candlewood Kayak Rental](#) at [Squantz Pond State Park](#) *
 - [Kingfisher Adventures](#) at Lake Wintergreen in West Rock Ridge State Park *
 - [Scoot & Paddle](#) at [Indian Well State Park](#) *
 - [Clarke Outdoors](#) at [Lake Waramaug State Park](#) and [Burr Pond State Park](#)
 - [Main Stream Canoes & Kayaks](#) at [Mount Tom State Park](#)
- [Essex Steam Train](#) at [Connecticut Valley Railroad State Park](#)
- [Farmington River Tubing](#) at [Satan's Kingdom State Park](#)
- [Mohawk Mountain Ski Area](#) at Mohawk Mountain State Park
- [Farm River Marina](#) at Farm River State Park
- Food & beverage Concessions Statewide

V. RFI REVIEW PROCESS

DEEP Internal Review and Evaluation Process

DEEP will acknowledge each RFI submission via email response and will convene an internal review team each quarter to evaluate ideas submitted through this RFI. The initial review will consider, but is not limited to, the following:

- Alignment with agency goals
- Suitability of the proposed State Park location
- Compatibility with state laws and regulations

The team will also assess whether the proposal can proceed through established agency processes, such as a Special Use License or Public Outreach, as noted in the introduction.

Potential Outcomes of the Review Include:

- Request for a meeting or additional information from the respondent
- Development of new DEEP-offered service
- Referral to Special Use permitting
- Referral to Public Outreach (Education)
- Issuance of an RFP for future partnership
- No further action

Any RFPs resulting from this RFI will first be released in draft form for public review and comment. This process allows both the public and potential bidders to provide feedback on the objectives, scope, terms, evaluation criteria, and selection process.

Important Note: Future RFPs will require a separate submission, independent of any materials submitted in response to this RFI.

VI. INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

All related information regarding the RFI and Partnerships in Parks Initiative can be found on the [Office of Outdoor Industry and Experiences webpage](#), including:

- New RFI materials
 - Overview of the new RFI, noting major changes from the original RFI – *visit the RFI webpage for additional information*
 - [Public Notice](#)
 - [RFI Submission template \(Appendix A\)](#)
 - [RFI Specific State Park facilities \(Appendix B\)](#)
- [Summaries of past submissions](#)
- [Newsletter sign-up](#)

VII. SUBMISSION PROCESS AND PUBLIC POSTING

Respondents should submit **all information listed in the template in Appendix A. Submit via e-mail to deep.partnershipsinparks@ct.gov.**

DEEP values the importance of transparent, public communication around any initiative that involves Connecticut State Parks and will post a quarterly summary of each RFI submission on the [Office of Outdoor Industry and Experiences webpage](#). Respondents are required to submit non-confidential summaries of their ideas (Appendix A, Section 7).

As noted in the introduction, DEEP anticipates some ideas submitted into this RFI may be established through [Special Use Licenses](#) if they meet the relevant criteria and regulatory requirements. If you are confident your idea meets Special Use eligibility criteria, [inquire/apply there](#). If you are not sure, please submit the RFI submission to deep.partnershipsinparks@ct.gov.

For accessibility, translation needs, requests for an exception for paper submission, or other questions, please contact Christopher Shepard at deep.partnershipsinparks@ct.gov or 860-424-3005.

VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY

If a respondent wishes to submit commercially sensitive or financial information to the Department that is of a confidential nature, please recognize that the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) governs the public's access to information. This law generally requires the disclosure of documents in the State's possession upon request of any citizen unless the documents are specifically exempt from disclosure.

All information submitted to DEEP will be considered a public record unless a respondent requests confidential treatment of materials submitted pursuant to the procedure below. If a respondent believes portions of the information it submits are exempt from FOIA disclosure, the respondent must submit:

- One complete response to this RFI, available upon public request with all claimed confidential material redacted and clearly labeled PUBLIC, and
- One complete, unredacted response to this RFI for DEEP's internal review, clearly labeled CONFIDENTIAL on each page.

Respondents also must indicate which FOIA exemption may be applicable to the specific information claimed confidential. A full list of FOIA exemptions can be found at [CGS § 1-210](#).

With your reasonable justification for confidentiality as described herein, the Department is better equipped to safeguard your confidential information should it become the subject of a Connecticut FOIA inquiry.

IX. GENERAL TERMS, CONDITIONS & LIMITATIONS

The issuance of this RFI and the submission of a response by any respondent, or the acceptance of such response by DEEP, does not obligate DEEP or the State of Connecticut in any manner. DEEP reserves the right (i) to amend, modify, or withdraw this RFI, (ii) to revise any requirements of this RFI, (iii) to require supplemental statements or information from any firm, (iv) to accept or reject any or all responses, (v) to extend the deadline for submission of responses, (vi) to negotiate or hold discussions with any respondent and to waive defects and allow corrections of deficient responses, and (vii) to cancel this RFI, in whole or in part, if DEEP deems it in its best interest to do so. DEEP may exercise these rights at any time without notice and without liability to any proposing firm or any other party for their expenses incurred in the preparation of the responses hereto or otherwise. Responses to this RFI will be prepared at the sole cost and expense of the proposing individuals.

All RFI responses submitted by respondents will become the property of the State of Connecticut. DEEP shall be entitled to retain and use for the project without compensation to any respondent any information submitted, including, but not limited to, any concept, element, or idea (including financial or ownership structures) disclosed in or evident in the submission or meetings or interviews with respondents. DEEP believes that the information in this RFI is accurate, but DEEP, the State of Connecticut and their officers, agents, and employees make no representations or warranties to such accuracy and assume no responsibility for errors and omissions contained herein.

DEEP shall be the sole decision maker of whether a response complies with the requirements of this RFI and whether responses have merit. Responding to this RFI will not enhance a person's or entity's chances of collaborating with DEEP in future State Park initiatives. Similarly, not responding to this RFI will not be a detriment to any person or entity when responding to future competitive procurement opportunities. Nothing contained in this RFI shall limit DEEP in its selection of individuals to be invited to respond to future development and other solicitations for this project or future projects, nor limit DEP's discretion in any way in formulating and adopting a development plan for the State Park(s). Submission of a response to this RFI by any respondent constitutes respondent's permission and consent to inquiries by DEEP concerning the respondent and their ability to participate in the development project, including checking references, credit checks, and similar investigations.

This is an RFI and not a competitive RFP. If, upon consideration by DEEP, a project or multiple projects are found of interest, the agency may issue a formal RFP in accordance with State

statutes and guidelines to institute any bidding processes as may be necessary. Any resulting agreements with the State will be subject to the relevant and applicable State approval and procurement processes.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is an Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employer that is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request an accommodation contact us at (860) 418-5910 or <mailto:deep.accommodations@ct.gov>.