



# GOING OUTSIDE

in CONNECTICUT

The Statewide Comprehensive  
Outdoor Recreation Plan

SCORP  
2024–2029



# GOING OUTSIDE in CONNECTICUT

The Statewide  
Comprehensive  
Outdoor Recreation  
Plan  
2024–2029





STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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# GOVERNOR NED LAMONT

December 31, 2023

Dear Residents of Connecticut:

Connecticut State Parks are one of the region's premier tourism destinations and are a huge boon to our state and local economy. With 259 state parks, forests, and boat launches packed in a small geographic area, and the Passport to the Parks program which allows Connecticut residents to access state parks for free, we have some of the most accessible outdoor recreation in the country, contributing to our tremendous quality of life and making Connecticut a great place to live, work, and play. In 2022, outdoor recreation generated over \$4.6 billion in economic growth and supported nearly 46,000 jobs in our state. Demand for outdoor recreation continues to expand, with two consecutive years of double-digit percentage growth since the pandemic. It is more crucial now than ever to understand the needs and usage patterns of various users, particularly our more recent outdoor enthusiasts who have become active since the pandemic.

I thank you for your passion, feedback, emails, and collaboration during the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) process. The SCORP is a planning document that assesses the demand for the wide variety of outdoor recreational pursuits that are available here in Connecticut. The plan was prepared cooperatively by the Bureau of Recreation at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP); the Department of Recreation, Tourism, and Sport Management at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU); the Center for Community Engagement and Social Research at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU); and a diverse advisory board composed of well-informed representatives from numerous recreation advocacy groups, land trusts, and environmental conservation organizations.

Together, the SCORP team implemented a variety of outreach efforts to ensure ample opportunity for public participation in the plan's development. Throughout 2023, CCSU implemented four stakeholder surveys, including a representative survey of all Connecticut households, a targeted survey for the households of outdoor recreation enthusiasts, a field survey of actively recreating residents, and a civic survey of recreation directors from all 169 municipalities in the state. Ultimately, 55 municipalities, 249 active recreationists, 5,210 recreation enthusiasts, and 1,010 households representing 2,870 residents of Connecticut shared their views on outdoor recreation issues of statewide and local significance and on the supply and demand for all varieties of outdoor recreation in Connecticut.

The SCORP helps Connecticut secure funding for outdoor recreation here in Connecticut, including federal support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The recommendations and guidance outlined in this plan will assist DEEP in developing outdoor recreation initiatives, serve as a guide and data source for local, regional, and state planners, and offer a convenient reference volume for outdoor recreation providers and enthusiasts alike.

For all of these reasons, and for the simple joy of playing outside in Connecticut, I am pleased to present the 2024-2029 SCORP to the residents of our beautiful state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ned Lamont".

Ned Lamont  
Governor

Ned Lamont, Governor  
State of Connecticut

Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner  
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

Mason Trumble, Deputy Commissioner  
Environmental Conservation Branch

Michael D. Lambert, Bureau Chief  
Bureau of Outdoor Recreation

Akiebia Hicks, Project Manager  
Bureau of Outdoor Recreation

December 2023

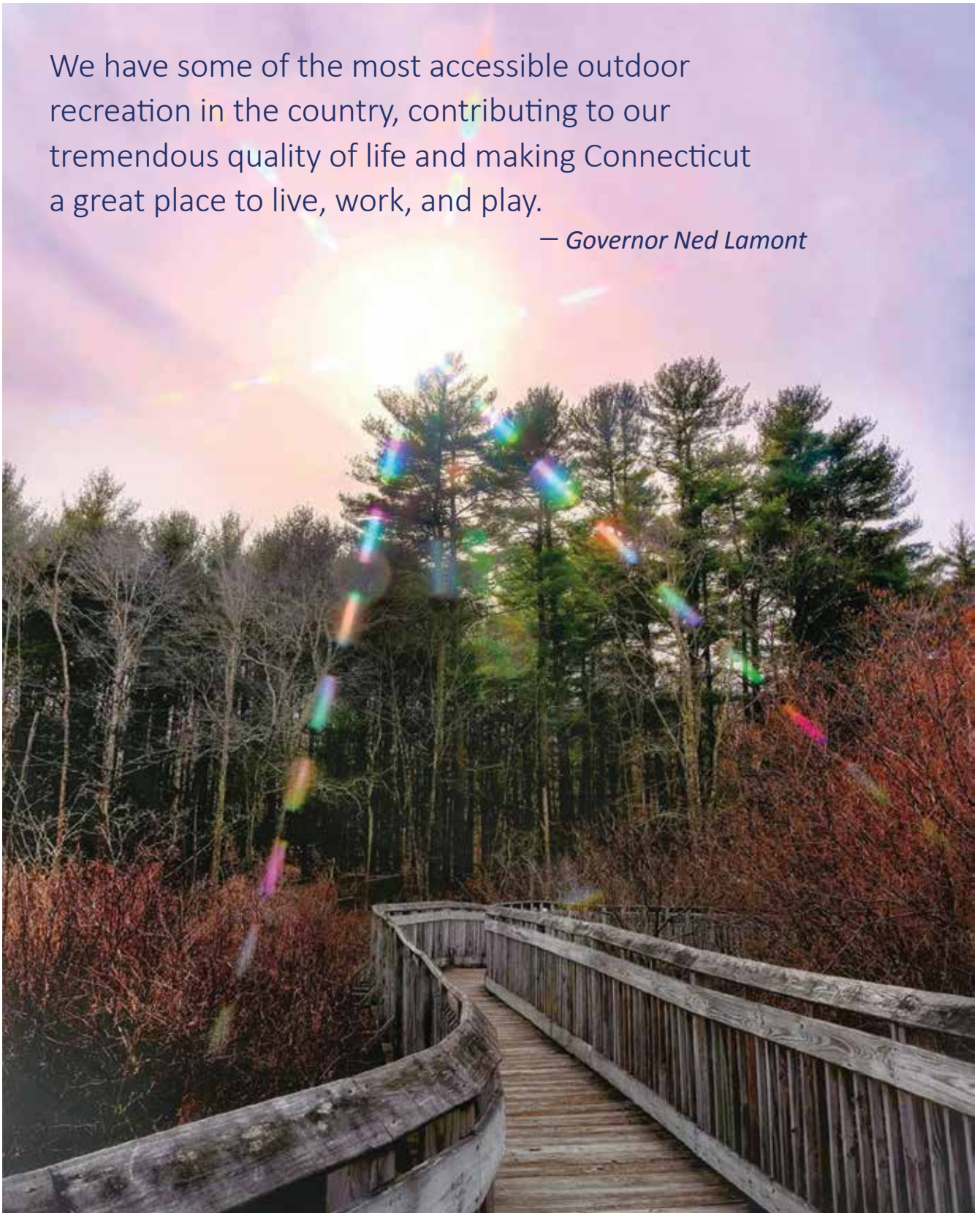


State of Connecticut  
Department of Energy & Environmental Protection  
79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5127  
[www.ct.gov/deep](http://www.ct.gov/deep)

The preparation of this plan was financed in part through a planning grant from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, under provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-578, as amended). The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer that is committed to complying with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please contact us at (860) 418-5910 or [deep.accommodations@ct.gov](mailto:deep.accommodations@ct.gov) if you: have a disability and need a communication aid or service; have limited proficiency in English and need information in another language; or if you wish to file an ADA or Title VI discrimination complaint. Any person needing a hearing accommodation may call the State of Connecticut relay number – 711. Requests for accommodations must be made at least two weeks prior to any agency hearing, program, or event.

We have some of the most accessible outdoor recreation in the country, contributing to our tremendous quality of life and making Connecticut a great place to live, work, and play.

— Governor Ned Lamont



*Chatfield Hollow Sunset, SunFlare (Instagram@limeyakphoto)*



*Shoreline anglers at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (DEEP)*



*Crescent Lake Recreation Area Loop, Southington (CTvisit)*

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*Salt marsh at Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (CTvisit)*

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The SCORP provides unified guidance to state and municipal officials as they develop and expand outdoor recreation opportunities for their respective constituents.

# Acknowledgments

## SCORP Advisory Committee

Bruce Donald, East Coast Greenway Alliance/CT Greenways Council

Paige Cox, Ragged Mountain Foundation

Walker Holmes, Trust for Public Land

Mick Ferraro, New England Mountain Bike Association

Amy Blaymore Paterson, Connecticut Land Conservation Council

Keith Cagle, Connecticut Conservation Advisory Council

Paula Burton, Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance

Diane Ciano, Connecticut Horse Council

Neil Johnson, REI Co-op

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Douglas Jann, Editor



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## Southern Connecticut State University

### Department of Recreation, Tourism & Sport Management

Lee J. deLisle, PhD, Professor

Joseph Milone, EdD, Associate Professor

## Central Connecticut State University

### Center for Community Engagement and Social Research

Diana T. Cohen, PhD, Principal Investigator

Maura Gaffney, Research Associate

Luis Beauchamp, Research Associate

Jordan Oquendo, Research Associate



# GOING OUTSIDE in CONNECTICUT

## The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2024–2029

*Jessie Gerard Trail in Peoples State Forest, Barkhamsted (CTvisit)*



*Dog walkers at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (CTvisit)*



*Green Falls Campground in Pachaug State Forest, Voluntown (Instagram@agollieno)*

# Statement of Purpose



*Sunday drive at Lake Waramaug, Kent (CTvisit)*

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is a strategic planning document that identifies outdoor recreation issues of statewide significance and evaluates the supply of and demand for outdoor recreation resources and facilities in Connecticut. The SCORP provides unified guidance to state and municipal officials as they develop and expand outdoor recreation opportunities for their respective constituents.

In addition to its value as a planning document, the completion of a SCORP also satisfies a requirement of the federally administered Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which then makes Connecticut eligible to receive its annual apportionment from the LWCF State and Municipal Assistance Program. Apportionments from the LWCF can be used by the state and its municipalities to acquire new land for outdoor recreation and conservation and to construct new outdoor recreational facilities.

As the agency having the authority to represent and act for Connecticut in communicating with the Secretary of the Interior for purposes of the Land Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, which was permanently reauthorized through the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act by Public Law 116-9 in 2019 and permanently funded by the Great American Outdoors Act, Public Law 116-152, in 2020, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is pleased to present this 2024-2029 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan to the Secretary and to the people of Connecticut.

The plan is a cooperative product of DEEP staff, the SCORP Advisory Committee, the Southern Connecticut State University Department of Recreation, Tourism & Sport Management, the Central Connecticut State University Center for Community Engagement & Social Research (CCESR), and the many Connecticut residents who participated in the planning process. Due to its considerable length of nearly 400 detailed pages, the full version of this SCORP, including annotated questionnaires from all four CCESR surveys, is publicly available only in PDF format on DEEP's website (<https://portal.ct.gov/deep/outdoor-recreation/scorp>) or as a printed



Family picnic at Lake Waramaug State Park, Kent (CTvisit)

reference volume in the DEEP Records Room. To facilitate the widest possible public distribution, this printed version is trimmed to half the length of the full version, but it nonetheless preserves the core analyses, discussions, and conclusions of the full version.

Connecticut's four-season climate and its full spectrum of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems together provide virtually all forms of outdoor recreation opportunities. Meanwhile, the cultural, demographic, and economic diversity of the state's 3.6 million residents often reflect divergent priorities for the development of outdoor recreation resources. Despite the omnipresent challenge of balancing the broad-ranging needs of state residents and visitors, DEEP is confident that this SCORP fairly addresses the state's significant outdoor recreation issues and represents the best plan for the greatest number of people.

## Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation provides benefits far greater than the personal enjoyment individuals derive from participation in recreational activities. Research addressing the benefits of recreational activities, particularly in outdoor settings, provides a solid justification for the allocation of resources to support facilities and programs that promote and provide for outdoor recreation.

It became evident during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic that individuals sought relief from the restrictions by seeking outdoor open spaces, particularly in parks and natural areas. Research conducted by Pennsylvania State University indicated that nearly half of all adults from across the United States participated in outdoor recreation on at least a monthly basis, and approximately 20% may have been new to outdoor recreation during the pandemic.

This trend is also supported by research conducted by the Outdoor Recreation Association (Forbes 2/2023) and the Outdoor Industry Association.<sup>1</sup> Americans took up new activities in significant numbers in April, May, and June of 2020. Urban participants flocked to outdoor activities: running, cycling, hiking, bird watching, camping, and walking were widely considered the safest activities in which to participate.

1 <https://outdoorindustry.org/article/increase-outdoor-activities-due-covid-19/>

Among the five activity segments measured (*Individual, Team, Raquet, Fitness, and Outdoor*) the *Outdoor* segment saw the lowest impact on participation rates due to Covid-19 shutdowns, as just 34% of respondents said they could not participate in outdoor activities due to pandemic restrictions. Team sports were the hardest hit at nearly 69%, followed by racquet sports at 55%.

Participation in outdoor recreation was predicted to increase throughout 2023 and beyond, with participation drivers for Americans getting outdoors being linked to their mental and physical well-being.<sup>2</sup> Fifty-two percent of respondents said they will increase their outdoor activity to reduce stress, up 3% from 2022. Forty-seven percent of respondents said they will increase their outdoor activity to improve health and well-being, a 5% increase from 2022. Additionally, 26% of respondents believe they will increase their outdoor activity to reduce expenses and save money, a 9% increase from 2022.

In a landmark case study published by National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA), *Parks Build Healthy Communities: Success Stories*, a diverse set of 44 communities explained the benefits of their efforts to incorporate parks into the promotion of healthy communities. Parks were cited as the main force for encouraging collaborative community building, increasing physical activity, improving nutrition, supporting economic development, addressing the obesity epidemic, and reducing tobacco use.<sup>3</sup>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services provide federal funding for local communities to address issues and implement policy and environmental changes that promote healthier lifestyles and reduce the risk of obesity, diabetes, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and cancer. Parks play a crucial role in bringing about positive health changes in communities.

Additionally, communities benefit from the increased social interaction of residents bonding with their neighbors while pursuing common interests. And the environment benefits from the increased awareness among residents of environmental issues and the importance of environmental stewardship.



*Paddling instruction at Hopeville Pond State Park, Griswold (Instagram@CTStateParks)*

<sup>2</sup> <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/participation-outdoor-activities-continues-increase-180100675.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers>

The Bureau of Economic Analysis within the U.S. Department of Commerce found in 2021 that outdoor recreation activities in Connecticut added \$3.9 billion in conventional, supplementary, and associated economic activity, a 19.6% increase from 2020. The report also noted that Connecticut supported more than 44,000 outdoor-related jobs, a 13% increase from 2020. The top added-value activities in the state were: a.) *Boating/Fishing*, b.) *Hunting/Shooting*, c.) *RVing*, d.) *Motorcycling/ATVing*, and e.) *Climbing/Hiking/Tent Camping* (BEA, 2021).

Furthermore, 2022 economic data reveals the unprecedented impact of outdoor recreation on the national economy. These numbers confirm that outdoor recreation contributes more than \$1.1 trillion to the economy, supports nearly 5 million jobs, and was led by the RV segment. The Outdoor Industry Association states that core activities like *Climbing/Hiking/Tent Camping* increased by 40% from 2019 to 2022, reflecting a diverse participant base.

Between 2016 and 2022, more than 700 articles were published in professional journals and open sources that addressed the importance of outdoor recreation facilities and activities to our physical and mental well-being. This research indicates that there is approximately one park for every 2,266 residents in the U.S., one playground for every 3,633 residents, and 9.6 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents.

Parks and other outdoor amenities contribute in many ways to residents' quality of life. Paramount to the continued success of Connecticut's parks, open spaces, and outdoor sites is the obligation to strategically assess current and projected demands for such places in order to allocate sufficient resources to meet these needs.

In a September 21, 2023, press release, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont remarked:

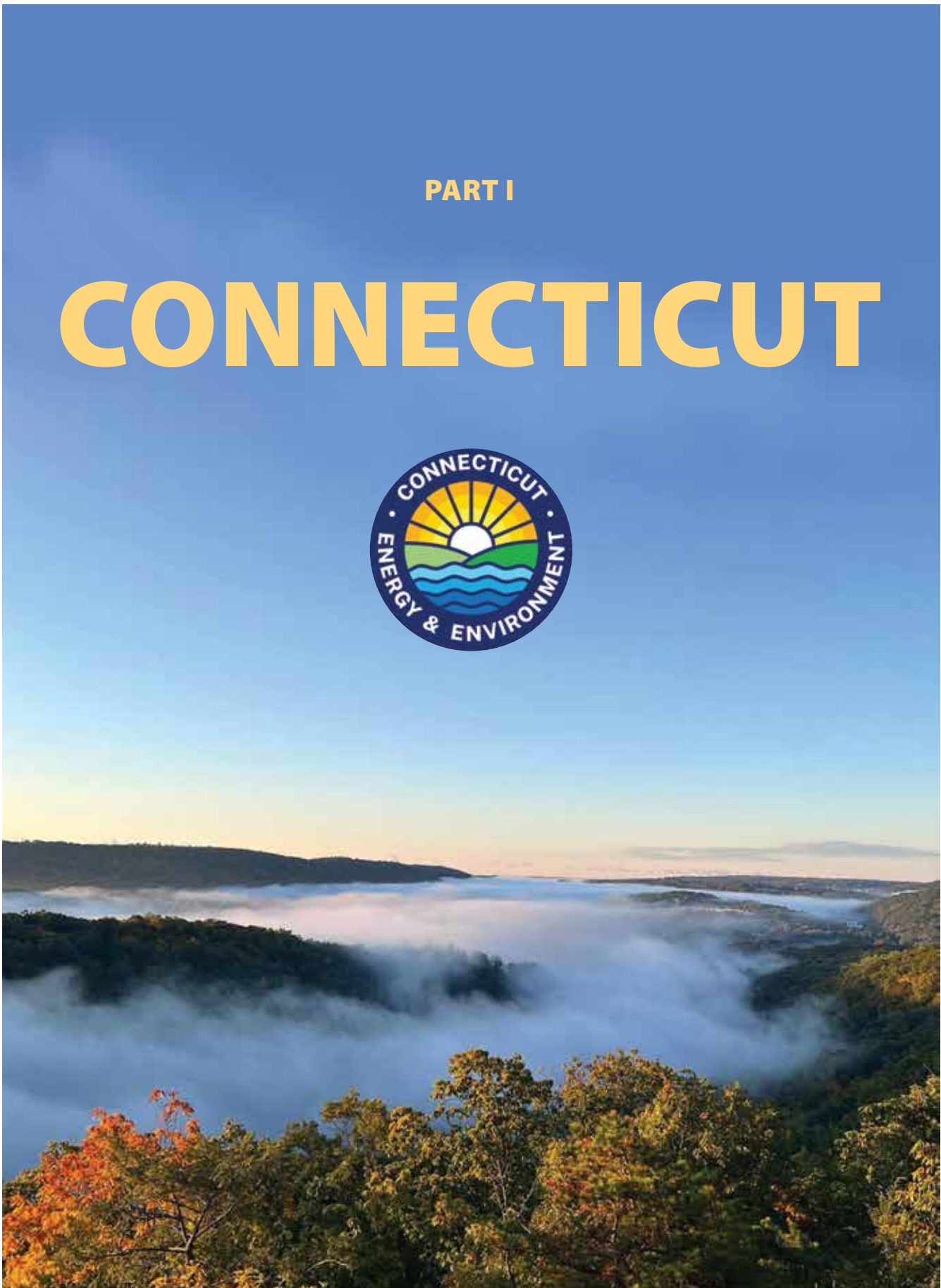
*"Connecticut State Parks are a huge part of our state's quality of life and a big reason why people are choosing to move to Connecticut, and we want to make sure people have all of the information they need to visit them." "These beautiful places, which offer residents and visitors an unparalleled recreation experience and provide significant economic benefits to our cities and towns, deserve a website befitting their value. [CTParks.com](https://www.ctparks.com) is the latest way we're helping to connect residents with their Connecticut State Parks."*

Connecticut is home to a magnificent array of state park and forest recreation areas, boat launches, and wildlife management areas cherished for their natural beauty and diverse recreational opportunities. With 110 state parks, 32 state forests, 117 state boat launches, and 112 state wildlife management areas totaling more than 287,000 acres and a network of more than 2,500 miles of scenic trails, Connecticut's stunning natural landscapes offer something for all of the state's 3.6 million residents and its many visitors. Connecticut's state parks continue to rank among the top regional tourist destinations and play a significant role in the state's tourism sector and local economies. In 2022, the state welcomed a staggering 17 million visitors to Connecticut's state parks and forests.

With the second largest outdoor recreation economy in New England, offering 110 state parks, 32 state forests, 117 state boat launches, and 112 state wildlife management areas totaling more than 287,000 acres and a network of more than 2,500 miles of scenic trails, Connecticut's stunning natural landscapes offer something for all of the state's 3.6 million residents and its many visitors. In 2022, the state welcomed a staggering 17 million visitors to Connecticut's state parks and forests.

PART I

# CONNECTICUT



*Morning mist over Naugatuck State Forest, Beacon Falls (Instagram@jizzo01)*

# PART I: CONNECTICUT

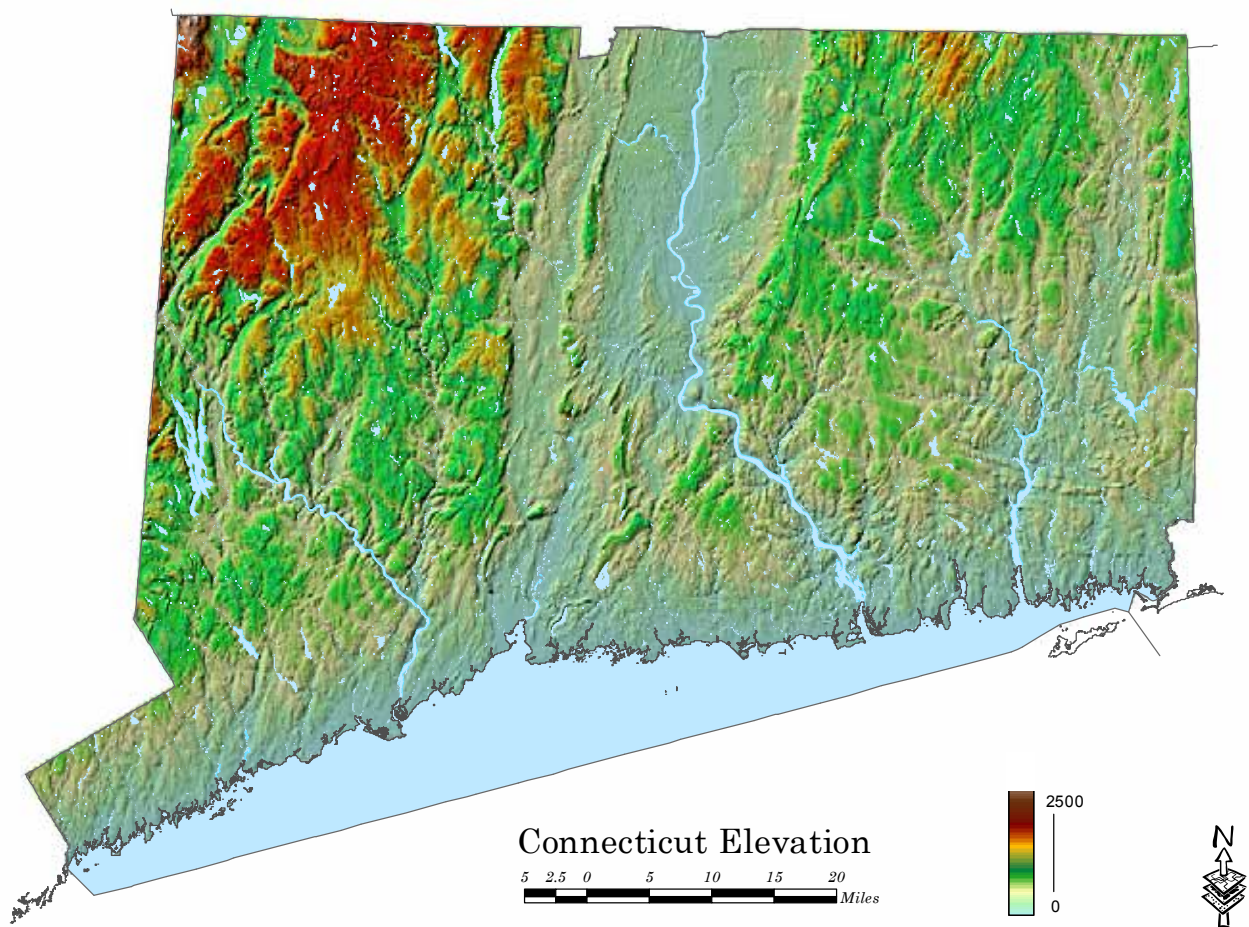
## Geography

Connecticut is the third smallest state in the union, comprised of a mere 5,018 square miles (3,211,520 acres) of land. It extends approximately 90 miles from east to west and 60 miles from north to south. Nestled between the New York City and Boston metropolitan areas, Connecticut is bordered on the west, north, and east by New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, respectively. The center of Long Island Sound forms the state's southern boundary with New York. Connecticut can be divided primarily into four distinct physiographic zones: the Southern New England Coastal Lowlands, the Lower Connecticut River Valley bisecting the state, the Hudson Highlands in the west, and the Southern New England Coastal Hills and Plains in the east. Figure 1 shows these four zones and three limited areas along the state's northern border that represent the southern extent of New England's mountainous interior zones.

The Southern New England Coastal Lowlands is a narrow strip of level land that extends along the shore of Long Island Sound. This coastline is characterized by small sections of sandy beach alternating with rocky bluffs and saltwater marshes. It includes numerous small coves and inlets, creating 458 miles of actual coastal frontage.



Figure 1. U.S. Forest Service Ecoregions of Connecticut



**Figure 2. Shaded Relief Map of Connecticut**

The Lower Connecticut River Valley is a wide, north-south strip of land cradling the Connecticut and Quinnipiac Rivers. Most of the land is gently to moderately sloping with fertile agricultural soils, except for the narrow trap rock ridges that run from Long Island Sound to Massachusetts. Rising to more than one thousand feet above sea level, these ridges contain some of the last undeveloped areas in central Connecticut.

The Hudson Highlands are the southern terminus of the Green Mountain Range. Here the elevation ranges from 200 feet near the coastal plain to 2,380 feet at Mt. Frissell in Salisbury. Generally, this area is more rugged than the Southern New England Coastal Hills and Plains, though its southern hills are gentle. While the Southern New England Coastal Hills and Plains and the Hudson Highlands both have scattered pockets of good croplands, they are largely unsuitable for extensive agriculture. Most of the land is either forests or pastures.

The remaining areas of the state are hilly regions sloping gradually toward the south and the east. The Southern New England Coastal Hills and Plains are continuous with the New England Highlands in Massachusetts. Near the Massachusetts border elevations range from 500 feet to 1,100 feet, while in the southeast elevations range from 200 to 500 feet (Figure 2).

## Climate

Interior portions of Connecticut have a humid continental climate, characterized by large seasonal temperature differences, with warm to hot summers and cold to very cold winters. The Connecticut shoreline has a borderline humid climate, with seasonal extremes tempered by proximity to Long Island Sound, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf Stream. Summers are hot and humid, and winters are mild to cool.

Precipitation levels in all portions of Connecticut remain relatively constant at roughly four inches per month throughout the year. Winter precipitation in interior portions is very often snow, averaging as much as 100 inches per year in the northwestern uplands, and areas of higher elevation frequently maintain a snowpack

throughout the winter season. Winter precipitation on the coastline and in lower elevations of the central river valley includes more rain events than the interior and the snow cover commonly melts between snow events. Annual snowfall along the shoreline averages 35 inches. For a detailed description of climate change effects in Connecticut, please refer to: [Climate Change \(ct.gov\)](https://www.ct.gov/ClimateChange)

## Ecological and Developmental History

Before European settlement, the region's indigenous population enjoyed a rolling landscape with expansive tracts of mature broadleaf and mixed forests populated by diverse and abundant wildlife communities. Hundreds of miles of upland rivers and streams supported robust salmon runs and other abundant native fisheries, and the coastal resources of Long Island Sound contributed a maritime aspect of diversity to the region's resources. For many millennia, Connecticut's first residents enjoyed a sustainable existence in harmony with the delicate balance of the natural ecosystems. It was Connecticut as nature intended it.

Following European settlement, the landscape in Connecticut was reshaped on a broad scale. Intensive agriculture deforested 75% of the state, leaving previously stable topsoil vulnerable to erosion. Mill-based industry became widespread and hundreds of small dams built to impound storage for the mills' water wheels eventually appeared on virtually every watercourse in the state. As a result, Connecticut was indeed experiencing economic prosperity. But without the canopy and ground cover of forests to stabilize the soil and slowly meter precipitation into the watercourses, the overwhelming force of unbounded runoff swept large amounts of topsoil into the rivers and substantially contributed to siltation and stream bank erosion.

As land was cleared for agriculture, habitat and natural prey for apex predators slowly vanished and protection of vulnerable livestock made wolves and mountain lions prime targets for eradication. During the mid-nineteenth century, 97% of Connecticut residents lived dispersed in rural areas. The landscape was carved up into tens of thousands of small parcels and the pressure on wild populations of flora and fauna was intense. The prevailing wisdom of the era was man's subjugation of nature, and in this pursuit the residents of eighteenth and nineteenth century Connecticut were very successful. Wild Connecticut was pressed to the frontier.

As the industrial revolution gained momentum and mechanized agriculture made farming more efficient and productive, the state's population shifted toward urban centers. Across the state, abandoned agricultural fields began their ecological succession back to mature forests. However, even while Connecticut is now 60% forested, it will continue to live with the legacy of its historic patterns of land development.

While the population shift to urban areas helped to relax pressure on the terrestrial landscape, the expansion of industrialism only further degraded the state's watercourses with discarded byproducts of manufacturing. Toxins such as PCB's and mercury still linger in the food chain today and several fisheries are permanently closed to harvest to protect public health, while others have strict consumption advisories.

Additionally, advancements in crop fertilization and the explosion of the human population and untreated sewer systems substantially increased nutrient input into aquatic ecosystems, unnaturally accelerating the ontogeny of the state's water bodies. As the increasing availability of automobiles precipitated another demographic shift, this time into suburbia, the augmented fertilization of manicured residential and golf course lawns further compounded the nutrient loading of aquatic ecosystems, eventually leading to algae blooms in Long Island Sound that created large areas of anoxic dead zones.

For centuries, the practices of European settlers had transformed Connecticut's landscape and severely degraded the habitats upon which fish and wildlife populations depend, severely depleting the stocks upon which modern recreationists base their pursuits. Fortunately, the last half century of increasing environmental awareness has given rise to widespread public and private sector stewardship initiatives, turning the tide on the environmental degradation of the preceding centuries. Habitat quality in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems is improving, and the stocks of fish and wildlife they support are recovering. With continued environmental stewardship and concerted fish and wildlife restoration efforts, Connecticut's modern residents are now beginning to enjoy the same rich resources as the region's original inhabitants.

## Department of Energy and Environmental Protection— History and Structure

During the 1960's, people were increasingly concerned about the quality of the environment. Public support for action to improve the environment led the 1971 session of Connecticut's General Assembly to create a new state agency – the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The new agency brought together numerous state boards and commissions that had been addressing issues related to the environment and the outdoors, such as the Water Resources Commission, the Board of Fisheries and Game, and the Park and Forest Commission.

The new agency was organized into two branches: one concerned with outdoor recreation and conservation and the other with protecting the quality of Connecticut's air, water, and land. Since the establishment of DEP, great progress has been made in:

- Cleaning up the waters of Long Island Sound and inland waterbodies and watercourses.
- Improving air quality.
- Beautifying Connecticut's landscape.
- Protecting natural resources.
- Expanding the network of state parks and forests.
- Restoring terrestrial wildlife and aquatic life in the state's waterways.

Over the years, DEP's role grew as new environmental issues emerged and as it took on responsibilities delegated to the states under various federal programs. The agency's responsibilities were significantly expanded in 2011, with the passage of [Public Act 11-80](#), giving DEP responsibility for developing and implementing state energy policy. As a result of this legislation, the name of the agency was changed to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). As part of this change, the energy office at the Office and Policy and Management and the state's public utility regulatory authority became part of DEEP.

This new structure gave Connecticut – for the first time – a state agency with a focus on Connecticut's energy future. Since then, the state has taken strong steps to expand energy efficiency programs, deploy clean energy resources, and reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere to address climate change.

Initially, DEP had 491 full-time employees, a budget of just over \$7M, and offices scattered all over Hartford. Today, DEEP has more than 950 full-time employees, a budget of more than \$170M, an attractive central office at 79 Elm Street in Hartford, a marine headquarters in Old Lyme, several major field offices, and a system of state parks, forests, boat launches, and wildlife management areas offering 368 locations for people to enjoy the outdoors.

The management of outdoor recreation in Connecticut benefits from the organizational structure of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, where public access to the state's outdoor recreational resources and the protection and management of the state's natural resources are planned and implemented under the direction of one department. Since 2011, the DEEP has been organized into the Office of the Commissioner and three main branches: Environmental Quality, Environmental Conservation, and Energy Policy and Regulation (Table 1).

During the mid-nineteenth century, 97% of Connecticut residents lived dispersed in rural areas. The landscape was carved up into tens of thousands of small parcels and the pressure on wild populations of flora and fauna was intense.

**Table 1. Agency Structure for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**

BRANCH	BUREAU	DIVISION
Office of the Commissioner	Office of Legal, Planning & Regulatory Affairs	Office of Legal Counsel
		Office of Adjudications
		Office of Innovative Partnerships & Planning
		Office of Environmental Review & Strategic Initiatives
		Office of Climate Planning
		Office of Equity & Environmental Justice
	Office of Chief of Staff	Communications, Public Affairs & Web Publications
		Land Acquisition & Management
		Legislative Policies & Programs
		DAS: Human Resources
		OPM: Office Labor Relations
		Planning, Coordination & Fiscal Management
	Bureau of Central Services	District Operations
Engineering, Safety and Sustainability		
Financial Management		
Equal Employment Opportunity Office	—	
Environmental Quality	Air Management	Planning & Standards
		Radiation
		Enforcement
		Engineering
	Water Protection & Land Reuse	Water Planning & Management
		Land & Water Resources
		Remediation
	Materials Management & Compliance Assurance	Office of Planning
		Emergency Response & Spill Prevention
		Engineering & Enforcement
Permitting & Enforcement		
Environmental Conservation	Outdoor Recreation	State Parks & Public Outreach
		State Environmental Conservation Police
		Boating
	Natural Resources	Fisheries
		Forestry
		Wildlife
Energy	Energy & Technology Policy	Office of Energy Supply & Infrastructure
		Office of Telecommunications & Broadband
		Office of Affordable Housing & Energy Retrofits
		Office of Building & Transportation Decarbonization
	Public Utilities Regulatory Authority	Office of Technical & Regulatory Analysis
		Office of Education, Outreach & Enforcement
		Office of Administration & Operations
		Office of Federal, Regional & Wholesale Affairs
		Office of Legislative & Governmental Affairs

### *The Office of the Commissioner*

The Office of the Commissioner includes the Offices of Adjudications, Equal Employment Opportunity, Legal Counsel, and Chief of Staff (which includes Communications, Climate Change, Environmental Justice, Planning and Program Development, and Governmental Affairs). These offices provide administrative management, staff assistance, and ancillary service to aid the commissioner and bureau chiefs in their efforts to carry out the mission of the agency. In addition, the Bureau of Central Services provides a wide array of services, including Information Management, Engineering and Field Support, Financial Management, Human Resource Management, and Purchasing.

### *Environmental Quality Branch*

The Environmental Quality Branch is comprised of the Bureaus of Air Management, Materials Management and Compliance Assurance, and Water Protection and Land Reuse. These bureaus protect the air, land, and water resources of the state by regulating air emissions, wastewater discharges, and solid and hazardous wastes. Tools used include the development of regulations, policies, and standards; permitting and enforcement; air and water quality monitoring; and public outreach and education.

### *Environmental Conservation Branch*

The Environmental Conservation Branch consists of two bureaus. The Bureau of Natural Resources manages the state's natural resources (particularly fish, wildlife, and forests) through programs of regulation, management, research, and public education. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation is charged with the conservation and management of statewide recreation lands and resources through the acquisition of open space and the management of resources, including state parks, to meet the outdoor recreation needs of the public. The benefit of this organizational structure to outdoor recreation in Connecticut is the ability of the various divisions to cooperate and collaborate efficiently and effectively under the unified leadership of the Commissioner of DEEP. The ultimate beneficiaries of this streamlined structure are the outdoor recreational resources of the state and the participants who utilize them.

### *Energy Branch*

The Energy Branch consists of the Bureau of Energy and Technology Policy (BETP) and Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA). BETP manages energy, telecommunication, and broadband policy issues and program deployment with the goal of establishing a clean, economical, resilient, and reliable energy and technology future for all residents. PURA is statutorily charged with ensuring that Connecticut's investor-owned utilities, including the state's electric, natural gas, water, and telecommunications companies provide safe, clean, reliable, and affordable utility service and infrastructure. PURA's mission is essential to advancing the state's energy, economic, and environmental goals and is critical to maintaining public health and safety as well as a robust economy.

The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation includes the Divisions of Boating, State Environmental Conservation Police, and State Parks and Public Outreach. Organized within the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach is the Office of Connecticut Trails and Greenways and the State Parks Education Unit.

## Outdoor Recreation in Connecticut

Although a relatively small state, Connecticut is the fourth most densely populated of the fifty United States ([census.gov](https://www.census.gov)). The *Constitution State* provides a wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities to its residents and visitors. With 458 miles of Long Island Sound coastline, direct access to the Atlantic Ocean, and hundreds of inland water bodies and watercourses, Connecticut supports most water-based forms of recreation. Due to a four-season climate and diverse terrain, the state also provides numerous land-based recreational opportunities, all of which are accessible within a relatively short drive.

A recent report produced by CNBC ranked Connecticut as the #1 state for retirees based on health care, wellness, safety, affordability, and entertainment; “Connecticut snagged the top spot, largely because it has more than 100 parks that retirees can spend time in, which increased the state’s wellness ranking.” (04/26/2023). Additionally, the online travel guide, *Why This Place*, scored Connecticut as the best state in America for hiking based on the extent of hiking trails, parkland, and waterfalls.

(08/08/2023)

However, for all the state has to offer, Connecticut has no shortage of challenges for outdoor recreation. With relatively few large land holdings in the state and with greater than 80% of land held privately, recreational areas tend to be small in scale and scattered across the landscape in abundance. This presents challenges to activities dependent on large tracts of land, challenges to informing people of the multitude of opportunities available to them, and challenges to monitoring for unlawful or unpermitted activities. In addition, most of the state’s population resides in urban areas and public transportation is often not available to Connecticut’s outdoor recreation areas and facilities.



*Rustic cabin at Hopeville Pond State Park, Griswold (LatinoWay)*

## 2017–2023 DEEP Bureau and Division Accomplishments

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP or The Plan) is a planning document for Connecticut that defines a path forward for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) as it strives to fulfill the mission of making outdoor recreation available to all residents and visitors of the state for the benefit of their health, prosperity, and enjoyment.

The Plan also provides guidance to legislators, municipal officials, land trusts, the business community, and the general public by defining a clear, five-year agency agenda to which others can easily refer and upon which they can also rely as they formulate and implement their own planning agendas for outdoor recreation and environmental conservation programs and facilities in their respective jurisdictions. For these reasons, the outdoor recreation goals and strategies set forth in a SCORP must be clearly stated and they must be based on careful consideration of present and evolving outdoor recreation issues of statewide significance.

In general terms, the DEEP’s outdoor recreation goals represent a logical progression of strategic planning and proactive measures to ensure that residents and visitors enjoy an optimal experience when visiting outdoor recreation facilities throughout the state. In specific terms, the DEEP’s outdoor recreation goals arise in part from public feedback regarding what visitors wish to find—or wish not to find—during their outdoor recreation experiences, and in part from the institutional knowledge of agency staff and Advisory Committee members regarding the past and present status of specific outdoor recreation facilities or trends in Connecticut.

In practice, institutional knowledge of Connecticut’s outdoor recreation history and present status combines with the expressed preferences of the recreating community to establish goals that move existing DEEP programs forward in directions that are compatible with expressed desires and that define new initiatives for future development.

Knowing where you’re going is difficult unless you know where you’ve been. It is therefore invaluable to recognize the many recent efforts of the DEEP and its many public and private partners to provide excellent stewardship of the state’s resources in accordance with Connecticut’s 2017 – 2022 SCORP goals, which were:

1. Protect, conserve, and manage Connecticut’s natural, cultural, and historical resources as they support outdoor recreation.
2. Provide clean, safe, well-maintained outdoor recreation areas and facilities.
3. Ensure that all residents and visitors can locate and access all outdoor recreation areas and facilities.
4. Promote healthy lifestyles through increased participation in outdoor recreation.

Major examples of projects, programs, and initiatives undertaken since 2017 that support one or more of the four goals above include:

- Goals 1, 2, 3 & 4: Connecticut parks will continue to bring people to the state, and will be in good shape thanks to the historic \$80M capital investment the Lamont administration made over the past two years to Restore Connecticut State Parks – kicking off major infrastructure improvements to roads, beaches, parking areas, bathhouses, and historic buildings such as Gillette Castle, Heublein Tower at Talcott Mountain State Park, Harkness Mansion, and the Ellie Mitchell Pavilion at Rocky Neck State Park.
- Goals 1, 2, 3 & 4: Establishment of the Office of Connecticut Trails and Greenways, administered by the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach.
- Goals 1 & 2: The Office of Connecticut Trails and Greenways and the Connecticut Greenways Council helped to establish 14 new greenways since 2017.
- Goals 1 & 2: DEEP’s new Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy and the corresponding public website promote targeted resource management and public safety by identifying hazard trees and educating the public about causes and conditions of hazard trees.
- Goals 1 & 2: The Division of State Environmental Conservation Police (EnCon) expanded its K-9 program from four officers in 2011 to seven teams currently. The Division added three new K-9s and completed rigorous training by the State Police K-9 Unit for certification in search and rescue tracking and evidence recovery.

- Goals 1 & 2: EnCon logged a total of 159,644 calls for service between January 1, 2017, and December 31, 2022. During this period, officers issued 6,358 citations and 3,650 warnings, investigated 202 accidents, and made 638 arrests.
- Goals 1 & 2: The Adopt a Park program was organized to support maintenance staff. Adopting volunteers have made a great impact at sites where aquatic plants were removed in swimming areas, historic Native American caves were cleaned from graffiti, trails were maintained safe enough for people and horses to use them, and recreational areas with invasive plant species were returned to their natural condition for the enjoyment and safety of visitors.
- Goals 1 & 3: Boating Education Assistants visited state boat launches to engage with active boaters regarding clean and safe boating practices, including pump-out facilities, aquatic invasive species, no-discharge areas, wearing life jackets, and more.
- Goals 1 & 3: The Land Acquisition and Management Office is completing a comprehensive assessment of dedicated open space lands across the state to understand what percentage of Connecticut’s land is already designated for that purpose. DEEP will use the results to set new targets and goals for land conservation efforts across Connecticut.
- Goals 1 & 3: The Urban Green and Community Garden Grants Program awarded \$1,176,666 to 20 projects in 11 different communities.
- Goal 1: DEEP supported 78 grants through its Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program, protecting 6,751 acres of open space land and distributing \$21,590,991 in funding to local communities.
- Goal 1: DEEP supported 53 projects totaling 6,906 acres of new outdoor recreation lands under the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program.
- Goal 1: The recently completed \$6.7M filtration and pump infrastructure improvement project at the Quinebaug Valley State Trout Hatchery in Plainfield is an incredible synergy of DEEP’s mission—providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Connecticut residents, driving tourism by offering one of the best recreational fisheries in the country, and making DEEP’s operations more energy efficient, saving money for residents and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Goal 1: The installation of new filters and pumps and the rehabilitation of the hatchery’s water treatment system together support more sustainable operations that will save thousands of gallons of water daily, reduce the hatchery’s environmental impact, and bring Connecticut closer to the goals set in Governor Lamont’s Executive Order 1 for reducing the state’s water consumption 10% by 2030.
- Goal 1: The Wildlife Division participated in a national #ResponsibleRecreation initiative and developed a webpage dedicated to the care and use of Connecticut’s state parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and natural area preserves.
- Goal 1: More than \$2.8M in federal Forest Legacy funding has been used by Connecticut’s Forest Legacy Program since 2017 to permanently protect 1,495 acres in Stafford. The program is also presently working on a 483-acre project in Ashford that was granted nearly \$1.5M in federal Forest Legacy funding by the U.S. Forest Service.
- Goal 1: DEEP foresters took the lead in creating an assessment tool in response to concerns about forest health. They also trained DEEP employees to recognize and document information about hazard trees to reduce public safety risks and keep DEEP facilities open and safe for continuous use and enjoyment.
- Goal 1: Seven landscape-level Important Bird Areas (IBAs) have been designated across the state in collaboration with DEEP, Audubon Connecticut, various conservation NGOs, and private landowners.
- Goal 1: Action plans to support trout and salmon fishing and the conservation and management of wild trout and black bass (i.e., largemouth and smallmouth bass) were published based on decades of fisheries science and input from the public. These plans will shape the future of fisheries management for the agency.



*Biking at Fort Trumbull State Park, New London (CTvisit)*

- Goals 2, 3 & 4: Established in 2019, the Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance (CORA) is a broad coalition of stakeholders providing a unified voice for Connecticut’s growing outdoor recreation industry engaged in a concerted effort to grow outdoor recreation by supporting the development of Connecticut’s outdoor recreation economy.
- Goals 2 & 3: Between 2015 and 2023, nearly \$22M in trail development grants were awarded to 130 projects. A total of \$20M (\$10M per year) has been approved in the 2024-2025 state budget to continue growing this important state grant program.
- Goals 2 & 3: The Boating Division has expanded boating safety messaging through social media channels including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, on which it collectively has more than 9,000 followers.
- Goals 3 & 4: With the new Passport to Parks program, passenger vehicles registered in Connecticut are no longer subject to parking fees at state parks and forests.
- Goals 3 & 4: The new Connecticut Trail Finder is a free, interactive mapping website designed to help Connecticut residents and visitors find hiking, walking, snowshoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and paddling trails across the state. Detailed trail description pages allow users to view the trails, get essential information, and submit trip comments and photos.
- Goals 3 & 4: The new official state parks website, CTParks.com, is a comprehensive, interactive website that helps visitors identify activities and locations across the state park and forest system that align with their outdoor recreation interests.
- Goals 3 & 4: With the addition of a Mobile First Catch Center, provided through a grant from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) in 2020, the Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education (CARE) program can bring fishing to your neighborhood.

- Goals 3 & 4: The Wildlife Division has created the R3 (Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate) Plan 2020–2024 in an effort to introduce more individuals to wildlife conservation through hunting and trapping. This approach is centered on bringing in new hunters and trappers, keeping existing hunters and trappers engaged, and reactivating individuals who have hunted or trapped in the past but have stopped doing so.
- Goal 3: A new program in the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach is providing all-terrain wheelchairs at five state parks beginning in the fall of 2024.
- Goal 3: The Wildlife Division created links to live-stream from wildlife cameras to help make nature accessible for everyone, and community science projects provided volunteers a way to continue contributing to research and conservation of natural resources.
- Goal 3: The Marine Fisheries program supports “Fish with CARE” and “Learn to Fish” programs and events at publicly accessible fishing locations and works with the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and coastal municipalities to maximize public access to fishing locations to allow for healthy participation and enjoyable fishing opportunities.
- Goal 4: People Active on Trails for Health and Sustainability (PATHS) is a new interdisciplinary team at the University of Connecticut committed to understanding and promoting the benefits of trails and natural resources for health, community, and economic development.
- Goal 4: In 2023, DEEP sponsored several Junior Hunter Training Days, including one during Pheasant Season, and two each during Deer, Waterfowl, and Spring Turkey Seasons. On DEEP’s Junior Pheasant Hunter Training Day, DEEP and several sportsmen’s clubs supervise junior pheasant hunts.
- Goal 4: Bat Appreciation Day has been celebrated at the Old Newgate Prison and Copper Mine in Granby, Connecticut, since 2017 as a joint effort by DEEP and the Department of Economic and Community Development.
- Goal 4: The Fisheries Division’s CARE program (Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education) deployed a self-paced web training in English and Spanish to introduce key concepts of fishing equipment, knot tying, places to fish, and fishing regulations. Other short instructional videos are published on the DEEP YouTube Channel regularly.
- Goal 4: The Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and the Boating Division hosted more than 15 No Child Left Inside® events in 2023 to encourage families to explore, play, learn, and read in state parks and forests, nature centers and museums, libraries, pop-up events, and programs. Additionally, the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and the Connecticut State Library have partnered to build a statewide StoryWalk program initiative.

While recognizing the value of goals for guiding the allocation of resources, DEEP and its partners remain pleased to advance the interests of outdoor recreation wherever those opportunities readily present themselves. In that context, it’s worth noting that not all accomplishments described in the following sections are necessarily driven directly by one or more of the previous SCORP’s goals. While many recent accomplishments support the 2017-2022 goals, others represent a continuing investment in successful legacy programs, and some are simply conversions of serendipitous opportunities. Regardless of a direct connection to goals or not, the bureau and division sections that follow below provide deeper insights into the many important accomplishments during the period since 2017.

Connecticut parks will continue to bring people to the state, and will be in good shape thanks to the historic \$80M capital investment the Lamont administration made over the past two years to Restore Connecticut State Parks ... .

# Land Acquisition and Management Office

The Land Acquisition and Management Office (LAM) is integral to the success of Connecticut’s SCORP and the Land and Water Conservation Fund within Connecticut. LAM implements DEEP’s open space programs and is responsible for acquiring lands to expand DEEP’s system of state parks, state forests, wildlife management areas, water access areas, natural area preserves, and other conservation and public recreation areas. LAM works in cooperation with other divisions, as well as with its federal, municipal, land trust, and water company partners to protect and steward open spaces across the state. The Land Acquisition and Management Office manages five primary programs focused on the acquisition and protection of open space in Connecticut and prioritizes its goals for acquisition in regular updates to its Green Plan.

In 1997, the Connecticut General Assembly recognized the environmental threat posed by changes in land use and set statewide acreage goals for land protection. In 2001, in partnership with municipalities and a wide variety of conservation organizations, DEEP developed the first Green Plan to guide land conservation efforts statewide. There have been several iterations of this plan over the years, each one building on past accomplishments and incorporating the latest innovations and opportunities.

The most recent Green Plan was completed in 2015 with an expiration in 2020. With the onset of Covid-19 and a large percentage of DEEP’s staff retiring between 2019 and 2022, the development of a new plan was delayed. However, the Land Acquisition and Management Office has recently rejuvenated the effort and is excited to move forward with the process of updating the Green Plan. Staff will be doing a comprehensive assessment of dedicated open space land across the state to understand what percentage of the state’s land is already used for that purpose. Once that data collection effort is complete, DEEP will use those numbers to set new targets and goals for land conservation efforts across Connecticut. The updated plan will highlight DEEP’s five main program areas, which include:

## Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program

Connecticut’s Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) Grant Program provides financial assistance to municipalities and nonprofit land conservation organizations to acquire land for open space and to water companies to acquire land to be classified as Class I or Class II water supply property. Project ranking is based on a series of scoring criteria that include the property’s public access and outdoor recreation benefits, its alignment with DEEP’s environmental justice and equity priorities, and its climate change and natural resource benefits. Between 2017 and 2022, DEEP funded 78 grants that protected 6,751 acres of open space land and distributed \$21,590,991 in funding to local communities (See Table 2).

**Table 2. State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) Grants 2017 – 2022**

Year	Number of Acres	Number of Projects	Grant Amount
2017	895	14	\$4,283,737
2018	1,443	14	\$3,226,513
2019	435	9	\$2,522,416
2020	1,175	17	\$3,412,815
2021	1,190	12	\$3,685,250
2022	1,613	12	\$4,460,260
Total	6,751	78	\$21,590,991

## The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program (RNHTP) is the department’s primary program for acquiring lands and waters to be added to the state’s system of public parks, forests, wildlife management, recreational water access, and other natural open spaces. It was established by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1986 to help protect and preserve the state’s natural heritage. Through the RNHTP, LAM handles the acquisition of lands of statewide significance representing the ecological and cultural diversity

of Connecticut. The focus is on unique features such as rivers, mountains, rare natural communities, scenic qualities, historic significance, important recreational resources, connections to other protected land, and access to water. This program leverages state funding with local, federal, and private funding to stretch dollars and protect additional land. Between 2017 and 2022, DEEP completed 53 projects totaling 6,906 acres and leveraged 73% of the costs from cooperators (See Table 3).

**Table 3. Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program Grants 2017 - 2022**

Year	Number of Acres	Number of Projects	Cooperator Share of Cost	State Share of Cost
2017	811	12	\$3,902,000	\$1,013,750
2018	704	6	\$2,271,610	\$1,432,500
2019	1,631	14	\$5,899,120	\$1,120,000
2020	1,710	9	\$3,752,750	\$2,078,600
2021	977	6	\$2,241,500	\$1,535,000
2022	1,073	6	\$2,375,000	\$395,000
Total	6,906	53	\$20,441,980	\$7,574,850

### Urban Green and Community Gardens Grant Program

The Urban Green and Community Gardens Grant Program (UGCG) directs funding to distressed municipalities and targeted investment communities to enhance habitat protection and the restoration of urban green spaces. The program funds urban access trails, green infrastructure, community gardens, and a variety of habitat restoration efforts. Between 2017 and 2022, UGCG awarded \$1,176,666 to 20 projects in 11 different communities.

### Land and Water Conservation Fund

The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is one of the primary programs managed within DEEP’s LAM office. LAM staff work with the agency’s outdoor recreation and parks staff to develop projects, apply for funding, and manage grant expectations. Additionally, LAM staff work with municipalities to apply for funding through LWCF’s Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program to increase open space acquisition and park infrastructure within environmental justice communities.

### Property Management

The property management section of LAM administers property rights and manages requests by outside entities. At any one time, there are approximately 100 to 200 active property management projects within the office spanning property throughout the state. Staff provide technical assistance and coordinate and plan agency responses for all federal, state, municipal, public utility, and private sector large-scale projects that involve the use of DEEP land. These projects often include complicated legal documentation, historical land records research, and balancing sensitive political, economic, and environmental issues.

This section of the LAM office is integral to ensuring the protection of open space properties throughout Connecticut. The LAM office is excited about the future of land conservation in Connecticut. Recent increases in federal funding and opportunities for additional staff will help amplify existing efforts. Office staff are reassessing existing programs and identifying key areas to increase efficiency, make grant programs more equitable, and collaborate with internal and external partners to conserve and enhance more open space across Connecticut.



*Sunset at Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison*



*Wildlife photography at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (CTvisit)*

## Bureau of Outdoor Recreation

The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation includes the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach, the Boating Division and the State Environmental Conservation Police. Organized within the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach is the Office of Connecticut Trails and Greenways and the State Parks Education Unit.

### Division of State Parks and Public Outreach

Established in 1913, the mission of the Connecticut state park system is to provide natural resource-based, public recreational and educational opportunities through a system of state park and forest recreation areas, environmental centers, and nature centers that provide access to and understanding and enjoyment of the state's historical, cultural, and natural resources.

Public use of the system's 110 state parks and 32 state forest recreation areas, collectively representing nearly 255,000 acres or 8% of the state, has increased dramatically from 2018. Estimated visitation grew from roughly 9 million annual visitors in 2018 to approximately 17 million in 2022. Several factors contributed to this dramatic increase, but the principal factors include growing public awareness of the state's Passport to Parks program and the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Passport to the Parks

In 2018, the state introduced Passport to the Parks, a program that eliminates parking fees for Connecticut registered passenger vehicles at state parks and forests while charging a small fee on each passenger motor vehicle registration. When the 2018 recreation season began, it was mostly established park users who benefited from the program as they began visiting their favorite state parks and forests, now without a parking fee. Soon other state residents became aware of the new benefit and began visiting the parks in increasing numbers. This new program has removed what might have been a financial barrier to outdoor recreation access for residents of limited means, as the \$10 biannual fee on passenger vehicle registrations now allows state residents to have free parking for unlimited visits to their favorite outdoor spaces.

#### Park ConneCT

Data from the 2017 SCORP indicated a need for public transportation to and from Connecticut state parks and beaches. This insight led to the implementation of the Park ConneCT program, a joint effort between the Connecticut Department of Transportation and DEEP. The goal of this service is to increase access to outdoor recreation by providing dependable and safe public transportation to state parks such as Sherwood Island, Silver Sands, Osbornedale, Indian Well, Sleeping Giant, and Hammonasset Beach within a ten-minute walk from a transportation stop. Regional access to the parks was made possible via bus connections to nearby train stations. The Park ConneCT Pilot Program operated in 2023 from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day.

#### Capital Projects

The year 2020 saw the opening of a new visitor complex along the beach at Silver Sands State Park in Milford. The new facility includes public bathrooms, changing areas, a shaded picnic area, office space for staff, including lifeguards and State Environmental Conservation Police, and a food concession building, all on an elevated deck with fantastic views of Charles Island and Long Island Sound. The long-needed project provides basic services for the public as well as facilities that make management of the property more efficient and effective.

DEEP is presently working closely with the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services, the state agency that will be managing the development project at Seaside State Park. In February of 2023, DEEP announced \$7.1M in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to implement the "passive park" design for Seaside. The passive park concept was one of four options identified through a comprehensive planning process in which DEEP engaged with local leaders, community members, and other stakeholders. The passive park concept includes the removal of the deteriorated buildings, the addition of passive-use amenities such as restrooms, picnic areas, and walking trails, improvements to the shoreline area and parking area, and installation of interpretive elements highlighting historical uses of the site. DEEP will be conducting outreach with stakeholders to help inform the historical interpretation elements that will be incorporated into the passive park design.

In 2018, the state introduced Passport to the Parks, a program that eliminates parking fees for Connecticut-registered passenger vehicles at state parks and forests.



*Swimming at Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme (CTvisit)*

In 2018, Sleeping Giant State Park experienced a devastating storm, including a tornado that caused severe damage to the main picnic area at the base of the mountain, causing a year-long closure of the park. Intense work by agency staff, contractors, and volunteers removed hundreds of downed and damaged trees across the park and its trail network and reopened the park in 2019. A master planning effort with public input was undertaken to develop a plan for both short-term and long-term improvements for the park. Planning work is now underway for improvements in the main parking area of the park, including the creation of a small visitor center so that visitors can orient themselves, learn about the history of the park, and ask questions of staff or volunteer docents.

A severe storm in 2022 damaged the shoreline and boardwalk at Rocky Neck State Park. Instead of replacing the boardwalk in-kind and risk further, similar damage, an innovative helical piling system (i.e., aluminum screw design) was installed in the damaged section. The hope is that this new anchoring system will be better able to resist damage from future coastal storms.

Ongoing improvements to campgrounds include additional water and electric sites and improved bathroom facilities at Hammonasset Beach State Park.

### **Civilian Conservation Corps**

The legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) and their work in Connecticut state forests and parks during the 1930s was honored in 2019 with the installation of two “Iron Mike” statues. These statues are dedicated to the thousands of young men who worked across the state as part of a nationwide program during the depression years to put men to work making lasting improvements to public lands. The first of the two statues was installed at Chatfield Hollow State Park and the second at Pachaug State Forest. Both installations were accompanied by large public gatherings celebrating the work of the CCC.

### **Lifeguards**

Connecticut’s State Park Lifeguard Program celebrated its 100th year in 2021. The program’s long history of providing safe beach access began at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison and then grew to include many additional beach parks across the state. Also in 2021, the Lifeguard Program achieved certification as a Lifeguard Agency Certified Program of the United States Lifesaving Association (USLA). The USLA represents the highest standards in certification for beach lifeguarding and open water rescuers.

### **Restore CT State Parks**

In 2022, DEEP was allocated \$80M for the new Restore CT State Parks program, which provides funding for improving and restoring state park infrastructure. The state budgets of 2022 and 2023 provided unprecedented levels of capital funding for much-needed reinvestments in scores of facilities and more than 1,000 buildings upon which the public relies to enjoy public lands. More than \$110M has been committed over several fiscal years, jump-starting efforts designed to address the \$250M+ of backlogged maintenance and improvement projects across the system. Updates on work accomplished and projects being planned is available for public review on the Restore CT State Parks website: (<https://portal.ct.gov/deep/state-parks/restore-ct-state-parks>)

### **Social Media**

The Division has increased its social media presence and now provides real-time park closure updates to the public. The notices on Twitter (now “X”) are generated by the DEEP Dispatch Center whenever closure announcements from park staff occur for reasons such as maximum capacity, construction, storm damage, or law enforcement activity. Visitors can now learn whether their intended destination park has reached capacity or not on a given day, affording would-be visitors the opportunity to adjust plans and avoid the frustration of being turned away at the park on a busy day.

### **Hazard Tree Policy**

In 2021, DEEP established a new Hazard Tree Policy with a website providing information to the public about significant efforts being made to address the growing problem of dead and dying trees across state properties. To reduce tree hazards to visitors at DEEP’s open spaces, this website educates readers about the various causes of increased tree mortality incidents (i.e., loss of human life caused by trees), including diseases and storm impacts.

## Improving Access

The 2023 state budget included significant funding to implement a new program for providing all-terrain wheelchairs to visitors in up to five state parks. A process is currently underway to evaluate state park and forest recreation areas for deployment of the chairs and to undertake the procurement of the chairs themselves. The expectation is that the new all-terrain chairs will begin being available for visitors by the summer of 2024 or 2025.

## State Parks Education Unit

The Division of State Parks and Public Outreach manages four year-round educational centers, a statewide youth program, and 10 seasonal interpretive centers dispersed throughout the state.

Recent initiatives include telling lesser-known historical stories, engaging and educating the public and school students during the Covid-19 pandemic, and incorporating technologies to provide expanded learning opportunities.

## Dinosaur State Park and Arboretum

In the summer of 2019, the annual Dinosaur Day celebration brought in record-breaking numbers of approximately 3,000 visitors. Just seven months later, the global pandemic struck, forcing the temporary closure of the indoor visitor center. The educational staff pivoted by successfully creating fully online programming for student groups and families. This created an opportunity to continue offering hybrid and in-person options today for groups.

After years of increasingly expensive but temporary fixes for the outdated HVAC system, the State Bond Commission approved expenditures for its complete replacement.

The greenhouse was cleaned out and is utilized once again under the expertise of volunteers and a seasonal botanist on staff.

Re-chargeable electric maintenance equipment was procured to help reduce the release of air pollutants that contribute to climate change.

In the summer of 2023, a new, purple-blazed trail was added by the Eastern District Summer Trail Crew, expanding trail-based educational access to the Dinosaur State Park grounds. Other accomplishments include new interactive exhibits featuring laser projected images, reptile and amphibian live ambassadors at the visitor center, and school and group program slots that fill to capacity each fall and spring.

## Kellogg Environmental Center

Located in Osbornedale State Park in Derby, this site focuses on environmentally based, professional development programs for teachers, youth group leaders, and other informal educators as well as environmental education for families, students, and youth audiences.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the education team pivoted to fully online programming due to the statewide closure of indoor public spaces. The staff took a leadership role by teaching other educators and outreach leaders within and beyond the agency how to create and run purposeful virtual programs, eventually resulting in hybrid programs that incorporate both virtual and in-person components.

In 2021, staff partnered with the Common Thread Quilt Group to create the now annual Pop of Color Outdoor Quilt Show, providing an opportunity for the public to enjoy the arts and nature together.

Additionally, the Center provides a Connecticut artist indoor space to exhibit their works along with a monthly opening and reception.

During the pandemic, the manicured grounds of the Kellogg Estate, which includes one of Connecticut's 14 Historical Gardens, remained open for the public's enjoyment. In 2022, staff at the Center were honored by the Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut with its highest award. This site also completed a myriad of HVAC repairs, ultimately leading to a full system replacement in 2023.

## Goodwin Conservation Education Center

This facility within the Goodwin State Forest in Hampton is staffed and managed through an agreement with the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a successful online Tree School utilized award-winning activities from Project Learning Tree, coordinated by DEEP and CFPA.

The Richard D. Haley Wildlife Garden continues to be supported by the Friends of Goodwin volunteer organization. Unfortunately, highly invasive jumping worms were discovered to be living in the native wildflower garden, prompting the Friends of Goodwin to cancel its annual plant sale to avoid further spreading the invasive species.

A long-awaited project to restore period siding on the historic Goodwin House began in 2021. In addition, the museum was upgraded with improved wiring so that staff could utilize the vacant upstairs space, allowing the main floor areas to be more appropriately used for programs and public meeting areas.

In 2023, the Outdoor Discovery Trail was selected as a prime location for a newly developed mobile app tour of Goodwin's demonstration forest.

## Meigs Point Nature Center

During the height of the global pandemic, education staff used the Facebook platform to livestream nature-based programs twice a day, reaching nearly a half million views in 2020. The center re-opened in 2021 with timed rotation of visitors, assisted by volunteers from the Friends of Hammonasset, Inc.

With financial support from the Friends of Hammonasset, a new deck was constructed, forming a great addition to the nature center by providing focused viewing access to the salt marsh and the osprey nest platform.

In the summer of 2023, the Menunkatuck Audubon Society donated an outdoor amphitheater in memory of a beloved patron, significantly expanding outdoor teaching space.

## No Child Left Inside® (NCLI)

During the 2020 season, which saw all group and indoor gatherings prohibited, the successful Great Park Pursuit outdoor family adventure was cancelled. In its place, the NCLI staff quickly pivoted by creating the Great Backyard Pursuit. This program provided fun outdoor activities via online videos that families could safely enjoy from home instead of gathering in the typical group traditions. The following summer of 2021, when families were encouraged to explore the outdoors in more local settings, NCLI created the Great Outdoor Pursuit, which provided family-based activities for finding elements of nature closer to home.

In 2021, new partnerships promoting outdoor equity were formed with the Connecticut State Library's Division of Library Development, the Connecticut Association of Foster & Adoptive Families, and the Connecticut Judiciary's Court Support Services Division.

In 2023, NCLI focused on increased programming throughout the calendar year, with smaller pop-up events at libraries and parks while maintaining multiple larger-scale outdoor recreation events with agency and nonprofit partners.

In partnership with the Connecticut State Library, the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach's StoryWalks program launched with the first StoryWalk installed at Dinosaur State Park in December of 2023. To increase relevancy with public visitors, especially English language learners and families with hearing impairments, the NCLI staff is working on creating audio recordings of each of the children's books in both Spanish and English.

## The Sky's the Limit

This year-round hiking challenge introduces the public to the state park and forest system through the creation of a themed hiking challenge. The challenge begins in early spring and provides specific locations and highlights in numerous state parks and forests for participants to find and discover. There is a new theme each year and the challenge concludes with a celebration on New Year's Day as part of the nationwide First Day Hikes program.

In the 2017 SCORP statewide survey, *Visiting Historical Sites* was identified by residents as the second most popular outdoor recreation activity after *Walking/Hiking*.

### Osborne Homestead Museum

On the grounds of the Kellogg Estate, within the boundaries of Osbornedale State Park in Derby, the education team created audio tours during the pandemic to educate the public about the site. Myriad self-guided audio tours continue to be used, which include tours of the homestead itself, the historical garden, and a local driving tour. Narratives now include information on the lesser-told stories of the people once working on the land, such as the farm workers and ranch hands.

To celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's right to vote in the United States of America, the museum's annual holiday theme highlighted the plight of women, especially the plight of black women, many of whom continued facing state-imposed barriers to voting such as literacy tests and poll taxes until passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The museum has been working to improve its archive by focusing on creating a photographic inventory of its collection.

In 2022, a painting of the Homestead Museum and its gardens by local artist Agnes Wnuk was chosen as the winner of the Historic Gardens Poster Contest.

In 2023, with financial support from the Kellogg Trustees, the staff partnered with a local performing arts collaborative to provide the inaugural Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* through a series of weekend-long performances.

Interest in general volunteer opportunities at state parks reignited after Covid-19 with groups and individuals seeking ways to serve. This includes many invasive plant removal days and light trail maintenance.

### Historical Sites

In the 2017 SCORP statewide survey, *Visiting Historical Sites* was identified by residents as the second most popular outdoor recreation activity after *Walking/Hiking*. DEEP's 10 seasonal historical sites and museums include:

- Fort Griswold Battlefield State Park, Groton
- Fort Trumbull State Park, New London
- Gillette Castle State Park, East Haddam
- Harkness Memorial State Park, Waterford
- Putnam Memorial State Park, Redding
- Stone Museum at Peoples State Forest, Barkhamsted
- Heublein Tower at Talcott Mountain State Park, Simsbury
- Topsmead State Forest, Litchfield
- Civilian Conservation Corps Museum at Shenipsit State Forest, Stafford Springs
- Osborne Homestead Museum, Derby

Gillette Castle State Park moved to online tickets for castle tours upon re-opening and it was successful enough that online ticketing remains in place today. In 2023, the Gillette Castle seasonal staff began piloting the use of audio equipment with guidance from the State Parks Education Unit staff. This equipment is to aid those with hearing challenges to better hear the tour guides during their visit.

With assistance from the State Parks Education Unit, the Fort Trumbull State Park Visitor Center has been undergoing an in-house exhibit repair process for older exhibit components.



*Rest stop along Farmington Canal State Park Trail, Cheshire (CTvisit)*

## Office of Connecticut Trails and Greenways

The Office of Connecticut Trails and Greenways, established in 2020 and administered by the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach, serves as the main contact for trails and trail-related activities within state parks and forests and is a liaison for trail issues to agency partners including the Connecticut Department of Transportation, Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Health, municipalities, and partner organizations.

This new office administers the Connecticut Greenways Program and the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program with support from and coordination with the Connecticut Greenways Council (CGC or Council). Members of the CGC are appointed by the Governor and leaders of the General Assembly per the Connecticut General Statutes Chapter 454 Sec 23-102. Their duties include advising and assisting the coordination of state agencies, municipalities, regional planning organizations, and state residents and the voluntarily planning and implementation of a statewide system of greenways. The Council also provides assistance to stakeholders on the technical aspects of planning, designing, and implementing greenways. This assistance includes advice on securing state, federal, and nongovernmental grants and establishing criteria for the designation of greenways.

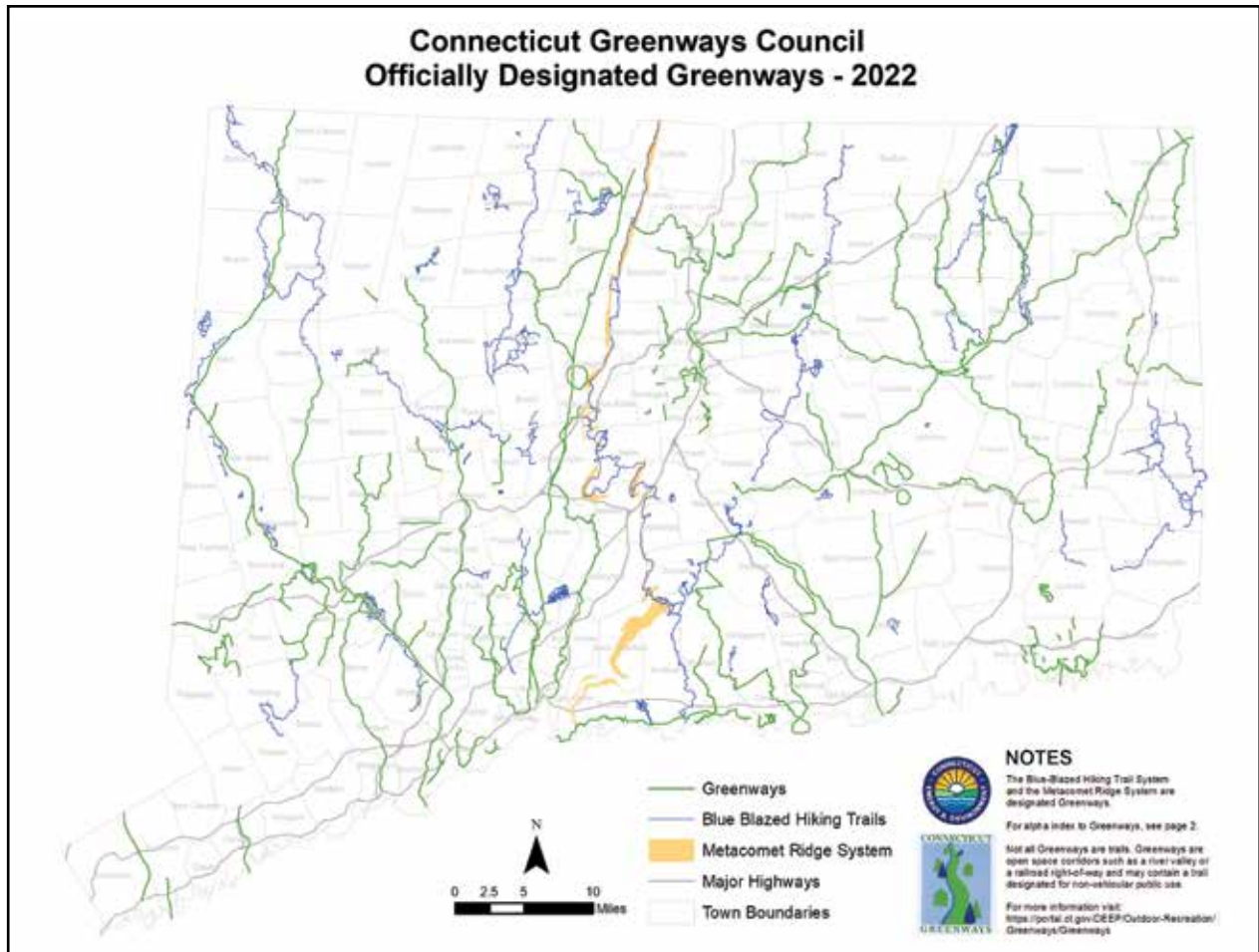
The Connecticut Greenways Council and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection have designated certain greenways as greenways of state significance based upon established criteria. Connecticut Public Act 95-335 defines a greenway as a “corridor of open space” that:

1. May protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources, or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation.
2. May connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors.
3. May be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway, along a man-made corridor, including an unused right of way, or along traditional trail routes or historical barge canals.
4. May be a green space along a highway or around a village.

Since 2017, Connecticut has designated 14 additional greenways (Table 4), bringing the total number of officially designated greenways in the state to 96. Greenways constitute several state park and forest properties, most notably Air Line State Park Trail, Hop River State Park Trail, Moosup Valley State Park Trail, and Larkin State Park Trail. Regional greenways serve multiple purposes, including environmental conservation, wildlife corridors, and scenic resource protection, as well as purely recreational opportunities.

**Table 4. Official Connecticut Greenways Established Between 2017 – 2023**

Year	Project Name	Municipality
2017	Crosstown Trail	South Windsor
2017	New Milford River Trail Greenway	New Milford
2018	Captain John Bissel Trail	South Windsor
2018	Great Oak Greenway	Ledyard
2018	South Meadows Greenway	East Hartford
2019	Clinton Blue Greenway	Clinton
2020	Cheney Trail	Manchester
2021	Portland Air Line Trail Spur	Portland
2021	Wethersfield Heritage Way	Wethersfield
2022	Rocky Hill Greenway	Rocky Hill
2022	Norfolk Mountain Express Rail Trail	Norfolk
2022	Groton Crosstown Greenway	Groton
2022	Tri-town Trail	Preston, Ledyard, Groton
2023	The Branford Trail	Branford



**Figure 3. Connecticut’s Officially Designated Greenways**

## Recreational Trails and Greenways Funding

The Connecticut Recreational Trails Program (RTP) was established in 2015, per Connecticut General Statutes Section 23-103, as amended by Public Act No. 15-190, to provide funding to private nonprofit organizations, municipalities, state agencies, and tribal governments in support of trail projects, including:

- Planning, design, and construction of new trails (motorized and non-motorized).
- Maintenance and restoration of existing trails (motorized and non-motorized).
- Enhancement of access to recreational trails.
- Purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment.
- Acquisition of land or easements for a trail or for trail corridors.
- Publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection as related to recreational trails.

Over the past eight years, the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program has awarded more than \$21M in grants to 130 projects. The eligibility criteria, total value, percentage of funds allocated to each project type, and example projects are provided below.

**Table 5. Connecticut Recreational Trail Development Grants 2015 - 2023**

Grant Round	Total Allocations	Recipients
2015	\$6,715,060	35
2016-2017	\$399,916	7
2018-2019	\$3,223,731	19
2020-2021	\$2,889,878	19
2022-2023	\$8,586,115	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$21,814,700</b>	<b>130</b>

### Planning Projects

Planning awards of \$2,253,548 (10.3% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that developed trail corridor studies and planning efforts, baseline condition assessments, and trail management plans. Recent examples include:

- (2016-2017) Planning and design of Nathan Hale Greenway, a multi-use trail system on 10 miles of the former Rte. 6 Expressway land recently conveyed to the towns of Bolton and Coventry by the Connecticut Department of Transportation.
- (2018-2019) Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development’s Master Plan for Air Line Trail State Park, including resource inventory, wayfinding, economic opportunities, bike to work assessment, increase safe routes to schools, and maintenance plan.
- (2020-2021) City of Danbury received funding for the Danbury Trail Route Planning Study to evaluate the best route for a multi-use trail connecting the terminus of Maybrook Trailway East Branch Reservoir Trail at the New York state border to downtown Danbury and Tarrywile Park.
- (2022-2023) City of Hartford was funded to study, identify, and plan vital trail connectivity opportunities between interior Keney Park trails and Hartford Riverwalk.

### Design and Development Projects

Design awards of \$5,200,583 (23.8% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that include the conceptual, preliminary, or final design plans for trail connections, including public participation, permitting, and associated studies required prior to construction. State and national RTP’s are important sources of design



*DEEP Maintainer at Penwood State Park, Bloomfield (DEEP)*

funding that provide access to a broad range of Connecticut Department of Transportation construction funding opportunities. Examples are:

- (2015-2016) Structural engineering and surveying to provide the project site plan, permits, land survey, and design work for a one-mile multi-use path connecting the Historic Waterfront District of New London—already a multi-modal transportation center—with Fort Trumbull State Park.
- (2018-19) Preparation of construction documents for an ADA shelter, restroom, and interpretive exhibit observation deck at the Connecticut Audubon property in Pomfret adjacent to Air Line State Park Trail.
- (2020-2021) Town of Windsor for designing a significant segment of the state and regional Connecticut riverfront trail. The proposed trail will link two of Windsor’s village centers, Windsor Center and Wilson, through Windsor Meadows State Park to the broader Riverfront Recapture trail system.
- (2022-2023) Borough of Naugatuck was funded for the design, engineering, and right-of-way acquisition of 0.5 miles for Naugatuck Valley Greenway south of Whittemore Bridge on Maple Street.

### Land Acquisition Projects

Land acquisition awards of \$170,000 (0.8% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that acquire land or easements for trail corridors. Three RTP projects have used for such an award:

- (2015-16) Acquisition of 2.4 acres by Manchester Land Trust and development of a 1-mile trail link. This award provided the funds required to obtain access to the railroad property that connects Hop River State Park Trail and Cheney Rail Trail.
- (2020-2021) Town of Thompson was funded for work on Train Wreck Park, including acquisition of 1.1 acres of land that will provide a cultural amenity adjacent to the portion of Air Line State Park Trail in that town.
- (2022-2023) City of Shelton was funded to conduct the planning, design, and land acquisition components of a project to extend Shelton Riverwalk.

### Construction and Construction Administration Projects

Construction awards of \$9,833,475 (45.1% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that actively construct new recreational trails or trail segments and include labor, materials, and construction administration costs. Trail construction projects represent close to half the allocated funds of the program. Example projects include:

- (2015-2016) Construct a 9,300 foot long, 6-foot-wide natural trail extending from an existing ADA-compliant trail segment south across Goodwin University Campus along the Connecticut River toward Glastonbury, linking East Hartford trails at Putnam Memorial Bridge to a regional trail network.
- (2018-2019) Construction to close a gap in the Cheney Rail Trail system in Manchester, which is part of the national East Coast Greenway.
- (2020-2021) Town of Vernon was funded for repairs and enhancements to Hop River State Park Trail (5.1 miles), the Rockville Spur of Vernon’s Rails-to-Trails (4.1 miles), and the Hockanum River Linear Park and Dart Hill Trails (4.0 miles).
- (2022-2023) Town of New Hartford received funding to construct Phase I of a multi-use trail connecting the center of New Hartford to the Farmington River Trail in Canton.

### Equipment Projects

Equipment awards of \$485,677 (2.2% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that purchased and leased trail construction and maintenance equipment. Equipment funds are most often a component of a more comprehensive project covering a broader range of project types. Example projects include:

- (2015-2016) The purchase of two attachments for a tractor owned by the Farmington Valley Trails Council to continuously manage the trail corridor.
- (2016-2017) The Last Green Valley purchased and is utilizing the upgraded High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HETAP) equipment, plus training new volunteers and hosting new events. The support provided by this grant enabled the improvement of accessibility on many miles of trails.
- (2020-2021) Trail equipment, equipment rentals, and safety equipment for Connecticut Forest & Park Association’s Blue-Blazed Trail Crew, which maintains more than 900 miles of hiking trails in Connecticut.
- (2022-2023) Riverfront Recapture received funding to purchase and install trail security cameras and video analytic software to report trail visitor data along Hartford Riverwalk in both Hartford and East Hartford.

### Trail Amenities and Facilities Projects

Trail amenity and facility awards of \$283,047 (1.3% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that designed, built, or purchased parking lots, toilet buildings, signs, and benches. It is important to note that amenities are tightly incorporated into construction plans and costs, therefore this summary focuses on projects that solely identified amenities. Example projects:

- (2015-2016) Bike bollards and racks, trash receptacles, benches, and signage for Hamden’s Center Park Spur Trail, which connects to Farmington Canal Heritage Trail.
- (2020-2021) Town of Windham received funding to improve the condition of its portion of Air Line State Park Trail, including deteriorated fencing, insufficient safety measures, signage, and other aesthetics.
- (2022-2023) The Hop River Trail Alliance—whose member towns include Andover, Bolton, Columbia, Coventry, Manchester, Vernon, and Windham—received funding to design and install signage along the entire 20-mile length of Hop River State Park Trail, as well as a 0.5-mile section of Willimantic River Greenway that connects Hop River State Park Trail and Air Line State Park Trail.

### Publications Projects

The intent and meaning of “publications” within Connecticut General Statutes Section 23-103, as amended by Public Act No. 15-190, is interpreted as “the act of making information or stories known to the public in a printed or electronic form” (Cambridge Dictionary). The Connecticut Recreational Trails Program is based on the National Park Service’s National Recreation Trails Program, which includes qualifying projects in the “Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection (as those objectives relate to one or more of the uses of recreational trails, supporting non-law enforcement trail safety and trail use monitoring patrol programs, and providing trail-related training).”

Outreach and education are therefore eligible projects and important recipients of funds as they address DEEP’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion objectives as well as other outdoor recreation goals. From 2015 to 2023, a total of \$1,567,137 (7.2% of total RTP awards) were granted to such projects. Examples include:

- (2015-2016) Connecticut Forest & Park Association: For Trails Weekend booklets, marketing, data collection, Great Park Pursuit, walk book, trail educational materials for distribution, signage, kiosks, maintenance equipment and materials, chainsaw training.
- (2018-2019) UConn Extension’s volunteer-based CT Trail Census: For trail use data collection and education program implemented as a pilot study from 2016-2018 on 16 multi-use (bicycle, pedestrian, equestrian) trail sites across the state. Design and launch of CT Trail Finder website, providing statewide access to officially approved trail maps and trail information and building a statewide trail database for planning and development.
- (2020-2021) Connecticut Forest & Park Association: For the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual CT Trails Day, the DEI Hike Series, and the Mansfield Elementary School-Nipmuck Blue Trail Connection.
- (2022-2023) Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development: For the formation and marketing of the Air Line State Park Trail Regional Association—comprised of the existing member towns on the 12-town Air Line State Park Trail Task Force—to coordinate regional planning, development, and maintenance activities for Air Line State Park Trail.

### Maintenance Projects

Maintenance awards of \$2,016,582 (9.2% of RTP awards) were granted to projects that include activities or construction to maintain the usability and sustainability of Connecticut’s existing recreational trail systems. Example projects include:

- (2015-2016) DEEP, Larkin State Park Trail: Resurfacing, drainage repairs, and parking improvements.
- (2018-2019) Connecticut Forest & Park Association: Statewide maintenance of Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails.
- (2020-2021) DEEP, Kent Falls State Park: Trail repairs.
- (2022-2023) DEEP, Bennett’s Pond State Park: Remove hazard trees along the green-blazed trail, remove, replace, and resurface aging culverts, and remove heavy vegetation adjacent to trails.

As identified in the above review of RTP grant funding allocation, construction awards (\$9,833,476 or 45.1%), and design awards (\$5,200,538 or 23.8%) dominate funding allocation. Construction and maintenance combined account for 54.3% of RTP funding (\$11,850,056). Planning and design account for 34.1% (\$7,454,131). These two main project categories cover 88.4% of awards. Publication and education awards account for 7.2% of RTP funding (\$1,567,137), equipment for 2.2% (\$485,677), and land acquisition for 0.8% (\$175,200).

### Trails of Regional Significance

There are more than 2,500 miles of trails across state park and forest lands, with many more publicly accessible trails on municipal, land trust, and other conservation lands. Several trails are identified as regionally significant by a range of national partner organizations and collaborations. Notable trails are identified below.

### New England Trail

The 215-mile New England Trail (NET) includes portions of four largely contiguous trails: the Mattabesett, Menunkatuck, and Metacomet Blue Trails in Connecticut and parts of the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail in Massachusetts. The NET was designated as a National Scenic Trail in 2009. The principal trail stewards of the NET are the staff and volunteers of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association in Connecticut and the Berkshire Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club in Massachusetts. They are assisted by the National Park Service in managing, protecting, restoring, and caring for this scenic New England treasure.

In 2021, 275 volunteers worked to maintain the NET, with approximately 7,069 hours in volunteer time donated along the length of the trail.

## East Coast Greenway

The East Coast Greenway (ECG), founded in 1991, is the nation’s longest connected biking and walking route. It accommodates bicyclists, walkers, runners, inline skaters, horseback riders, wheelchair users, cross-country skiers, and people of all ages and abilities. It travels through 25 cities and 450 communities from Maine to Key West, Florida. Despite being smaller than most East Coast Greenway states, Connecticut has one of the longest stretches of the route, at 200 miles long. The trail connects Stamford, Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford.



**Figure 4. East Coast Greenway in Connecticut**

Currently, 54% of the trail in Connecticut is a safe, off-road, multi-use trail. Additionally, the 56-mile Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, which is Connecticut’s portion of an 84-mile trail from New Haven to Northampton, MA, is nearing completion. The East Coast Greenway follows nearly the entire length of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. One short gap remains, but the final connection is currently planned, is almost 100% designed, and is already fully funded for construction to be completed by 2026. The East Coast Greenway also follows Air Line State Park Trail, which will be a 50-mile trail through 12 towns in eastern Connecticut once completed.

Between 2015 and 2023, 35 additional miles of East Coast Greenway were constructed or were moving to the construction phase in Connecticut, with allocated funding of approximately \$64M. Moving forward, 18 state and federally funded projects totaling 24 miles and \$95M will be completed by 2027, which would complete more than 64% of the ECG in Connecticut.

### Trail Partners and Advocacy Groups

DEEP’s Office of Trails and Greenways engages and collaborates with a broad range of partner organizations and agencies to support the planning and management of recreational trails across the state. Many of these organizations provide significant volunteer support and stewardship of recreational resources. DEEP is grateful to the many organizations who have supported trail maintenance and management throughout the state.

### The Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Established in 1895, the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is a strong advocate for hiking trails, maintaining 900 miles representing the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System. CFPA trail volunteers contribute thousands of hours annually to the maintenance and upkeep of this statewide network of trails. Section 23-10a of the Connecticut General Statutes states, “Those portions of the Connecticut Blue-Blazed Trail System that cross state property are hereby designated as state hiking trails.”

In 2021, CFPA volunteers donated more than 29,000 hours of in-kind work valued at more than \$800,000.

This work included the organization of 43 trail work parties with help from more than 300 volunteers. Volunteer training opportunities attracted 130 volunteers to 18 training sessions. Two new volunteer positions, Activity Leader and Habitat Steward, were added to the CFPA structure. The Ramble Guides held 38 rambles that connected more than 600 participants to the trails, walking locations, and open spaces the state has to offer.

To attract the next generation of conservation-conscious supporters, the Junior Conservation Ambassador program was offered to 16 students who were able to connect to the land thanks to a volunteer organizer and the support of 10 volunteer presenters.

Twenty-one Land Stewards monitored the 2,100+ acres of open space and forested land that CFPA protects. This work ensures CFPA properties are appropriately utilized and helps to strengthen CFPA's name in the community.

### **New England Mountain Bike Association**

The New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) is a non-profit recreational trails advocacy organization with 35 chapters and more than 10,000 members across five states. At 36 years, NEMBA is one of the oldest mountain bike advocacy organizations in the country. NEMBA's mission is to promote the best that mountain biking has to offer, steward the trail systems where members recreate, and preserve open space. NEMBA has six regional chapters in Connecticut: Central Connecticut Chapter, Housatonic Valley Chapter, Southeastern Connecticut Chapter, Fairfield County Chapter, Northwest Connecticut Chapter, and the Quiet Corner Chapter representing Northeastern Connecticut.

NEMBA leads nearly 1,000 mountain bike rides annually, hosting various skills clinics and trail-building schools. It advocates for mountain biking and recreational trails, as well as organizes hundreds of trail-building and maintenance events in scores of state parks across the New England region. It also donates more than 8,000 hours of volunteerism to local parks and forests each year. NEMBA is committed to working with key state leaders and land managers to protect mountain biking access and allow members to give back to the trails and to the sport they love.

### **UConn Extension—CT Trails Program**

The University of Connecticut Extension Connecticut Trails Program, funded through the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program, supports statewide coordination, data collection, research, and publication of Connecticut's trail resources. The Connecticut Trail Census, the Connecticut Trail Finder, and People Active on Trails for Health and Sustainability (PATHS) make up UConn's trail programs.

The Connecticut Trail Census is an innovative statewide volunteer-based data collection and education program that encourages data-informed decision making and promotes active resident participation in multi-use path monitoring and advocacy. The Trail Census includes 23 state-wide trail use counts recorded by infrared pedestrian counters and trail user intercept surveys, and it provides the most comprehensive estimate of multi-use trail use in the region.

The Connecticut Trail Finder is a free, interactive mapping website designed to help Connecticut residents and visitors find hiking, walking, snowshoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and paddling trails across the state. Detailed trail description pages allow users to view the trails, get essential information, and submit trip comments and photos. The website includes state park and forest trails, municipal trails, land trusts, the CFPA Blue-Blazed Trail System and more. The database that UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research is developing for the CT Trail Finder will provide the most comprehensive state-wide inventory of trail resources to date, which can serve not only for public outreach but can also be useful for planning trail management activities.

People Active on Trails for Health and Sustainability (PATHS) is an interdisciplinary team at UConn committed to understanding and promoting the benefits of trails and natural resources for health, community, and economic development.

### **The Last Green Valley**

The Last Green Valley is a 35-town National Heritage Corridor in eastern Connecticut and south-central Massachusetts, and is a member-supported, non-profit stewardship organization within the National Heritage Corridor. Congress designated this region as The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor, recognizing the



*Volunteer Horse Patrol members encounter hikers and bicyclist in the Lost Silvermine Horse Camp at Natchaug State Forest, Hampton.*

region as a unique national resource encompassing 35 towns: 26 in Connecticut and nine in Massachusetts. The Connecticut municipalities include Ashford, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Chaplin, Coventry, Eastford, Franklin, Griswold, Hampton, Killingly, Lebanon, Lisbon, Mansfield, Norwich, Plainfield, Pomfret, Preston, Putnam, Scotland, Sprague, Sterling, Thompson, Union, Voluntown, Windham, and Woodstock. Forest and farmland make up 84% of its almost 707,000 acres, yet it lies only an hour from three of New England's four largest urban areas. Its 300,000 inhabitants reside only 2.5 hours from 25 million people. The location of this largely undeveloped rural island amid the most urbanized region in the nation makes it a resource of local, regional, and national importance.

The Last Green Valley serves as a significant greenway within Connecticut, and its managing organization is a key partner to the Office of Trails and Greenways, serving as a member of the Greenways Council, coordinating the annual Spring Outdoors and Walktober events, and encouraging community engagement on trails, hikes, walks, and bike rides across the region.

### **The Connecticut Horse Council and the Equine Advisory Council**

The Equine Advisory Council (EAC) was established on May 22, 2007, by Public Act 07-42 to assist the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection with issues related to the preservation of equine trails in the state. The EAC consists of the president of the Connecticut Horse Council (CHC), established in 1971, and five representatives from organizations that serve the horse industry within each congressional district statewide, in addition to one member of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association, appointed by the minority leader of the Senate. The goals of the council are to:

- Promote equestrian use on public lands.

- Preserve, maintain, and restore existing trails.
- Promote the development of new multi-use trails.
- Document and create maps for trails used by equestrians.

During 2022, the CHC's Volunteer Horse Patrol (VHP) had 1,808 patrols. They logged 4,000 patrol hours valued at more than \$100,000 in service to the state. The VHP's 20 years of volunteer contributions total 53,505 hours, equating to services worth \$1,337,625. The VHP patrols state and private lands, monitoring trail conditions and reporting to the property owners as well as providing assistance to trail users.

### New England Trail Riders Association

The New England Trail Riders Association (NETRA) promotes the sport of safe and responsible off-road motorcycling in the New England and New York region. More than 80 competitive and recreational events are held annually across the region, including several licensed events in Connecticut, providing a range of opportunities. NETRA is also a steward of off-road riders' rights. They are active with state legislators and land managers to preserve and expand the right to ride. NETRA has more than 3,000 members and 25 member clubs, including six clubs in Connecticut: Berkshire Trail Riders, Central Cycle Club, Connecticut Ramblers Motorcycle Club, Meriden Motorcycle Club, Salmon River County Riders, and Pathfinders Motorcycle Club.

### Connecticut Off Road Enthusiasts Coalition

The Connecticut Off Road Enthusiasts Coalition (COREC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to lobbying and petitioning state legislators to designate land exclusively for use by its off-road community, through the support of members, dealers, and other supporting organizations.

### Connecticut Land Conservation Council

There are more than 130 land trusts in Connecticut that provide a wide range of access to open spaces and trail resources. The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC), the only statewide service provider for all Connecticut land trusts, serves as a partner to DEEP's Office of Trails and Greenways. The CLCC is a leader in advocacy and policy, education and training, and technical assistance to empower Connecticut's land trusts, and it works to ensure the long-term viability of land conservation efforts in the state.

### Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance

The Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance (CORA), established in 2019, is a broad coalition of stakeholders providing a unified voice for Connecticut's growing outdoor recreation industry. Engaged in a concerted effort to grow outdoor recreation by supporting the development of Connecticut's outdoor recreation economy, CORA believes outdoor recreation is created through the intersection of resources (parks, trails, waterways, etc.), users (hikers, boaters, skiers, hunters, anglers, etc.) and related commercial enterprises (manufacturers, distributors, labor, retailers, hospitality, etc.). CORA has provided advisory services to enhance governmental processes related to outdoor recreation access and priorities.

### Regional Partners

There are many more organizations that partner with the Office of Trails and Greenways. Many regional collaborations of volunteers, municipal and state representatives, planners, and professionals serve to support the planning, implementation, and expansion of their trails and greenways. Some of these organizations include the Farmington Valley Trails Council, Hop River Alliance, Norwalk River Valley Trail, Naugatuck River Greenway, and the Shoreline Greenway.

Regional Councils of Governments (COGS), regional planning organizations, Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development, and several watershed councils and associations also support trails and greenways throughout Connecticut as a component of their respective missions. COGS are key partners in coordinating and planning funding opportunities between many state agencies and bringing opportunities to local municipalities and communities.



*Above and below: family paddling at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (CTvisit)*



## Boating Division

The Boating Division’s mission is to provide boating access and promote safe and clean boating on all of Connecticut’s coastal and inland waters. This mission is accomplished by providing access at 117 state boat launches that feature parking, access ramps, and associated infrastructure, by promoting boating safety through outreach, education, and certification, and by fostering environmental stewardship through the promotion of the Clean Vessel Act program. The Boating Division works in cooperation with other agency divisions and with many federal, municipal, and boating safety partners.

The Boating Division receives federal financial assistance to carry out the cooperative agreement between DEEP and the United States Coast Guard and to locally support their Recreational Boating Safety Program. This assistance allows DEEP to implement state initiatives to reduce the number of boating accidents, injuries, and deaths on Connecticut waters. Through education and outreach, strategic placement of regulatory markers, regulated events, improved access, and active law enforcement, the boaters on Connecticut’s waters become more knowledgeable. This encourages the boaters of Connecticut to have a safe, secure, and enjoyable recreational boating experience.

### State Boat Launches

The Boating Division manages and maintains access to 117 state boat launches located throughout the state, including 22 that provide boating access to Long Island Sound. Each year, these launches are maintained by landscaping, picking up refuse, resurfacing, line striping, concrete repairs to the ramps, and wooden dock repairs. Solar lights, ADA-accessible parking, portable toilet platforms, and platform screens have been added at many boat launches. Toilet facilities are provided at 72 of the launches. In 2022, the Pachaug Pond State Boat Launch in Griswold was completely renovated.

### Boating Infrastructure Grant Program

The Boating Division administers the federal Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (BIG) on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This program seeks to address insufficient facilities for transient, non-trailer boats and connect boaters with recreational, cultural, historical, scenic, and natural resources of the United States.

BIG program funds are made available to public and private agencies, marinas, and facilities that provide transient tie-up opportunities for non-trailer boats. Eligible projects include the construction, renovation, and maintenance of publicly or privately-owned facilities including docks and moorings; upland amenities such as bathrooms, showers, laundry facilities, and picnic areas; installation of navigational aids for safe passage to the tie-up facility; and educational materials. Altogether, 12 BIG projects have been completed in Connecticut, all of which can be found on DEEP’s interactive *Facilities for Transient Boaters* map (Figure 5).<sup>4 5</sup>

The Boating Division’s mission is accomplished by providing access at 117 state boat launches that feature parking, access ramps, and associated infrastructure, by promoting boating safety through outreach, education, and certification.

<sup>4</sup> [www.ct.gov/deep/transientboaterfacilities](http://www.ct.gov/deep/transientboaterfacilities)

<sup>5</sup> For more information about the program please visit: [Boating Infrastructure Grant Program](#)



**Figure 5. Facilities for Coastal Transient Boaters**

### Aquatic Invasive Species Control

Invasive species threaten the quality of recreational aquatic sites. To maintain the quality of Connecticut’s waterbodies, Boating Division staff have participated in several initiatives and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

For example, the Zebra Mussel Task Force, formed in 2010 in response to the discovery of zebra mussels in the Candlewood Lake area, was expanded to become a Regional Lake Task Force. The Regional Lake Task Force includes individuals and agencies with expertise in zebra mussels, DEEP staff from the Fisheries and Boating Divisions, and lake community residents and representatives. The scope of the water quality topics covered by the Task Force also increased to include invasive plants and blue-green algal blooms.

In 2012, Connecticut General Statutes Section 15-180 was amended to require the inspection of vessels and trailers for aquatic invasive species (AIS) such as zebra mussels. In 2022, more than 4,300 vessel inspections were completed by seasonal Boating Division staff. Through outreach efforts, including direct conversations with boaters and a digital advertising campaign in 2022, awareness of AIS laws in Connecticut continues to improve.

### Outreach Efforts

Connecticut is a state rich with boating access and diverse waterbodies. From Long Island Sound to small inland rivers, diverse waterbodies call for specialized boating safety outreach. To broadcast safety messages that are waterbody specific and effective, the Boating Division utilizes several methods, including two outreach vessels.

The first vessel, named *Prudence*, is used on larger inland waterbodies and Long Island Sound. On waterbodies that have motor restrictions or speed limits, the Boating Division utilizes a smaller vessel that is powered by an electric outboard. This type of motor is particularly useful when accessing smaller waterbodies and gives the Boating Division a chance to interact with a broader range of boaters.

While on the water, DEEP staff educates boaters about local regulations, provides boating safety tips, and discusses other boating education-related topics. DEEP staff approaches as many boaters as possible, from paddlers to those operating larger vessels. Waterbodies are targeted when boater activity is expected to be the highest, including weekends and evenings, in order to have the most impact.

The Boating Division has expanded boating safety messaging through social media channels including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, on which it collectively has more than 9,000 followers. The

Division posts relevant information about new regulations, updated technology, and boat launch closures. Early in the calendar year, when the water remains cold and the air warms up, there is a real danger to boaters. DEEP launched a “Cold Water” campaign in 2022 to bring more focused attention to boating during the March to May months. This campaign included an increase in safety reminders for cold water boating and ice safety.

For more boater information on safety topics and regulations, the Boating Division also publishes an annual *Connecticut Boater’s Guide* magazine. The agency distributes 75,000 hard copies of this guide each year and provides digital options in both English and Spanish.

Seasonal staff known as Boating Education Assistants, or BEAs, visited state boat launches to interact with boaters to discuss clean and safe boating, including pump-out facilities, aquatic invasive species, no-discharge areas, wearing life jackets, and more. BEAs conduct voluntary Vessel Safety Checks and Aquatic Invasive Species Inspections and report launch conditions.

For more information about these vessels or other outreach programs, please visit the website:

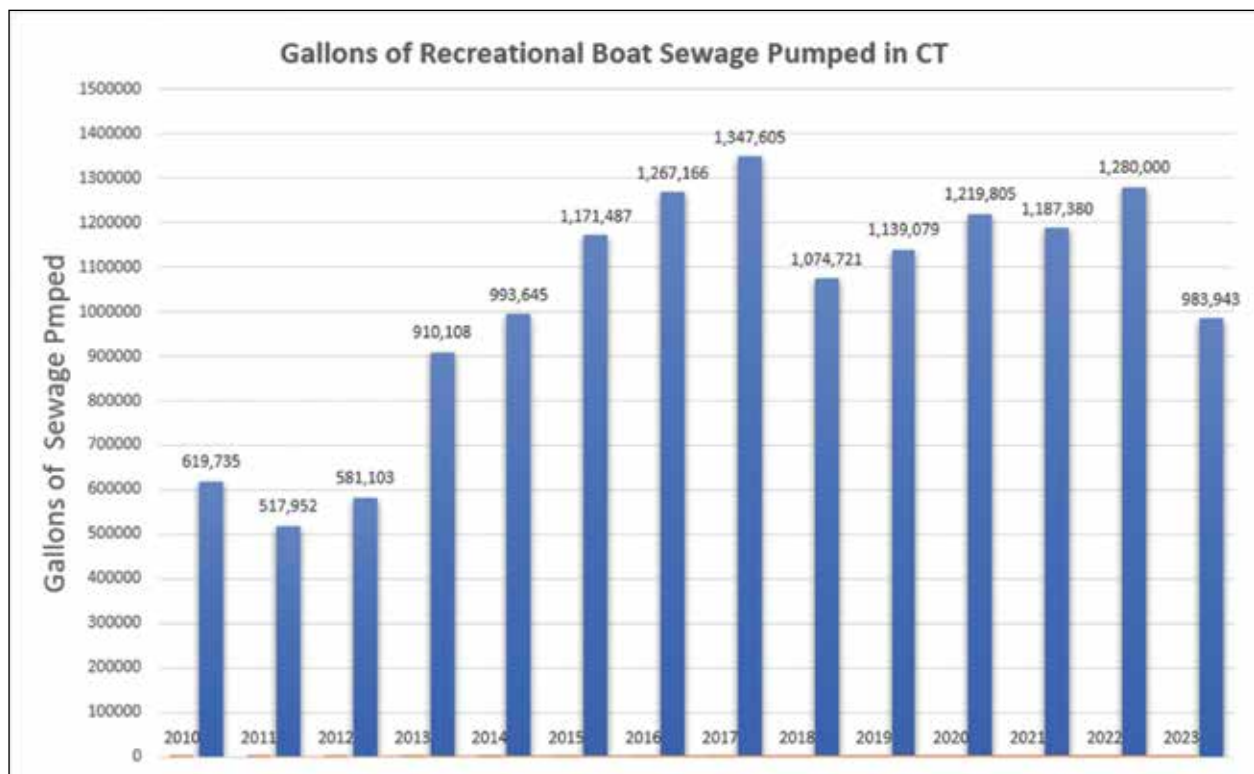
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Boating-and-Paddling>

### Safe-Boating Classes and Certification

Mandatory safety education for vessel operators in Connecticut started in 1992. The safe-boating course began by teaching about boating safety and evolved to include safe personal watercraft operation in 1999. The program expanded again in 2015 to include safety while engaged in towed watersports. With the assistance of volunteer instructors, the Boating Division provides education to an average of 1,800 students each year. In response to Covid-19, safe boating courses were approved for teaching in a virtual classroom, in addition to the traditional classroom setting, and this method continues today.

### Clean Water Management

Clean water and clean air make boating experiences more enjoyable. By becoming aware of some of the environmental hazards that are associated with boating and using sound environmental boating practices, boaters learn to help protect the resource and ensure the future health of Connecticut’s waters. In 2022, there were 2,971 clean boater pledges received.



**Figure 6. Gallons of Recreational Boat Sewage Pumped**

Since its inception, the Federal Clean Water Act has prohibited the discharge of untreated sewage from vessels in all of Long Island Sound. Connecticut’s coastal waters, from the Rhode Island state boundary in the Pawcatuck River to the New York state boundary in the Byram River and extending from shore out to the New York state boundary formed by the centerline of Long Island Sound, have been designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as a federal No Discharge Area. In these waters, the discharge of any sewage from any vessel is prohibited. Facilities funded under this program provide free pump-out services to recreational boaters statewide.

The Boating Division has awarded approximately \$8.5M in Clean Vessel Act grant funds to qualifying projects that provide boat sewage disposal facilities. The Boating Division provides a pump-out vessel on Candlewood Lake as well. An interactive web app was created so that boaters can easily locate a pump-out facility or pump-out boat from their smartphone or tablet. Visit: [Connecticut CVA Pump-Out Directory Application \(arcgis.com\)](#)

The Division is positioned to continue educating boaters about clean and safe boating. The Division achieves these goals through the deployment of Boating Education Assistants at state boat launches, through boating safety classes and outreach events at boat shows and other on-water venues, and through innovative educational programming.

## **Division of State Environmental Conservation Police**

The Division of State Environmental Conservation Police (EnCon) mission is natural resource protection and public safety through education, outreach, and enforcement. EnCon added eight new positions in 2022 and 2023 due to state budget support from Governor Lamont and the legislature, resulting in 62 sworn officer positions statewide. EnCon is completing the hiring process for these positions, which will help address increased enforcement needs stemming from the spike in demand for outdoor recreation, increased park visitation, and elevated human-bear conflicts.

The Division is composed of certified police officers with the primary responsibility for enforcing the state’s boating, wildlife, and commercial and recreational fishing laws and for providing traditional law enforcement services in Connecticut state parks and forests.

EnCon also enforces Connecticut’s off-road vehicle statutes to prevent environmental degradation of sensitive landscapes. These efforts improve the quality of life for the residents that recreate in Connecticut state parks and forests and on the waterways of the state.

### **Education and Outreach**

The Division of State Environmental Conservation Police maintains two public outreach trailers outfitted for use at public events to highlight the Division’s mission of natural resource protection and public safety through education, outreach, and enforcement. These public outreach trailers are taken to special events, including large agricultural fairs, boat shows, hunting and fishing shows, and public safety events done in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies. This gives uniformed officers the opportunity to interact with the public in a positive setting and respond to questions about a variety of topics ranging from wildlife concerns to boating safety requirements. From 2017 through 2022, officers from the EnCon Police Division participated in 1,469 public outreach events.

### **Operation Game Thief**

In 2015, the Division began efforts to initiate a new program called Connecticut Operation Game Thief. The goals of the program are to promote outdoor recreation including hunting and fishing, bring awareness to the public of the consequences of poaching, be a recruiting tool for the profession of conservation law enforcement, and identify and apprehend wildlife violators. This effort is still under development with significant progress being made during 2022, including the Division sending an officer to the annual International Wildlife Crimestopper’s meeting. The Division has plans to follow through with this program in the coming years.



*Encon Officer handing out life jackets donated by the Emily Fedorko Foundation at an outreach event.*



*Encon Officer seizes undersized tautog in Long Island Sound.*

## K-9 Program

The EnCon Police Division has continued to expand the K-9 Program from four officers selected for the Unit in 2011 to seven teams currently. In 2022, the Division added three new K-9s to the teams and completed three weeks of rigorous training by the State Police K-9 Unit and were certified in search and rescue tracking and evidence recovery. From 2017 through 2022, the K-9 Unit's skills and abilities were called upon 456 times to assist in the search for lost and missing persons and the location of evidence.

## Police Accountability

In 2020, Connecticut required, as part of a sweeping police accountability bill, that all law enforcement officers be outfitted with body-worn cameras and dash cameras in patrol vehicles by July 1, 2022. EnCon Police met that requirement by outfitting officers with body-worn cameras and dash cameras while working diligently to update Division policy and procedures to meet state-mandated police accreditation standards for 2023. The accreditation standards will ensure that EnCon Police are following nationwide best practices in order to be responsive to constituents and serve them in a professional manner.

## Enforcement

During the period January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2022, EnCon Police logged a total of 159,644 calls for service. In this period, officers issued 6,358 citations and 3,650 warnings, investigated 202 accidents, and made 638 arrests. EnCon staffing levels throughout the 5-year period ranged from as low as 44 officers to 50 officers as the Division experienced the retirement of several experienced officers and the hiring of new officers during this time. For 2023, EnCon Police will work to fill vacancies from retirements and add new officers with funding appropriated from the 2022 state budget.



*Owl roosting at Windsor Locks Canal State Park, Windsor Locks (DEEP)*

## Bureau of Natural Resources

The Bureau of Natural Resources (BNR), like many other entities, faced many challenges in 2020. Connecticut's state forests, wildlife management areas, water access areas, fishing access locations and piers, and natural area preserves all experienced unprecedented increases in public use during the pandemic as people sought solace in nature and pursued more independent forms of recreation. While the increased interest and activity presented challenges in terms of facility capacity, it also created a unique opportunity to engage with new audiences, foster a love of nature and the outdoors, increase awareness of conservation issues facing fish, wildlife, and their habitats, and help BNR reimagine how it engages with people.

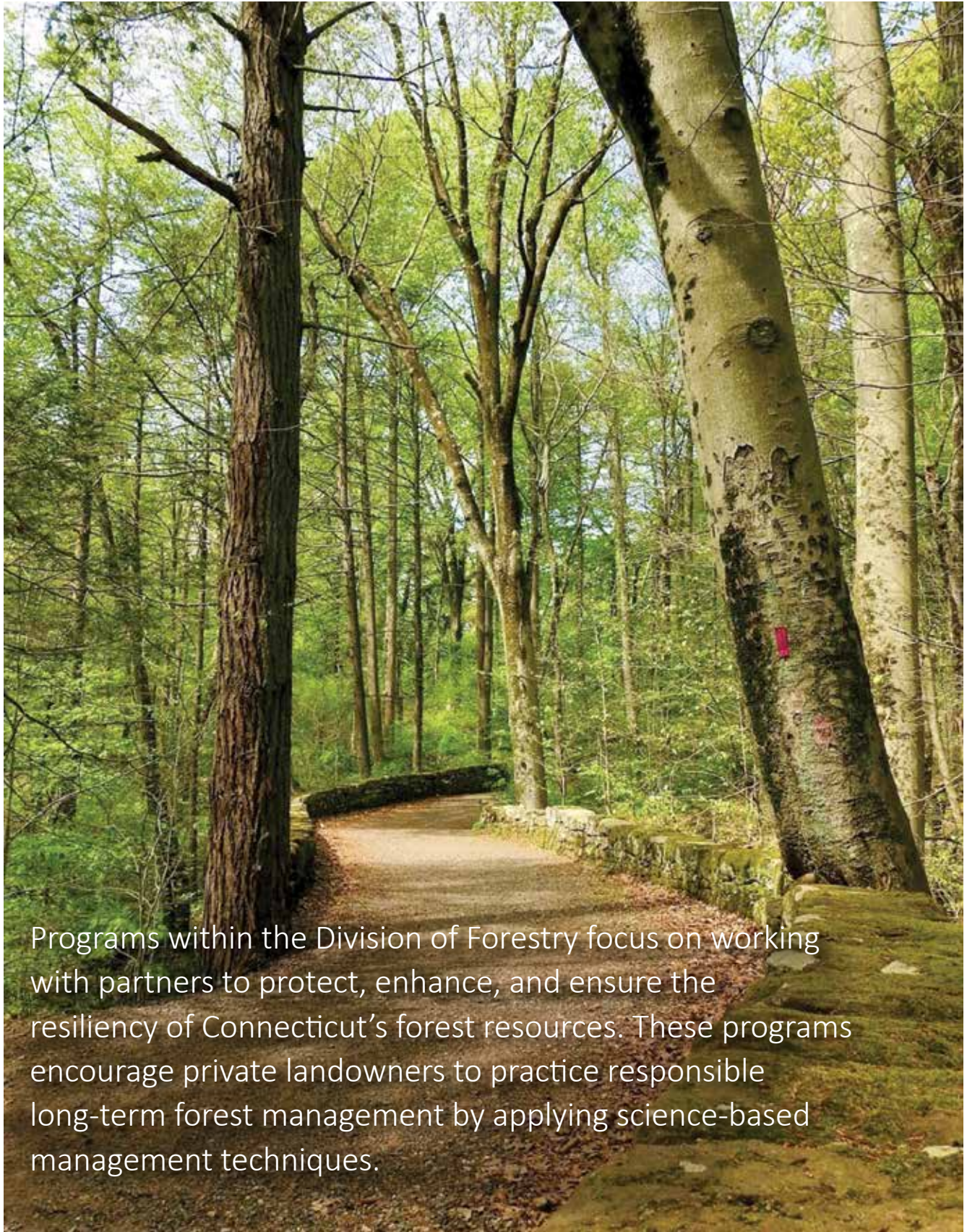
An area of focus for the Bureau of Natural Resources is addressing the impacts of climate change on ecosystems. Creating healthy, more resilient habitats helps fish, wildlife, and people. Significant new federal investments have enabled a focus on increasing urban tree canopy cover and sustaining urban trees and riparian areas as places for recreation and refuge from urban heat island stress. The globalized economy has contributed to an increased occurrence of new and emerging invasive insects, non-native plants, and new diseases that have negatively impacted natural resources. Climate change has exacerbated extreme seasonal weather patterns, resulting in both drought and flood conditions, sea level rise, and increased storm intensity. These stressors have combined to amplify management challenges and the complexity of actions needed to ensure that outdoor activities remain accessible and enjoyable, and that fish and wildlife resources, and the habitats they rely on, are here for future generations to enjoy.

*Connecticut Wildlife Magazine* continues to be popular, with articles about inland and marine fisheries, forestry, and wildlife, and encouraging the interest of all outdoor enthusiasts. *Wildlife Highlights* and *Hunter Highlights* are monthly and quarterly electronic newsletters that provide tips on wildlife-associated recreation, outdoor safety, and wildlife conservation. These digital resources reach approximately 7,000 and 2,000 readers, respectively.

The Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) was established to a.) enhance communication and the exchange of information involving the management of natural resources among and between sportsmen and conservation organizations and the DEEP, b.) identify and address issues that affect the users of outdoor recreation areas and natural resources, and c.) advise and assist the DEEP in matters involving the management of natural resources and outdoor activities. The CAC consists of conservation and outdoor sports organizations whose activities are enhanced or affected by the Bureaus of Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation. Members of the Council are recommended by the sitting Council and appointed by the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, to include up to 25 regular members, five members at large, and 10 emeritus members.

DEEP staff and many DEEP-produced educational materials are involved in the Connecticut Envirothon. The Connecticut Envirothon is a natural resource-based education program started in 1992 by the state's Soil and Water Conservation Districts. High school students work in teams led by a teacher/advisor. During the school year, teams receive curriculum materials and are invited to a series of training workshops in the five Envirothon study areas of *Soils*, *Aquatics*, *Wildlife*, *Forestry*, and a *Current Environmental Issue*. These workshops are presented by foresters, soil scientists, aquatic ecologists, wildlife biologists, and many others. Students benefit from meeting people working in a broad range of environmental careers. Teachers also benefit and find the program a wonderful source of networking and professional growth for their own careers. A spring competition among teams results in a state winner. The winning team earns the chance to represent Connecticut at the North American Envirothon, a weeklong event held at a college campus during the summer. They compete with about 60 teams from across the United States and Canada for scholarships and other prizes. Many Envirothon alumni go on to further study leading to environmental careers and are eligible for special scholarships.

While 2020 halted many in-person recreational events, it provided an opportunity to reimagine how BNR connects with people and how it can help them engage with nature regardless of where they are. The Wildlife Division created activities that could be done at home, either to supplement online learning or to provide wildlife-associated recreational opportunities for residents' backyards, balconies, or neighborhood greenspaces. Links to live-stream wildlife cameras helped make nature accessible for everyone, and community science projects provided volunteers a way to continue contributing to research and conservation of natural resources. The increased interest in outdoor recreation provided an avenue to teach about the importance of caring for natural resources and recreating responsibly. The Wildlife Division participated in a national



Programs within the Division of Forestry focus on working with partners to protect, enhance, and ensure the resiliency of Connecticut’s forest resources. These programs encourage private landowners to practice responsible long-term forest management by applying science-based management techniques.

*Walking path at Wadsworth Falls State Park, Middletown (DEEP)*

#ResponsibleRecreation initiative and developed a webpage dedicated to the care and use of state parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and natural area preserves.

The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation<sup>6</sup> reported in 2016 that 101.6 million Americans of age 16 years and older—40% of the U.S. population—enjoyed some form of fishing, hunting, or wildlife-associated recreation. Outdoor recreation is a huge contributor to the nation’s economy, and expenditures by hunters, anglers, and wildlife-watchers were \$156B. This amounts to 1% of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product, meaning one out of every one hundred dollars of all goods and services produced in the U.S. is due to wildlife-associated recreation.

## Forestry Division

Programs within the Division of Forestry focus on working with partners to protect, enhance, and ensure the resiliency of Connecticut’s forest resources. These programs encourage private landowners to practice responsible long-term forest management by applying science-based management techniques. Private landowners possess 72% of Connecticut’s forests, with more than two-thirds of that owned by families or individuals. The Division protects Connecticut’s forest resources from the effects of fire, insects, disease, and misuse, provides accurate and timely information about Connecticut’s forest resources, certifies forest practitioners, manages the large blocks of contiguous forestland in state forests, engages municipalities and residents in the work of urban forestry, and encourages the local forest industry.

### State Forest Action Plan

In 2020, the Forestry Division completed a full update of the State Forest Action Plan. The State Forest Action Plan is a document intended to guide the management of forests by the DEEP Forestry Division and the Division’s forest conservation partners (academia, extension, non-profits, regional organizations, municipalities, and private landowners). Input from these partners, as well as from the public, was imperative to preparing a robust guidance document. The State Forest Action Plan is meant to complement other statewide plans including the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the Green Plan, the Governor’s Council on Climate Change (GC3) Plan, and the Policy on Resilient Forests for Connecticut’s Future (PRFCT Future) report.

### Forest Legacy Program

Since 2017, Connecticut’s Forest Legacy Program has permanently protected an additional 1,495 acres in Stafford using more than \$2.8M in federal Forest Legacy funding and is currently working on a 483-acre project in Ashford that was awarded nearly \$1.5M in federal Forest Legacy funding by the U.S. Forest Service. This project will be added to Connecticut’s existing Forest Legacy Program project list totaling 9,621 acres, with interests valued near \$24M, using slightly more than \$11M in federal funds.

### Grants and Technical Assistance

The U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have provided a significant amount of money since 2017 in the form of grants and technical assistance, with guidance from the Forestry Division to private landowners and non-profits to improve Connecticut’s forests. The U.S. Forest Service has awarded \$775,000 in competitive grants to Connecticut governmental and non-profit agencies with additional funding through multi-state projects. Through NRCS, from 2017 to 2022, more than \$2M was awarded to private landowners to complete forestry improvement projects and young forest habitat projects and to prepare forest stewardship plans offering guidance to ensure that management of forest resources in Connecticut is following science-based methods and practices.

In 2018, the Forestry Division, working with the state Wildlife Division, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and private landowners, began increasing the acreage of young forest habitat on state and private land to benefit wildlife species. Young forest habitat benefits at least 50 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in Connecticut and provides both structural and age diversity that can improve resiliency to climate change.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau; 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.



*Overlook at Sleeping Giant State Park, Hamden (CTvisit)*



*Soapstone Mountain Observation Platform, Shenipsit State Forest, Somers (DEEP)*

## State Lands Management Program

Since 2017, numerous challenges have arisen affecting forests throughout the state, including state-owned forest lands. Drought, spongy moth, beech leaf disease, and emerald ash borer have significantly impacted forest health and wildlife habitat, and there has been an increase in recreational uses across state lands resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

These challenges have presented opportunities to foresters working within the State Lands Management program. In response to forest health issues, DEEP foresters led the development of an assessment tool and trained DEEP staff to identify and record hazard tree information to mitigate public safety concerns to help keep DEEP facilities open and safe for continued use and enjoyment.

Since the emergence of Covid-19, there has been an increased interest in forest management activities on state lands as recreational use has expanded. In 2020, foresters began hosting field walks prior to implementing forestry projects with the objective of improving communications between foresters and the community and sharing information about the forest resource and management strategies that DEEP has developed for each area. These outreach events have been well received by the public and will continue for future projects.

In addition to increased traditional passive recreational uses such as hunting, hiking, and birding on state forest land, there has been a significant increase in active recreational uses such as unauthorized motorized vehicle use, as well as illegal trail creation and unauthorized use. Responsible trail use begins with the planning and development of an authorized trail system that is designed to minimize environmental impact on resources and habitat while providing recreational users the opportunity to discover and enjoy the forests of Connecticut.

## Forest Protection Program

DEEP's Forest Protection program has also been working in response to these issues. In Pachaug State Forest, work is being conducted utilizing multiple U.S. Forest Service Wildfire Risk Reduction grants to reduce excessive fuel loads and hazards and create fire breaks that would help protect firefighters and increase public safety along roads and trails in heavily impacted areas of the forest. This work began in 2018 and is expected to continue through 2024.

Additionally, work has been initiated to restore a sand barren ecosystem at Hopeville Pond State Park, specifically a pitch pine grassland community. This rare ecosystem provides habitat for several species of concern, including the buck moth. Without the disturbance of fire, it is anticipated that the pitch pine stands would be lost to natural competition and the opportunity to perpetuate the sand barren ecosystem will greatly diminish.

## Service Forestry Program

The Service Forestry program informed the development of Connecticut's first and only Master Woodland Manager program alongside the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. In its first year, and with the help of the Service Forestry program and partners such as Audubon Connecticut, University of Connecticut, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, and the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, this landowner education program engaged 34 landowners from 31 of the state's 169 municipalities. These participants completed 92 hours of field-based learning and 15 hours of virtual learning that prepared them to steward 12,358 forest acres throughout Connecticut. This program has been so successful that there continues to be an applicant waitlist each year.

## Urban Forestry Program

The Urban Forestry Program Coordinator developed and proposed legislation that was successfully passed in 2023, resulting in a statewide goal to increase urban tree canopy cover by 5% by 2040. Additionally, \$1M in Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative funds and \$500,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds were dedicated to urban forestry in 2020 and 2022, respectively. These funds have yielded successful municipal and non-profit grant programs, with an emphasis on capacity building and urban forest stewardship in historically underserved and vulnerable communities. Urban forestry is at the center of forestry-related policy development, statewide initiatives, and stewardship, as well as being integral to the 2020 State Forest Action Plan and the 2021 Governor's Council on Climate Change.



*First salmon on the fly, Shetucket River, Scotland (DEEP)*



*Kids enjoying tubes and sun at Mt Tom in Litchfield.*

## Fisheries Division

A major role of the DEEP Fisheries Division is to conserve and actively manage Connecticut’s fish and fisheries. Current estimates indicate recreational fishing provides approximately \$436M to Connecticut’s economy annually. In addition to an economic benefit, well-managed fisheries provide benefit to an increasingly informed public, one that appreciates the ecological value of healthy fisheries.

### Inland Fisheries

#### Fish Management

The Fish Management program seeks to create and maintain a diverse suite of recreational fishing opportunities for the public. Both cold water (e.g., trout and salmon) and warm water (e.g., black bass, walleye, northern pike, and channel catfish) fisheries are managed primarily through stocking or regulations or both. These practices result in trout management areas, bass management lakes, community fishing waters, and many other management types. Central to providing high-quality angling opportunities are management plans, which outline actions and management strategies. Currently, Fisheries Division biologists are operating under a Salmonid Action Plan, a Bass Action Plan, and a Wild Trout Conservation and Management Plan, each of which were developed with input from the angling public. A comprehensive Warmwater Fisheries Action Plan is being drafted.

#### Fish Culture

A cornerstone of recreational fishing in Connecticut is the State Fish Hatchery System, which began in 1899 with the first state-operated trout hatchery, located in Windsor Locks. Three facilities currently produce all trout and salmon stocked by the Fisheries Division to support recreational fishing. The largest is the Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery in Plainfield. Built in 1973, this facility rears and stocks nearly 400,000 adult trout annually. The Burlington State Fish Hatchery, built in 1923, supports the unique programs of Kokanee (sockeye salmon)—one of the only active recreational fisheries of its kind east of the Mississippi River—and the “Survivor Strain” brown trout fishery in the West Branch Farmington River. The facility and staff produce more than 100,000 adult-sized trout and more than 150,000 Kokanee fingerlings annually. The third facility, Kensington State Fish Hatchery, built in 1932, focuses on Atlantic salmon, both maintaining the genetics of the Connecticut River strain as well as producing fish specifically to support unique recreational fishing opportunities for Atlantic salmon on the Naugatuck and Shetucket rivers. This facility also rears and stocks the “Seeforellen Strain” brown trout, a strain that can reach large size in some of Connecticut’s trout management lakes.

#### Habitat Conservation and Enhancement

The Habitat Conservation and Enhancement (HCE) program serves as a vital liaison between the Fisheries Division and other DEEP programs, holding primary permitting responsibility for regulated activities potentially impacting fish populations and their habitats.

HCE staff interact directly with federal, state, and local regulatory and planning agencies as well as with private conservation organizations and individuals to provide timely information to conserve, restore, and enhance the state’s aquatic environments.

On average, HCE staff annually review more than 200 projects and activities that have the potential to affect fish habitat or fish populations. For many of these projects, HCE staff provide recommendations to applicants and regulatory staff that result in the protection, restoration, or enhancement of fish habitat and ensure that fish populations are not harmed. For example, recommendations for new culverts might request design changes relative to culvert slope and outlet elevation to ensure that fish can enter and swim through the culvert. Recommendations often include restricting the seasons when instream work can be done to protect spawning fish.

The HCE program also manages the introduction of sterile grass carp for the purpose of aquatic vegetation control in Connecticut’s lakes and ponds. Permits are needed to release grass carp into state waters and the HCE program has established criteria such as onsite inspections and screening requirements that must be met to obtain such permits. Annually, more than 125 permit applications for stocking triploid grass carp are processed.



*Quinebaug Valley Trout Hatchery, Plainfield*

### **Diadromous Fish Restoration**

The Diadromous Fish Restoration program seeks to restore runs of Connecticut’s migratory fish species. These include anadromous alewife, blueback herring, American shad, and sea lamprey, which spend most of their adult lives at sea but must return to freshwater to spawn, as well as catadromous American eel, which spend most of their adult lives in freshwater but must return to saltwater to spawn. Program staff strive to maintain, enhance, or restore migratory fish runs using a variety of strategies, including removing dams and other migratory barriers, constructing and operating fishways, transplanting fish, building partnerships, and providing public outreach to raise awareness about the importance of these keystone species.

### **Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education**

The Connecticut Aquatic Resource Education (CARE) program, established in 1986, strives to recruit people to the sport of fishing through a diverse set of free educational courses and hands-on experiences. A primary focus is to provide the skills and confidence to beginner anglers so they may choose fishing as an activity of choice through a combination of web-based training, instructional videos, in-person and virtual classes, and fishing events. The program offers ice fishing, trout fishing, warm water pond fishing, saltwater fishing, fly fishing, and women-only fishing events. CARE partners with organizations and municipalities to bring a successful first fishing experience to anglers of every age across the state in rural, suburban, and urban communities.

In 2019, Connecticut was one of 10 states to be awarded a Mobile First Catch Center, a graphic-wrapped cargo trailer designed to haul all the gear needed to facilitate statewide “pop up” fishing events to help introduce people to fishing. With the addition of a Mobile First Catch Center, provided through a grant from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), the CARE program can bring fishing to your neighborhood. In 2021, more than 4,100 people attended 139 events hosted in 41 towns. A second grant from RBFF provided funding to purchase equipment for Beginner Fishing Kits, which are distributed to participants at First Catch Events. Crucial to assisting the CARE staff reach as many people as possible are certified volunteer fishing coaches who donated 2,877 hours in 2021, providing \$163,646 of in-kind match for the Division’s Federal Sport Fish Restoration Grant.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Federal-Funding-for-Fish-and-Wildlife>

The global pandemic of 2020 prompted a shift in CARE programs to include virtual classes featuring self-paced, online learning with video content. In addition to greatly expanding the fishing instruction video library, the CARE program launched self-paced, web-based introduction to fishing courses in English and Spanish. The course, based on the CARE Introduction to Fishing curriculum, was key to continuing to engage people during the Covid-19 pandemic, when in-person gatherings were not possible. The course continues to be popular due to the flexibility for people to participate when and where convenient.

### **Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3)**

The Fisheries Division has developed an Angler R3 Plan to build upon prior R3 actions and to ensure that its efforts are relevant moving forward. The R3 efforts are structured into three different themes: Opportunities and Access, Adult-Onset Participation, and Feeding the Flame. Each theme has a hierarchy of goals, objectives, and details needed for implementation. Examples of recent successful activities and campaigns include the implementation of an online angler recognition submission process that includes the Youth Fishing Passport –Fishing Challenge, the Tiger-Tamer campaign that provides free T-shirts to people who caught a Tiger Trout (a cross between a male brook trout and a female brown trout), and the Take a Friend Fishing campaign to encourage existing anglers to share their passion for fishing with others.

### **Fisheries Education and Outreach**

The distribution of relevant fishing information is key to maintaining relevant and timely communication with those who are interested in fish and fishing. The Fisheries Division uses a multi-faceted approach including social media (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube), webinars, a monthly e-newsletter (*CT Fishin' Tips*), articles in *Connecticut Wildlife Magazine*, email, trout stocking reports, and an interactive stocking map. Public presentations at various sporting clubs, groups, and associations as well as television and radio interviews, along with Facebook Live sessions and webinars all deliver the Division's message to a variety of audiences.

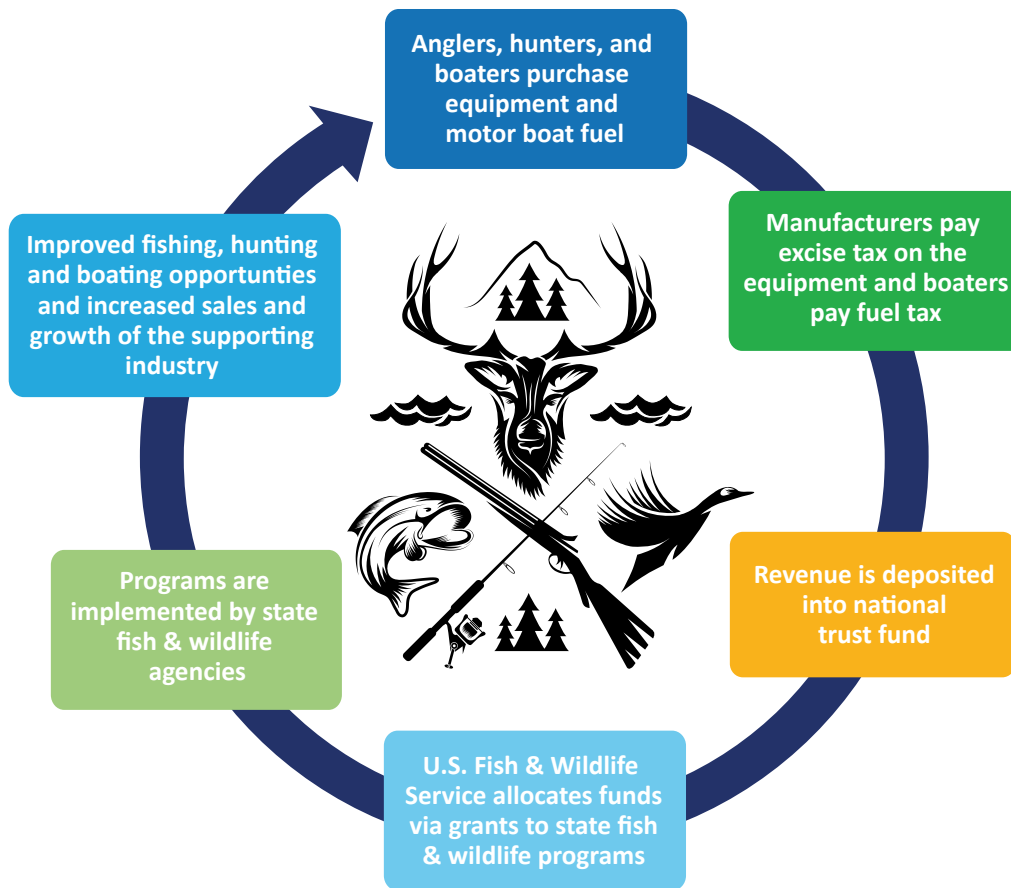
### **Conservation Partners**

The Fisheries Division receives support and partnership from many local and regional conservation organizations involved in angling, boating, fisheries management, aquatic habitat protection, and fish passage. These groups provide hundreds of hours of volunteer effort annually by teaching Connecticut Aquatic Resources Education (CARE) programs, cleaning streams and rivers, enhancing aquatic habitat, assisting with fish stocking, participating in community science projects, testifying, and helping to address invasive species issues. Generous conservation partners include the Connecticut Fisheries Advisory Council, Trout Unlimited, Connecticut River Salmon Association, Connecticut River Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and dozens of local private fish and game clubs.

### **Marine Fisheries**

The Marine Fisheries program has been entrusted with managing and conserving marine natural resources and ecosystems for all residents of the state. This program oversees an area encompassing 618 miles of tidal coastline, 1,300 square miles of Long Island Sound, and the estuary zones of three major river systems: the Connecticut, Thames, and Housatonic Rivers. Long Island Sound is steeped in cultural and historical traditions utilizing common property resources that support outdoor recreation. Approximately 95% of state residents live within 50 miles of Long Island Sound and 150,000 residents enjoy recreational fishing in the waters of the Sound. Marine Fisheries manages important recreational fish and invertebrate species for all residents of the state to enjoy and have access to.

The Marine Fisheries program continues to work with federal, state, and municipal partners on sustainable fisheries management while maintaining the health of this diverse fishery resource. The Marine Fisheries program strives to acquire coastal access to protect and support important fisheries habitat while also allowing constituents to participate in outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation relevancy is determined through surveying constituents, determining their needs, and, more importantly, exceeding their expectations as it applies to Connecticut's natural, cultural, and historical resources. Lastly, the program strives to better understand the impacts of recreation on natural marine ecosystems to make informed decisions to protect, conserve, and manage the important resources of the state.



**Figure 7. Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Plan**

The Marine Fisheries program actively participates in DEEP’s priority to acquire property or easements to facilitate safe public access for fishing, supporting the Bureau of Natural Resources’ mission to create, maintain, and improve important public fishing access areas. The program also collaborates with the Boating Division to make improvements to state-owned boat launches while also working with the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and coastal municipalities to maximize public access for fishing opportunities. In a continuous effort to maintain safe, natural fishery resources, Marine Fisheries supports efforts to manage and control aquatic invasive species that potentially could affect outdoor recreation areas, facilities, and the important recreational fish species anglers seek. Through marine angler surveys, specific outdoor recreation issues are identified in order to determine the supply of and the demand for outdoor recreational resources and facilities along Connecticut’s coastline.

The Marine Fisheries program works closely with other divisions and programs within DEEP to acquire property or easements to facilitate public access for fishing. It develops relationships, partnering with municipalities and non-governmental organizations, to increase public access for fishing along the 96 miles of public coastal shoreline access.

The Marine Fisheries program creates multi-lingual web and print content and signage to better communicate public fishing access and outdoor recreational fishing opportunities. In cooperation with the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and coastal municipalities, public access to as many diverse fishing locations throughout the marine ecosystem are maximized while striving to maintain and improve fishing access for persons with disabilities. Lastly, an additional important focus is determining whether all residents have access to outdoor recreational opportunities, including those in underserved communities.

The Marine Fisheries program supports “Fish with CARE” and “Learn to Fish” programs and events at publicly accessible fishing locations and works with the Division of State Parks and Public Outreach and coastal municipalities to maximize public access to fishing locations to allow for healthy participation and enjoyable fishing opportunities. Through the support of these “Learn to Fish” programs, promoting healthy lifestyles



*Park users fishing off Meigs Point, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison*



*Supply Pond Fishway, Pisgah Brook, Branford (DEEP)*

through the creation of digital content for social media platforms, the connection between recreational fishing and healthy lifestyles is demonstrated. This will ultimately increase participation in outdoor activities supporting DEEP’s mission. These public outreach programs expand public-private partnerships and relationships to increase outdoor recreation participation.

A priority of Marine Fisheries is to provide access opportunities through funding and technical guidance to underserved communities, especially in Environmental Justice Communities, striving to develop relationships and build trust to expand recreational opportunities. Marine Fisheries offers technical assistance by providing guidelines to outdoor recreational facilities so as to maximize and expand outdoor participation by all constituents. Ultimately these efforts are to provide opportunities for people of Connecticut “To Go Outside” and enjoy the health benefits. Supporting conservation by increasing participation is fundamental to this mission.

## Wildlife Division

The mission of the Wildlife Division is to advance the conservation, use, and appreciation of Connecticut's wildlife resources. Wildlife species are inventoried, monitored, and managed to maintain healthy populations, including endangered and threatened species. Annually, hundreds of volunteers help inventory and monitor wildlife in partnership with the Wildlife Division. To support a diversity of wildlife and wildlife habitats, the Wildlife Division manages a diverse array of habitat types in wildlife management areas, state forests, natural area preserves, and some state parks. Educational programs and technical assistance are provided to enhance privately-owned habitats, manage nuisance wildlife, and promote an appreciation for the value of Connecticut's wildlife. Environmental reviews ensure that projects on state lands or projects using state funds or requiring state permits do not impact species that are listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern under Connecticut's Endangered Species Act.

The Wildlife Division manages and maintains a system of 109 wildlife management areas that provide important habitat for wildlife and areas for the public to pursue wildlife-based recreation. Public hunting opportunities are offered on many state-owned lands and some privately-owned lands, with the Wildlife Division regulating hunting seasons and bag limits for harvestable wildlife species statewide. With volunteer assistance, conservation education and firearm safety programs are provided to promote safe and ethical hunting practices. The mission and actions of the Wildlife Division are closely aligned with DEEP's strategic goals as it strives toward: 1.) safeguarding, enhancing, and promoting Connecticut's environment and natural resources, and 2.) promoting environmental and energy justice by applying equity, diversity, and inclusion lenses to policy development and program implementation.

### State Wildlife Action Plan

Connecticut's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) was updated in 2015, establishing a conservation blueprint for proactively conserving Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and their habitats. In addition to updating Connecticut's SGCN list, the SWAP describes key habitats and communities. The 2015 SWAP was expanded to include 100 plant SGCN. A total of 67 animal SGCN were added, while 75 were removed. The 2015 SGCN list includes 26 mammals, 95 birds, 31 reptiles and amphibians, 73 fishes, 242 invertebrates, and 100 plants.

To guide conservation, the SWAP details threats and stressors that impact SGCN and key habitats and prescribes conservation actions to address those threats. In addition to these traditional elements, the 2015 revision includes information on climate change, energy development, and emerging diseases.

The SWAP discusses threats posed by outdoor recreation, including the encroachment of humans into natural areas, the degradation of habitat by motorized vehicles, the degradation of habitat by the blazing of unauthorized trails, and adverse impacts like disturbance, litter, and injury. Actions to deal with these threats include developing best management practices for sensitive species, increasing public awareness and stewardship, and creating outreach materials promoting responsible recreation. Participation by conservation partners, academic institutions, and the public is key to making the State Wildlife Action Plan an effective tool for conserving Connecticut's diversity of wildlife resources for future generations. DEEP has initiated a revision to the SWAP scheduled for release in 2025. As part of that effort, DEEP plans to conduct user surveys with existing and new stakeholders to better understand how to make the 2025 SWAP relevant and accessible to a wider audience. Connecticut's fish and wildlife diversity serves as a significant recreational attraction for residents and tourists alike and the SWAP provides a blueprint to recover declining species and keep common species common.

### Endangered Species

The presence of endangered species in the state is a reminder that the environment is fragile and subject to degradation if not properly cared for by all. While some recreation can be a threat to wildlife species, recreationists, through activities such as wildlife viewing and bird watching, can help to further support the efforts of the DEEP to protect these valuable resources. The DEEP has a long record of success in identifying and intervening in the management of threatened and endangered species.

In 1986, when the piping plover was added to the federal Endangered and Threatened Species List as a threatened species, only 20 pairs nested on nine Connecticut beaches. Thirty-six years later, in 2022, Connecticut



*Snowy egret at Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme (DEEP)*

had a record 66 pairs of plovers nesting on 17 beaches. This success is due to a large, collaborative effort including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DEEP, Audubon Connecticut, the Connecticut Audubon Society, and the Nature Conservancy. This alliance protects shorebirds across the state using string fencing, volunteer monitors, and outreach campaigns to “share the shore.” Importantly, this effort has meant that beaches have not been closed due to nesting birds, but rather that success has come alongside responsible coastal recreation. Connecticut’s Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species list offers some direct protection. Listed species are included in the Natural Diversity Database, which provides environmental reviews for all projects on state property, projects for which state funds are used, or whenever state permits are required. The list was last updated in 2015 to include the addition of three bat species—little brown, tricolor, and northern long-eared bats—that have suffered dramatic population declines due to the spread of white-nose syndrome. They are now on the endangered list. Since their state listing, northern long eared bats have been federally listed, tricolored bats have been proposed for federal listing, and little brown bats and spotted turtles are being considered as candidates. Northern diamondback terrapin and spotted turtle are threatened by the fragmentation and loss of suitable wetland habitats, collection for the pet trade, disease, and road mortality.

The Wildlife Division’s Natural Diversity Database and Conservation Compliance program administers the state’s Natural Diversity Database, a geodatabase that maintains spatial data related to the occurrence of state-listed plants and animals to help protect Connecticut’s native biological diversity. The database is informed by DEEP research along with many observations submitted by conservation groups, the local scientific community, and the public as they make observations while afield.

The Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-Off Fund is voluntarily supported by Connecticut’s state income taxpayers to support efforts aimed at helping Connecticut’s endangered species, natural area preserves, and watchable wildlife. Some projects funded through this mechanism include: botanical field surveys, habitat restoration for the ghost dune tiger beetle, preserving chimney swift roosts through education, Indiana bat study, monitoring SGCN bird species in shrub land and forest interior habitats, purple martin research, state-listed plant field work, monitoring ospreys using community science, stream salamanders living within exurban watersheds, installation of monofilament fishing line receptacles, conservation and stewardship of state endangered and threatened species, assessment of heavy metal and organic contaminants in snapping turtles, and webcams live-streaming from a bat colony.

## Hunting

In Connecticut, approximately 50,000 hunters collectively spend millions of dollars annually while enjoying one million days a year in the field.

Hunting is permitted at most wildlife management areas and state forests, and infrastructure such as parking lots, service roads, wetland impoundments, and handicapped accessible hunting blinds are installed and maintained by the Wildlife Division to facilitate these activities. Additionally, 45 properties not owned by DEEP are open for hunting through cooperative agreements, totaling more than 45,000 acres. Three wildlife management areas are designated as dog training areas, where hunting dogs may be trained year-round. Four other wildlife management areas are designated as field trial areas that accommodate field trial activities and sanctioned events (i.e., competitive events involving dogs).

Pheasant hunting is made possible through stocking efforts by DEEP staff and volunteers. Approximately 22,000 pheasants are purchased and released annually during the fall pheasant hunting season at 37 public hunting areas statewide. Pheasant hunting is seen as an important activity for hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation in light of long-term declining trends in hunting and trapping participation. The Wildlife Division has developed a plan to reverse this declining trend in hunting and trapping participation – the R3 Plan 2020-2024 (Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate). This plan focuses on recruiting new hunters and trappers, retaining interest and participation by current hunters and trappers, and reactivating those who have hunted or trapped in the past but no longer participate in these activities. Several web-based [Hunting Roadmaps](#) have been developed to help new hunters better navigate the process of becoming trained, qualified, and licensed to hunt in Connecticut.

Hunting and shooting sports support a significant amount of land and resource conservation in Connecticut. Fishing and boating support a significant amount recreational access and resource conservation in Connecticut. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) administers the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program in which excise taxes are collected on the sale of fishing equipment and motorboat fuels as established by the Pittman-Robertson, Dingell-Johnson, and Wallop-Breaux Acts. These funds are then distributed to state agencies to fund recreational fishing, public boating access improvements, fisheries research, and habitat management. Millions of dollars are delivered annually through this program demonstrating an exceptional user-pay user-benefit model wherein anglers are directly contributing to conserving the resources they utilize and enjoy while providing significant benefits to the public.

The Connecticut Migratory Bird Conservation Stamp (a.k.a. Duck Stamp) is a required endorsement that hunters must purchase in order to pursue migratory game birds. Ninety-nine percent of the funds derived from the sale of these endorsements are used to protect and enhance wetland habitat that support wildlife and wildlife-associated recreational activities while providing a variety of broad ecosystem services that increase the integrity and resilience of Connecticut's natural landscape. The Duck Stamp is available for purchase to anyone interested in supporting wetland conservation.

Hunting in Connecticut is currently prohibited on Sundays, except for private land archery deer hunting. DEEP submitted testimony in 2023 supporting legislation that would have allowed Sunday hunting. Although the legislation did not ultimately pass, DEEP is supportive of providing a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting, and has demonstrated that multiple recreation users can safely and concurrently recreate on public lands.

## Conservation Partners

The Wildlife Division receives support and partnership from many local and regional conservation organizations involved in hunting, trapping, shooting sports, wildlife conservation, plant conservation, and land conservation.

These groups provide thousands of hours of volunteer effort annually, teaching Conservation Education/ Firearms Safety (CE/FS) programs, cleaning up litter, building and monitoring nesting boxes, conducting habitat management, conducting wildlife surveys, testifying, and mitigating nuisance wildlife issues. Additionally, many of these groups provide direct financial support to the Division by donating equipment for habitat management, seed and plant material for habitat enhancement projects, and educational signage.

Significant funding has been contributed to construction and engineering projects, including several



*Junior pheasant hunter at a Junior Hunter Training Day*

wetland impoundment restoration projects and tidal marsh adaptation projects that provide critical wetland habitat for a large array of wildlife and have increased the opportunity for waterfowl hunting and other forms of wildlife-associated recreation. Collectively, the value of the time and materials donated provides tens of thousands of dollars of match for grants annually, allowing DEEP to leverage federal resources to advance the goals of the Division.

Generous conservation partners include Ducks Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, Connecticut Waterfowl Association, Delta Waterfowl, Northwest Connecticut Sportsman’s Council, Ruffed Grouse Society, Connecticut Trappers Association, Friends of Connecticut Sportsmen, Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Audubon Society, Connecticut Ornithological Association, Connecticut Botanical Society, The Nature Conservancy, and dozens of local private fish and game clubs.

### **Conservation Education/Firearms Safety**

The Conservation Education/Firearms Safety program has 300 volunteer instructors who donate more than 1,000 hours of service per year. These dedicated instructors have taught and encouraged tens of thousands of students in firearms, bow-hunting, and trapping to participate in recreational hunting and trapping. Additionally, the program has added classes to provide education about the cleaning, preparation, and cooking of game animals. Public shooting ranges provide an opportunity for target practice and recreational shooting. The Wildlife Division will continue to explore opportunities to create or expand infrastructure for public shooting ranges.

### **Junior Hunter Training Day Events**

Connecticut designates specific days when experienced adult hunters are encouraged to take a youth hunting, helping them learn safe and effective hunting practices, develop observational skills, and gain the confidence and a comfort level they need to discover a passion for hunting and the outdoors. On these days, licensed junior hunters (12 to 15 years of age) may hunt when accompanied by a licensed adult hunter 18 years of age or older. The adult mentor may not carry a firearm and must remain within physical contact distance of the junior hunter, in a position to always provide direct supervision and instruction.

Each year, Junior Hunter Training Days are planned for Spring Turkey Season, Waterfowl Season, Pheasant Season, and Deer Season. Additionally, DEEP offers mentored junior pheasant hunts on Junior Pheasant Hunter Training Day on state land and several sportsmen's clubs offer additional junior pheasant hunts on private land throughout the fall. These are staffed with Certified Volunteer Hunter Safety Instructors and experienced hunters, along with bird dogs and handlers.

### **Master Wildlife Conservationist Program**

Master Wildlife Conservationists (MWCs) are provided training through the DEEP Wildlife Division and are committed to assisting DEEP and other environmental organizations with research, habitat management, and outreach efforts. MWCs present wildlife-related programs at libraries, schools, nature centers, and other environmental organizations and they assist with events associated with the No Child Left Inside® program.

### **Public Awareness and Education**

Connecticut's wildlife is remarkably diverse. The state has 84 species of mammals, 335 species of birds, 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, 169 species of fish, and an estimated 20,000 species of invertebrates. Wildlife-viewing participation continues to grow in popularity.

To engage constituents across the state, the Wildlife Division has increased its online offerings. *Wildlife Highlights*, a free electronic newsletter for anyone interested in Connecticut's wildlife and the outdoors, became available in 2016 and currently has approximately 6,500 subscribers. *Hunter Highlights*, an electronic newsletter geared toward hunters, was launched in the fall of 2020 and has approximately 1,500 subscribers. In addition to newsletters, the Wildlife Division has a significant social media presence, with about 1,700 followers on X (formerly Twitter), roughly 5,000 followers on Instagram, and 48,000 followers on Facebook. DEEP uses iNaturalist to run several community science projects, such as reporting backyard bee inventories. The Wildlife Division also maintains an extensive library of informative web pages and fact sheets, including information about species, advice on managing land for wildlife, and technical assistance on dealing with nuisance wildlife.

Belding Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Vernon and Sessions Woods WMA in Burlington serve as educational destinations for school groups, summer camps, and college students. Belding WMA is visited by approximately 500 third and fourth-grade school children each year along with roughly 200 summer program attendees and 40 college students. Monthly programs for the public at Sessions Woods WMA are attended by approximately 25 people per program.

Viewing platforms, boardwalks, blinds, and educational signs were constructed at various DEEP locations statewide to provide the public with opportunities to observe and photograph wildlife in its natural habitat and at the same time increase public awareness of the diversity and complexity of Connecticut's natural resources. The Wildlife Division creates, maintains, and updates these recreation opportunities and the supporting infrastructure like parking areas, gates, bathrooms, and trash cans at WMAs across the state.

### **Habitat Management for Wildlife**

The Wildlife Division works to enhance and sustain wildlife habitat throughout Connecticut. Maintaining sustainable populations of wildlife requires suitable habitats. State-owned conservation land provides tracts of undeveloped space that contain a diversity of habitats, and habitat management can further enhance these spaces, supporting wildlife and the wildlife-associated recreation that relies on them.

Habitat conditions are continuously evaluated, and a variety of land management techniques are prescribed by wildlife biologists and accomplished by DEEP staff and partners as needed, including mowing, prescribed burning, planting, agriculture, invasive plant control, silvicultural treatments, wetland management, and coastal adaptation. The Division's Habitat Management for Wildlife program seeks to conserve both common species and Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by providing a diversity of high-quality habitats, including forests of varying ages and types, coastal and inland wetlands, grasslands, and shrublands in support of Connecticut's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

In accordance with the SWAP and Goal 3, Strategy I of this Plan, the Wildlife Division will take and support measures to identify and mitigate unauthorized activity that threatens natural resources and wildlife-associated recreation on state land, including littering, unleashed dogs, unauthorized operation of motorized vehicles, and the creation and use of unauthorized trails.

The state has 84 species of mammals, 335 species of birds, 50 species of reptiles and amphibians, 169 species of fish, and an estimated 20,000 species of invertebrates. Wildlife-viewing participation continues to grow in popularity.



*Sherwood Island State Park, Westport (CTvisit)*



*Pileated woodpecker*



*Great blue heron at Stratton Brook State Park, Simsbury  
(Instagram@amyhunterdrago)*



*Beaver at Pachaug State Forest, Voluntown  
(Instagram@connecticut.backcountry)*



*Pollinator Garden at Kellogg Environmental Center, Osbornedale State Park, Derby (DEEP)*

### Young Forest Initiative

The Wildlife Division works cooperatively with the state Forestry Division, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Wildlife Management Institute, and various non-governmental organizations and private landowners to implement priority habitat management in support of the Regional Young Forest Initiative for At-Risk Species. The goal of the initiative is to increase the quantity and quality of young forest habitat essential to New England cottontail, American woodcock, and more than 50 other SGCN in support of the SWAP, the New England Cottontail Conservation Strategy, and the state's American Woodcock Management Plan. Wildlife biologists and state foresters plan and execute relevant habitat management on state-owned land, and technical and financial assistance is provided to non-industrial private forestland owners wishing to implement practices through the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Silvicultural treatments play an important role in the conservation of biological diversity in forested ecosystems.

### Important Bird Areas

In 2016, Audubon Connecticut, other conservation nongovernmental organizations, private landowners, and DEEP partnered to designate seven landscape-level Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the state. This partnership of stakeholders works together to protect, restore, enhance, and increase awareness about these critical areas. IBA designation helps prioritize the conservation of these critical habitats and helps land managers ensure that outdoor recreation is compatible with birds and wildlife. People may visit or live near an IBA and be unaware of its value to birds and other wildlife. However, once engaged, they become familiar with the birds that the IBA protects, make efforts to prevent disturbing the birds or their habitat, and may even become active stewards. To date, 40 IBAs have been publicly recognized in Connecticut.

The seven landscape-level IBAs, including state-owned as well as privately held lands being recognized, include:

- Great Meadows: This IBA includes lush farmland and forested wetlands along an eight-mile reach of the Connecticut River in Wethersfield, East Hartford, Glastonbury, and Rocky Hill.
- Mouth of the Connecticut River: This area spans the river in Old Lyme and Old Saybrook. It includes the Roger Tory Peterson Wildlife Management Area and the Ragged Rock Creek Wildlife Management Area.

- Lyme Forest Block: This area includes lands in several towns within Middlesex and New London counties. State lands in this IBA include Devil's Hopyard State Park, Babcock Pond Wildlife Management Area, Zemko Pond Wildlife Management Area, Eightmile River Wildlife Management Area, Nehantic State Forest, Selden Neck State Park, and Beckett Hill State Park.
- Macedonia Forest Block: This area in Kent and Sharon includes Audubon Sharon and Macedonia Brook State Park.
- Meshomasic Forest Block: This area covers lands in Hartford and Middlesex Counties, including Meshomasic State Forest and Gay City State Park.
- Miles Wildlife Sanctuary and Housatonic State Forest Block: This area in Sharon and Lakeville includes Housatonic State Forest and the Audubon Miles Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Shepaug Forest Block: This area includes forested lands along a 15-mile reach of the Shepaug River in Washington and Roxbury.



*Ovenbird*

## Species Management

The Wildlife Division oversees many projects to conserve and manage wildlife species statewide. Many of those species are relevant to outdoor recreation. With the help of volunteers and nonprofit partners, DEEP monitors bald eagles, peregrine falcons, ospreys, and beach nesting birds. With these data, DEEP staff protect these species from human disturbance. The Wildlife Division and the University of Connecticut are leading an effort to produce an extensive Connecticut Bird Atlas. This multi-faceted project focuses on breeding and wintering birds. The first Connecticut Bird Atlas was published in 1986. This update began in 2018 and is concluding in 2023.

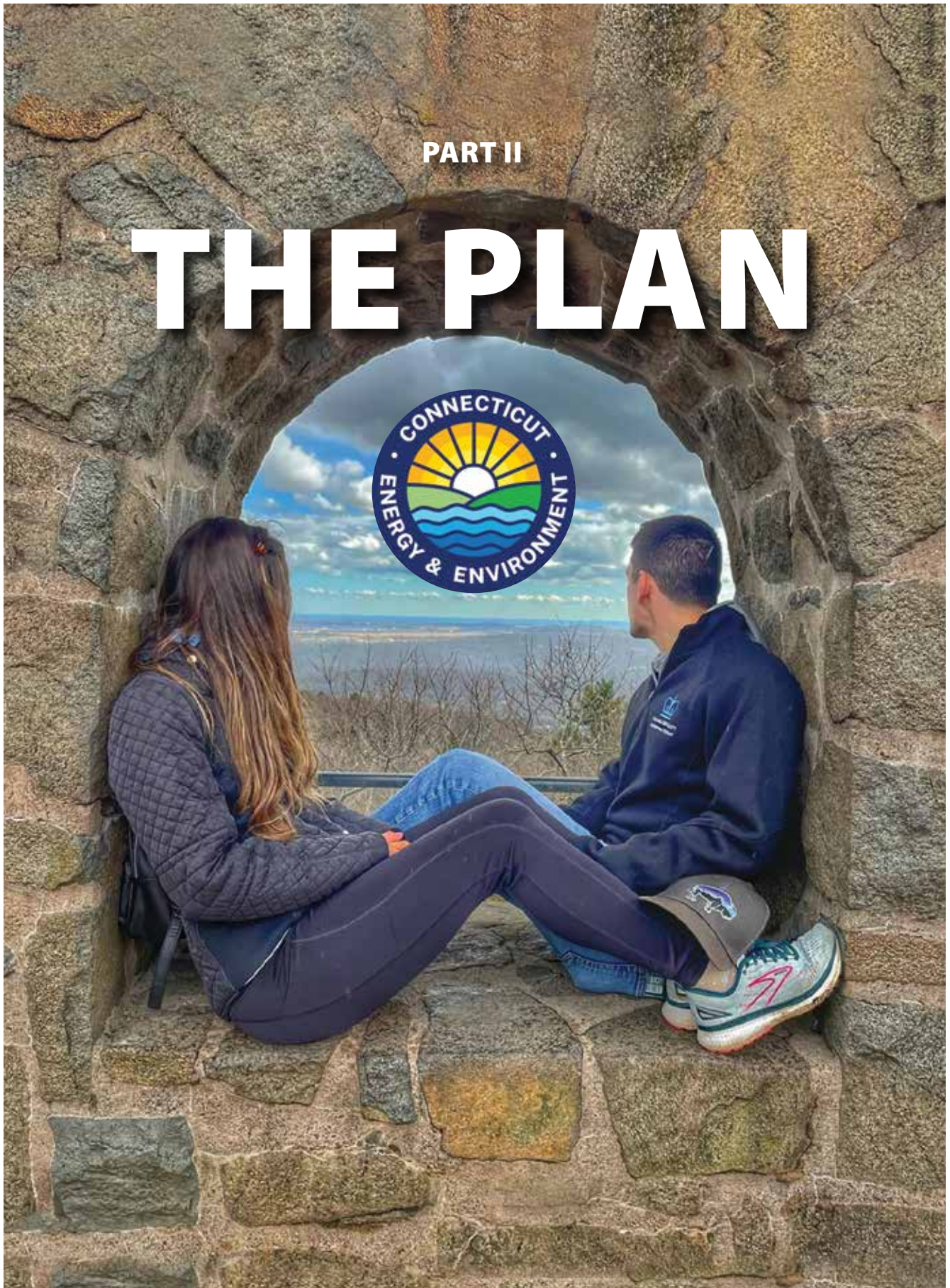
Since 2011, the Wildlife Division has been conducting, with the help of volunteers, acoustic monitoring surveys on twelve 20-mile transects to determine the species and abundance of bats across the state. Division staff are also conducting surveys to monitor populations of spotted turtles, wood turtles, box turtles, bog turtles, and timber rattlesnakes and protect these sensitive reptile species from human disturbance. The agency monitors freshwater mussel species that are impacted by water quality and levels. Since 2017, DEEP and the Department of Economic and Community Development have jointly hosted a Bat Appreciation Day celebration at the Old Newgate Prison and Copper Mine in Granby. Agency staff collect reports of wild turkey, ruffed grouse, moose, bobcats, and bears as part of statewide efforts to monitor population levels and manage nuisance wildlife encounters. Connecticut has an abundant black bear population, with more than 10,000 sightings reported in 2022. Also in 2022, roughly 4,000 bobcat and 79 moose sightings were reported to DEEP.

## Additional Bureau and Division Accomplishments, 2017 – 2023

The materials presented in the above sections represent some, but not all, of the innovative programs, public outreach, facility improvements, and management activities of the DEEP over the past six years. For further information regarding a particular division in the DEEP, the reader is encouraged to visit the DEEP website at <http://www.ct.gov/deep/site/default.asp> to learn more about the contributions made to the quality of life in Connecticut through DEEP initiatives.

PART II

# THE PLAN



Stone tower at Sleeping Giant State Park, Hamden (Instagram@andiamoadventure)

# PART II: THE PLAN

## Connecticut's Outdoor Recreation Goals and Strategies

The following section presents Connecticut's three main outdoor recreation goals with correlating strategies and available data to help guide the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) decision-making processes for the next five years.

Goal development for the 2024-2029 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) involved members of the SCORP Advisory Committee, DEEP Bureau of Outdoor Recreation staff, and faculty from Southern Connecticut State University Department of Recreation, Tourism, and Sport Management. Central Connecticut State University's Center for Community Engagement and Social Research (CCESR) gathered data using surveys administered to various stakeholders throughout Connecticut to provide direction to the process.

Goals were created based on the need to build upon past success and address needs raised in the public surveys conducted by CCESR. They represent a commitment by DEEP to continue to be responsive to the needs of Connecticut residents while responsibly managing the available resources to realize the greatest return on investments made to the outdoor recreation system.

### 2024 – 2029 Outdoor Recreation Goals:

- Goal 1:** Provide equitable and sustainable access to outdoor recreation in Connecticut.
- Goal 2:** Enhance visitor experience and tourism by providing welcoming, safe, and well-maintained outdoor recreation areas and recreation amenities.
- Goal 3:** Address the threats of climate change on outdoor recreation and the conservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources by working together with outdoor recreation participants to implement strategies for habitat preservation, conservation, and decarbonization and climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and education.

Nature owes us nothing but gives us everything.

—*Akiebia Hicks*

## Goal 1: Provide equitable and sustainable access to outdoor recreation in Connecticut.

### Strategies:

- A. Develop diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for existing open spaces and outdoor recreation areas through collaboration with diverse stakeholders.
- B. Increase awareness of and accessibility to outdoor recreational opportunities by implementing public outreach campaigns geared toward traditionally underserved populations.
- C. Increase accessibility by reducing real and perceived barriers to visiting outdoor recreation facilities.
- D. Assess the distribution of open spaces throughout the state and increase land protection efforts in areas lacking existing opportunities.
- E. Identify, increase, and promote the availability of public transportation serving outdoor recreation areas and facilities.
- F. Develop policies and guidelines for facilities, parks, and natural areas that include measures to foster an inclusive and welcoming environment while protecting and conserving natural, cultural, and historical resources.
- G. Collect and analyze user demographic data to improve recreational resource allocation and better serve user groups.
- H. Assess and address historical bias in program development, site names, and outreach methods.
- I. Increase educational programming that highlights environmental and recreational contributions from historically underrepresented groups.
- J. Increase adapted outdoor recreation pursuits for people with disabilities.

### Strategy 1A: Develop diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for existing open spaces and outdoor recreation areas through collaboration with diverse stakeholders.

#### SUPPORTIVE DATA

Based on the data developed in the 2023 Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS), Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) performance in this area is acceptable, with some additional effort required to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. New initiatives should be considered and developed to further this strategy.

Question 11 of the SORS included 21 categories of constraints to participation: *If there are reasons preventing you or members of your household from using outdoor recreation facilities in Connecticut, please indicate them by selecting all that apply from the list below.* Forty-three percent of the respondents to the SORS indicated that they were *Fully Able to Access Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Activities* (#1 ranked response). Five percent cited a *Lack of Accessibility for People with Disabilities* (#15 ranked response), while 3% cited *Language Barriers*, 3% cited a *Lack of Visitor Diversity* (#20 ranked response), and 2% mentioned a *Lack of Staff Diversity* (#21 ranked response).

DEEP divisions plan collectively to expand upon their efforts at outreach to underserved communities. (See Appendix A: Division Action Plans)

Municipalities play an important role in DEI initiatives. Results from the Municipal Officials Survey (MOS) indicate a mixed assessment of efforts to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Question 9 of the MOS asked: *Thinking about the various age groups of people you serve, please indicate whether your municipality is currently able to adequately meet their needs.* Fifty-six percent of responding municipalities (31 of 55) reported that they adequately meet the needs of *People of All Ages with Disabilities*,

while 44% (24 of 55) stated they are presently unable to adequately meet the needs of this population. The *Need for More Areas That Accommodate Individuals with Disabilities* ranked 5<sup>th</sup> among the constraints to meeting the needs of this population. *Insufficient Resources* was the top ranked cause.

Question 22 of the MOS asked: *Please indicate which, if any, of the following support components are inadequate at any of the facilities in your community.* Thirty-one respondents (57%) cited *General Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities* and 22 respondents (36%) cited *Playground Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities*. Question 16 of the MOS identified the most popular resources currently available to individuals with disabilities (Table 6).

**Table 6. Popular Resources for Individuals with Disabilities**

Combined Resource Categories	Percentage of Municipalities
Parks/playgrounds/gardens/picnic areas	60%
Trails/paths	31%
Pools/aquatics/fishing	23%
Trips/programs/special events (road races, concerts)	15%
Beaches	15%
Outdoor recreation (facilities, leagues, fields, courts, parks, courses)	10%
Indoor facilities (senior center, recreation centers, bowling)	6%

Question 26 of the MOS specifically addresses efforts by municipalities regarding any action to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion for their residents: *In your municipality, are you aware of any action being taken in the sphere of outdoor recreation to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion among the people you serve?* Given that fewer than half of municipalities responded affirmatively (18% said *No* and 33% were *Not Sure*, see Table 7) additional awareness training may be warranted, potentially led by DEEP initiatives.

**Table 7. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Awareness**

Response	Number of Municipalities	Percentage
Yes	27	49%
No	10	18%
Not Sure	18	33%

Question 26A of the MOS asked: *Please elaborate on any action or inaction in your municipality regarding the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion among the people you serve.* The top five response categories are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8. Top Five Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Actions Taken by Municipalities**

Response Category (5 most common coded responses)	Rank
Open bi-lingual facilities	1
Grants and funding for facility upgrades and projects	2
Town programs/policies	3
Inclusive/equity/diversity programs active or in development	4
Staff training and accommodations	5

**Strategy 1B: Increase awareness of and accessibility to outdoor recreational opportunities by implementing public outreach campaigns geared toward traditionally underserved populations.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Communication and outreach are critical elements to the current and future relevance and success of DEEP’s outdoor recreation mission. It has become increasingly clear that a multimedia approach to communication best serves this goal. The Covid-19 pandemic amplified the importance of web-based communication to inform residents of opportunities and restrictions regarding facility availability. Continued refinement of the use of social media, including messaging in languages other than English, will enhance this approach.

The following data from the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) may guide future efforts in improving communication and outreach. Question 11 of the SORS asked: *If there are reasons preventing you or members of your household from using outdoor recreation facilities in Connecticut, please indicate them by selecting all that apply from the list below.*

Thirteen percent of respondents selected *Do Not Know What Is Being Offered* as a reason preventing them from using outdoor recreation facilities, the third ranked choice of 21 options. Approximately 1% of respondents indicated that *Unclear/Unavailable Maps* were also impediments to resource usage.

To increase the effectiveness of communication, it is critical to identify the methods of information access used by residents. Question 12 of the SORS identified how residents accessed information about outdoor recreational facilities and activities in their communities.

**Table 9. How Residents Learn About Outdoor Recreation Opportunities**

Means of Information Access	2023	2017	2005
Websites/Internet	62%	58%	34%
Word of mouth	51%	59%	67%
Social media	40%	37%	--
Newspaper	31%	42%	61%
Maps and road signs	27%	29%	41%
Television	25%	27%	22%
Tourist information center	19%	22%	20%
Program fliers	17%	18%	20%
Town mailings	17%	22%	28%
Visited/Called Parks & Rec Office	16%	22%	21%
Radio	14%	18%	17%
Magazines	11%	11%	23%
Club membership newsletters	9%	8%	12%
Other	1%	--	--

The 2023 results presented in Table 9 mark a change from the previous SORS data (2005 and 2017) in that *Websites/Internet* now outranks *Word of Mouth* as the most common means of learning about outdoor recreation opportunities, an increase from 58% in 2017 to 62% in 2023 (and up from 34% in 2005). *Social Media* was identified in 2017 as one of the primary modes of communication, a factor that has increased from 37% in 2017 to 40% in the most recent survey. *Word of Mouth*, ranked second in 2023, dropped in significance from 67% in 2005 to 59% in 2017 and then to 51% in 2023.

Grants administered through the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program support projects that include outreach and education programs that address the DEEP’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion objectives.

**Strategy 1C: Increase accessibility by reducing real and perceived barriers to visiting outdoor recreation facilities.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

The 2023 Municipal Officials Survey revealed that accessibility issues and inadequacies exist at 17% of local outdoor recreation facilities. An additional 13% of municipalities reported the need to improve public transportation to their facilities, while 10% cited the need for more directional and interpretive signage. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated that they are not currently able to meet the needs of people with disabilities relative to their access to outdoor recreation facilities. The top ranked reason for this shortfall was attributed to insufficient resources, including funding and space.

The DEEP Passport to Parks program, implemented in 2018, is supported through a \$10 biannual fee applied through the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles to passenger vehicle registrations, renewals, and plate transfers. Having a Connecticut license plate on their car allows residents free access to state parks, thereby reducing or eliminating barriers to resident visitors.

**Strategy 1D: Assess the distribution of open spaces throughout the state and increase land protection efforts in areas lacking existing opportunities.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

The Land Acquisition and Management staff will be completing a comprehensive assessment of the open space land across the state to understand what percentage of the state’s land is already used for that purpose. Once that data collection effort is complete, DEEP will use those numbers to set new targets and goals for land conservation efforts across Connecticut. The updated Green Plan will highlight five main program areas, including:

- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program
- The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program
- Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program
- Property Management

**Strategy 1E: Identify, increase, and promote the availability of public transportation serving outdoor recreation areas and facilities.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

The ParkConneCT program ([ParkConneCT | Connecticut State Parks and Forests \(ctparks.com\)](https://www.ctparks.com)) marks the collaboration between the DEEP and the Connecticut Department of Transportation to provide safe and reliable public transportation within ten minutes’ walk to six state parks and beaches. The service was provided in 2023 from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Table 10 describes the various modes of transportation that residents use when traveling to outdoor recreation areas.

**Table 10. How Visitors Travel to Outdoor Recreation Areas**

Mode of Transportation	Percentage of Respondents
Automobile	86%
Bicycle	28%
Boat	8%
Bus or train	14%
Walk	52%
Other	2%

**Strategy 1F: Develop policies and guidelines for facilities, parks, and natural areas that include measures to foster an inclusive and welcoming environment while protecting and conserving natural, cultural, and historical resources.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Grants administered through the Connecticut Recreational Trails Program support projects that include outreach and education programs that address the DEEP’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion objectives, including the CT Trail Finder website: [www.cttrailfinder.com](http://www.cttrailfinder.com)

In Question 26 of the Municipal Officials Survey, 49% of respondents (27 of 55 municipalities) were aware of actions being taken in the sphere of outdoor recreation to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion among people served. Similarly, in Question 25 of the Municipal Officials Survey, 47% (26 of 55 municipalities) noted they were aware of action being taken regarding the protection of municipal open space from environmental degradation or overuse.

**Strategy 1G: Collect and analyze user demographic data to improve recreational resource allocation and better serve user groups.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

***Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts Survey***

Data provided by CCESR identify respondents to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey to be from all eight counties in Connecticut and comprised of 68.2% males, 30.7% females, 0.8% non-binary, and 0.3% other. Individuals reporting their age as 55+ made up 47% of those responding to this survey, with 93.5% reporting to be other than Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ancestry, with 92% being Caucasian and 99% listing English as the primary household language. Eighty-nine percent of respondents reported an annual household income of more than \$50,000 with a full 31% identifying their household income as being more than \$150,000. Almost 100% reported at least a high school diploma, with 66% reporting a college degree or post graduate degree. Twelve percent reported that a household member had a medical condition related to physical or mobility limitations. Note that Avid Outdoor Enthusiast responses are not representative of the general population in Connecticut regarding demographics or activity choices.

***Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey***

The demographic data from the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey indicate noticeable differences with the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey. All eight counties were represented, with 50% of respondents residing in Hartford and New Haven counties. Nearly 49% of respondents were male with 51% identifying as female. (Alternatives such as “binary gender” or “other” identification were not offered in the survey.) Slightly more than half of respondents, 56%, reported their age to be between 25 and 54 years old. Twenty-seven percent reported their ancestry to be Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish. Additionally, 65% reported Caucasian ethnicity while 18% reported as Hispanic or Latino and

13% reported as African American. Ninety-one percent of respondents identified English as the primary household language, with 7% speaking Spanish at home. Furthermore, 53% reported a household income of more than \$50,000, with only 20% reporting household income of more than \$150,000. Finally, 97% reported at least a high school degree, with 49% having undergraduate or graduate degrees.

It is evident from the two surveys distributed to Connecticut residents that there is a significant difference between the two groups regarding their demographic make-up. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CT/PST045222>), the general population of Connecticut (N=3,617,176) is 64% white non-Hispanic or Latino, 18% is Hispanic or Latino, and 13% is African American as of July, 2023.

Similar data was gathered in the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (n=1,010), providing detailed demographic information and a five-tiered inquiry regarding outdoor land-based and water-based activities preferences and frequency of use.

Respondents identified their top five land-based activities to be *Walking/Hiking* (69%), *Visiting Historic Sites* (35%), *Running* (30%), *Road/Neighborhood Biking* (25%), and *Biking in Parks* (23%). Frequency responses indicate *A Few Times a Month* as the median level of participation in these five activities.

The top five water-based activities are *Activities at the Beach* (59%), *Freshwater/Saltwater Swimming* (46%), *Swimming in Outdoor Pools* (38%), *Canoeing/Kayaking/Paddleboarding* (18%), and *Motor Boating/Jet Skiing* (18%).

Frequency indicators suggest *Less Than Once a Month* as the median level of activity for seasonal activities. Eighty-two percent of the respondents who visited a state-owned property reported visiting between 1 and 10 times annually, with 92% rating the condition of the properties as *Excellent* or *Good*. Fewer than 1% rated them as *Poor*.

The response for municipal facilities indicates that these facilities were visited 1 to 10 times annually by 71% of the respondents who reported visiting municipal areas. Eighty-eight percent rated the condition of the facilities to be *Excellent* or *Good*.

The perceived need for additional access or improvements to the facilities did not indicate a majority response for any of the 36 recreational areas identified in Question 7A of the SORS. The majority of respondents for the same 36 facilities stated that the present conditions *Somewhat Met* or *Mostly Met* the needs of each household.

For Question 13 of the SORS, “Please indicate if you feel that the state of Connecticut or your local community should increase funding, maintain the same funding, decrease funding, or you are not sure for each action.” Respondents offered these opinions on funding (Table 11):

**Table 11. Attitudes Towards Funding Priorities for Outdoor Recreation**

Category	Increase Funding	Maintain Funding	Decrease Funding	Not Sure
Maintain and improve existing outdoor facilities	43%	42%	4%	11%
Develop new outdoor recreation activities	43%	38%	7%	13%
Provide additional recreation programs and activities	39%	42%	6%	13%
Improve advertising and information regarding existing outdoor facilities and programs	28%	49%	9%	14%
Acquire open space	34%	41%	9%	16%
Sustain and enhance natural habitats that support hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, birding, and hiking	40%	41%	7%	12%
Other	12%	22%	5%	61%

Question 14 of the SORS asked: *Please indicate which THREE of the actions listed below you would most support increasing funding for by dragging the items from the column on the left into the box on the right.*



Mohawk Mountain Ski Area, Mohawk Mountain State Park, Cornwall (Instagram@mohawkmntn)

Analysis reveals that *Maintain and Improve Existing Outdoor Facilities* (43%), *Develop New Outdoor Recreation Activities* (43%), *Sustain and Enhance Natural Habitats That Support Hunting, Fishing, Wildlife Viewing, Birding, and Hiking* (40%), and *Provide Additional Recreation Programs and Activities* (39%) were seen almost equally as the most important areas for increased funding.

**Strategy 1H: Assess and address historical bias in program development, site names, and outreach methods.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

This strategy will be implemented and tracked during the 2024-2029 Plan period.

**Strategy 1I: Increase educational programming that highlights environmental and recreational contributions from historically underrepresented groups.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

While some efforts to accomplish this are currently evident in various agency outreach efforts, DEEP divisions will develop tactics to meet this strategy in subsequent years through their individual division action plans.

**Strategy 1J: Increase adapted outdoor recreation pursuits for people with disabilities.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

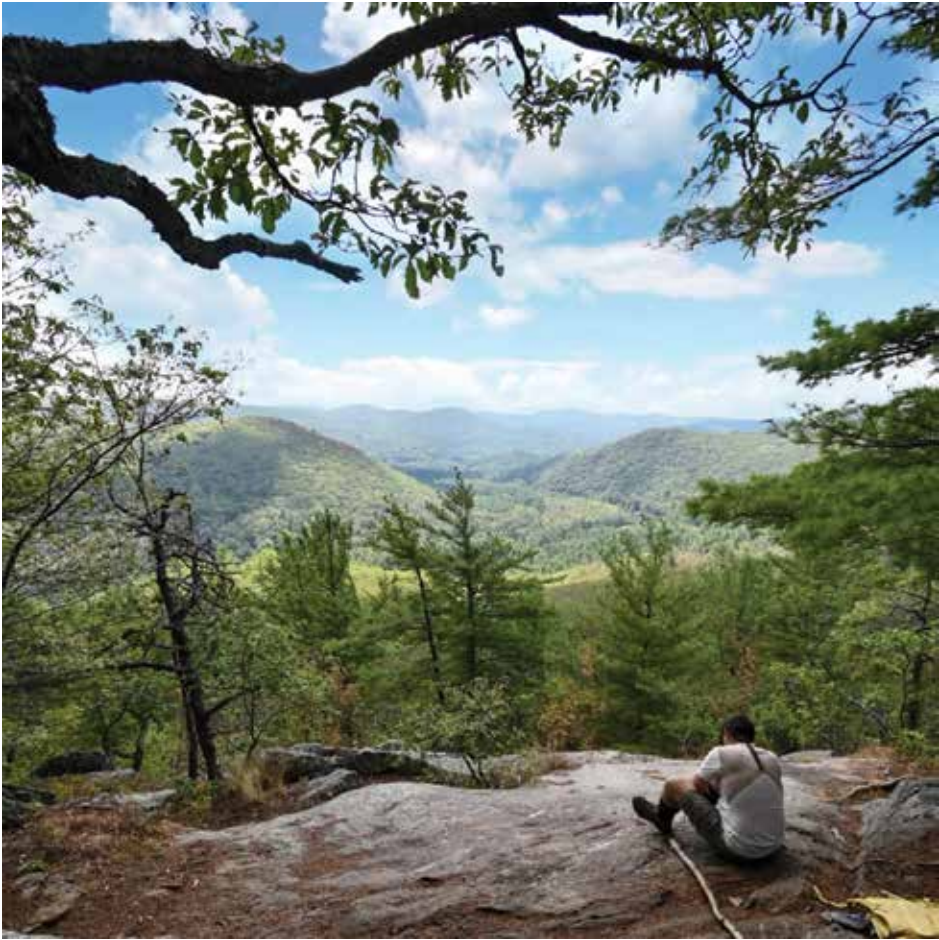
DEEP is currently in the process of purchasing 10 all-terrain wheelchairs for park use.



Family hike at Bigelow Hollow State Park, Union (Instagram@taylorwaltonphoto)



Pedestrian bridge in Mashamoquet Brook State Park, Pomfret (Instagram@beyond.the\_.lenses)



Pine Loop Trail in Housatonic Meadows State Park, Cornwall (CTvisit)

## Goal 2: Enhance visitor experience and tourism by providing welcoming, safe, and well-maintained outdoor recreation areas and recreation amenities.

### Strategies:

- A. Improve outdoor recreation infrastructure to increase access and add amenities that serve diverse populations.
- B. Prioritize sustainable practices to improve the cleanliness of facilities and outdoor areas.
- C. Ensure visitor safety and protect facilities and resources through monitoring of unlawful or unpermitted activity and ensure appropriate methods of enforcement and compliance.
- D. Increase technologically innovative interfaces to enhance customer service and visitor experiences.
- E. Increase resources to repair, improve, and replace infrastructure and recreational amenities that support the public’s use of facilities.
- F. Create and implement volunteer programs to help supplement staffing and increase engagement with visitors and volunteer organizations.
- G. Assess where there are gaps in recreational access and acquire land to ensure that amenities are available to all while exploring collaboration with outdoor recreation organizations (businesses and nonprofits) to offer additional tourism and outdoor recreation services in state parks.

### Strategy 2A: Improve outdoor recreation infrastructure to increase access and add amenities that serve diverse populations.

#### SUPPORTIVE DATA

Question 7 of the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) asked: *Please indicate whether you or any member of your household have a need or desire for additional access to each of the outdoor recreation facilities listed below.* Fifty percent or more of respondents were completely satisfied with the activities listed below.

**Table 12. Facility Access Level of Satisfaction**

Activity	Completely Satisfied	Need or Desire for Improvement
Paved multi-use trails	57%	27%
Unpaved multi-use trails	57%	24%
Unpaved single use trails	57%	20%
ADA accessible trails	50%	15%
Picnic areas/shelters	51%	31%
Historic sites and areas	52%	27%

However, there is still room for improvement with outdoor amenities and facilities in Connecticut. Respondents noted a higher need or desire for improvement in the following activities:

**Table 13. Improvement Assessment by Participants**

Activity	Need or Desire for Improvement
Nature preserves and bird watching areas	26%
Freshwater and saltwater swimming areas	26%
Outdoor public pools, water parks, and splash pads	27%

In addition, the following activities (Table 14) were rated as either *Needs Somewhat Met* or *Needs Not Met at All* ratings. This suggests that approximately 60-80% of respondents do not perceive that their needs are being adequately satisfied at the present time.

Question 7A of the SORS asked: *For each outdoor recreational facility, please rate how well the needs of your household are being met in terms of access or desire for improvement.*

**Table 14. Needs Assessment for Facilities**

Facility Type	Number of Responses	Needs Not Met at All	Needs Somewhat Met	Needs Mostly Met
ADA accessible trails	149	24%	56%	20%
Cross-country skiing or snowshoeing trails	136	25%	48%	27%
ATV areas	159	29%	42%	29%
Dirt biking/motorcycling areas	154	29%	40%	31%
Snowmobiling areas	127	28%	45%	27%
Sledding areas	230	26%	47%	27%
Ice skating or hockey areas	176	24%	50%	26%
Bicycle playgrounds	225	27%	44%	29%
Biking pump tracks	155	30%	45%	25%
Pickleball courts	123	28%	44%	29%
Volleyball courts	158	29%	45%	26%
Disc golf courses	107	23%	49%	28%
Boating access for motor boating, jet skiing, sailing, or paddle sports	144	23%	51%	26%
Snorkeling and scuba diving areas	140	34%	38%	28%
RV or tent sites	201	24%	48%	27%
Cabin, yurt, or 'glamping' sites	191	28%	44%	28%
Archery or shooting sport areas	147	32%	45%	23%

The results provide guidance for outdoor recreation providers to grow and develop new amenities that could attract new visitors or participants to the state's parks and natural areas.

Additionally, participants in the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey reported that *Improved Access/Options, Limited Places to Ride (ATV/Dirt Bikes), Lack of Facility/Area/Trail Upkeep or Maintenance, and Parking* were some of the reasons participants gave that could help increase their access to or enjoyment of activities.

## Strategy 2B: Prioritize sustainable practices to improve the cleanliness of facilities and outdoor areas.

### SUPPORTIVE DATA

Aesthetics could be a motivating factor for users engaging in physical activity. Additionally, “park users are more likely to visit a park where the features are maintained on a regular basis and shun those places containing elements that are in disrepair... Parks that are not maintained... could contribute to people’s perceptions of safety within the park, which likely impacts their use” (Bedino-Rung, Mowen, and Cohen, 2016).

Question 5D of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey asked: *In your opinion, what are the most pressing needs of the outdoor recreation areas that you visit?* Survey respondents ranked *Litter/Maintenance* in outdoor recreation areas as the most pressing need to be addressed.

Question 4 of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey asked: *What is the most significant issue that you encounter when engaging in any of the activities you listed?* Survey respondents identified *Litter* as the most significant issue they encounter while engaging in outdoor recreation, accounting for 17% of responses.

Question 7 of the Municipal Officials Survey asked: *In the following table, please indicate the overall condition of each type of recreational facility that your community offers.* (Percentages were displayed when 40% or more of respondents’ ratings were *Needs Improvement* or *Poor*.)

**Table 15. Municipal Recreational Facility Types Identified as Needing Improvement**

Facility Type	Number of Responses	Condition (Needs Improvement or Poor)
Camping	15	60%
Fields – lacrosse	34	44%
Courts – volleyball	31	46%
Swimming, beaches, or outdoor pools	47	40%
Winter sports	39	49%

As identified in a review of Connecticut Recreational Trails Program grant funding allocation, *Construction* awards (\$9,833,475 or 45%) and *Design* awards (\$5,200,583 or 24%) dominate funding allocation. *Construction* and *Maintenance* combined account for 54% of RTP funding (\$11,850,057). *Planning* and *Design* together account for 34% (\$7,454,131). These last two main project categories cover 88% of awards. *Trail Amenity and Facilities* awards funded \$283,047 for projects, including parking lots, toilet buildings, signs, and benches.

## Strategy 2C: Ensure visitor safety and protect facilities and resources through monitoring of unlawful or unpermitted activity and ensure appropriate methods of enforcement and compliance.

### SUPPORTIVE DATA

With relatively few large land holdings in the state and with greater than 80% of land held privately, Connecticut’s recreational areas tend to be small in scale and scattered across the landscape in abundance. This presents challenges to activities dependent on large tracts of land, challenges for accommodating multiple user groups, and challenges for monitoring of unlawful or unpermitted activities.

During the period January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2022, State Environmental Conservation Police logged a total of 159,644 calls for service. In this period, officers issued 6,358 citations and 3,650 warnings, investigated 202 accidents, and made 638 arrests. The staffing levels throughout the

5-year period ranged from as low as 44 officers to 50 officers due to the retirement of several experienced officers and the hiring of new officers during this time.

Of the activities reported by participants in the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey, *Behavior of Other Visitors: Littering, Vandalism, Unleashed Dogs (Activity 1, Q3A)* and *Maintenance Issues: Vandalism, Poor Upkeep, Dirty Facilities (Activity 2, Q3A)* were identified as impacting their recreation experience.

## **Strategy 2D: Increase technologically innovative interfaces to enhance customer service and visitor experiences.**

### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

“Agencies use customer engagement tools that collect insights shared by their customers and tap market research data resources to better understand the demographic trends of their populace.” (National Recreation & Parks Association, 2016) “By merging data and technology, agencies are better able to improve the customer experience and feedback, as well as improve engagement among community members who might otherwise not be heard.” (Bhatt, 2017)

As mentioned in the opening section of this report, a new state park website, CTparks.com, was made available in September of 2023 that includes:

- A user-friendly ParkFinder Tool that helps users identify nearby state parks and forests based on their current location.
- An event management system that highlights activities happening in and around state park and forest recreation areas.
- A user-generated content feature that captures social media content shared by actual visitors to state park and forest recreation areas.
- A “While You’re Here” function that highlights nearby restaurants, shops, hotels, and attractions.
- ADA and multi-language support.
- Existing links from the individual state park pages on the portal.ct.gov/DEEP website will redirect to the new website.

Additional technological innovations include the CT Park Finder, CT Trail Finder, and the Connecticut Coastal Access Guide.

## **Strategy 2E: Increase resources to repair, improve, and replace infrastructure and recreational amenities that support the public’s use of facilities.**

### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Connecticut Recreational Trails Program grant funding opportunities help cover costs of repair, maintenance, and improvements to trail systems in Connecticut. (Refer to Strategy 2B.)

With the implementation of the Passport to the Parks funding program, supported by a dedicated \$10 biannual fee on all Connecticut passenger vehicle registrations in lieu of traditional parking fees<sup>8</sup>, several discontinued or curtailed services were restored.

Hours of operation at DEEP’s museums and nature centers are once again from Memorial Day to Labor Day, including those at Dinosaur State Park and Arboretum, Gillette Castle State Park, Meigs Point Nature Center at Hammonasset Beach State Park, and Fort Trumbull State Park.

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<sup>8</sup> Out-of-state vehicles will still be charged parking fees ranging from \$7 to \$22 depending on the park and time of day. (DEEP news release 02/06/2019)



Re-enactors at Fort Trumbull State Park, New London (Instagram@the\_8th\_cv)



DEEP Maintainer, Penwood State Park, Bloomfield (DEEP)

Four closed campgrounds are reopening:

- Devil’s Hopyard State Park (East Haddam) – Opening day of fishing season<sup>9</sup> through Labor Day.
- Pachaug State Forest, Green Falls Area (Voluntown) – Opening day of fishing season through Labor Day.
- Macedonia Brook State Park (Kent) – Opening day of fishing season through Labor Day.
- Salt Rock State Campground (Sprague) – The weekend before Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day.

Spring camping will be restored at the following locations:

- American Legion and Peoples State Forests (Barkhamsted) – Opening day of fishing season through Labor Day.
- Pachaug State Forest, Mount Misery Area (Voluntown) – Opening day of fishing season through Labor Day.

Fall camping will be restored at the following locations:

- Hammonasset Beach State Park (Madison) – Weekend before Memorial Day Weekend through Columbus Day.
- Rocky Neck State Park (East Lyme) – Weekend before Memorial Day Weekend through the end of September.
- Housatonic Meadows State Park (Sharon) – Weekend before Memorial Day Weekend through Columbus Day.
- Hopeville Pond State Park (Griswold) – Weekend before Memorial Day Weekend through the end of September.

**Strategy 2F: Create and implement volunteer programs to help supplement staffing and increase engagement with visitors and volunteer organizations.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

In addition to municipal efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, DEEP divisions and partnering organizations also will identify inclusive opportunities along with the need to conserve open space resources through proper stewardship. CCESR data highlighted that *Trail Building/Maintenance/Conservation/Volunteering* was most popular in Litchfield and Tolland Counties (both with 11% participation), as well as Windham County (10% participation).

**Table 16. Volunteer Organizations**

Volunteer Organizations
Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association
Friends of Connecticut State Parks
New England Mountain Bike Association
Connecticut Horse Council
DEEP Internship Program

<sup>9</sup> “Opening Day” is the second Saturday in April. Under newly adopted regulations, as of March 1, 2023, there will be no closed season on trout-stocked waters, however all trout caught between March 1 and 6:00 a.m. on the second Saturday in April must be released.

Question 9 of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey asked: *Are you a member of a club or organization whose purpose or mission is the enjoyment or support of outdoor recreation in some form?*

Sixty percent of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey respondents reported being active members in outdoor recreation or natural resource conservation clubs for which the top-rated purpose of the organization is the support, preservation, and conservation of land or wildlife.

**Table 17. Avid Outdoor Recreation Enthusiast Conservation Club Membership**

Outdoor Recreation/Conservation Club Membership	Top Five Responses
Land trust, conservation clubs	1
Sportsman, fish & game, land & game clubs	2
Audubon, bird, ornithology club	3
Mountain biking clubs	4
Hiking, mountain clubs	5

**Strategy 2G: Assess where there are gaps in recreational access and acquire land to ensure that amenities are available to all while exploring collaboration with outdoor recreation organizations (businesses and nonprofits) to offer additional tourism and outdoor recreation services in state parks.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

DEEP staff is completing a comprehensive, GIS-based assessment of dedicated open space lands across Connecticut to better understand what percentage of the state’s land is already used for that purpose and where the uses are presently concentrated. Once that data collection effort is completed, DEEP will use the information to set new targets for land conservation efforts, especially in presently underserved areas.

Responses to the 2023 outdoor recreation surveys could be skewed towards more white and wealthy areas of the state, which may make determining gaps in access a challenge. Major urban centers in the state, including Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, and Stamford, did not respond to the Municipal Officials Survey, which does not aid in identifying gaps in services.

**Table 18. Municipal Officials Survey Respondents by County and Municipality (2023)**

County	Municipality
Fairfield	Brookfield, Danbury, Newtown, Norwalk, Ridgefield, Weston
Hartford	Avon, Bristol, Burlington, Canton, East Windsor, Glastonbury, Newington, Simsbury, West Hartford, Wethersfield
Litchfield	Canaan, Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, Norfolk, Plymouth, Roxbury, Salisbury, Thomaston, Washington, Watertown, Winchester
Middlesex	Chester, Cromwell, Deep River, East Hampton, Middletown, Old Saybrook, Westbrook
New Haven	Bethany, Branford, Guilford, North Branford, Wallingford
New London	Colchester, East Lyme, Griswold, Groton, Lisbon, Preston
Tolland	Ellington, Hebron, Mansfield, Somers, Vernon
Windham	Killingly, Plainfield, Putnam, Thompson

### **Goal 3: Address the threats of climate change on outdoor recreation and the conservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources by working together with outdoor recreation participants to implement strategies for habitat preservation, conservation, and decarbonization and climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and education.**

#### **Strategies:**

- A. Foster community engagement, relevancy, and stewardship in outdoor recreation, community science, and conservation efforts.**
- B. Plan for and invest in outdoor recreation infrastructure that is resilient to the effects of climate change, such as floods and severe weather.**
- C. Reduce operating costs and minimize the carbon footprint of outdoor recreation in Connecticut through sustainable operations.**
- D. Connect communities to trails by promoting trail networks that offer effective transportation alternatives and reduce emissions.**
- E. Provide electric vehicle chargers at outdoor recreation destinations to ensure accessibility for electric vehicle drivers.**
- F. Incorporate climate change information in experiential educational materials provided at outdoor recreation and natural resource destinations (nature centers, museums, etc.).**
- G. Increase residents' understanding of both the benefits of outdoor recreational activities and the historical, cultural, and natural resource value of outdoor spaces.**
- H. Create healthy, resilient, and connected habitats to protect and enhance nature and the economic, recreational, and physical and mental health benefits it supports.**
- I. Assess, monitor, remediate, and reduce negative impacts of recreational activity on the environment.**
- J. Communicate how natural resource management strategies are addressing threats from climate change and can produce more resilient natural spaces and ensure future fish and wildlife-based recreation opportunities.**
- K. Connect communities to trails and multiuse paths that offer effective transportation alternatives, reducing emissions and preserving natural corridors through the promotion of interconnected greenway systems and trail networks.**

#### **Strategy 3A: Foster community engagement, relevancy, and stewardship in outdoor recreation, community science, and conservation efforts.**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

In 2021, the National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA) published the *Engaging Diverse Groups in Building Community Resiliency Through Stewardship* guide, which found that “Advocates, stewards, and volunteers are key to the success of ecologically balanced park projects and spaces. They provide vital assistance in the advocacy, establishment, maintenance, and educational outreach needed to ensure these spaces are in harmony with nature, well-maintained, and a welcoming place for all.” The guide noted “According to national research NRPA conducted in 2020, we know that this population generally skews older, whiter, and wealthier than the community as a whole. To ensure the sustainability and success of our natural resource programs and parks, we need to make certain our advocates and stewards reflect the communities these spaces serve.”

Question 9 of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey asked: *Are you a member of a club or organization whose purpose or mission is the enjoyment or support of outdoor recreation in some form?* Sixty percent of the 4,753 respondents to the question reported being part of a club or organization. Specifically, respondents said they were part of these types of organizations:

**Table 19. Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Conservation Club Membership**

Outdoor Recreation/Conservation Club Membership	Top Five Responses
Land trust, conservation clubs	1
Sportsman, fish and game, land and game clubs	2
Audubon, bird, ornithology club	3
Mountain biking clubs	4
Hiking, mountain clubs	5

**Table 20. Purpose or Mission of the Outdoor Recreation/Conservation Club**

Response Category	Top Five Responses
Promote preservation and conservation of land	1
Promote fishing, hunting, riding, shooting, etc.	2
Promote or provide safety	3
Promote restoration and education	4
Provide resources, land, and opportunities for people	5

This population of dedicated volunteers could be a valuable resource to increase community engagement in outdoor recreation and conservation efforts.

**Strategy 3B: Plan for and invest in outdoor recreation infrastructure that is resilient to the effects of climate change, such as floods and severe weather.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

As a coastal state, Connecticut is positioned to be a leader in the adoption of resilient infrastructure. DEEP has implemented numerous initiatives to address climate change. Specific initiatives, legislation, and guidelines can be found in Appendix A.

**Strategy 3C: Reduce operating costs and minimize the carbon footprint of outdoor recreation in Connecticut through sustainable operations.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Moving away from fossil fuels to electric power can help reduce the carbon footprint in parks. Transportation is responsible for approximately 28% of the annual greenhouse gas emissions in the United States (NPS.gov, n.d.). According to Dolesh in an article in the National Recreation & Parks Association magazine (2023), “Park and recreation agencies have an opportunity now to plan, budget, and implement a changeover to electric power that positions them for more cost-efficient operations and a more reliable and resilient future that demonstrates a commitment to sustainability.”

### **Strategy 3D: Connect communities to trails by promoting trail networks that offer effective transportation alternatives and reduce emissions.**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Connecticut is fortunate to have a wide variety of volunteer organizations that are dedicated to the establishment, promotion, and continued support of alternative modes of transport related to their individual areas of interest. Many regional collaborations of volunteers, municipal and state representatives, planners, and professionals serve to support the planning, implementation, and expansion of their trails and greenways.

### **Strategy 3E: Provide electric vehicle chargers at outdoor recreation destinations to ensure accessibility for electric vehicle drivers.**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

This strategy aligns with the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection's 2020 statewide initiative, the *Electric Vehicle Roadmap for Connecticut, A Policy Framework to Accelerate Electric Vehicle Adoption (EV Roadmap)*, which represents a comprehensive strategy for accelerating the deployment of electric vehicles (EVs) through policies and regulatory tools addressing transportation equity, purchasing incentives, consumer education, charging infrastructure expansion, consumer protection, integration of EVs into the electric grid, utility investment, and utility rate design.

Furthermore, in 2023 the U.S. Department of Transportation highlighted the impact of increased EV infrastructure related to local health and economic benefits, reduction of greenhouse gases, and opportunities to reach a larger population in more rural or traditionally underserved communities. Also in 2023, the U.S. Department of Energy noted that EV sales in the United States continue to increase. Therefore, more charging stations in non-traditional areas like parks and outdoor recreation areas will be needed.

### **Strategy 3F: Incorporate climate change information in experiential educational materials provided at outdoor recreation and natural resource destinations (nature centers, museums, etc.).**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Various subsections of the *2017-2023 Bureau and Division Accomplishments* section in Part I of this Plan identify and explain the effective use of experiential programming in support of the overall mission of DEEP and the objectives of each division as they relate to climate change.

### **Strategy 3G: Increase residents' understanding of both the benefits of outdoor recreational activities and the historical, cultural, and natural resource value of outdoor spaces.**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

There are numerous wellness benefits from being outdoors, including physical, mental, social, and community (USDA, 2021).<sup>10</sup> A survey by the National Recreation & Parks Association found that local parks or picnic areas are among the favorite outdoor places Americans visit to experience the health benefits of nature (NRPA, 2019).<sup>11</sup> The three overall leading areas noted were lakes, riverfronts, or beaches (56%), local parks or picnic areas (55%), and trails or campsites (36%). "Parks provide a connection to nature, which studies demonstrate relieves stress levels, tightens interpersonal relationships, and improves overall mental health."

Outreach programs identified by the State Parks Education Unit demonstrate both an awareness of and an effort to address this issue.

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10 <https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/wellness-benefits-great-outdoors>

11 <https://www.nrpa.org/about-national-recreation-and-park-association/press-room/local-parks-among-the-top-outdoor-areas-americans-visit-to-experience-the-health-benefits-of-nature/>



*Meigs Point Nature Center, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (DEEP)*

**Strategy 3H: Create healthy, resilient, and connected habitats to protect and enhance nature and the economic, recreational, and physical and mental health benefits it provides.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

The benefits that sustainable habitats provide through ecosystem service help to support resident’s day-to-day lives. Healthy habitats help keep drinking water clean, protect from storms and flooding, and support outdoor recreational activities like hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and tourism.<sup>12</sup>

The Connecticut DEEP fosters healthy habitats by implementing conservation policies, investing in green infrastructure, promoting sustainable land use practices, and effectively communicating both its goals and outcomes to residents and visitors. Connecting habitats through ecological corridors enhances biodiversity. This approach protects nature, boosts economic opportunities, and contributes to the well-being of residents through recreation, physical health, and mental wellness.

**Strategy 3I: Assess, monitor, remediate, and reduce negative impacts of recreational activity on the environment.**

**SUPPORTIVE DATA**

The importance of assessing, monitoring, and remediating the negative impacts of recreational activities is an important element of both the management of each resource and its use by the public. Examples of these efforts comprise much of the information regarding the accomplishments mentioned earlier in this report.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/value-habitat#:~:text=Nature’s%20Benefits,boating%2C%20fishing%2C%20and%20tourism>

### **Strategy 3J: Communicate how natural resource management strategies are addressing threats from climate change and can produce more resilient natural spaces and ensure future fish and wildlife-based recreation opportunities.**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, “Climate change will alter the dynamics of outdoor recreation and the infrastructure that supports it in a number of ways, and these effects will vary greatly by season, geographic location, and population demographic... To help managers thoughtfully consider how to respond to the effects of climate change on outdoor recreation, the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science’s Climate Change Response Framework has designed a free download menu of climate adaptation strategies and approaches relevant to the conservation and management of natural resources for outdoor recreation.”<sup>13</sup>

The individual divisions of DEEP have directed strategies to address the need for informed decisions regarding the resiliency of natural spaces. The reader is advised to refer to the division reports appearing earlier in this document and the Action Plans for each division included in Appendix A. Additional information sources, including more than 50 online publications covering topics including Connecticut Outdoor Guides, Responsible Recreation, Outdoor Learning Resources, and online newsletters, are available to the public and can be accessed through the DEEP official website.<sup>14</sup>

### **Strategy 3K: Connect communities to trails and multiuse paths that offer effective transportation alternatives, reducing emissions and preserving natural corridors through the promotion of interconnected greenway systems and trail networks.**

#### **SUPPORTIVE DATA**

Communities across Connecticut are both aware of and actively involved in addressing the need to engage in alternative means of accessing municipal and state outdoor recreation facilities. Construction awards of \$9,833,475 (45.1% of total RTP awards) were granted to projects that actively construct new recreational trails or trail segments and include labor, materials, and construction administration costs. Trail construction projects represent close to half the allocated fees of the program.

DEEP’s Office of Trails and Greenways engages and collaborates with a broad range of partner organizations and agencies to support the planning and management of recreational trails across the state. There are many organizations that partner with the Office of Trails and Greenways. There are more than 2,500 miles of trails across state park and forest lands in Connecticut, with many more publicly accessible trails on municipal, land trust, and other conservation lands.

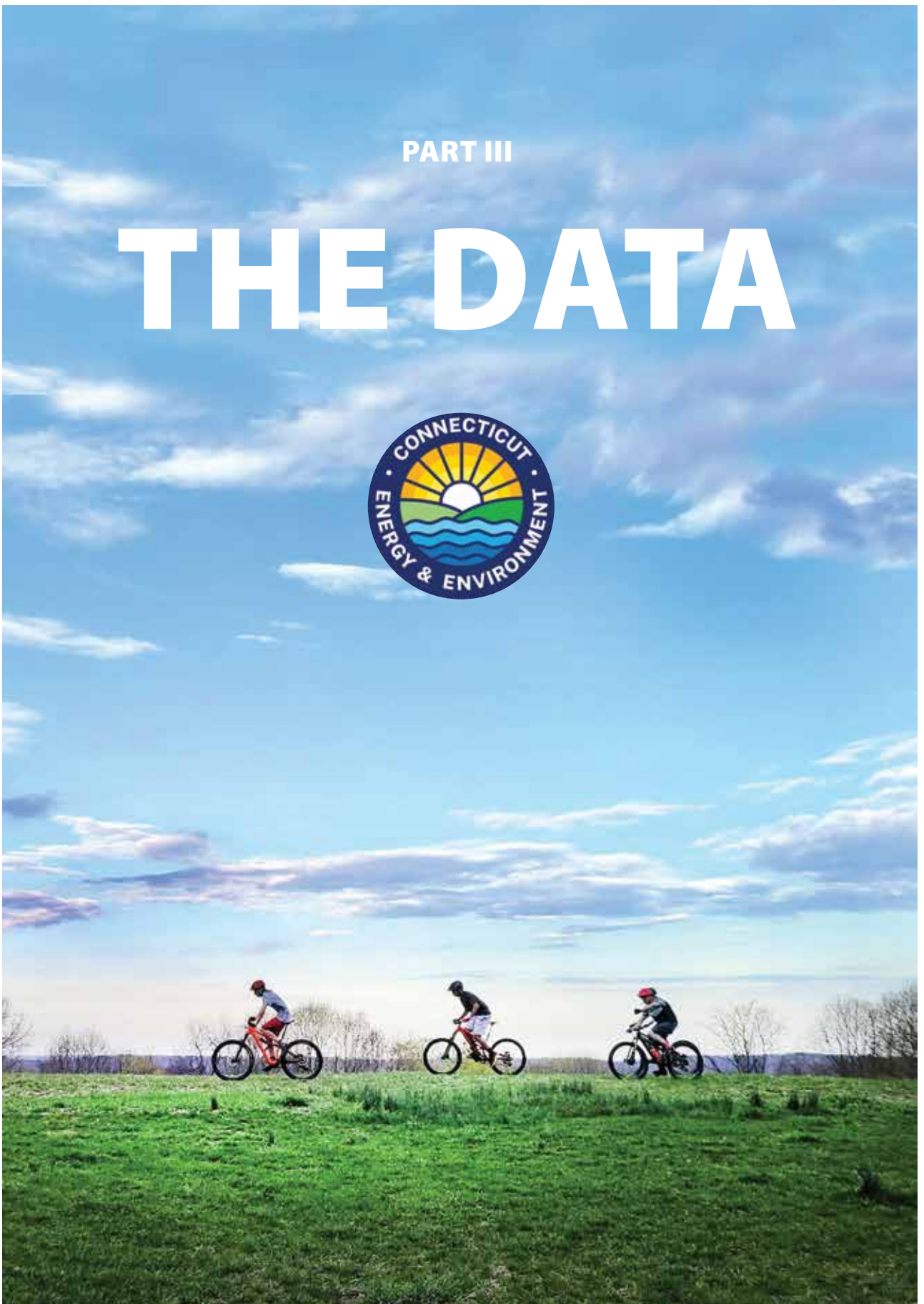
According to the United States Department of Agriculture,  
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these effects will vary greatly by season, geographic location, and  
population demographic....”

13 <https://forestadaptation.org/recreation-menu>; <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/24/7030>

14 <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP>

PART III

# THE DATA



*Mountain biking at C. P. Huntington State Park, Redding (Instagram@riding4fun)*

# PART III: THE DATA

## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

### *About This Study*

This study is a collaboration between the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Center for Community Engagement and Social Research (CCESR) at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). In October 2022, CCESR was commissioned to collect data and provide analysis to assist DEEP with drafting and assembling the 2024–2029 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The data collected will help DEEP evaluate the supply of and demand for public outdoor recreation resources throughout Connecticut and identify outdoor recreation issues of statewide significance.

### *Methodology for the 2024–2029 Plan*

Four surveys and two pairs of focus groups were conducted for the 2024-2029 SCORP:

#### **Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey**

To measure the demand for public outdoor recreation resources throughout the state, CCESR executed the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS), which was an online, non-probability survey of 1,010 Connecticut residents. By using quotas, the survey sample closely mirrors the state demographics as they apply to geographic distribution, gender, household income, and ethnicity. This means that, based on these four demographic categories, findings from the SORS can be reasonably extrapolated to those of Connecticut residents more broadly. The online survey was distributed electronically in English.

#### **Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey**

To better understand the recreation habits and needs of those who are passionate about outdoor activity in the state, CCESR conducted the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey (AOES), which was an online, non-random survey of 5,210 avid outdoor enthusiasts. Referred to as “Avid Users” in previous SCORPS, this group of survey respondents self-identified as those who currently participate in outdoor recreation activities. The survey was distributed via numerous channels, including listserv contacts from SCORP Advisory Committee members and CCESR social media accounts. The survey was distributed electronically in English, with a Spanish version available upon request.

#### **Municipal Officials Survey**

To update DEEP’s understanding of public outdoor recreation resources throughout Connecticut (i.e., the supply of outdoor recreation facilities), CCESR sent the Municipal Officials Survey (MOS) to the outdoor recreation director in each of Connecticut’s 169 municipalities. Participation was first solicited by email, followed by telephone calls to any nonresponding municipalities. In cases where a recreation director was unavailable to answer the survey questions, other municipal officials were contacted. The survey was administered in English. In all, 55 municipalities participated.

#### **Current Recreationist Survey**

New for the 2024–2029 SCORP, CCESR conducted a survey of current recreationists. CCSU students and University Assistants visited 64 DEEP facilities to spread awareness about the survey. A combination of flyers, yard signs, and postcards were utilized, with each item containing a QR code to the survey as well as a phone number. A total of 249 current recreationists shared their views on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), expenditures related to facility visits, and facility needs. The survey was distributed electronically in English, with a Spanish version available upon request.

## Focus Groups

Four qualitative focus groups were assembled to complement the quantitative surveys. Each focus group included five individuals. Two groups consisted of avid outdoor enthusiasts and two groups consisted of those who perceived significant barriers to the use of Connecticut’s outdoor recreation resources. Two focus groups were conducted in person on the CCSU campus, while the other two were conducted virtually.

## Methodological Limitations

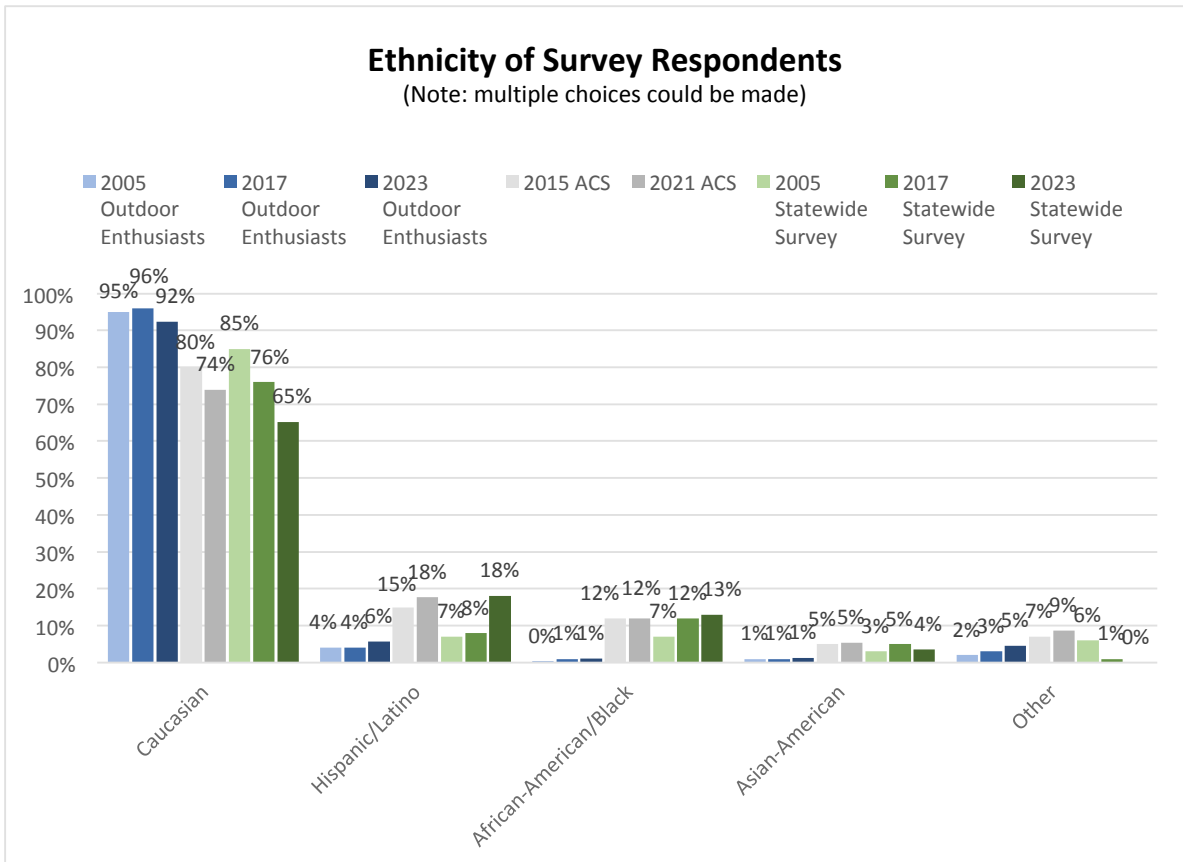
It is important to point out the methodological limitations of this study—including the implications of those limitations when attempting to interpret the data presented throughout this document. *Section VII: Methodological Limitations* presents the most prominent limitations of each survey and the focus groups. Readers are encouraged to review this section of the report to gain valuable insight into issues surrounding data generalizability and extrapolation.

## Survey Participant Demographics

The American Community Survey (ACS), administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, is the premier source for detailed population and housing information about the nation. National and state-specific results of the 2021 ACS, which is the most recent available version of the survey, are provided in this report as a baseline for comparisons to survey participant demographics.

## Ethnicity

Survey participants were asked to identify their ethnicity from multiple options. Compared with the 2023 Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS), the 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey (AOES) comprised a significantly less diverse respondent base that is not representative of the overall demographic groups in Connecticut. Meanwhile, the ethnic composition of the 2023 SORS is largely comparable to the 2021 ACS results for Connecticut, although the values for *Caucasian* and *Other* differ by up to 9% (Figure 8).

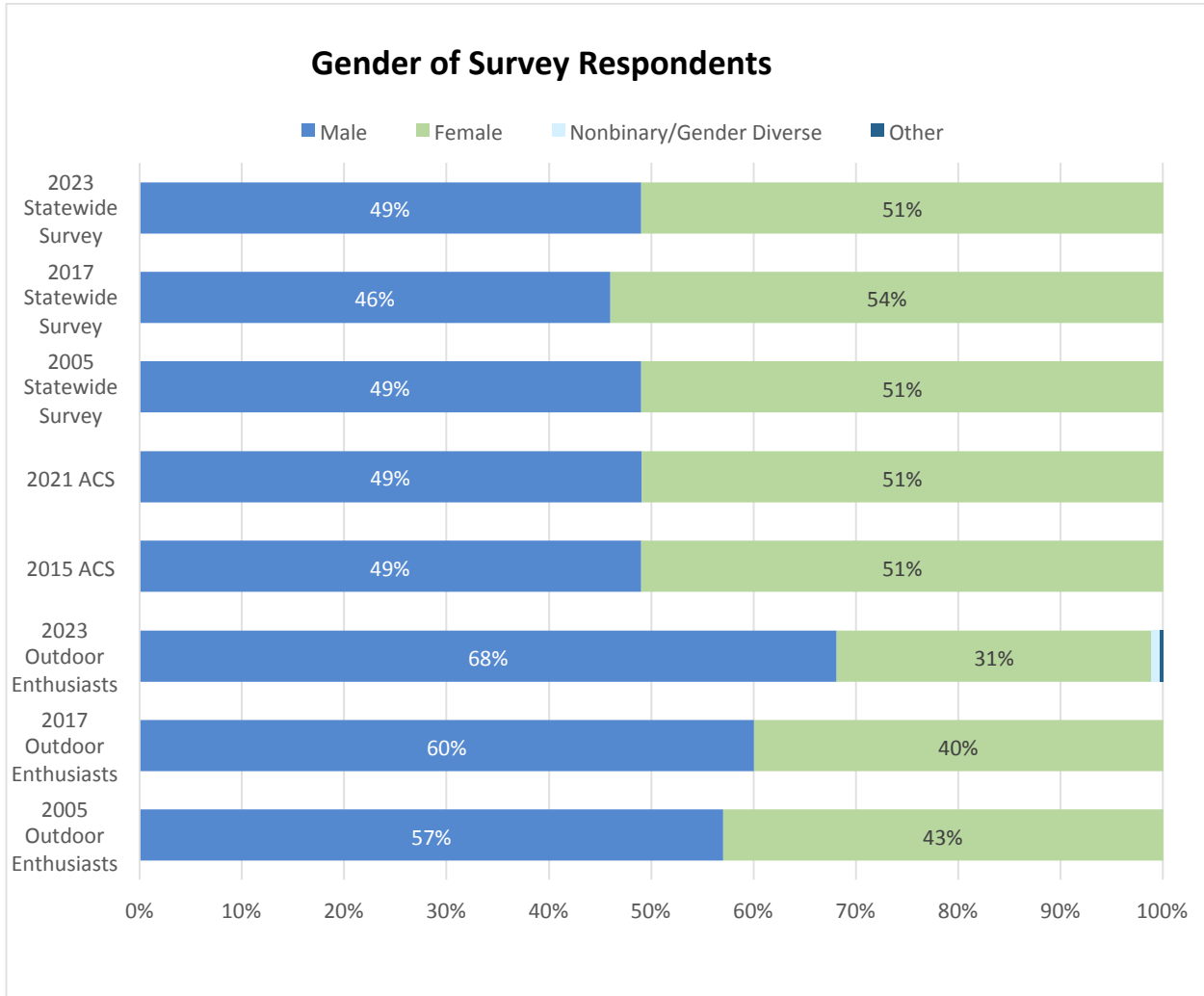


**Figure 8. Ethnicity of Survey Respondents (2005–2023)**

## Gender

Participants in the 2023 Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) were asked to report their gender as either female or male. Gender proportions reported in the SORS match the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) exactly, with 51% of Connecticut residents reporting as female and 49% as male (Figure 9).

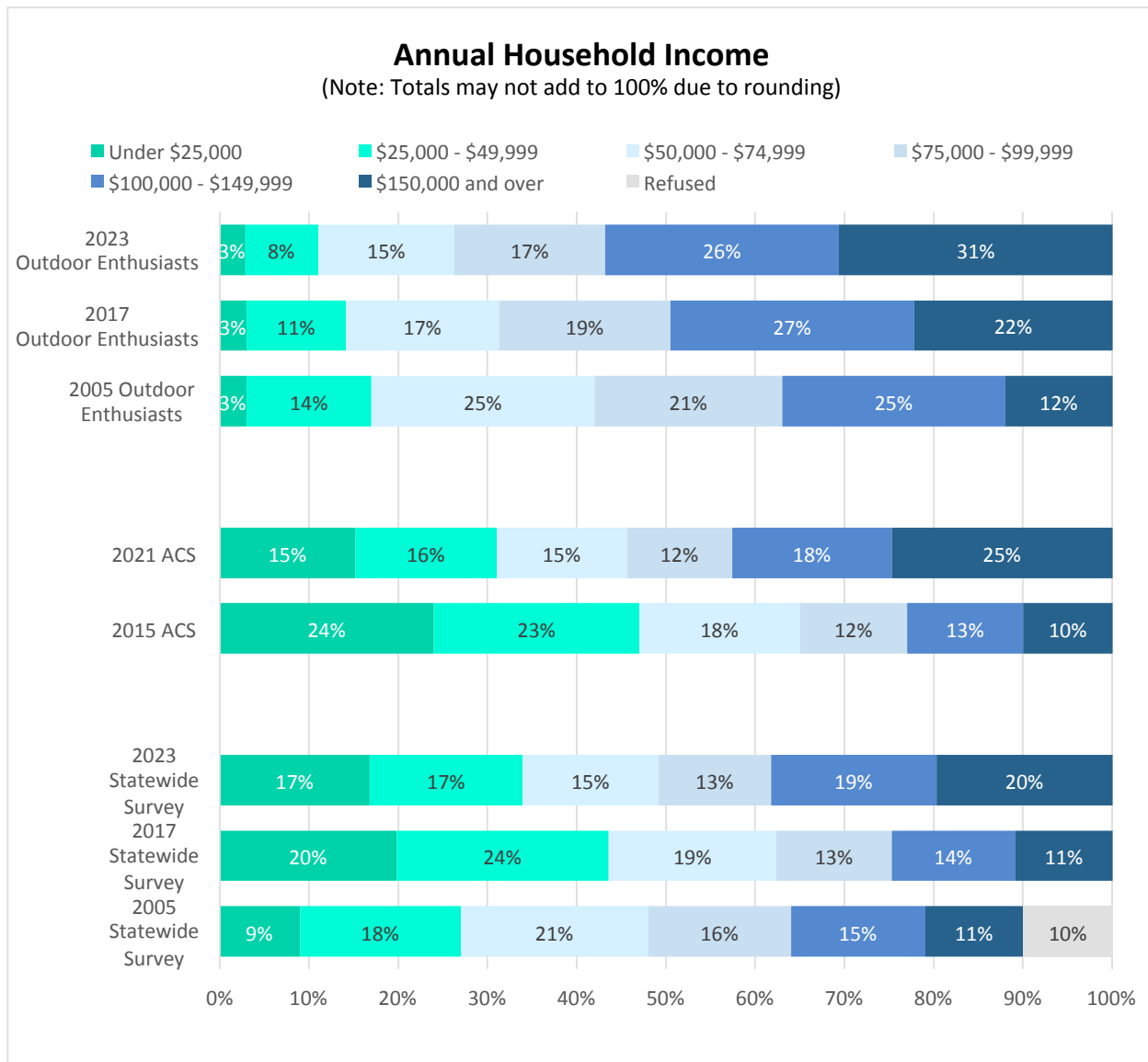
The 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey (AOES) provided two additional gender options beyond female/male: *Non-Binary/Gender-Diverse* or *Other*. Among those who responded to the question, the results were 68% Male, 31% Female, 0.8% Non-binary/Gender-diverse, and 0.3% Other. Overall, 9% of AOES participants did not respond to the gender question.



**Figure 9. Gender of Survey Respondents**

## Household Income

Participants were asked to identify their annual household income. The most common response for Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) participants was \$150,000+ (20%), a considerable increase from 2017 when only 11% reported income in this category. Among 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey (AOES) respondents, the response in this category was even higher. Nearly one-third of avid outdoor enthusiasts reported household income of \$150,000 or more in 2023. The 2021 American Community Survey (ASC) results in this category fall midway between the SORS and AOES results at 25% (Figure 10).

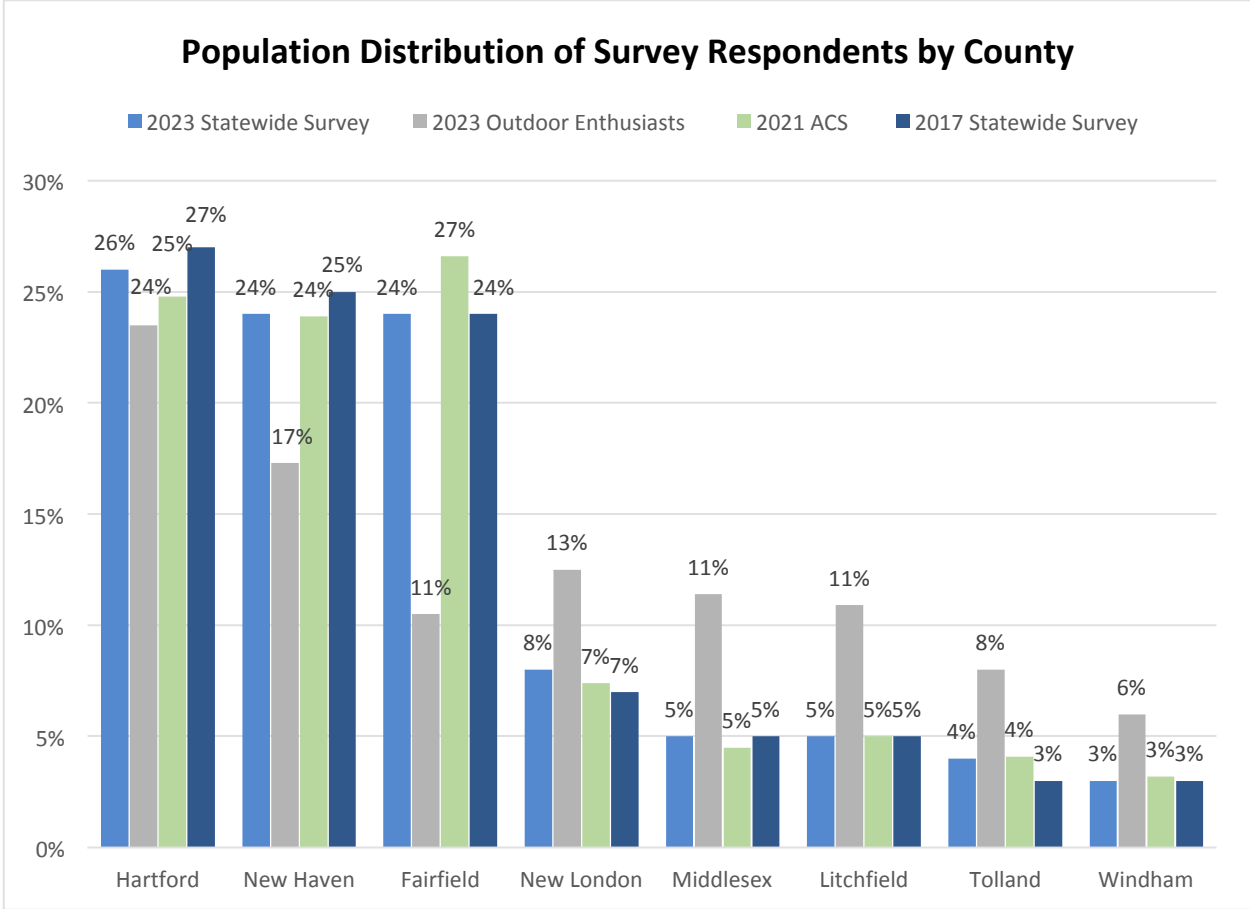


**Figure 10. Annual Household Income**

## Geographic Distribution

Survey participants were asked to identify their county of residence. The geographic distribution of Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) participants in 2023 closely matches 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) figures and is also very similar to the 2017 SORS results (Figure 11).

Hartford, New Haven, and Fairfield counties are the most populous counties in the state, each accounting for roughly one quarter of the population, or three quarters of the population (74%) when taken together. In the 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey (AOES), Hartford County again accounts for roughly one quarter of respondents, but Hartford, New Haven, and Fairfield counties together account for only half of AOES respondents (52%). The remaining five less-populous counties account for a disproportionately higher share of avid outdoor enthusiasts, with each county registering roughly double the given ACS percentage. Proportionately, Fairfield County was the most significantly underrepresented in the AOES compared to the ACS, with 11% compared to 27%, respectively.



**Figure 11. Population Distribution of Survey Respondents by County**

### Demographics of the Municipal Officials Survey

While all 169 state municipalities were invited to participate in the 2023 Municipal Officials Survey, only 55 municipalities responded. Table 21 shows the municipalities that participated in the 2017 and 2023 surveys. Twenty-four municipalities participated in both years.



*Family hike at Devils Hopyard State Park, Salem (Instagram@kleelee19\_0(1))*

**Table 21. Municipalities Represented in the 2017 & 2023 Municipal Officials Survey**

(Municipalities that participated in both the 2017 and 2023 surveys (24 total) are shown in *underlined italics*)

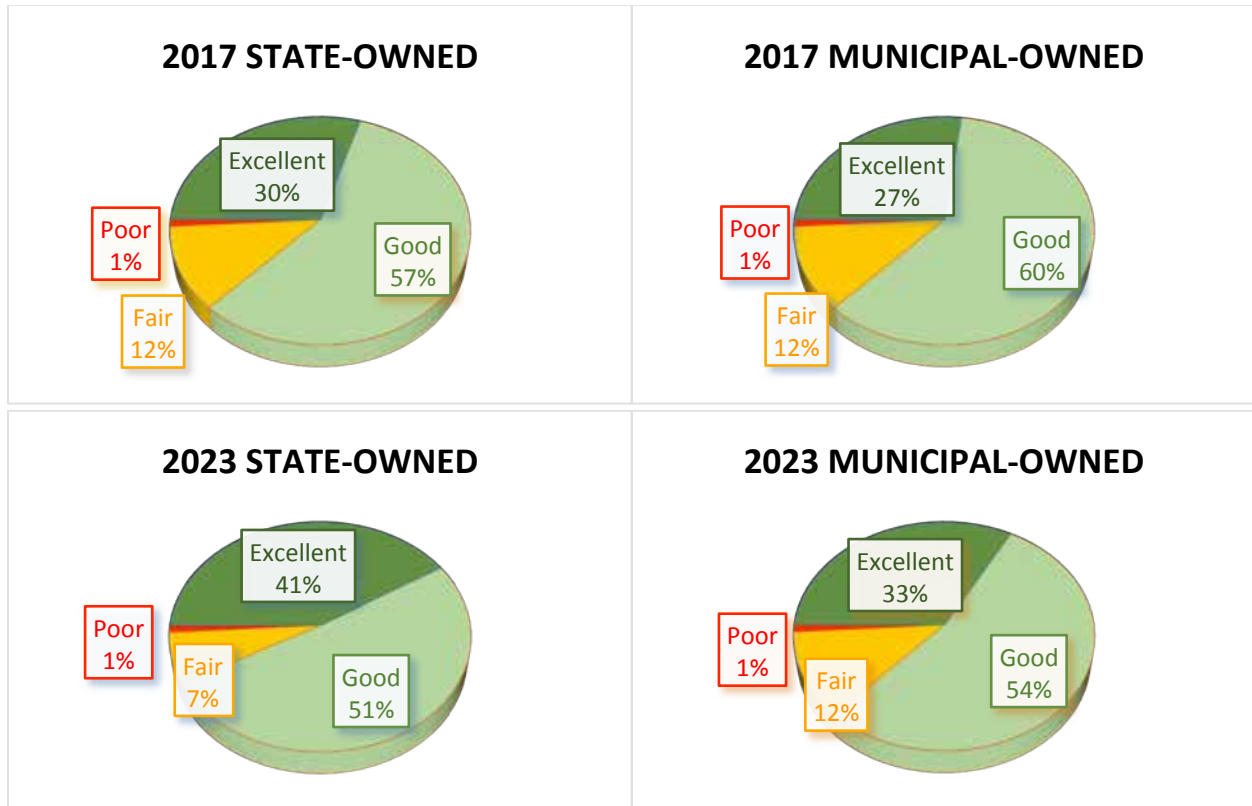
County	Year	Municipality
Fairfield	2017	Darien, Fairfield, New Canaan, <u>Newtown</u> , <u>Norwalk</u> , Redding, <u>Ridgefield</u> , Shelton, Stamford, Stratford, Trumbull, <u>Weston</u>
	2023	Brookfield, Danbury, <u>Newtown</u> , <u>Norwalk</u> , <u>Ridgefield</u> , <u>Weston</u>
Hartford	2017	<u>Avon</u> , Berlin, <u>Bristol</u> , <u>Burlington</u> , <u>Canton</u> , <u>East Windsor</u> , <u>Glastonbury</u> , Granby, Marlborough, <u>Newington</u> , <u>Simsbury</u> , South Windsor, <u>Wethersfield</u>
	2023	<u>Avon</u> , <u>Bristol</u> , <u>Burlington</u> , <u>Canton</u> , <u>East Windsor</u> , <u>Glastonbury</u> , <u>Newington</u> , <u>Simsbury</u> , West Hartford, <u>Wethersfield</u>
Litchfield	2017	<u>Goshen</u> , Kent, <u>Litchfield</u> , Torrington, Woodbury
	2023	Canaan, <u>Goshen</u> , <u>Litchfield</u> , Morris, Norfolk, Plymouth, Roxbury, Salisbury, Thomaston, Washington, Watertown, Winchester
Middlesex	2017	Clinton, Durham, East Haddam, <u>Westbrook</u>
	2023	Chester, Cromwell, Deep River, East Hampton, Middletown, Old Saybrook, <u>Westbrook</u>
New Haven	2017	<u>Branford</u> , <u>Guilford</u> , Madison, Milford, New Haven, Southbury, Wolcott
	2023	Bethany, <u>Branford</u> , <u>Guilford</u> , North Branford, Wallingford
New London	2017	<u>Colchester</u> , <u>East Lyme</u> , <u>Groton</u> , Waterford
	2023	<u>Colchester</u> , <u>East Lyme</u> , Griswold, <u>Groton</u> , Lisbon, Preston
Tolland	2017	Coventry, <u>Hebron</u> , <u>Mansfield</u>
	2023	Ellington, <u>Hebron</u> , <u>Mansfield</u> , Somers, Vernon
Windham	2017	<u>Putnam</u>
	2023	Killingly, Plainfield, <u>Putnam</u> , Thompson

Readers are advised to use caution in generalizing the findings about these 55 municipalities to all 169 municipalities in the state. While the sample represents 33% of the state’s municipalities, it may not evenly represent various characteristics such as population or property type (urban, suburban, or rural). For example, the five most populous cities did not participate in the study. These five urban areas (Bridgeport, Stamford, New Haven, Hartford, and Waterbury) account for 18% of the state’s population. In fact, among the 25 most populous municipalities in Connecticut, only six responded to the survey: Norwalk (#6), Danbury (#7), West Hartford (#9), Bristol (#14), Middletown (#20), and Wallingford (#21). This urban contrast is an example of the limitations in generalizing the sample of 55 municipalities to all 169 municipalities in the state.

## SECTION II: ASSESSING SUPPLY

### Residents' Ratings of Facility Conditions

The Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) asked residents to rate the condition of state and municipal outdoor recreation facilities. Figure 12 shows the 2023 results along with a comparison to data reported in the 2017 SCORP.



**Figure 12. Residents Rate the Condition of State and Municipal Outdoor Recreation Areas**

### Municipal Official Ratings of Facility Conditions

Whereas the SORS asked respondents for an overall rating of facilities in general, the Municipal Officials Survey asked respondents to rate the condition of 25 specific facility types. Figure 13 displays municipal officials' ratings of the condition of various recreational facilities.

Readers are advised to use caution in generalizing the findings about the 55 municipalities in Table 21 to all 169 municipalities in the state as it may not evenly represent various characteristics such as population or property type....



Aerial of Fort Trumbull State Park, New London (DEEP)

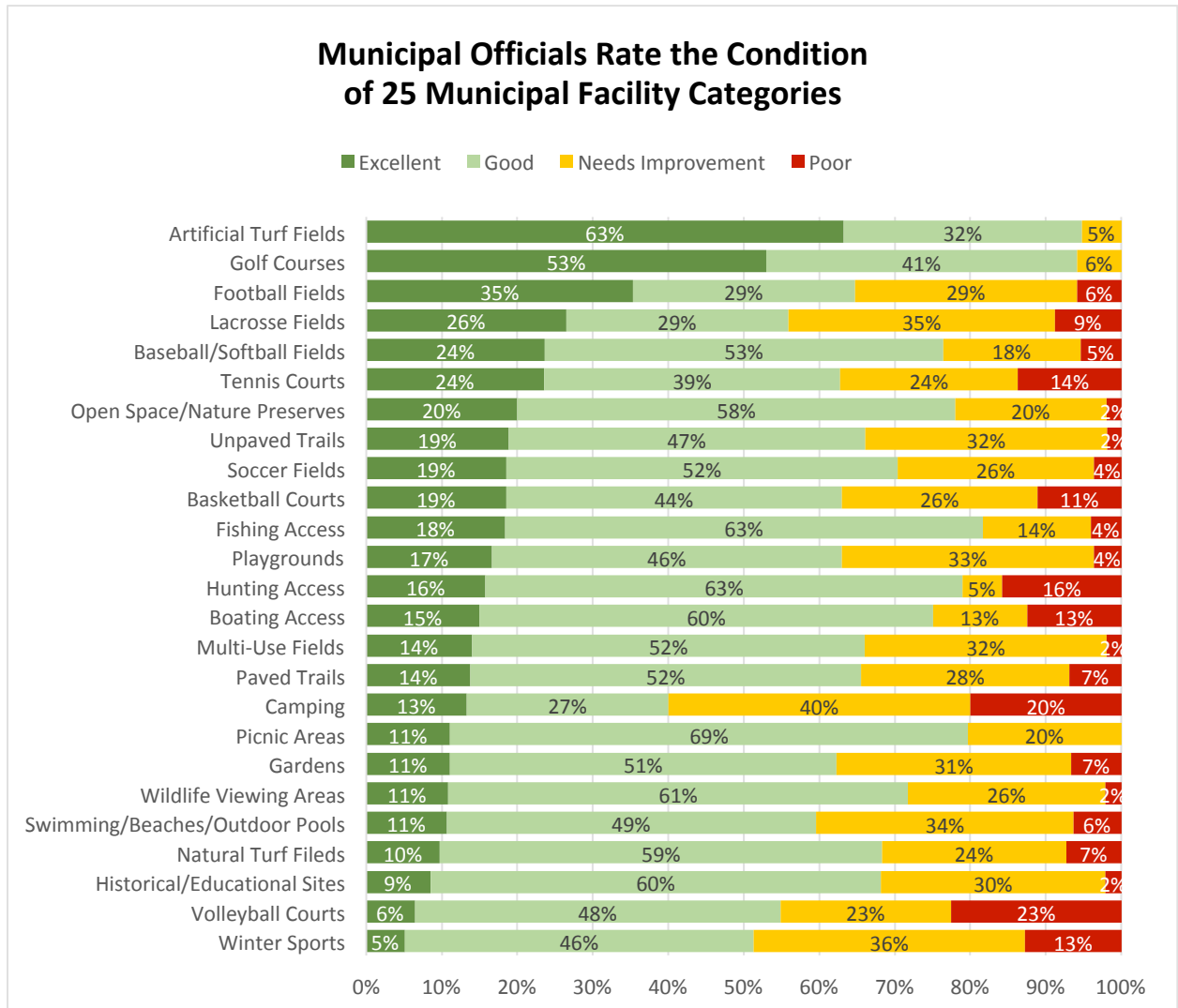
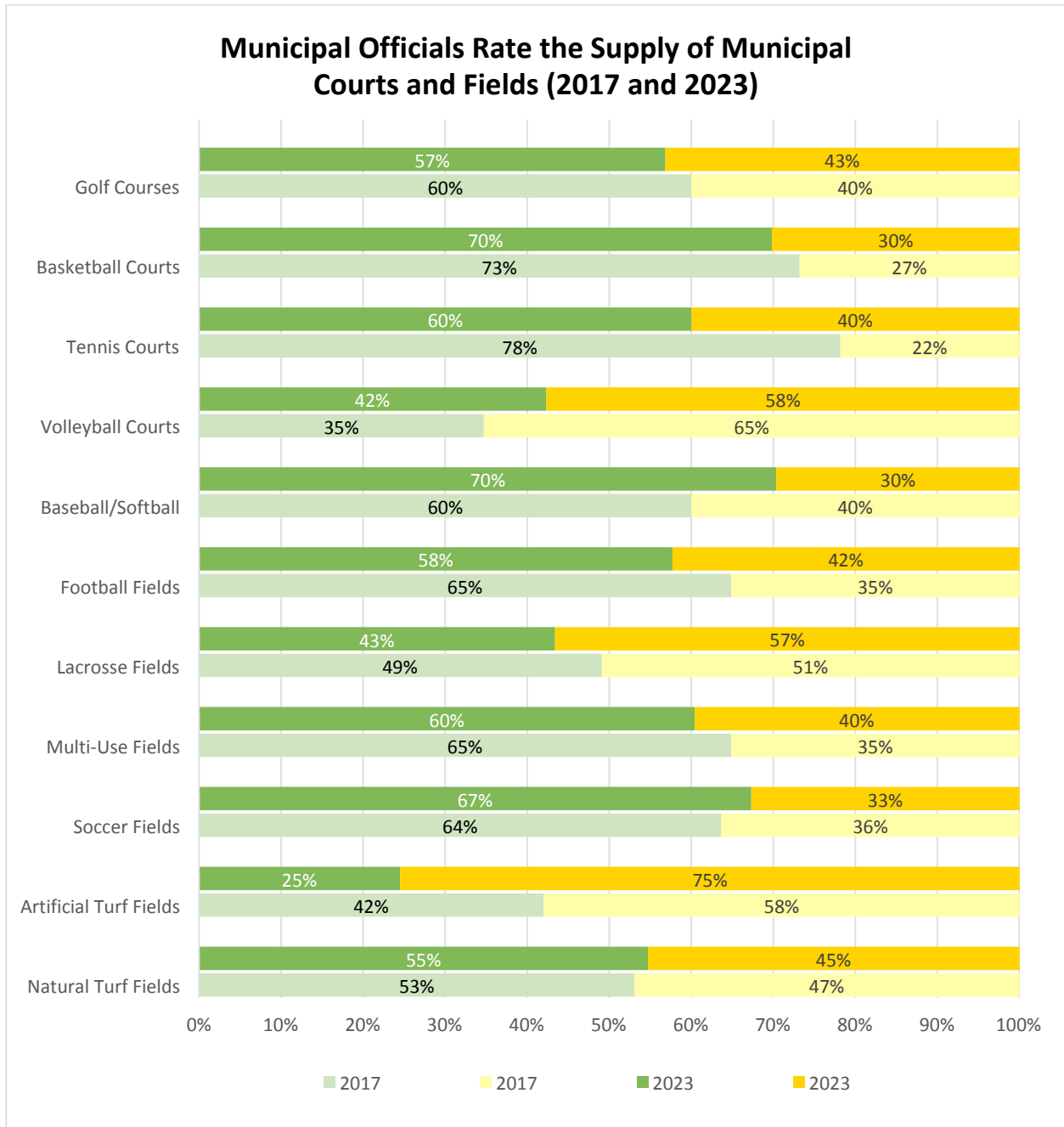


Figure 13. Municipal Officials Rate the Condition of 25 Municipal Facility Categories

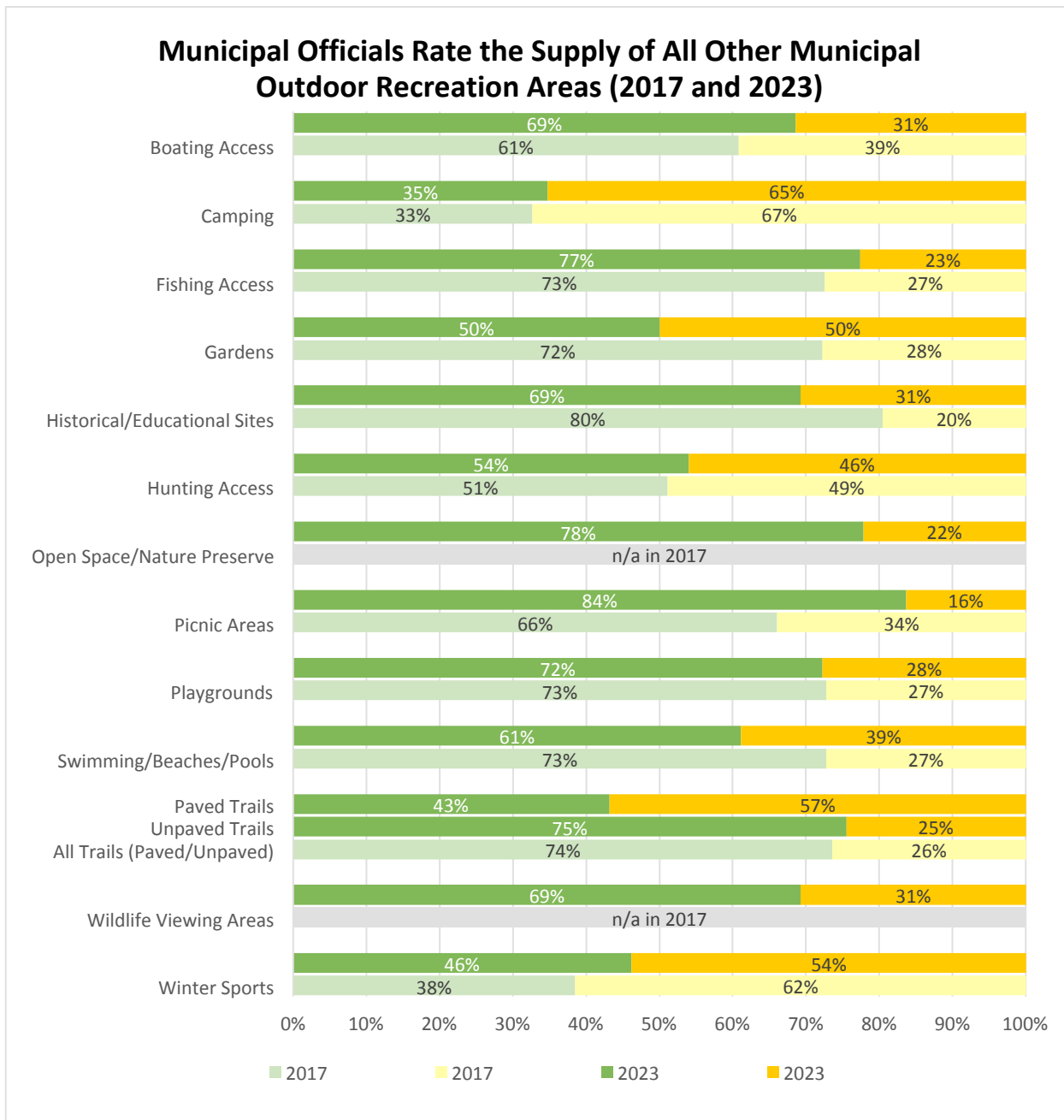
## Municipal Official Ratings of Facility Supply

Municipal officials were asked to rate the supply of various outdoor recreation facilities as *Sufficient* or *Insufficient* for meeting demand in their municipality. Figures 14 and 15 display the 2023 results as well as data from the 2017 SCORP for comparison.



**Figure 14. Municipal Officials Rate the Supply of Courts and Fields**

A direct comparison of resource sufficiency ratings between the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) and the Municipal Officials Survey (MOS) is difficult due to a difference in the rating scales used. However, combining the *Needs Not at All Met* and *Needs Somewhat Met* SORS categories (Figure 16) constitutes a reasonable comparison to the *Insufficient* category in the MOS. Seventy percent of SORS respondents and 57% of MOS respondents rated *Paved Trails* as *Insufficient*, suggesting a significant need for more or better paved trails in the state.

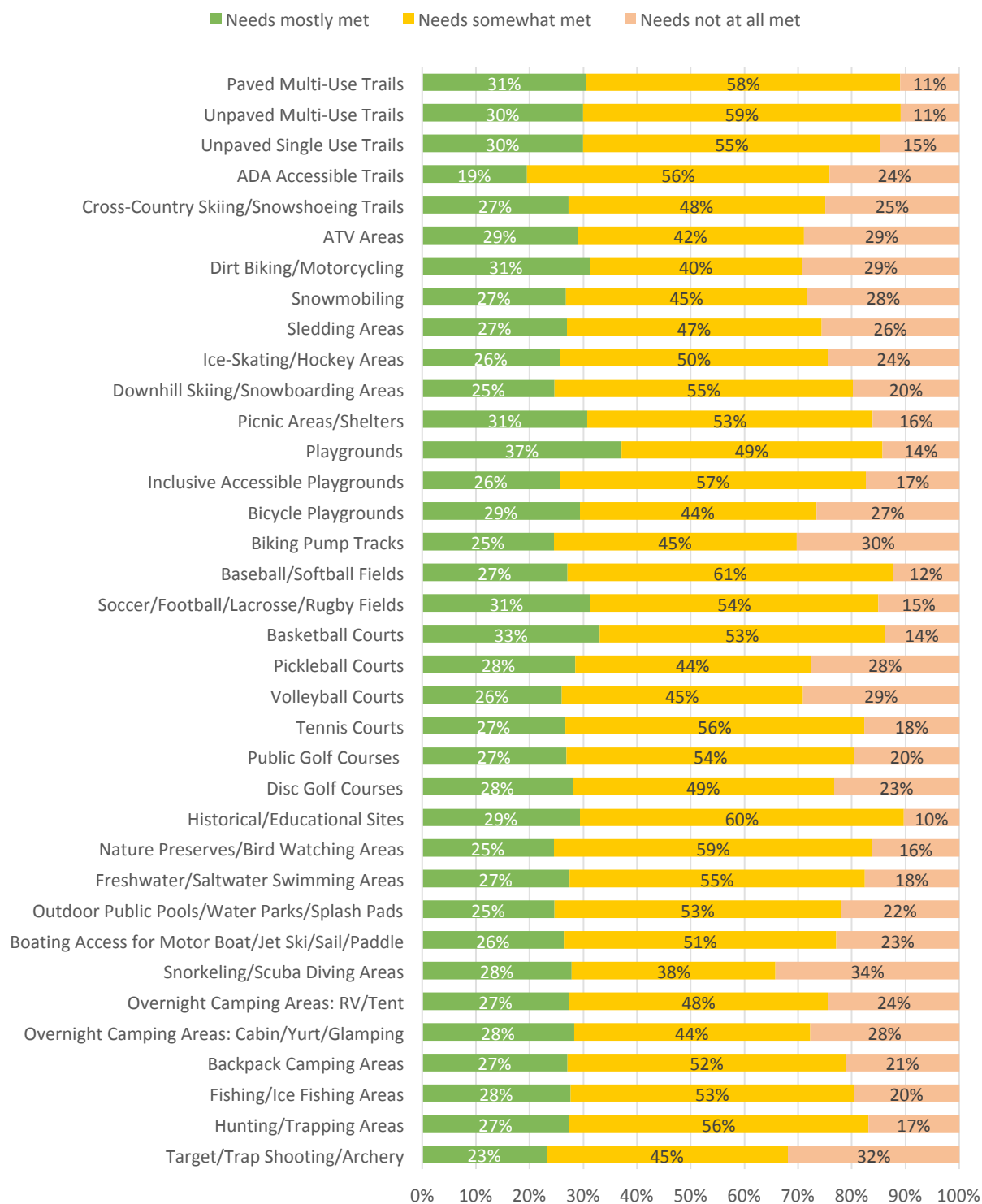


**Figure 15. Municipal Officials Rate the Supply of All Other Outdoor Recreation Areas**

Another resource worth noting is campsites, as nearly three-quarters (72%) in the SORS and almost two-thirds (65%) in the MOS rated *Campsites* as *Insufficient*. There also seems to be consistently *Insufficient* ratings for *Snowmobiling*, *Sledding*, *Skating*, and other *Winter Sports*. Seventy percent of SORS and 54% of MORS respondents rated winter facilities as *Insufficient*.

A survey by the National Recreation & Parks Association found that local parks or picnic areas are among the favorite outdoor places Americans visit to experience the health benefits of nature. (NRPA, 2019)

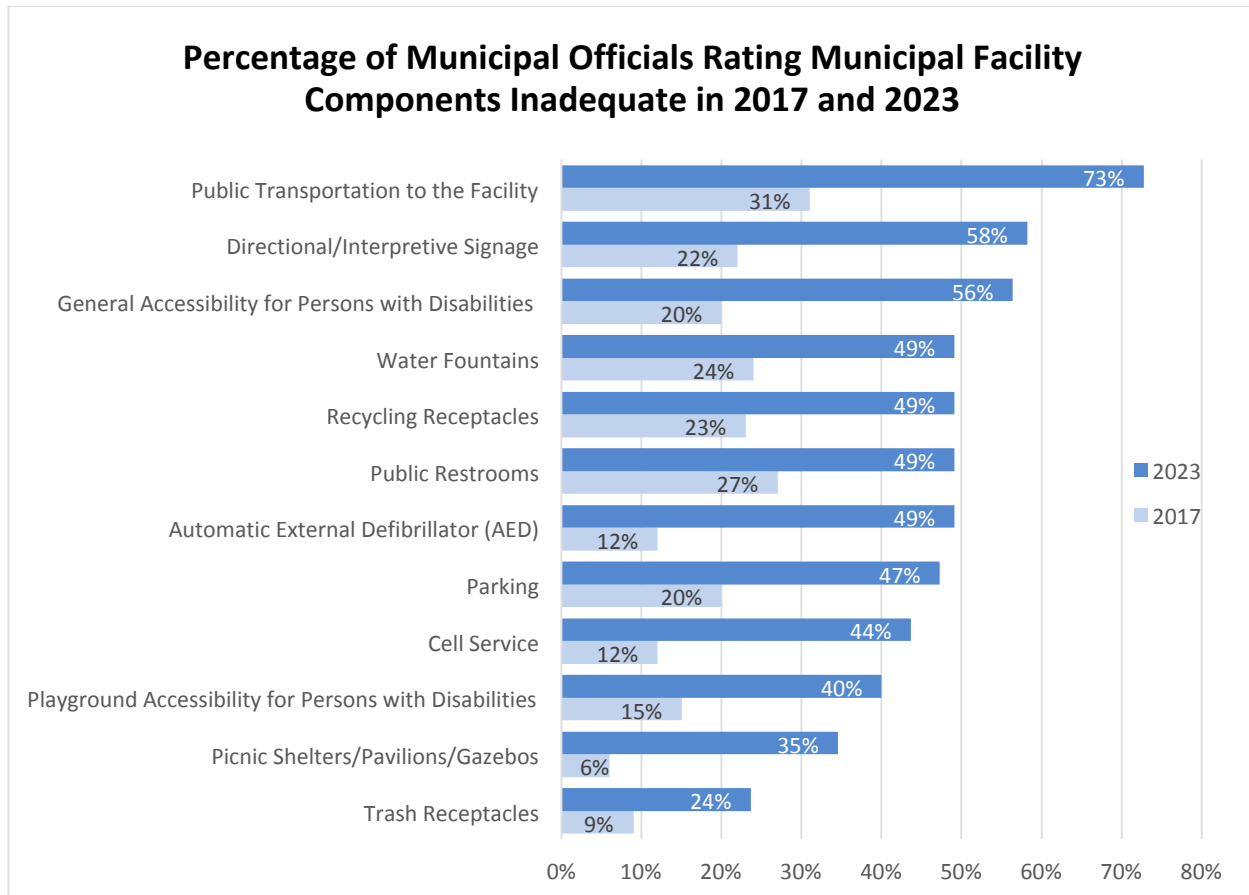
## Household Needs for Access to or Improvement of Outdoor Recreation Areas



**Figure 16. Household Needs for Access to or Improvement of Outdoor Recreation Areas**

## Municipal Official Ratings of Support Components

Respondents to the Municipal Officials Survey were asked to identify which support components were inadequate at any of the facilities in their community, with selection of multiple responses permitted (Figure 17). Support components are resources that make it easier or more enjoyable to practice outdoor recreational activities at a recreational area. For example, restrooms are considered a support component because they allow individuals to stay longer in an area.



**Figure 17. Percentage of Municipal Officials Rating Municipal Facility Components Inadequate**

In reviewing the results shown in Figure 17, it is important to note that there are differences between the 2017 and 2023 Municipal Officials Survey samples (see Table 21). Among the 55 municipalities represented in the 2023 Municipal Officials Survey, only 24 were also represented in the 2017 survey. With just 44% overlap, direct comparisons between 2023 and 2017 survey results should be viewed with caution. More than half of the towns that completed the 2023 survey did not participate in the 2017 survey, and vice versa. Furthermore, even among the towns represented in both 2023 and 2017, it is possible that the surveys were not completed by the same municipal employee in both years.

Connecticut’s four-season climate and its full spectrum of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems together provide virtually all forms of outdoor recreation opportunities.



*Water sports at Kettletown State Park, Southbury (Instagram@seankeenan)*



*Dog walking at Day Pond State Park, Colchester (Instagram@rodi.the\_.pup\_)*

## SECTION III: ASSESSING DEMAND

### Profile of Participation: Statewide Outdoor Recreation

#### Household Participation Rates in Land-Based Activities

Figure 18 shows 23 land-based activities with household participation rates of 10% or more. Figure 19 shows eight land-based activities with household participation rates of less than 10%.

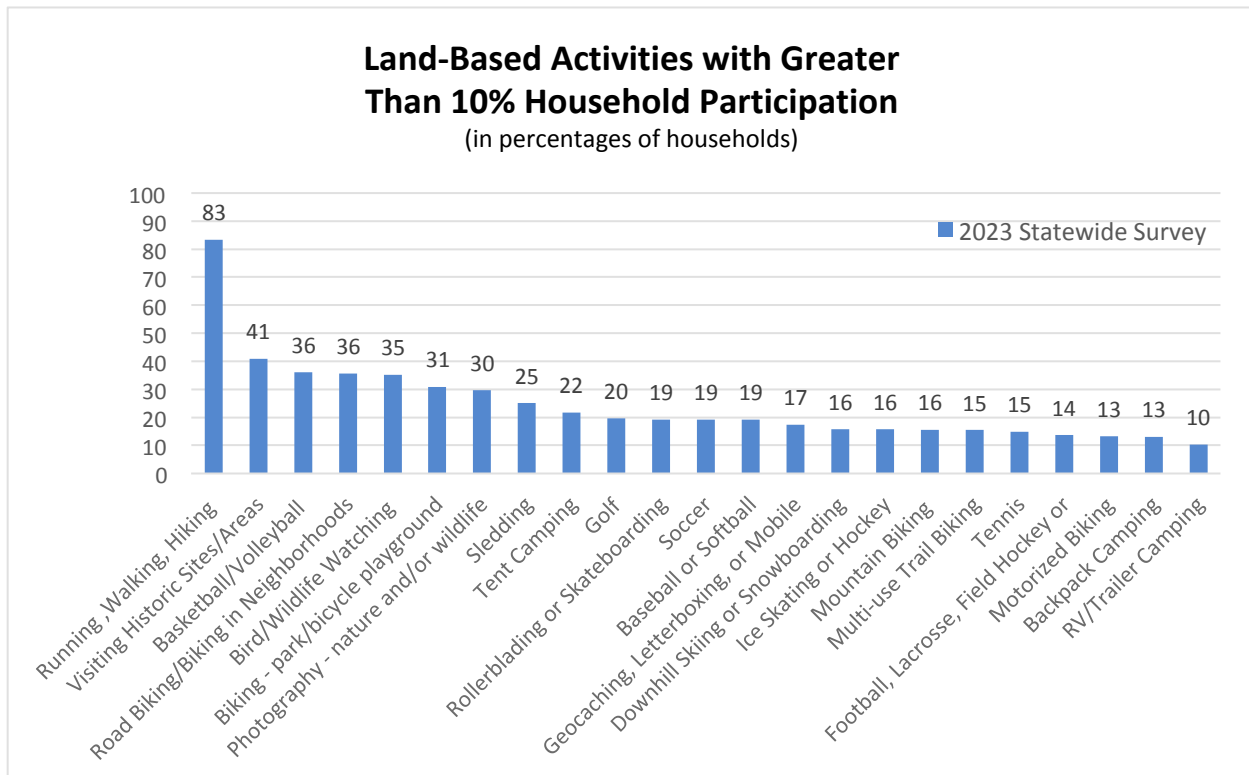


Figure 18. Land-Based Activities with Greater Than 10% Household Participation

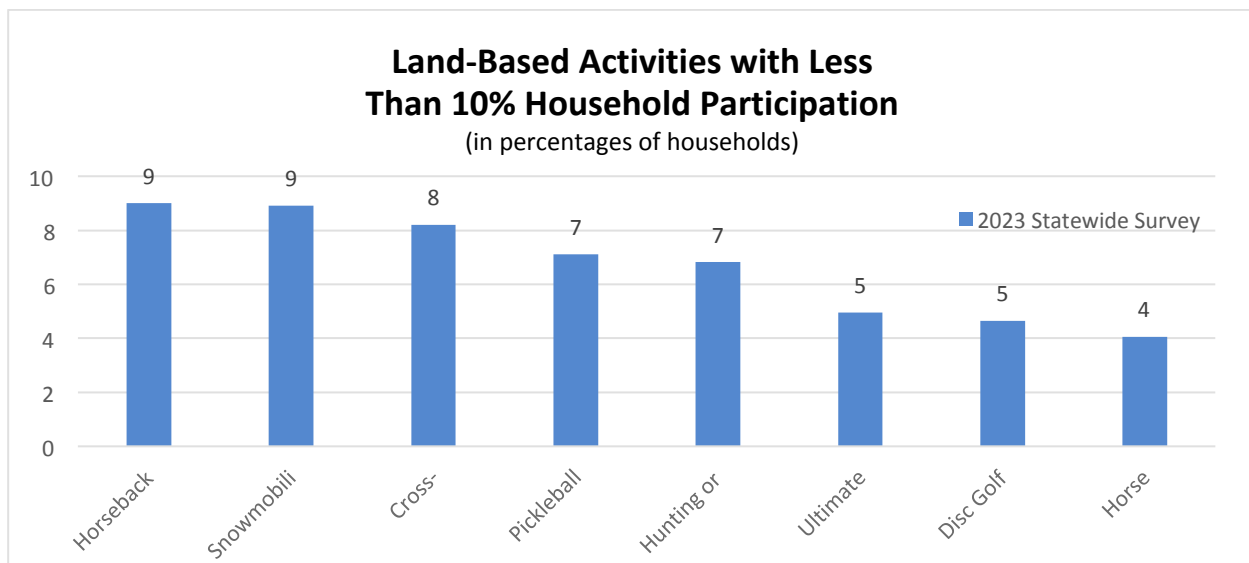
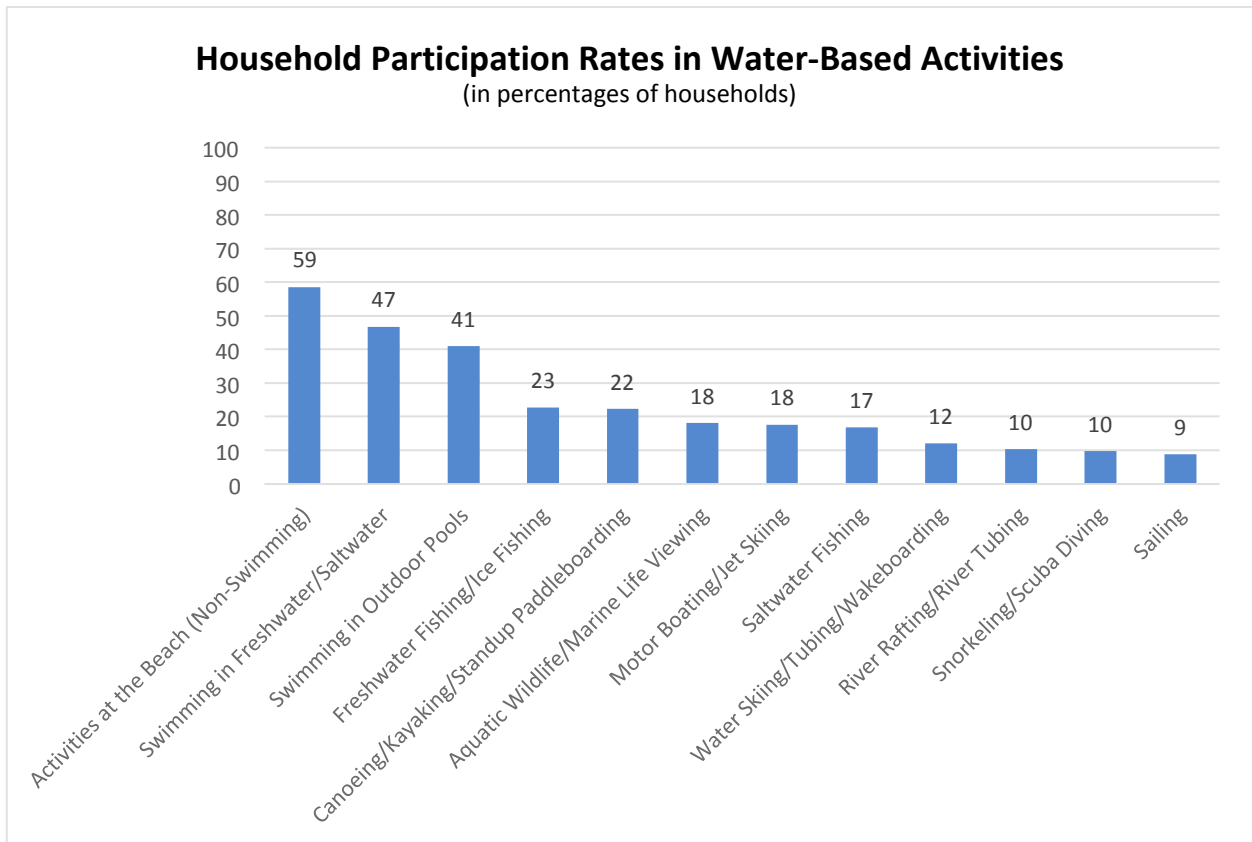


Figure 19. Land-Based Activities with Less Than 10% Household Participation

## Household Participation Rates in Water-Based Activities

Figure 20 shows the percentage of households that participate in 12 water-based outdoor recreation activities.



**Figure 20. Household Participation Rates in Water-Based Activities**

## Household Participation Frequency in Land-Based Activities

Respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey who participated in a land-based activity were asked to indicate the frequency with which household members engaged in that activity. The options were *Seldom or Never*, *Less Than Once a Month*, *At Least Once a Month*, *A Few Times a Month*, and *Several Times a Week*. The results are presented in Figure 21.

As a further analysis, the categorical scale in Figure 21 was converted to an average monthly participation value, as shown in Figure 22. This allows for a more practical quantitative view of the overall frequency data for each activity. The scale values are as follows: *Seldom/Never* = 0, *Less Than Once a Month* = 0.5, *At Least Once a Month* = 1, *A Few Times a Month* = 2, and *Several Times a Week* = 10. (The value of 10 assumes an average of two or three times a week. All categories are valued conservatively and can be reasonably viewed as minimum frequency values.) The values for all respondents were combined to produce an average monthly participation value for each activity. For example, a value of 5.3 for *Walking or Hiking* indicates that walkers/hikers hit the trail 5.3 times a month on average.

## Household Participation Frequency in Land-Based Activities

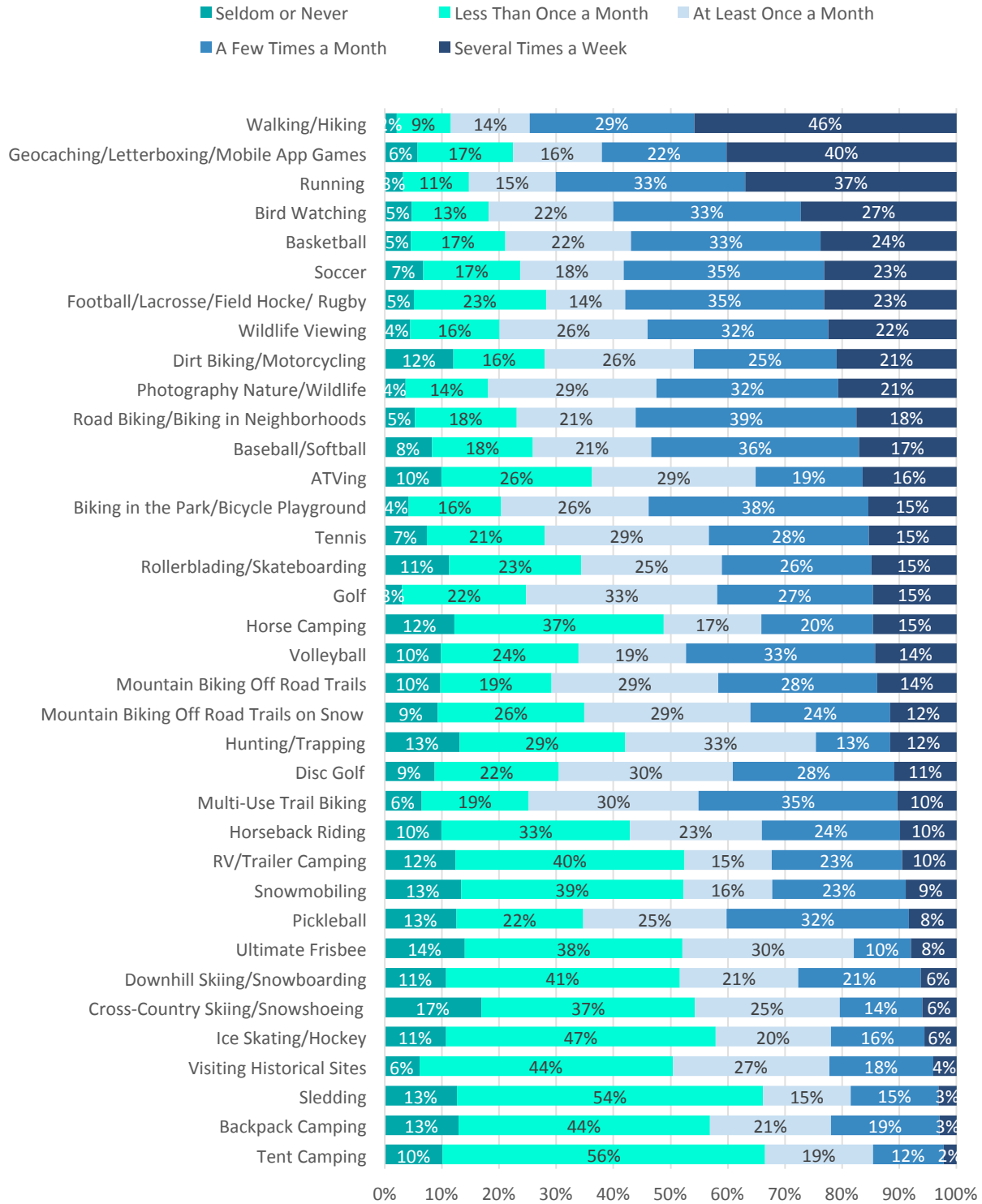
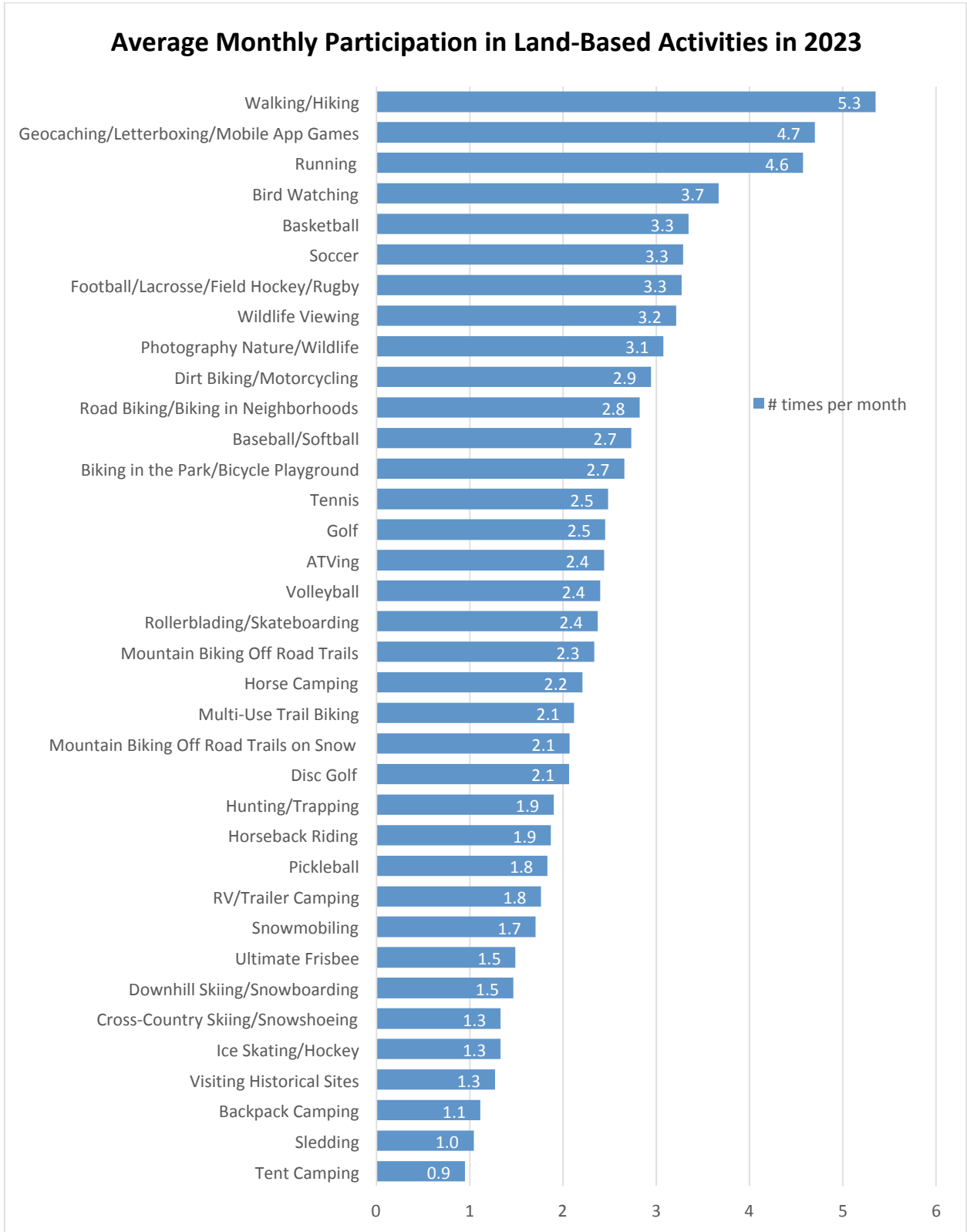


Figure 21. Household Participation Frequency in Land-Based Activities



**Figure 22. Average Monthly Participation in Land-Based Activities in 2023**

### Average Monthly Participation in Land-Based Activities in 2017 and 2023

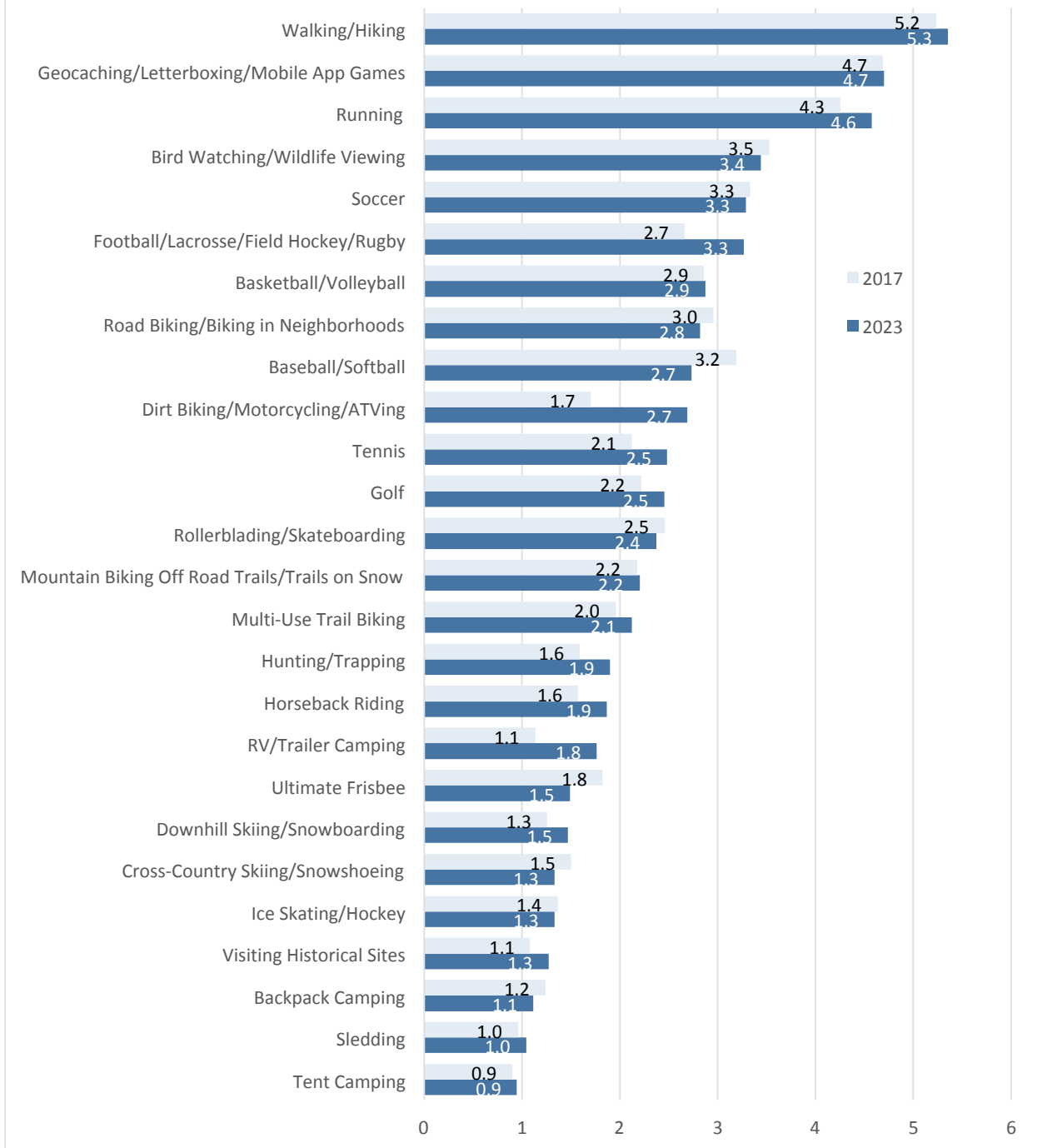
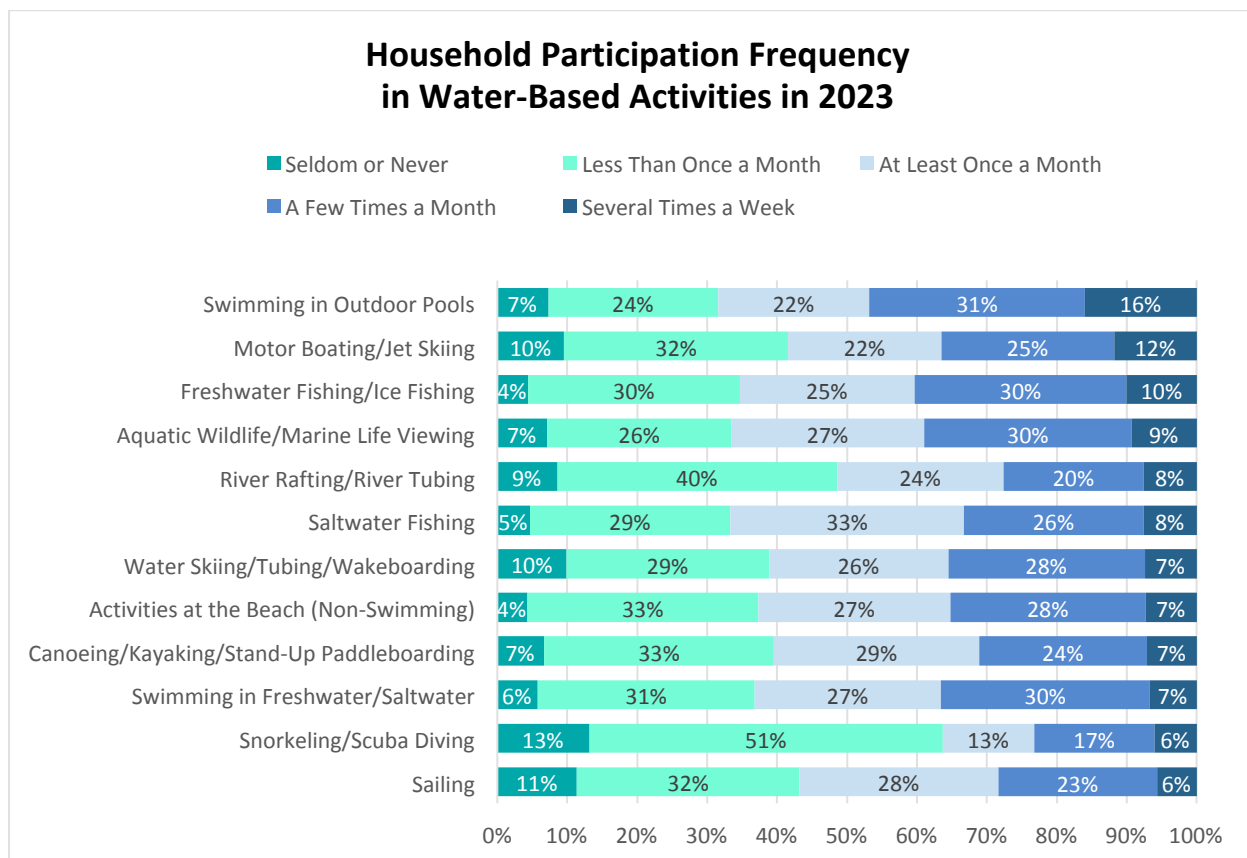


Figure 23. Average Monthly Participation in Land-Based Activities in 2017 & 2023

## Household Participation Frequency in Water-Based Activities

Respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey who participated in a water-based activity were asked to indicate the frequency with which household members engaged in that activity. The options were *Seldom or Never*, *Less Than Once a Month*, *At Least Once a Month*, *A Few Times a Month*, and *Several Times a Week*. The results are presented in Figure 24.

As a further analysis, the categorical scale in Figure 24 was converted to an average monthly participation value, as shown in Figure 25. This allows for a more practical quantitative view of the overall frequency data for each activity. The scale values are as follows: *Seldom/Never* = 0, *Less Than Once a Month* = 0.5, *At Least Once a Month* = 1, *A Few Times a Month* = 2, and *Several Times a Week* = 10. (The value of 10 assumes an average of two or three times a week. All categories are valued conservatively and can be reasonably viewed as minimum frequency values.) The values for all respondents were combined to produce an average monthly participation value for each activity. For example, a value of 1.8 for *Saltwater Fishing* indicates that marine anglers wet a line 1.8 times a month on average.



**Figure 24. Household Participation Frequency in Water-Based Activities in 2023**

In 2021, new partnerships promoting outdoor equity were formed with the Connecticut State Library’s Division of Library Development, the Connecticut Association of Foster & Adoptive Families, and the Connecticut Judiciary’s Court Support Services Division.



**Figure 25. Average Monthly Participation in Water-Based Activities in 2017 and 2023**



*Inshore fishing at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (DEEP)*



*Equestrians at Mansfield Hollow State Park, Mansfield (Instagram@horseys)*



*Family paddling at Mansfield Hollow State Park, Mansfield (CTvisit)*

# Profile of Participation: Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts

## Participation Rates of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts

The Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey (AOES) was designed to measure the needs of outdoor recreationists who participate most frequently. It differed from the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) by asking respondents to self-report up to five outdoor recreation activities that they practiced most frequently rather than selecting from a predetermined list of activities. Participation rates from the AOES should not be directly compared to those from the SORS because they do not reflect total participation rates, rather they reflect the percentage of respondents who mentioned an activity among their top five.

Still, a loose comparison between these two surveys is illuminative. Consistent with the SORS, *Walking, Running, and Hiking* were the most popular activities among avid outdoor enthusiasts. *Road Biking, Wildlife Viewing, and Tent Camping* were also activities that showed a relatively high degree of participation in both surveys. Other activities, specifically *Motorized Biking (including ATVs, Dirt Bikes, and Other Off-Road Vehicles), Mountain Biking, Hunting/Trapping, and Horseback Riding* showed a comparatively low percentage of household participation in the SORS compared to the frequency with which they were mentioned by avid outdoor enthusiasts. This suggests that while these activities are practiced by a smaller portion of the state’s population, the participants tend to show a high degree of engagement. This contrasted with *Visiting Historic Sites, Sledding, and Ball/Racket Sports (e.g., Basketball, Baseball, Tennis, etc.)*, which are practiced at higher rates by Connecticut households in the SORS with seemingly less engagement reflected in the AOES.

The percentage of avid outdoor enthusiasts who chose one of the 14 most-mentioned activities as their first choice is depicted in Figure 26, along with comparisons from the 2017 and 2005 SCORP reports. In some instances, methodological differences prevent direct comparison. Specifically, compared to 2017 surveys, a few activities have been categorized under different names or combinations in the 2023 SCORP. Collectively, 91% of respondents to the AOES in 2023 chose one of the top 12 reported activities as their first-choice activity.

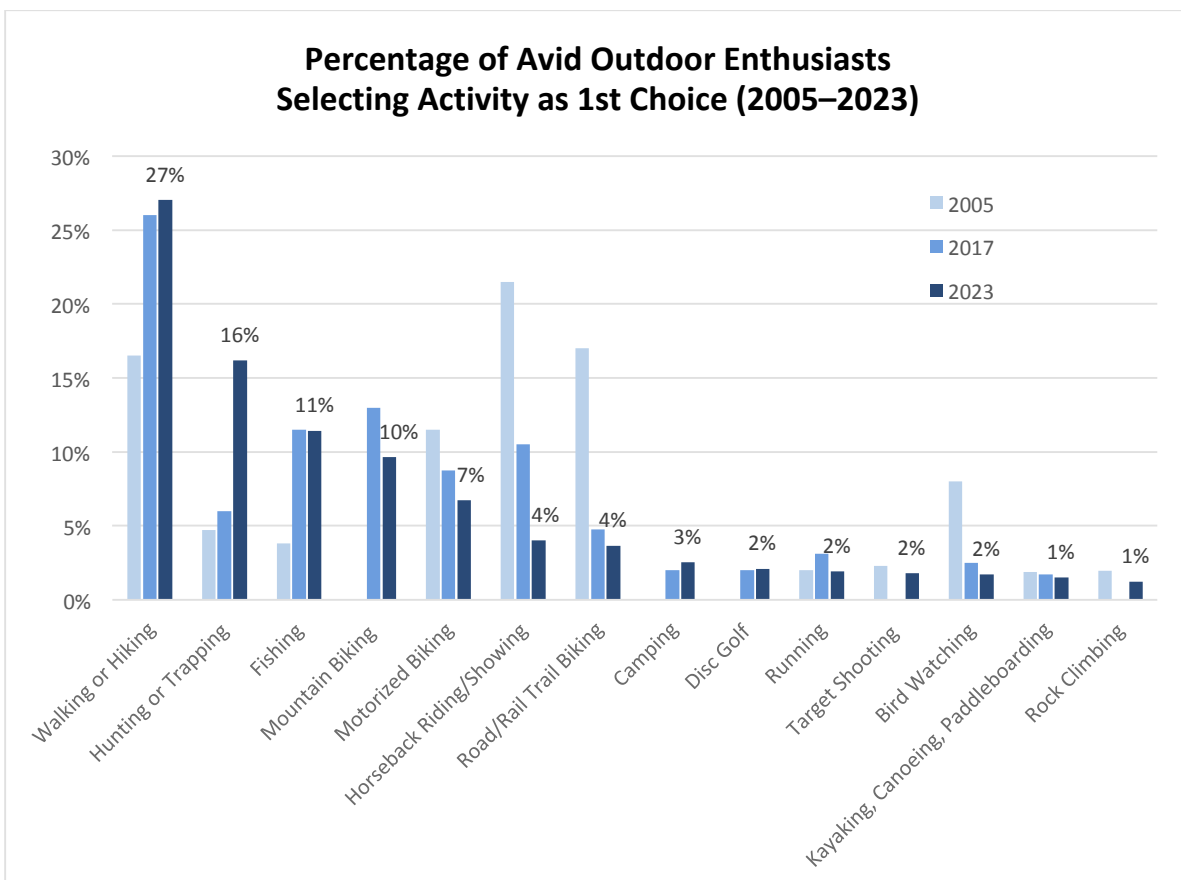
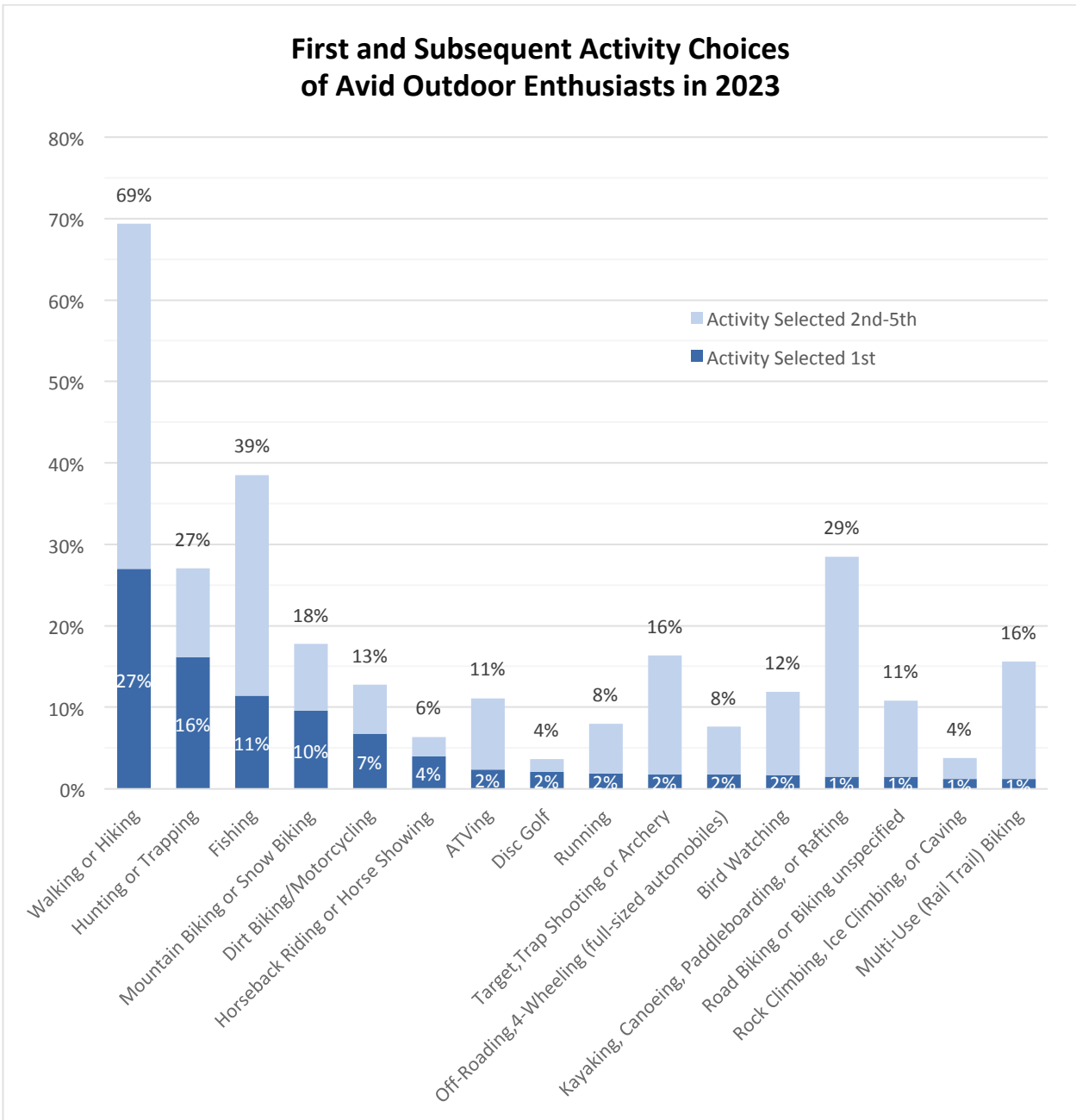


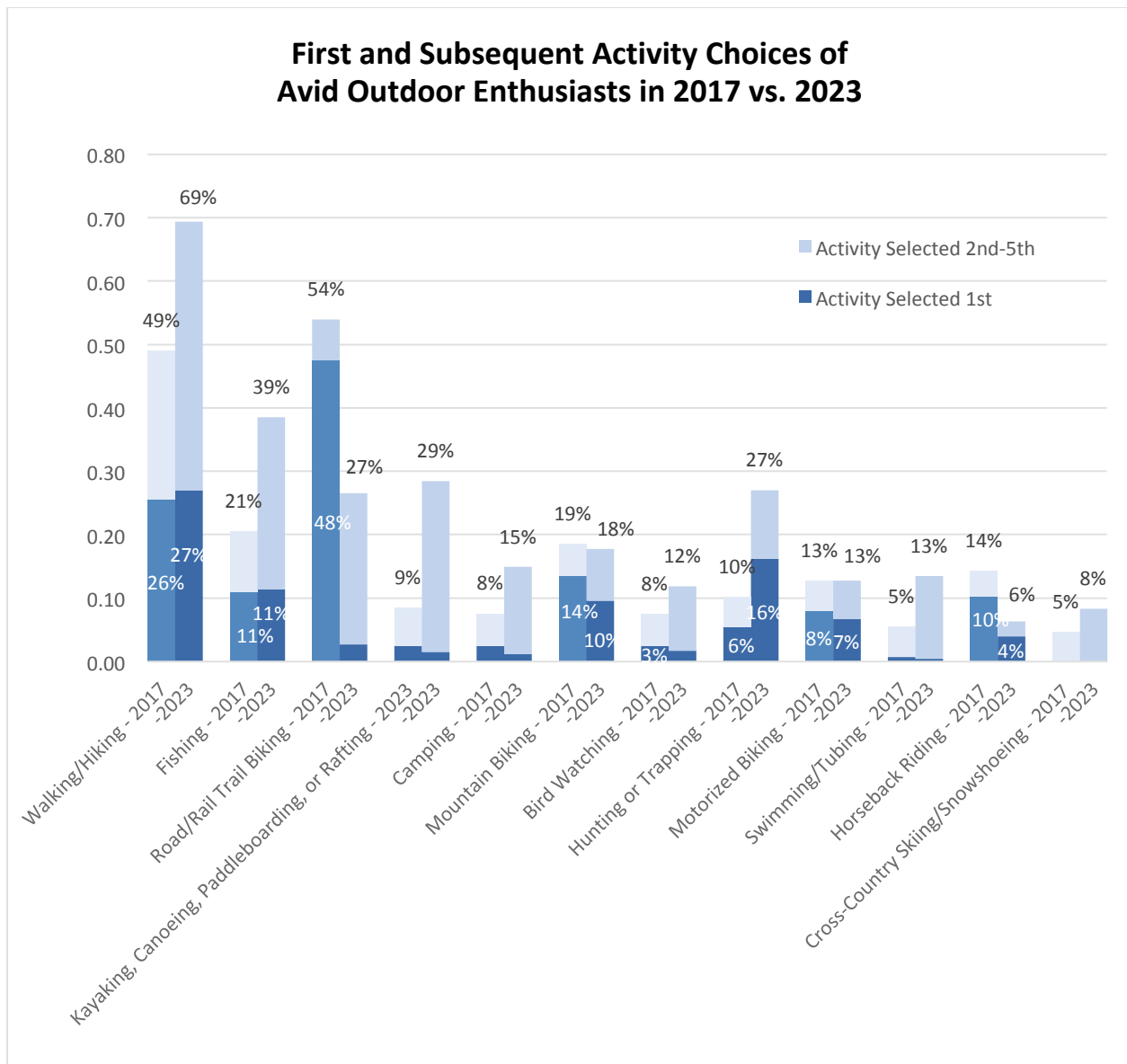
Figure 26. Percentage of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts Selecting Activity as 1st Choice (2005–2023)

Interestingly, the relative frequency with which activities were mentioned differed somewhat when looking at all activities reported by avid outdoor enthusiasts (i.e., the combined top five choices) versus those reported as an individual’s top choice. Figure 27 shows that activities like *Mountain Biking or Snow Biking*, *Horseback Riding or Horse Showing*, and *Dirt Biking or Motorcycling* were chosen more often as first-choice activities than overall (top five), suggesting that these activities attract participants who tend to be more engaged in that specific activity.



**Figure 27. First and Subsequent Activity Choices of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts in 2023**

The benefits that sustainable habitats provide through ecosystem service help to support residents’ day-to-day lives...



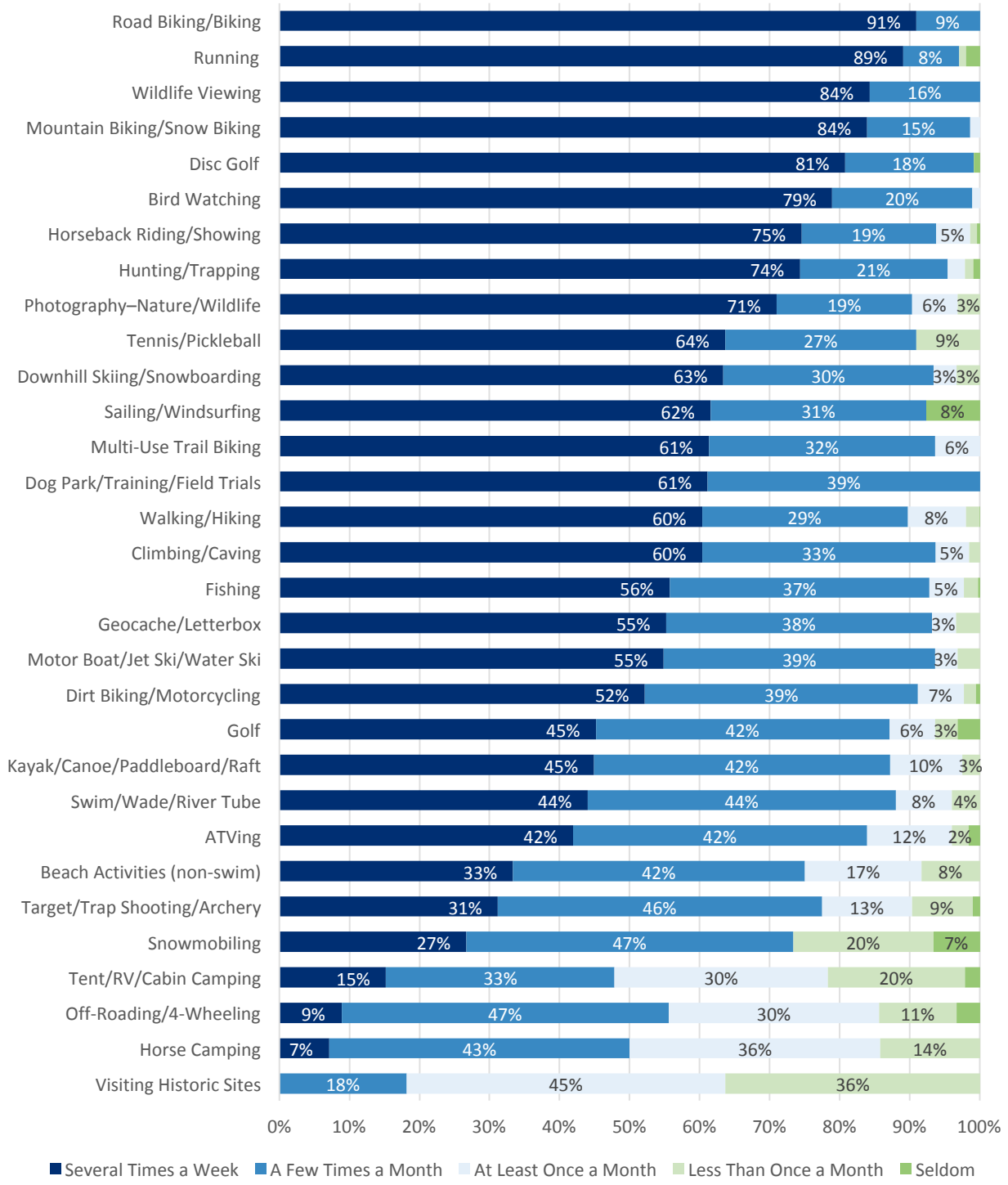
**Figure 28. First and Subsequent Activity Choices of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts in 2017 vs. 2023**

### Participation Frequency by Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts

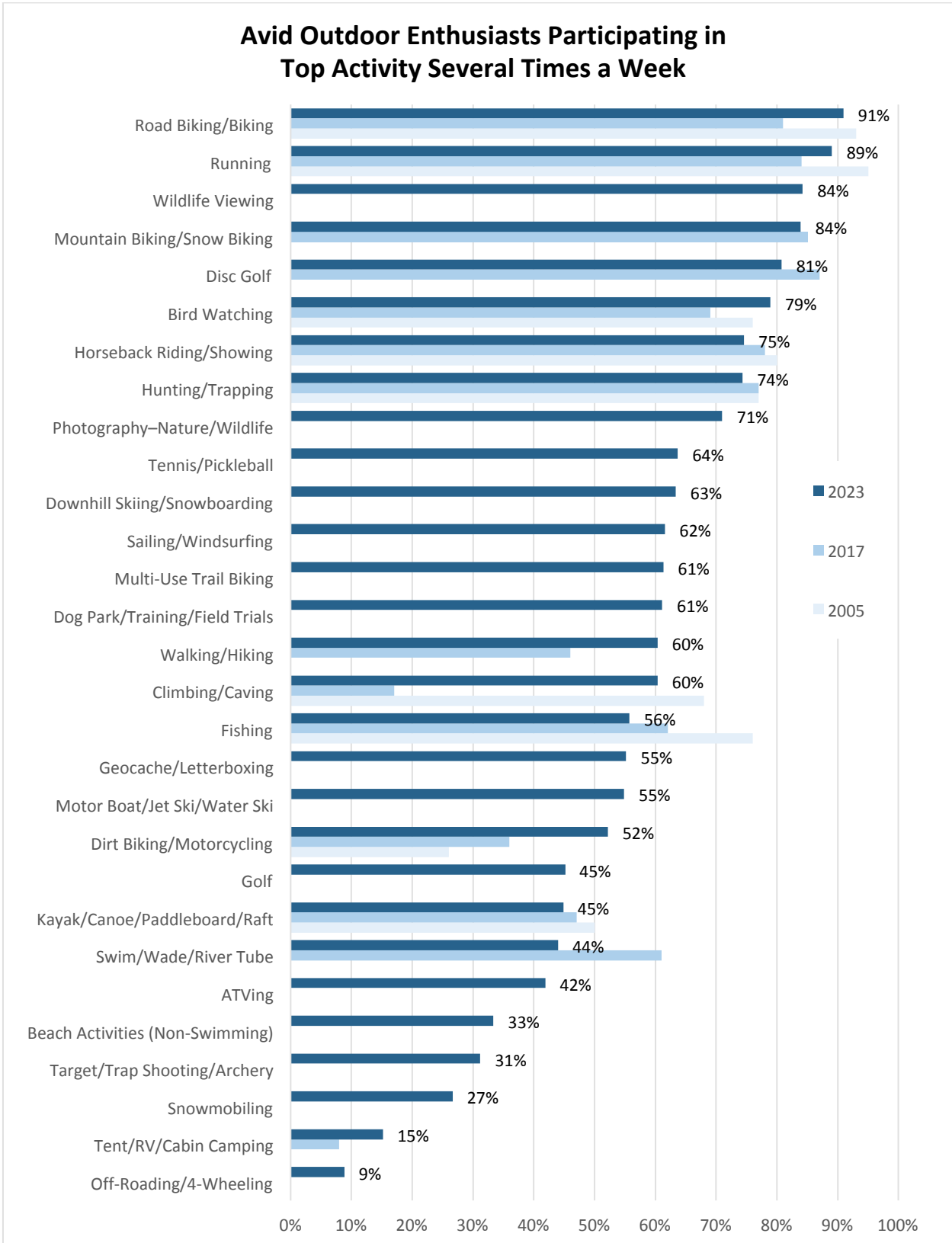
Figure 29 shows the participation frequency in first-choice recreation activities for avid outdoor enthusiasts. As expected, enthusiasts engaged in these activities more frequently than individuals in the general population, evidenced by a higher percentage of *Several Times a Week* frequency ratings. Only *Snowmobiling*, *Off-Roading/4-Wheeling*, *Beach Activities (non-swim)*, *Target/Trap Shooting/Archery*, *Tent/RV/Cabin Camping*, and *Horse Camping* showed a greater proportion of enthusiasts participating *A Few Times a Month* than *Several Times a Week*.

...Healthy habitats help keep drinking water clean, protect from storms and flooding, and support outdoor recreational activities like hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and tourism.

## Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Participation Frequency in First Choice Activities



**Figure 29. Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Participation Frequency in First Choice Activities**



**Figure 30. Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts Participating in Top Activity Several Times a Week**



*Camping at Housatonic Meadows State Park, Cornwall (Instagram@inouehd)*



*Jet skis at Indian Well State Park, Shelton (Instagram@bx\_jaystarr)*

## Profile of Participation: Statewide Demographic Trends

In addition to examining the rate and frequency of participation, potential correlations with demographic variables were explored, namely: gender, age, income, and county of residence.

### Gender

Because the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey asked respondents to provide information generalized across all members of their household, looking at the relationship between gender and participation in specific activities was not possible for that survey. For that reason, the following representations of gender differences are based solely on responses to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey and are not generalizable to the overall statewide population. Figure 31 shows the gender proportions for 45 activity categories.

### Age

Similarly with gender, due to the generalized nature of household responses to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey, linking the ages of participants to specific activities was not possible. However, ages are linked with specific activities in the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey. The average age of individuals reporting each activity is displayed in Figure 32. The overall median age of respondents to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey was 52, an increase of three years from 2017.

### Household Income

Household income was a variable that applied to all household members reported on the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey and all participants of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey. Thus, the relationship between this variable and the type of activities practiced could be examined. Figures 33 and 34 depict the rates of participation by households in each of three income brackets and Figure 35 depicts the rates of participation by activity in each of six income brackets for avid outdoor enthusiasts. Survey respondents with higher annual household incomes tended to participate more often in outdoor recreation activities.

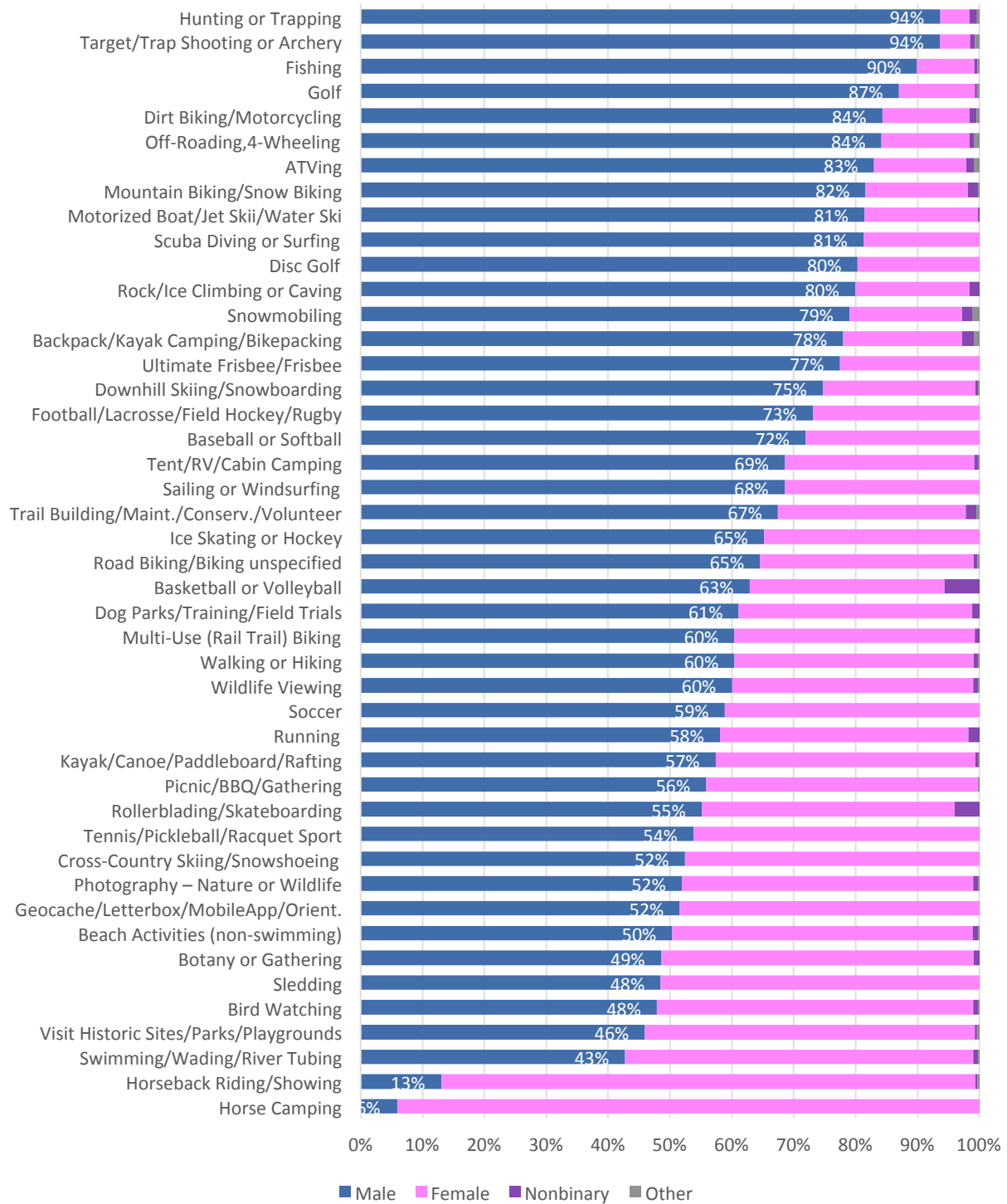
### Geographic Distribution

The rate of participation in outdoor recreation among Connecticut residents was compared by county for both the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey and the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey. Results are presented in Figures 36 through 39. It should be noted that due to the low sample size associated with some combinations of counties and activities, data from this section should be interpreted with caution.

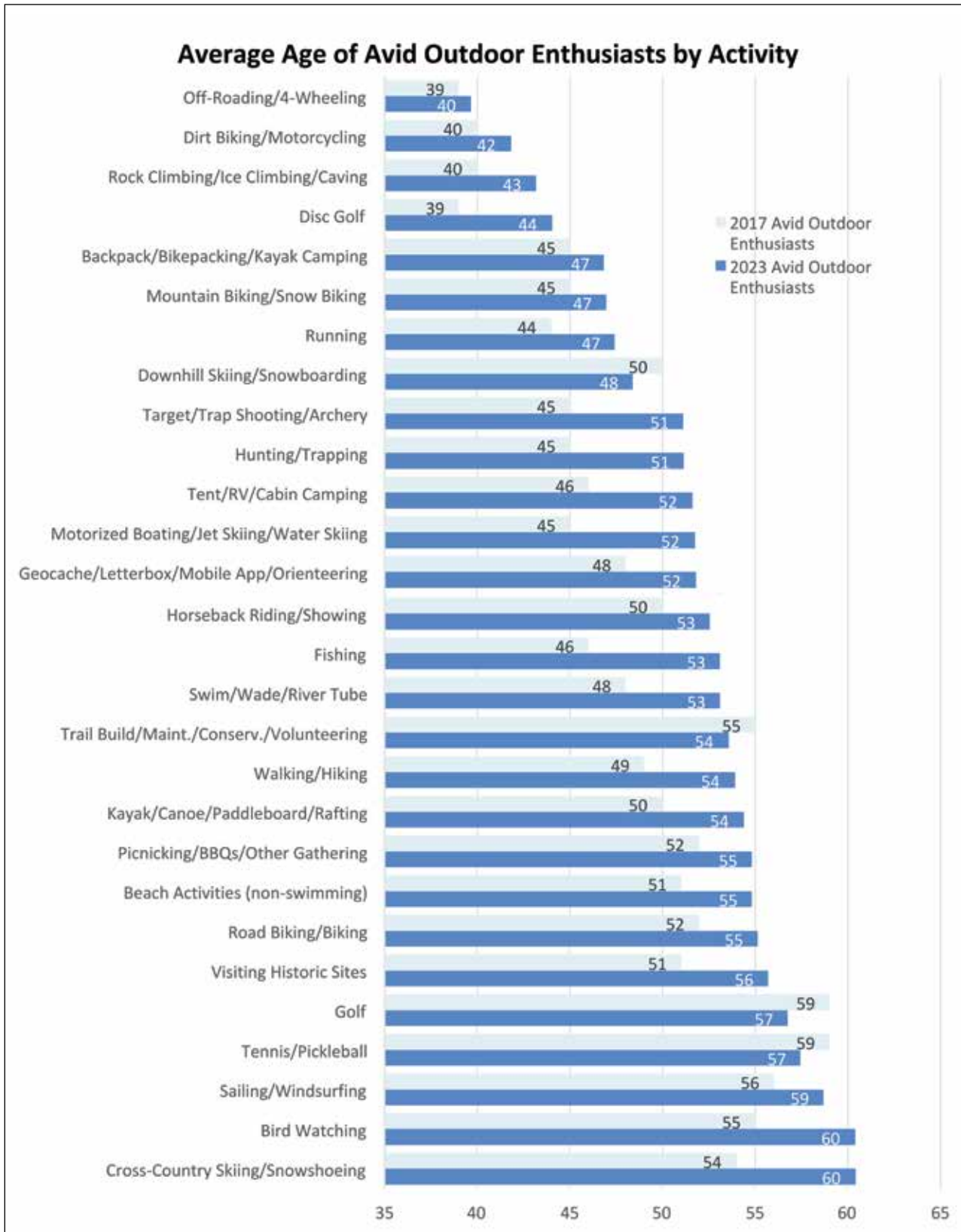


*Snow-shoeing at Hurd State Park (Instagram@mikevonct)*

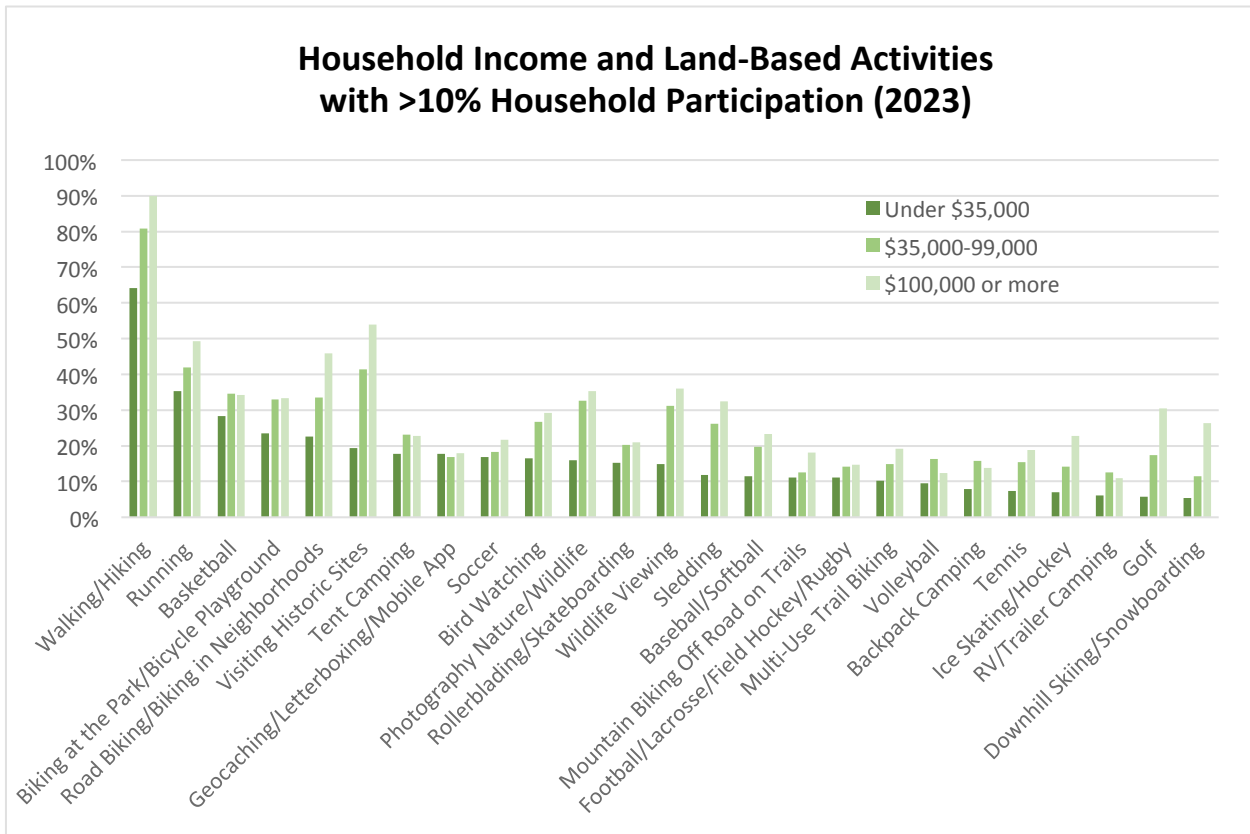
## Gender of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts in Various Outdoor Recreation Activities (2023)



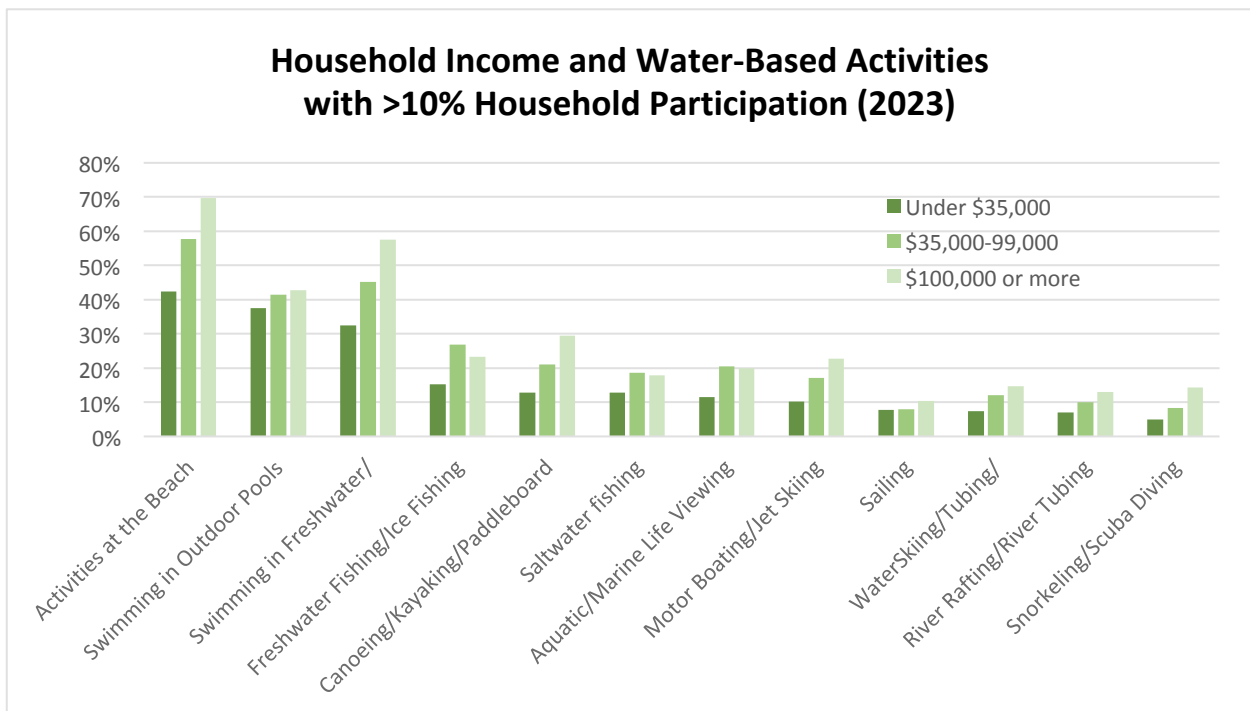
**Figure 31. Gender of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts in Various Outdoor Recreation Activities**



**Figure 32. Average Age of Avid Outdoor Enthusiast by Activity**



**Figure 33. Household Income and Land-based Activities with >10% Participation (2023)**



**Figure 34. Household Income and Water-Based Activities with <10% Participation (2023)**

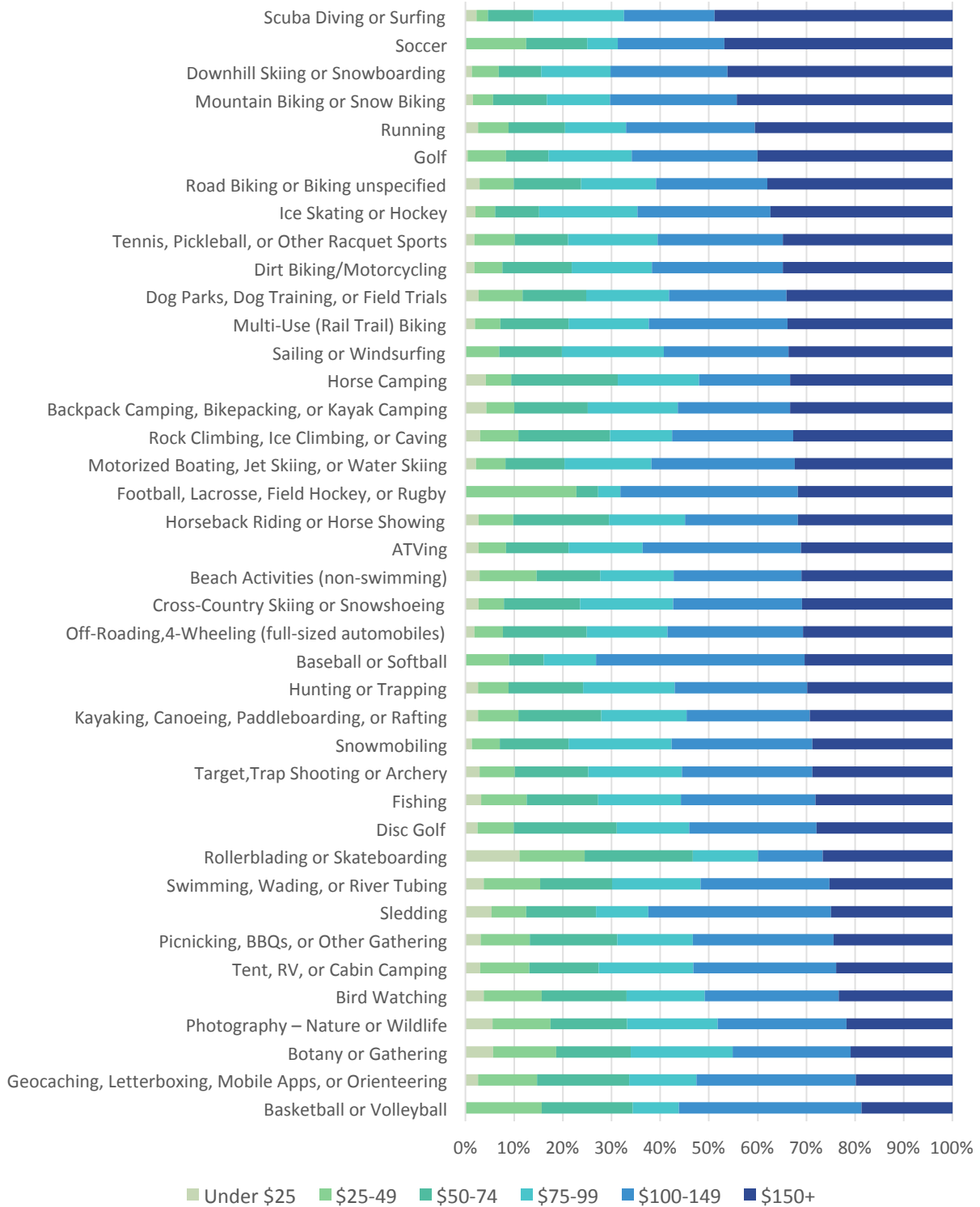


*Boardwalk at Silver Sands State Park, Milford (LatinWay)*



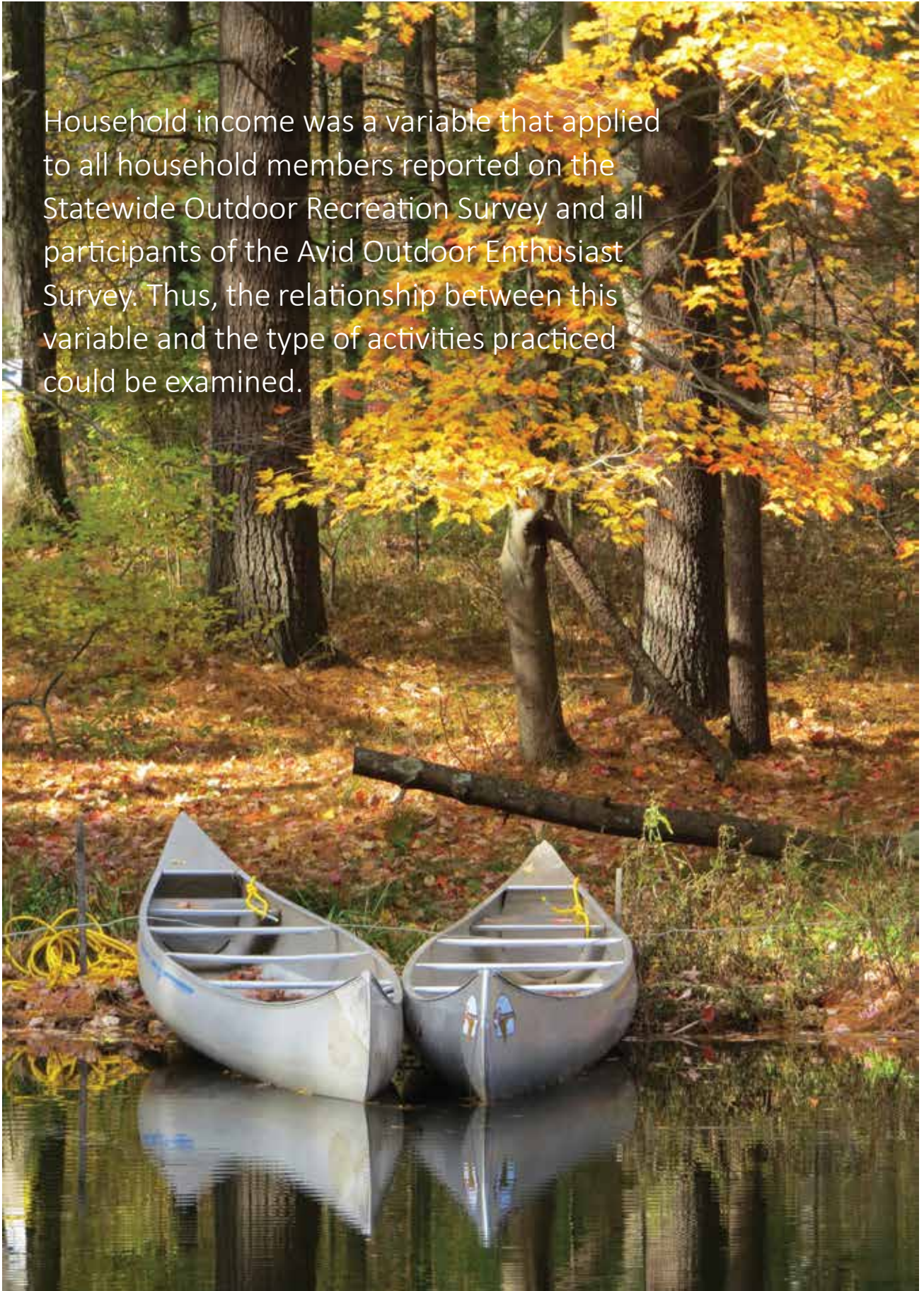
*Camping at Rocky Neck State Park, East Lyme (Instagram@jonelucf)*

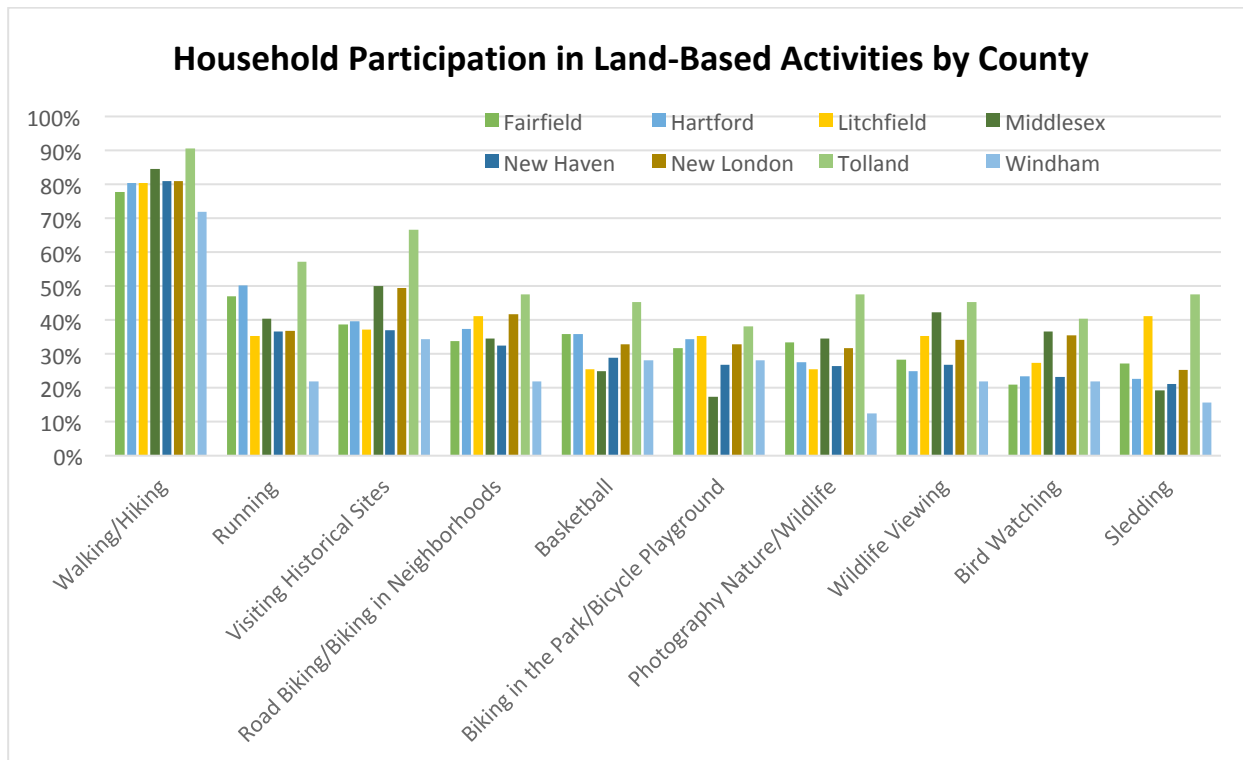
## Income Distribution of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts by Activity



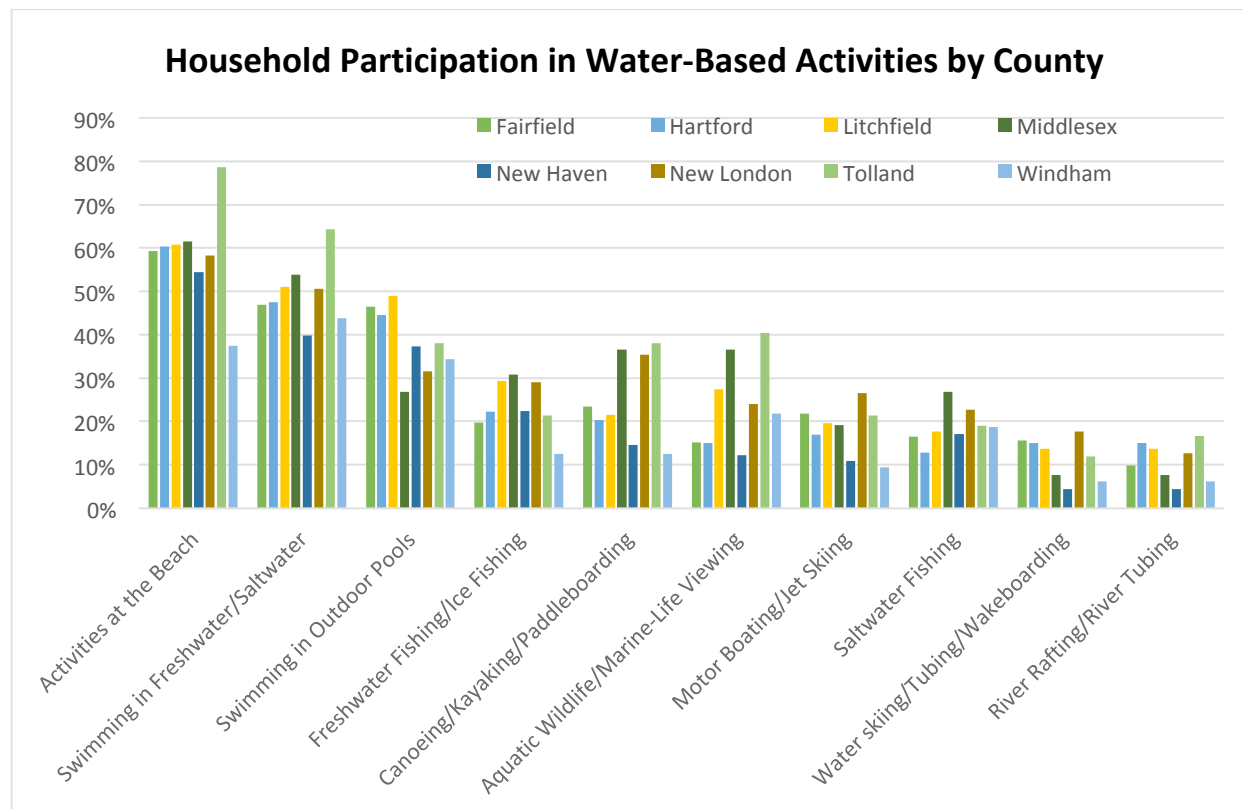
**Figure 35. Income Distribution of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts by Activity**

Household income was a variable that applied to all household members reported on the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey and all participants of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey. Thus, the relationship between this variable and the type of activities practiced could be examined.

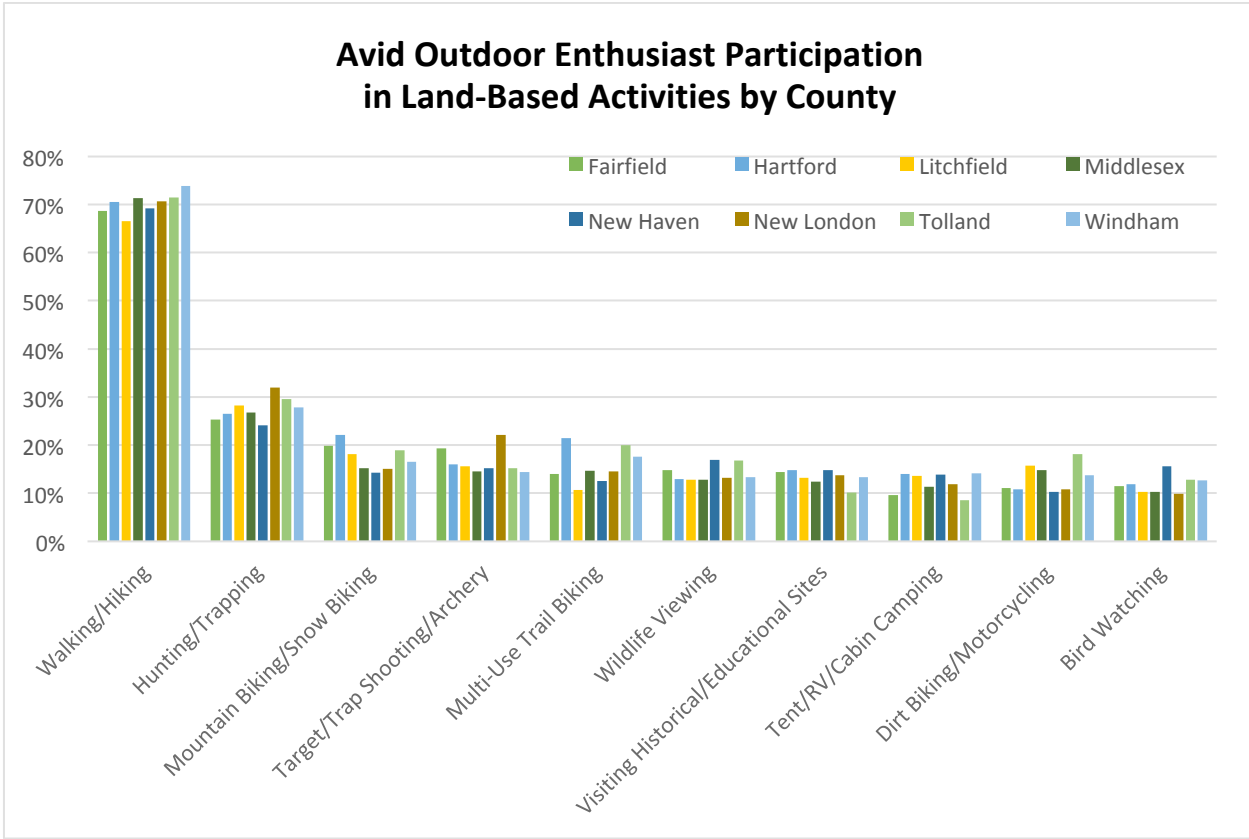




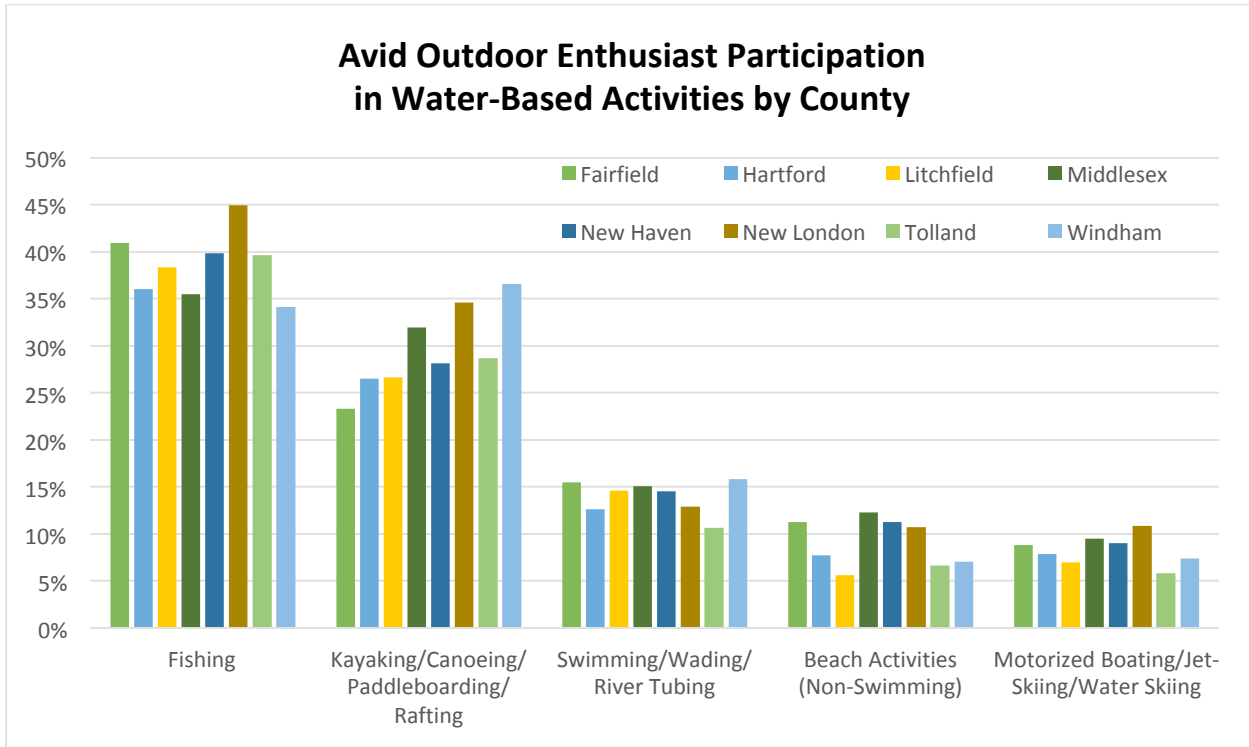
**Figure 36. Household Participation in Land-Based Activities by County**



**Figure 37. Household Participation in Water-Based Activities by County**



**Figure 38. Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Participation in Land-Based Activities by County**



**Figure 39. Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Participation in Water-Based Activities by County**

## Municipal Officials' Views of Activity Trends

For a different perspective on recreation trends, municipal officials were asked to identify activities that have shown an increase or decrease in participation over the past five to ten years. The results are presented in Table 22.

**Table 22. Municipal Officials Assess Recent Participation Rates in Various Activities**

Year	Increased Participation	Decreased Participation
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summer Camp</li> <li>- Lacrosse</li> <li>- Walking</li> <li>- Trails</li> <li>- Pool Use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Baseball/Softball</li> <li>- Adult programming</li> <li>- Other Outdoor Sports</li> <li>- Tennis</li> </ul>
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pickleball</li> <li>- Summer/Day Camps</li> <li>- Hiking/Walking Trails</li> <li>- After-school programs</li> <li>- Organized Sports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sports Leagues/Fields/Courts</li> <li>- Baseball/Softball</li> <li>- Tennis</li> <li>- Other (Adult programming, Fitness Classes, Playgrounds, etc.)</li> </ul>

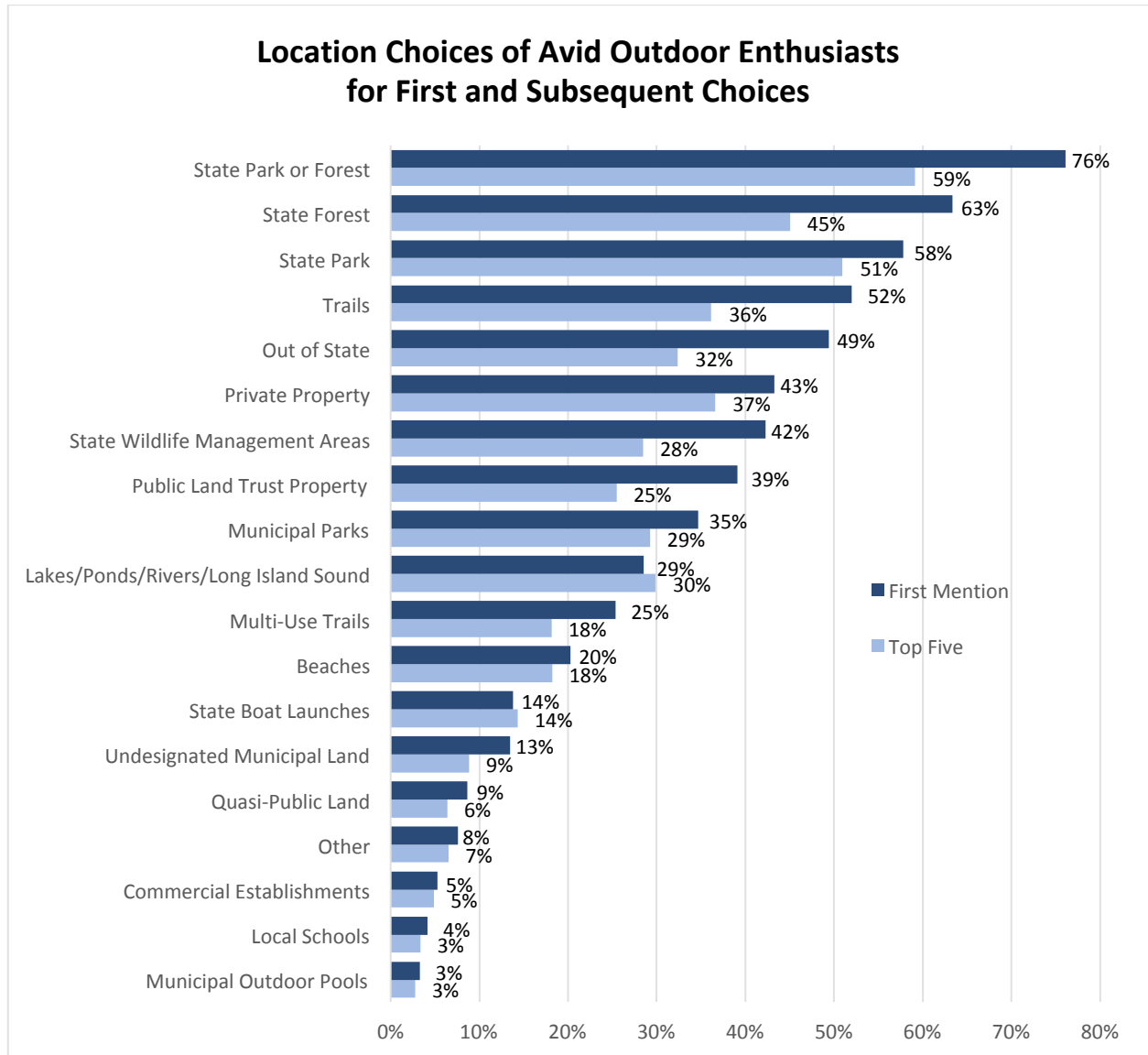


Trail race at Gay City State Park, Hebron (Instagram@soundrunner\_racing)

# Profile of Participation: Where People Recreate

## Location of Recreation Participation by Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts

Respondents to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey were asked to identify the locations where they practice their most preferred outdoor recreation activity, with multiple responses being accepted. Figure 40 presents the preferred locations of first-choice activities and those of all activities in aggregate.

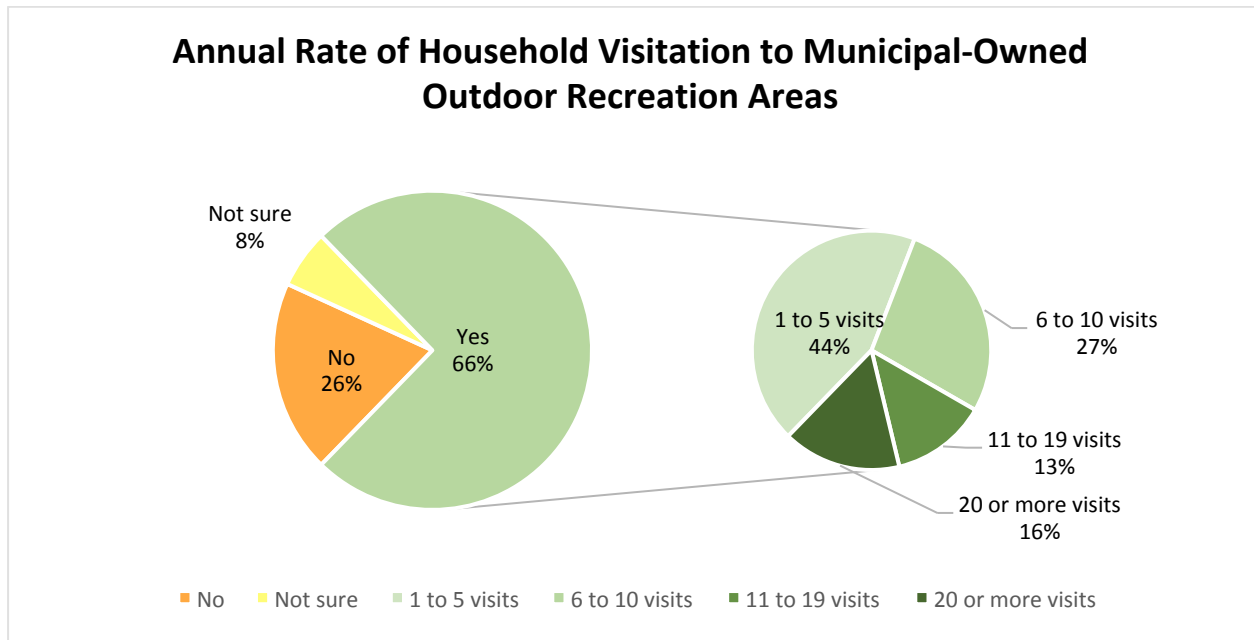


**Figure 40. Location Choices of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts for First and Subsequent Choices**

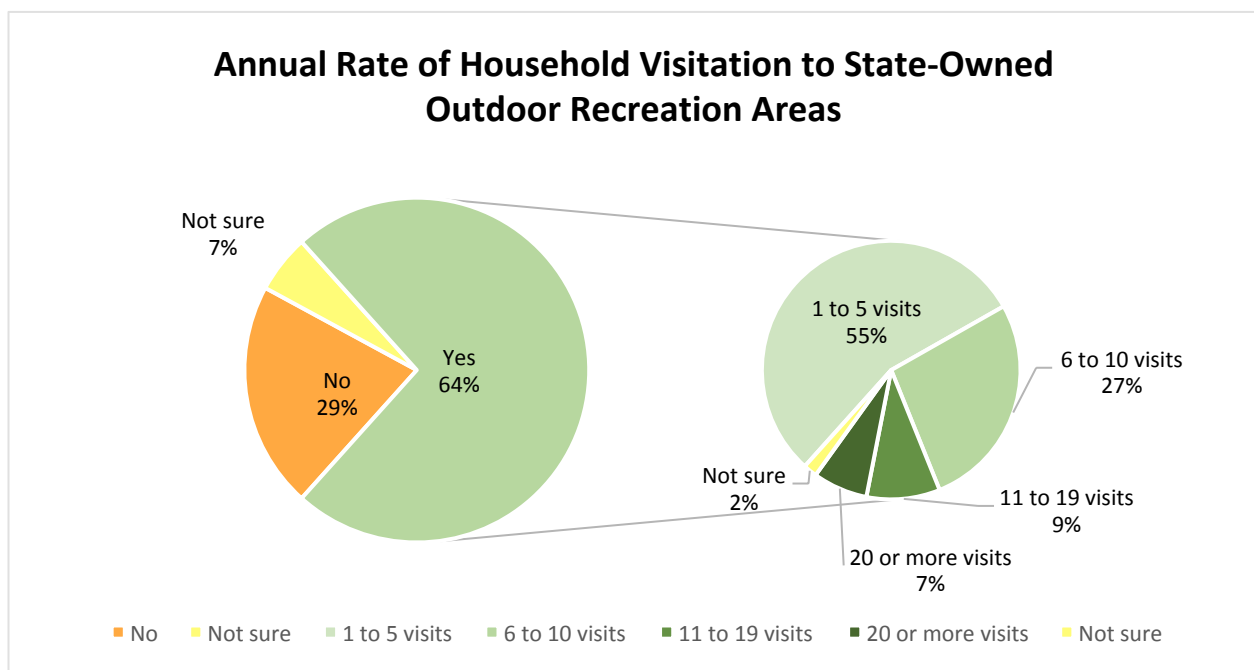
Survey results showed that outdoor enthusiasts tend to practice their favorite activity in a wider variety of locations than lower-ranked activities, with significantly higher percentages for nearly all locations. This finding is unsurprising, as respondents were instructed to identify their first-choice activity, defined as the “first mention,” as the one in which they participated most frequently or to which they were most devoted.

## Household Visitation Frequency at State and Municipal Parks

The clear reliance on state parks and forests (and to a lesser extent local parks) as places for avid outdoor enthusiasts to recreate emphasizes the importance of these facilities to those individuals most enthusiastic about outdoor recreation. To assess the extent to which state- and municipal-owned outdoor recreation facilities are being used by households from the general population of Connecticut, respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey were asked how often they visited each of these outdoor recreation areas over the past twelve months. The results are presented in Figures 41 and 42.



**Figure 41. Annual Rate of Household Visitation to Municipal-Owned Outdoor Recreation Areas**



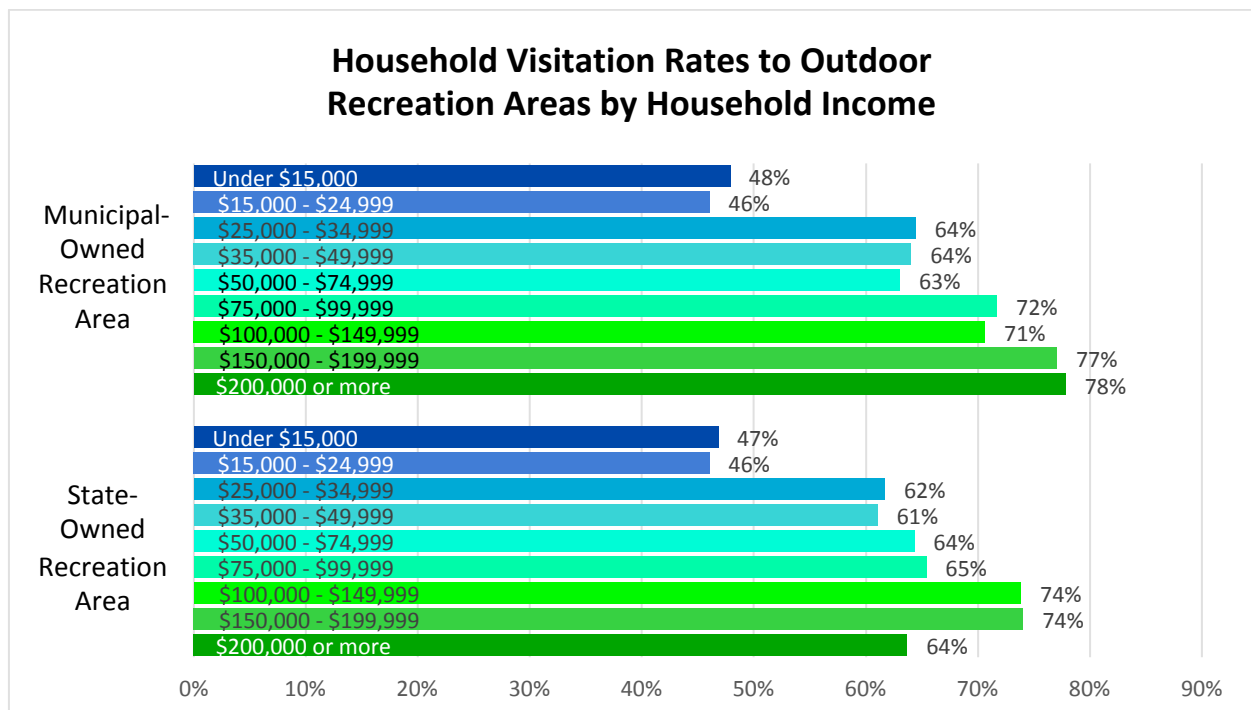
**Figure 42. Annual Rate of Household Visitation to State-Owned Outdoor Recreation Areas**

The clear reliance on state parks and forests (and to a lesser extent local parks) as places for avid outdoor enthusiasts to recreate emphasizes the importance of these facilities to those individuals most enthusiastic about outdoor recreation.

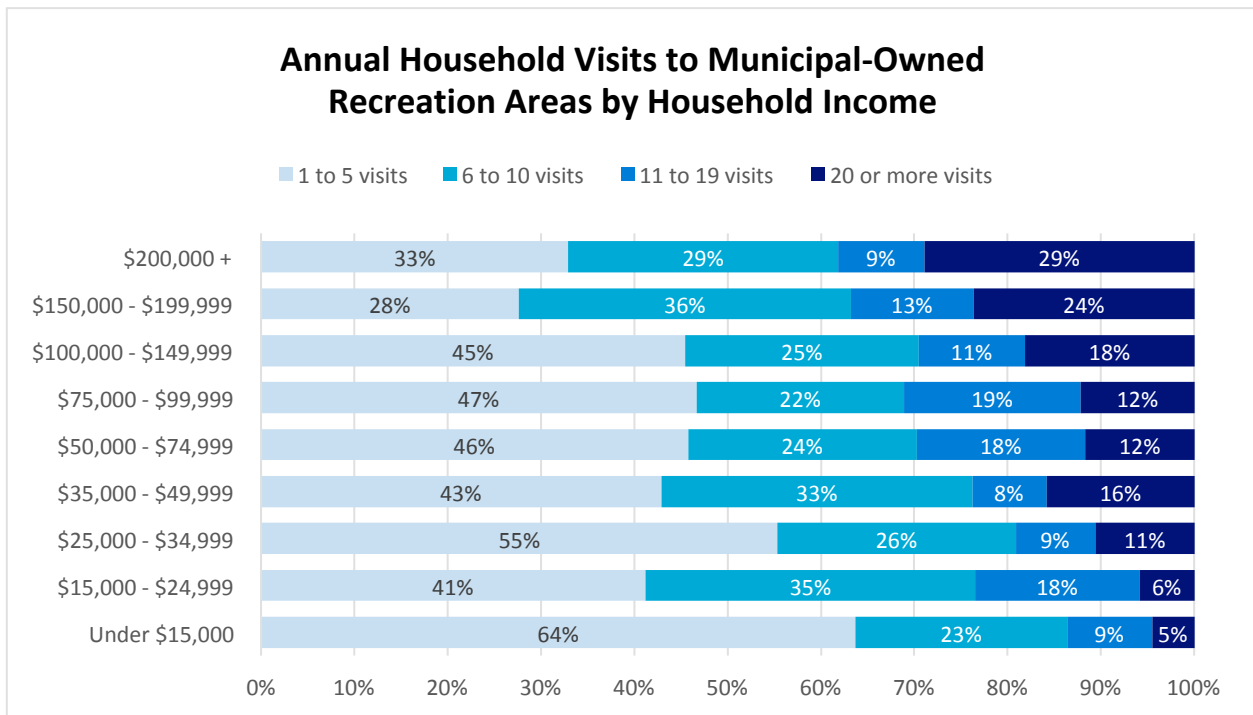
Households were roughly as likely to have visited municipal-owned areas (66% of households) as state-owned areas (64% of households) in the past year. However, municipal-owned areas attracted a larger subset of frequent visitors (20+ visits), approximately 9% more than state-owned areas. Ease of accessibility (i.e., shorter distance to the location from one’s residence) may account for the more frequent visits to municipal-owned recreation areas than to state-owned recreation areas.

In addition to overall visitation rates, visitation rates among those coming from different household income brackets were examined. Figure 43 is a representation of households from each income bracket who reported visiting outdoor recreation areas at least once within the past year, whether it be municipal-owned or state-owned. Figures 44 and 45 show the annual visitation rates to municipal-owned and state-owned areas based on household income.

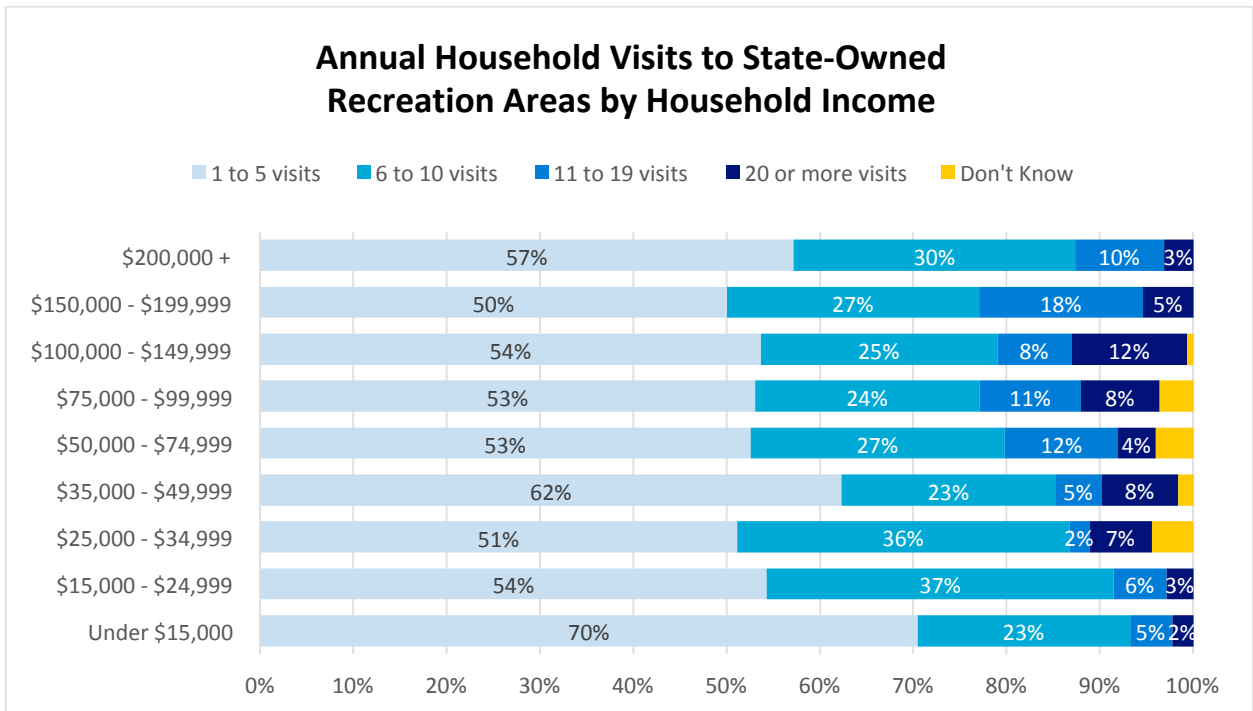
Households with annual incomes below \$25,000 were least likely to have visited a state or municipal outdoor recreation area within the past year. The households most likely to have visited a state-owned recreation area within the past year were those with annual incomes between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Those with incomes of \$200,000 or more were the most likely to visit municipal-owned areas. These data suggest a clear relationship between higher income and higher likelihood to have visited outdoor recreation areas.



**Figure 43. Household Visitation Rates to Outdoor Recreation Areas by Household Income**



**Figure 44. Annual Household Visits to Municipal-Owned Recreation Areas by Household Income**



**Figure 45. Annual Household Visits to State-Owned Recreation Areas by Household Income**



*Seals off Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison*



*Beach goers at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (CTvisit)*

## Profile of Participation: Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation

Many outdoor recreationists pursue their activities out of state. In order of popularity, the states most visited by Connecticut residents for outdoor recreation were Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Florida, and New Hampshire.

### Rate and Frequency of Out-of-State Recreation

Respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey were asked if they or a member of their household had visited any out-of-state recreation areas in the past year. In 2023, the percentage of Connecticut residents reporting that they visited an out-of-state park or recreation area declined 6% from 2017 (Figure 46). Most respondents (60%) reported that they had not visited any outdoor recreation area outside of Connecticut. Of the remaining 40% who did visit out-of-state areas, 69% made between one and five visits, while 31% visited these areas six times or more. Only 5% of remaining respondents (or 2% of all Connecticut residents) visited out-of-state areas for outdoor recreation twenty times or more. These data, as well as 2017 data, are displayed in Figure 47.

Respondents to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey were also asked whether they practiced one or more of their top five activities at out-of-state outdoor recreational areas. Unsurprisingly, avid enthusiasts were more likely to utilize out-of-state areas than members of the general population, with 50% reporting that they had practiced their top-ranked activity at an out-of-state recreation area within the past year compared to 40% of state households.

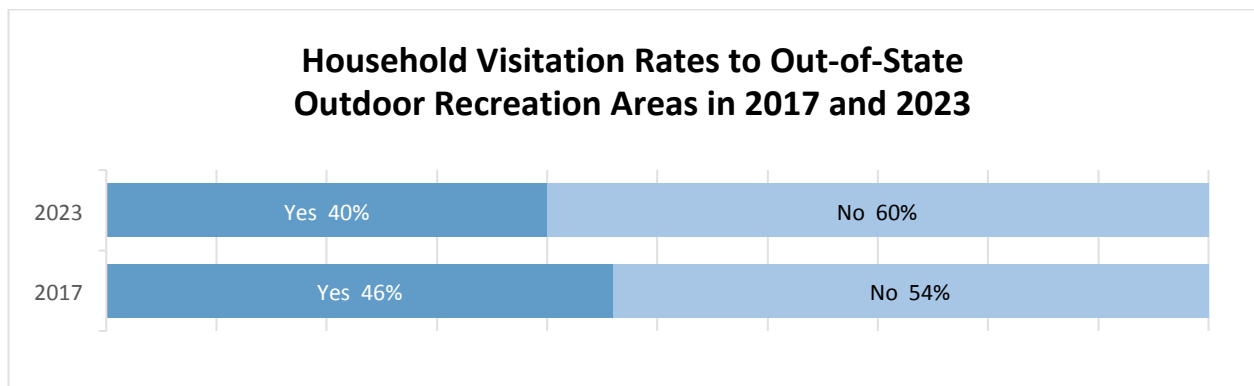


Figure 46. Rate of Household Visitation to Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Areas

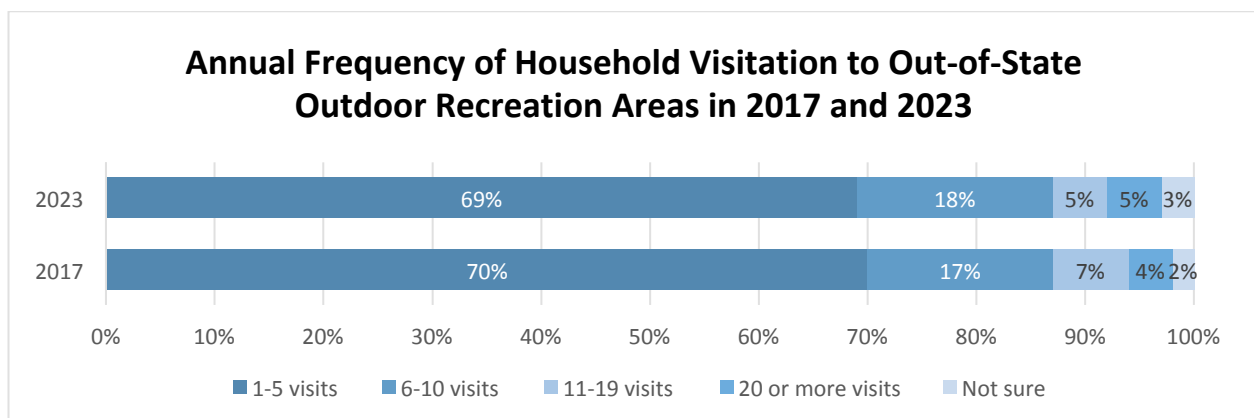


Figure 47. Frequency of Household Visitation to Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Areas

## Reasons for Visiting Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Areas

Respondents to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey who indicated that they practiced any of their reported activities out of state were asked to explain their reasons in an open-ended response. Table 23 shows the results, with the top 10 categories being coded from individual open-ended responses.

Avid outdoor enthusiasts reported that they are generally looking for more—more land, more access, more challenging terrain, and more variety. Similarly, they desire something different—different scenery, different species, different trails, or different habitats. In addition to traveling out of state for more opportunities and variety, avid outdoor enthusiasts leave the state in search of experiences that are better overall—better fishing, better hunting, better beaches, better conditions, and better terrain.

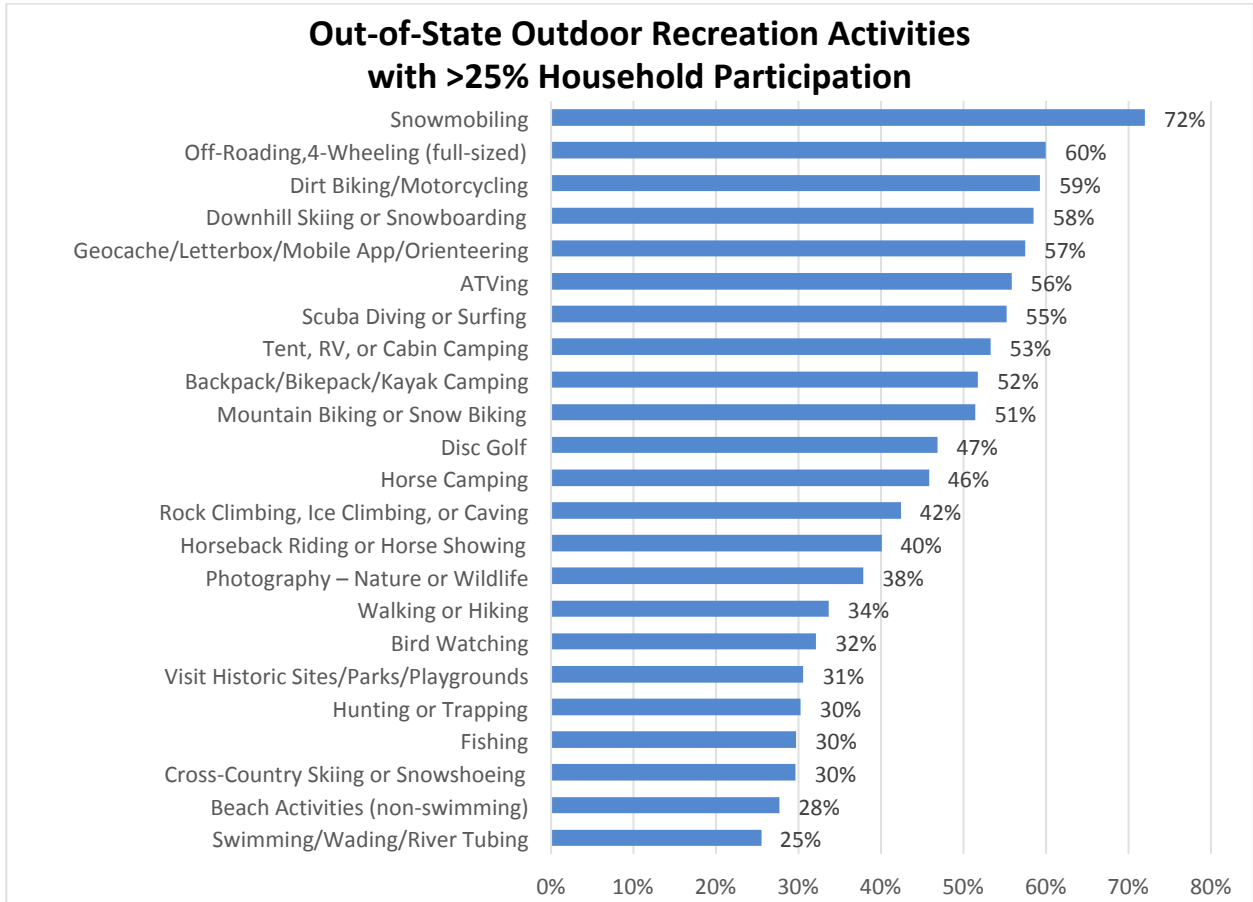
With thousands of open-ended responses, categorizing the data in a manner that would allow for direct comparison between the 2017 and 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Surveys was challenging. Furthermore, many individuals in the 2023 survey referenced multiple reasons for traveling out of state within their open-ended response. Entries such as “better access to beaches for family vacation” could be coded into multiple categories such as “accessibility,” “vacation” or “beaches.” Although the major themes shown below reflect the most commonly stated reasons, it is helpful to recognize that significant overlap exists across the categories.

**Table 23. Reasons for Visiting Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Areas**

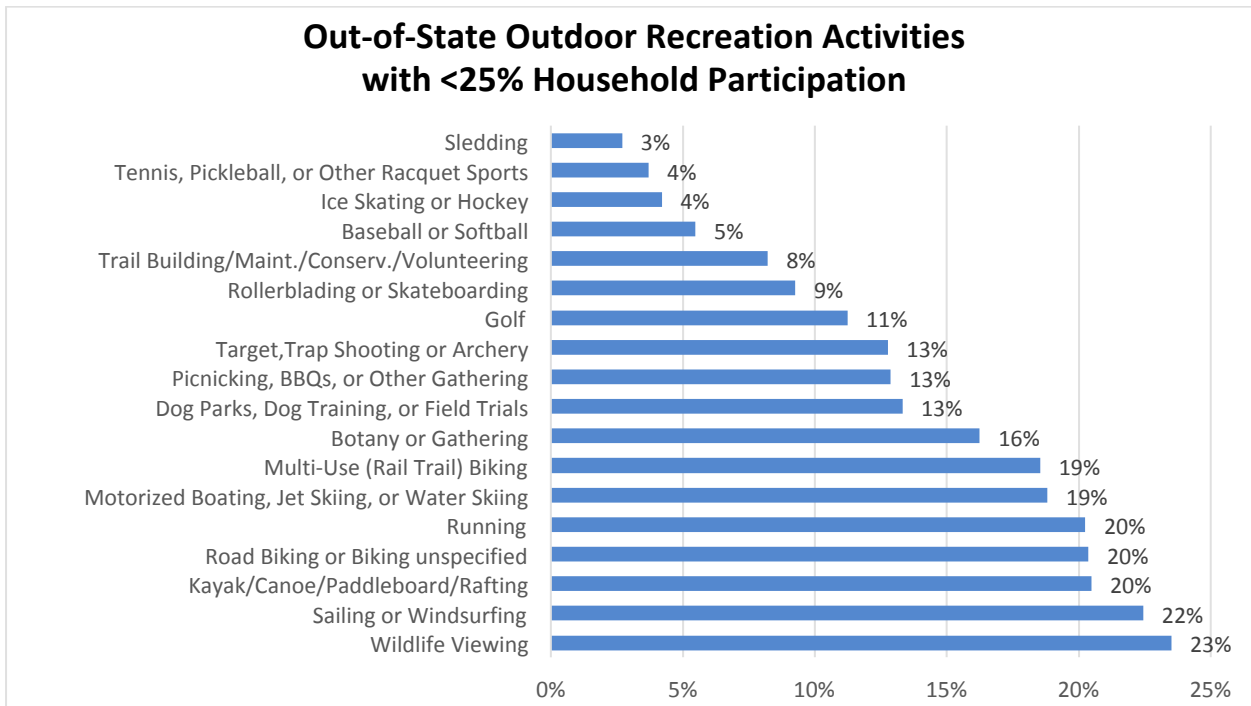
Activity or Issue	Reasons for Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Visits
Beaches	Ocean access, bigger/better beaches, more public access, cleaner, quieter, not Long Island Sound, etc.
Camping	Too regulated in Connecticut, out-of-state campsites less crowded, more options, better conditions.
Fishing	Better fishing, better access, variety of locations/species, different seasons, better regulated, stocked better, etc.
Hunting	Allow Sunday hunting, fewer restrictions/regulation (including firearm use), more land, better/more game, less crowded.
Mountains	Bigger/taller, more scenic, more challenging, better conditions, more options, etc.
Regulation/Restrictions	No legal land to ride motorized vehicles (ATVs, dirt bikes, four-wheel, etc.) in Connecticut. State legal restrictions also push enthusiasts out of state for hunting, backpacking, and camping.
Snow	More snow, better snow, overall better weather conditions.
Trails	Bigger, longer, more scenic, more varied, etc.
Vacation	Enjoy the outdoors on trips with family, friends, groups.
Variety	Both in terms of enjoying a wider variety of activities and in doing familiar activities in new, different, more exciting places.

## Outdoor Activities Practiced Out-of-State

Figures 48 and 49 show the percentage of avid outdoor enthusiasts who reported practicing an activity at an out-of-state recreational facility within the past year. Among 2023 avid outdoor enthusiasts, *Snowmobiling* was the top activity practiced out of state. This was followed by *Off-Roading/Four-Wheeling (Full Sized)*, *Dirt Biking/Motorcycling*, *Downhill Skiing or Snowboarding*, *Geocaching/Letterboxing/Mobile App/Orienteering*, and *ATVing*. Activities with the least out-of-state participation included *Sledding*, *Tennis/Pickleball/Other Racquet Sports*, *Ice Skating or Hockey*, and *Softball or Baseball*. Figure 50 compares 2017 and 2023 avid outdoor enthusiasts’ participation in activities out of state.



**Figure 48. Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Activities with >25% Household Participation**



**Figure 49. Out-of-State Outdoor Recreation Activities with <25% Household Participation**

### Participation Out-of-State by Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts in 2017 and 2023

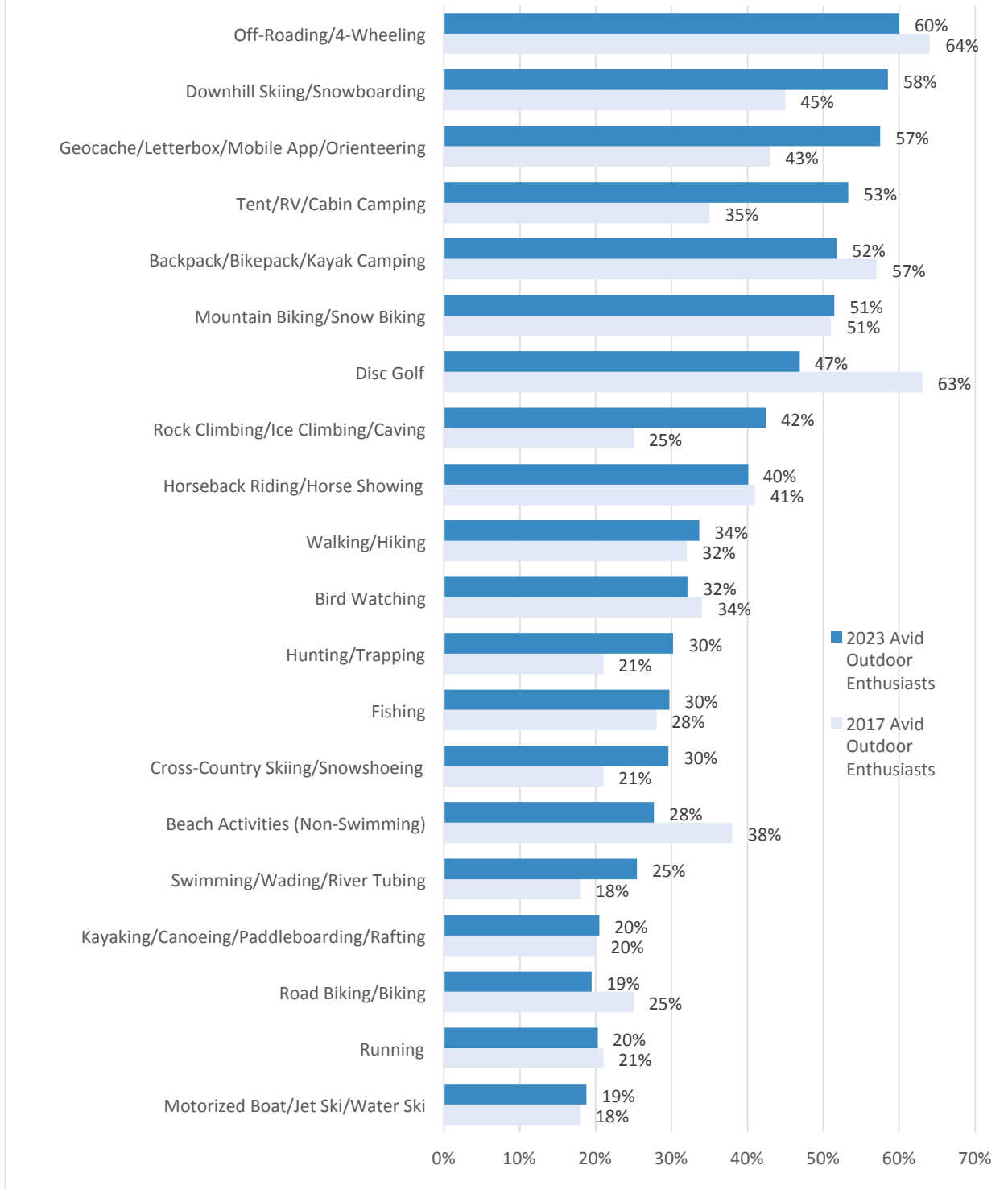


Figure 50. Participation Out-of-State by Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts in 2017 and 2023

## Assessing Modes of Transportation

Connecticut residents were asked to identify the different ways in which they or members of their household travel to outdoor recreation areas in their local community or throughout the state. The results are shown in Figure 51.

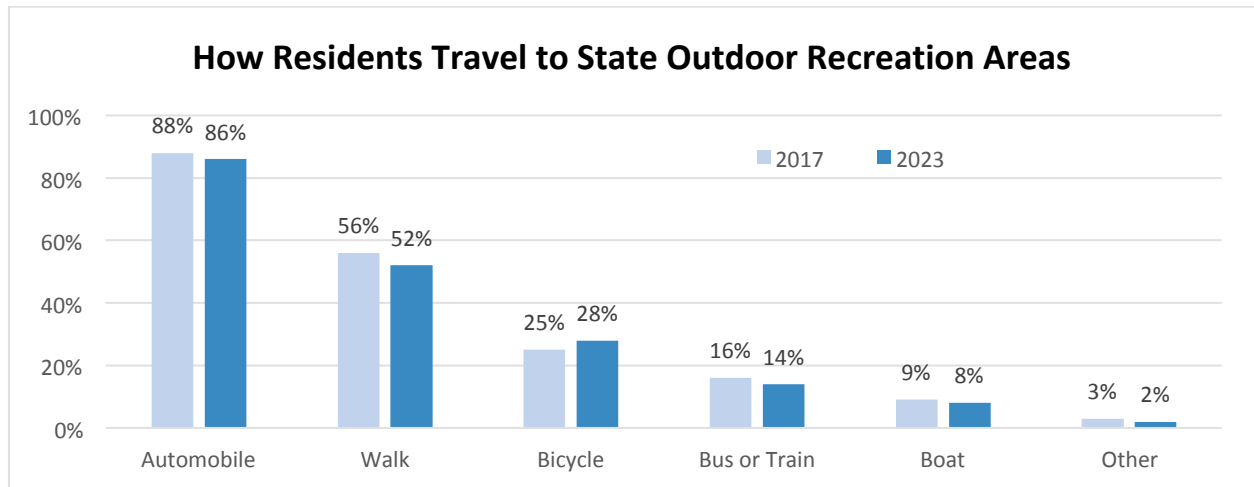


Figure 51. How Residents Travel to State Outdoor Recreation Areas

## Municipal Officials Identify Age-Group Demands

### Understanding Age-Group Activity Demands

Respondents to the Municipal Officials Survey were asked to list the two most popular resources or activities provided by their municipality for the following groups: *Families, Preschool Children 0–4, Children 5–12, Adolescents, Adults, Seniors*, and the newest addition to this year’s survey: *People of All Ages with Disabilities*. The most frequent responses for each group in 2005, 2017, and 2023 are presented in Table 24.



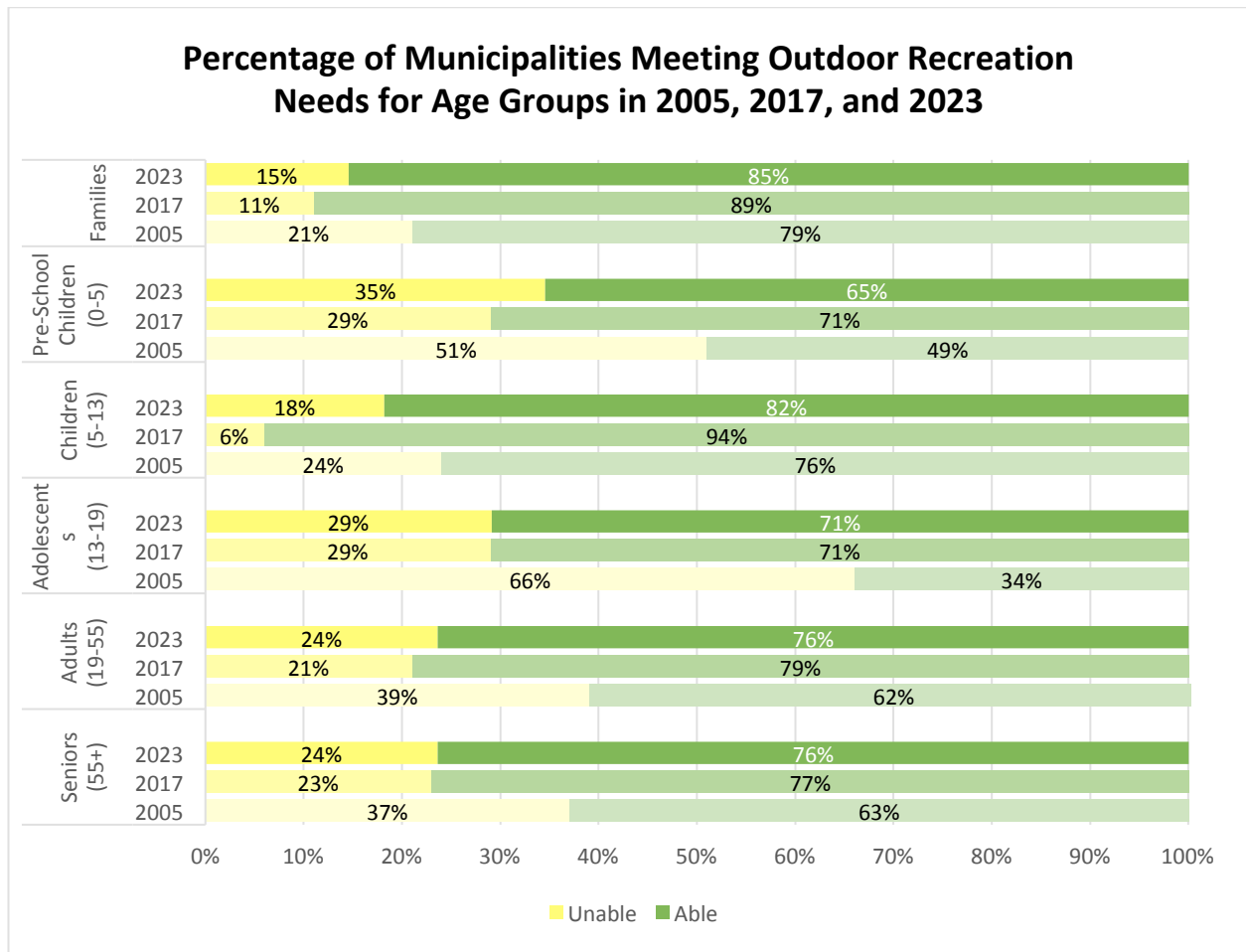
Family fun at Windsor Locks Canal State Park, Windsor (Instagram@juliapistell)

**Table 24. Municipal Officials Identify Popular Outdoor Recreation Activities by Age Group**

Age Group	2005	2017	2023
<b>Families</b>	Swimming Sports Playgrounds Picnic areas	Beaches, lakes, ponds Parks and picnic areas Special events Athletic fields Swimming pools	Athletic fields, courts, facilities Playgrounds Aquatics, swimming, pools Ponds, lakes, beaches, boating Kayak rentals Parks, pavilions Special events Summer camps, after school programs Hiking, trails
<b>Pre-School (Ages 0–4)</b> <b>Pre-School (Ages 0–4) (continued)</b>	Swimming Recreation programs Picnic areas Playgrounds	Playgrounds Swimming pools Recreation programs Beaches, lakes, ponds	Playgrounds Aquatics, swimming, pools Parks, pavilions, walking paths, trails Sports Programming/playgroups/fields/facilities Community events/resources/library Day camps/programming (non-sport)/classes Beaches/lakes
<b>Children Ages 5–12</b>	Playgrounds Recreation programs Swimming Sports	Recreation programs Fields Sports or playgroups Playgrounds	Fields/courts Playgrounds Aquatics/swimming/pools Day camps/programming (non-sport)/classes Sports programming/playgroups Community events Parks/walking paths/trails Beaches/lakes
<b>Adolescents</b>	Sports leagues Recreation center Skiing	Fields Sports or playgrounds Camps/programming Skate parks	Fields/courts/facilities Sports programming/playgroups Skate parks Parks/walking paths/trails Summer camp/programming (non-sport)/adventure camp/classes Aquatics/swimming/pools Beaches/lakes Social/community events
<b>Adults</b>	Sports leagues Fitness facilities Walking/hiking trails Swimming	Walking/hiking trails Sports Trips, programs, or events Parks and picnic areas	Trails/paths Sports Outdoor recreation facilities Trips/programs/special events Beaches Pools/aquatics
<b>Seniors</b>	Community centers Fitness facilities Trips Swimming Walking trails	Walking/hiking trails Trips, programs, or events Parks and picnic areas Fitness facilities/classes	Outdoor recreation facilities Trails/paths Parks/gardens/picnic areas Indoor facilities Trips/programs/special events Beaches Fitness classes Pools/aquatics
<b>People with Disabilities</b>	--	--	Parks/playgrounds/gardens/picnic areas Trails/paths Pools/aquatics/fishing Trips/programs/special events Beaches Outdoor recreation Indoor facilities

Municipal officials were also asked to report whether their municipality was currently able to meet the outdoor recreation needs of each of six age groups. Figure 52 shows responses from 2005, 2017, and 2023. Overall, the viewpoints of municipal officials have remained relatively stable since 2017, with mostly modest decreases emerging in 2023.

In addition to specifying whether the needs of each age group are being met, municipal officials were also given the opportunity to provide insight on issues that are related to these needs. Several topics emerged among the open-ended responses. Most mentioned was *Insufficient Resources*, whether it be funding, space, or staff. This was followed by *A Lack of Programs to Accommodate Younger Adults*, *A Lack of Programs to Accommodate Children*, *A Lack of Accommodation for Seniors*, *Outdated Outdoor Recreation Spaces*, and the *Need for More Areas to Accommodate People of All Ages with Disabilities*.



**Figure 52. Percentage of Municipalities Meeting Outdoor Recreation Needs for Age Groups**

Participation in outdoor recreation was predicted to increase throughout 2023 and beyond, with participation drivers for Americans getting outdoors being linked to their mental and physical well-being.

## Assessing Demand for Additional Facilities

This section examines the public demand for outdoor recreation facilities in Connecticut and the extent to which those demands are being met throughout Connecticut.

### Residents Rate Demand for Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey were asked whether they or members of their household had a *Need or Desire for Additional Access* to each of 31 recreational facilities. Figures 53 and 54 show the percentage of respondents who indicated a demand for each facility in 2005, 2017, and 2023.

There is a consistent longitudinal demand for *Picnic Areas/Shelters* from 2005 to 2023. There has been a significant increase in the demand for *Volleyball/Tennis/Basketball Courts* across the state, up from 35% in 2005 to 49% in 2023. Other notable increases include *ADA-Accessible Trails*, going up from 17% to 24%, *Snorkeling/Scuba Diving*, going up from 16% to 22%, and *Cross-Country Skiing/Snowshoeing Trails*, going up from 14% to 21%.

Notable decreases in demand were observed for *Historic Sites and Areas*, *Freshwater/Saltwater Swimming*, *Paved Multi-Use Trails*, *Nature Preserves & Bird Watching Areas*, and *Outdoor Public Pools/Water Parks/Splash Pads*.

Categories such as *Bicycle Playgrounds*, *Biking Pump Tracks*, *Snowmobiling Areas*, and *Pickleball Courts* were new to this year's survey, leaving no ability to compare these categories to previous years.

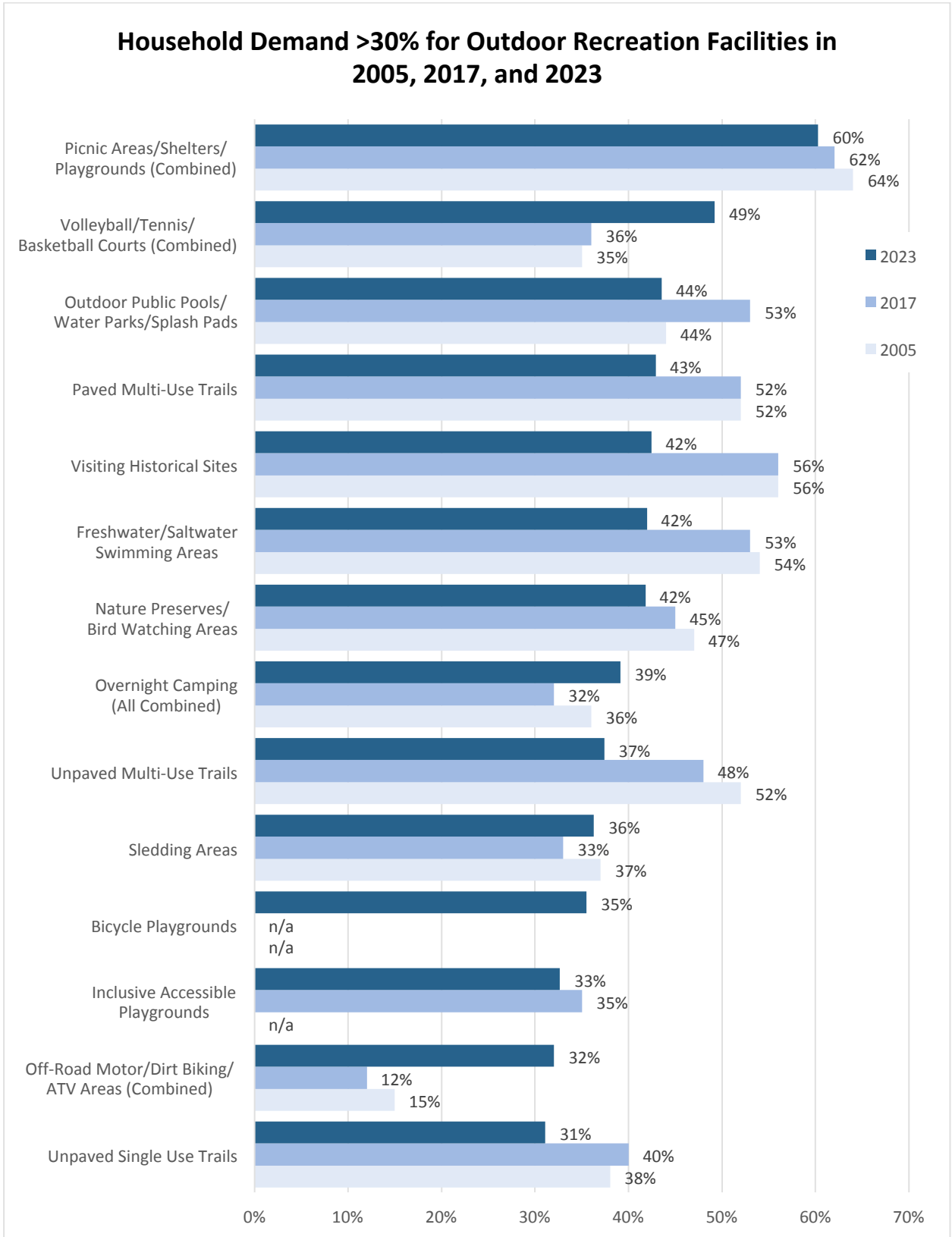
As in 2017, the 2023 survey asked participants to indicate *A Need or Desire for Additional Access* to each of the facilities, as well as only indicating *Yes* if their needs were entirely met. Thus, percentages from 2017 and 2023 have bigger discrepancies in comparison to 2005.

### Municipal Officials Rate Demand for Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Respondents to the Municipal Officials Survey were asked to identify outdoor recreation facilities or programs not currently provided in their community that should be provided. Up to two open-ended responses were accepted. The results are presented in Figure 55.

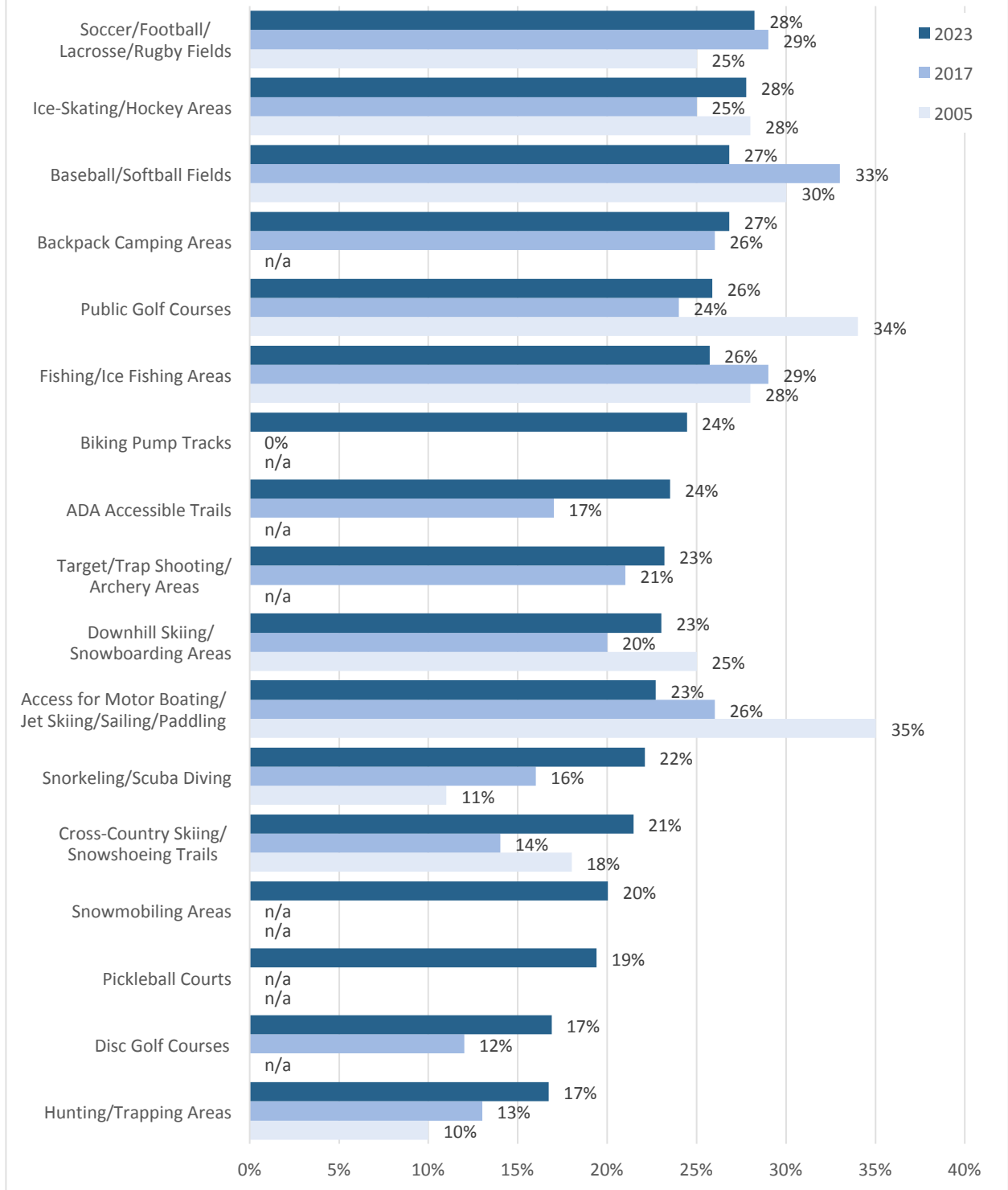


DEEP Maintainer, Miller's Pond State Park, Durham (DEEP)

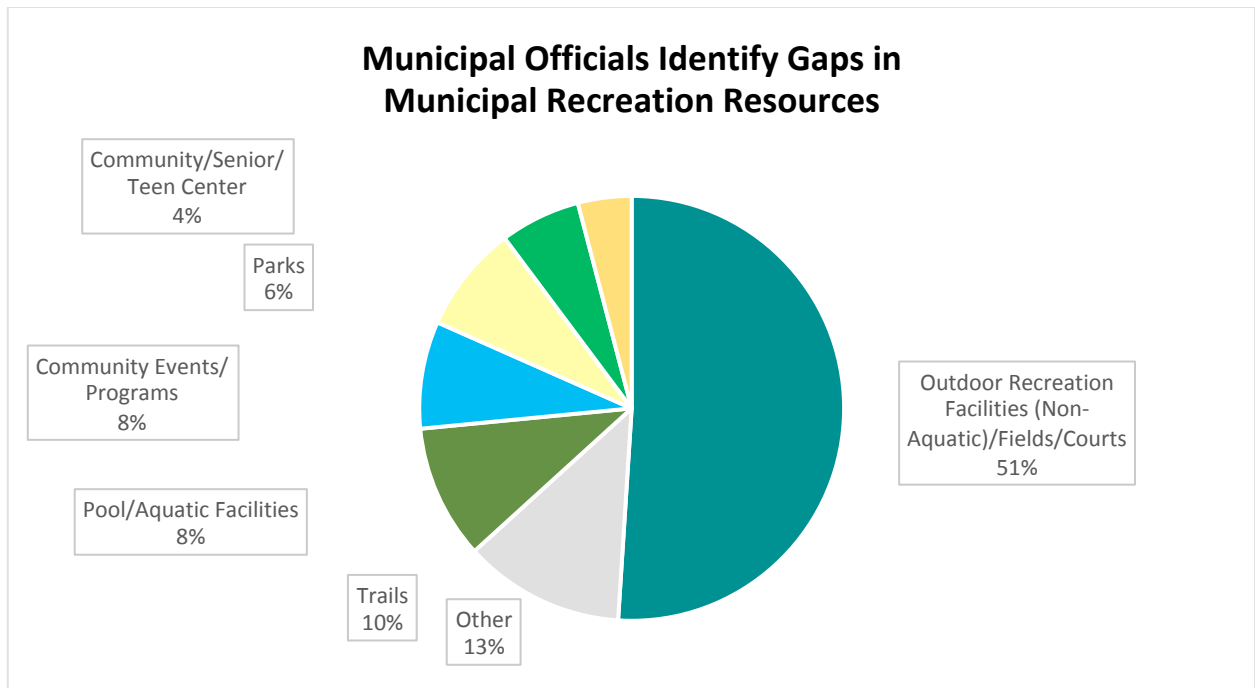


**Figure 53. Household Demand >30% for Outdoor Recreation Facilities in 2005, 2017, and 2023**

### Household Demand <30% for Outdoor Recreation Facilities in 2005, 2017, and 2023



**Figure 54. Household Demand <30% for Outdoor Recreation Facilities in 2005, 2017, and 2023**



**Figure 55. Municipal Officials Identify Gaps in Municipal Recreation Resources**



*Spring blooms at Wadsworth Falls State Park, Middletown (Instagram@alpine)*



Fall frost at Osbornedale State Park, Derby (Instagram@b\_perkins203)

## SECTION IV: BARRIERS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION

### *Households Identify Barriers to Outdoor Recreation*

Connecticut residents were asked to identify reasons preventing them or members of their household from using outdoor recreation facilities. The results are presented in Figure 56.

### *Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts Identify Barriers to Outdoor Recreation*

For each of their top five activities, avid outdoor enthusiasts were asked to what extent their needs for outdoor recreation facilities or resources were being met. Those indicating that their needs were not being *Completely Met* were asked to identify what problems they experienced. For each activity, the top five most frequent problems were coded from open-ended responses. For the top 12 coded responses, Figure 57 shows the percentage that each response appeared in any of the top five responses for all activities.

Outdoor enthusiasts were then asked to identify the most significant issue they encountered when engaging in any of their top five outdoor activities. Unlike the question discussed above, which was only asked to those who indicated that their outdoor recreation needs were not *Completely Met*, this question presents more of a general sentiment towards outdoor recreation. Here, two other major points are worth noting. Unlike the prior question, only one answer choice could be identified by each respondent. Further, this question required participants to select from closed-ended answer options, while the prior question was completely open-ended. The results are presented in Figure 58.

### Barriers to Household Participation in Outdoor Recreation in 2005, 2017, and 2023

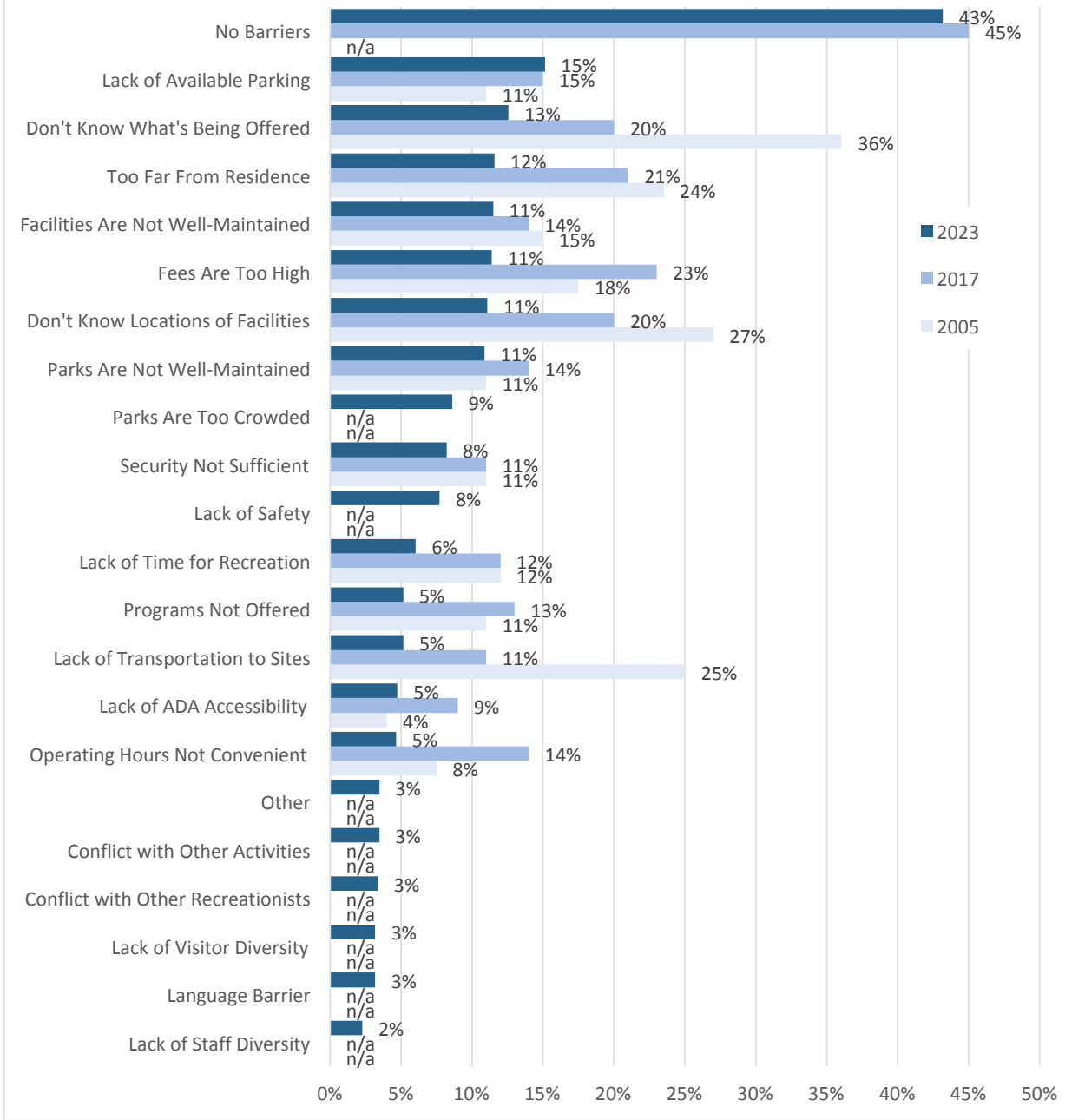
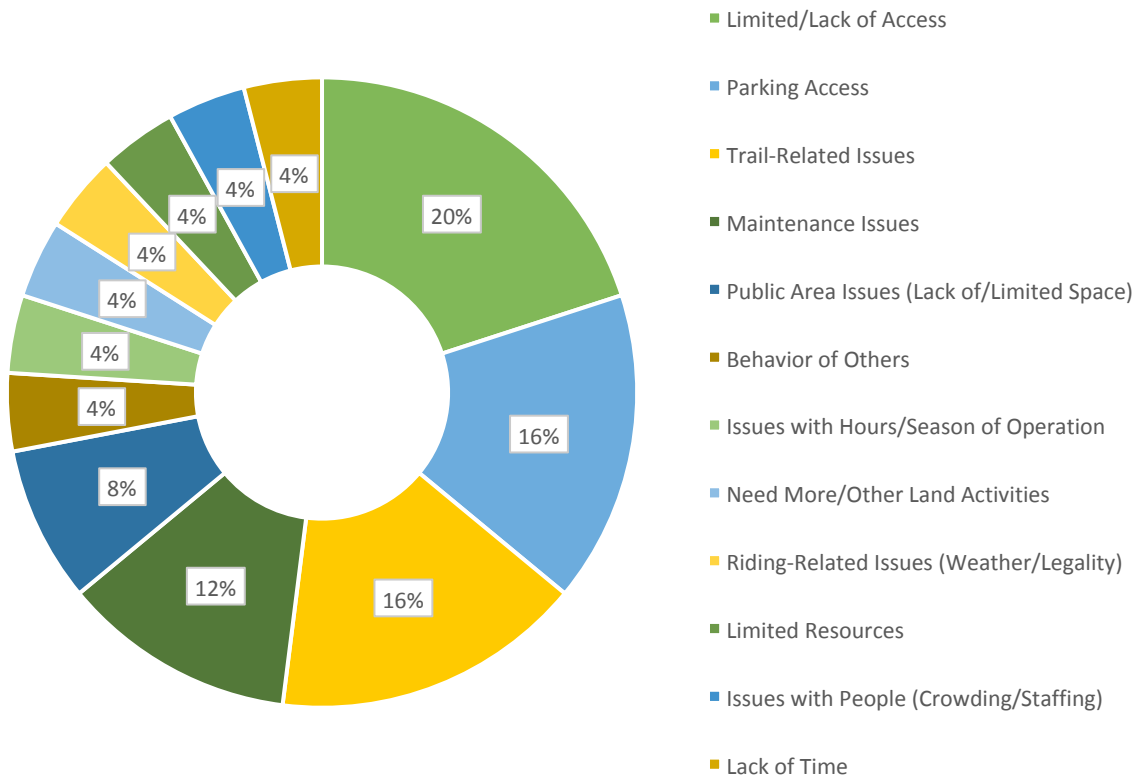


Figure 56. Barriers to Household Participation in Outdoor Recreation in 2005, 2017, and 2023

**Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Recreation  
for Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts**  
(percentage of appearance in top five coded responses for all activities)

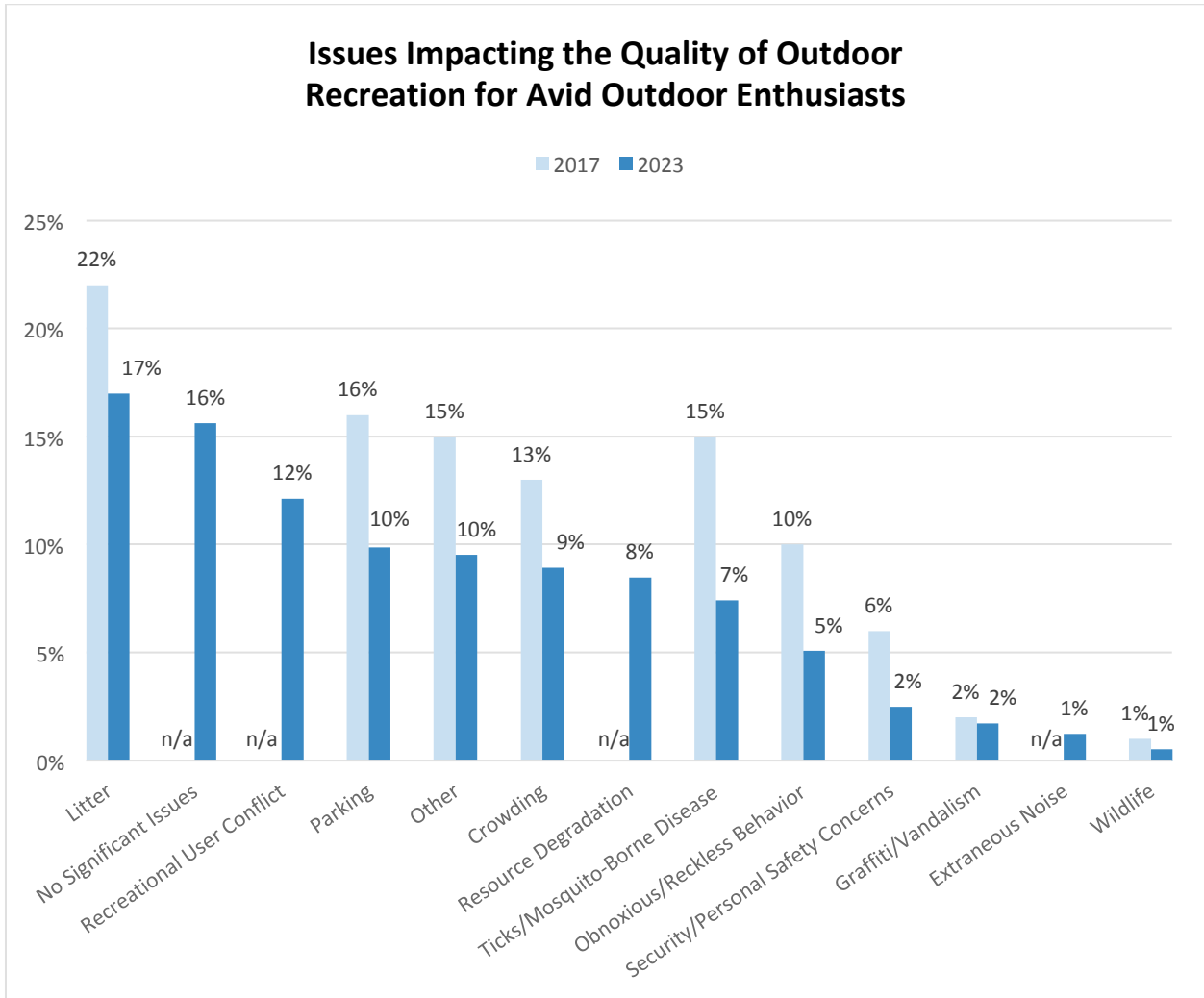


**Figure 57. Barriers to Participation in Outdoor Recreation for Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts**

Finally, respondents to the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey were asked to identify what they believed to be the most pressing needs of the outdoor recreation areas that they visit. Themes were coded from open-ended responses, with multiple responses being accepted. The top five most common responses were coded and ranked (Table 25).

**Table 25. Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts Identify the Most Pressing Needs for Recreation Areas**

Outdoor Recreation Area Needs	Rank
Litter/Maintenance – trash, overgrown greenery, lack of trail upkeep	1
Parking – not enough, not horse trailer accessible	2
Motorized/All-Terrain Vehicles – limited areas, disturbing others in illegal areas	3
Hunting – non-hunters in designated areas, lack of awareness	4
Enforcement of Rules – lack of supervision/safety, illegal activity	5



**Figure 58. Issues Impacting the Quality of Outdoor Recreation for Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts**

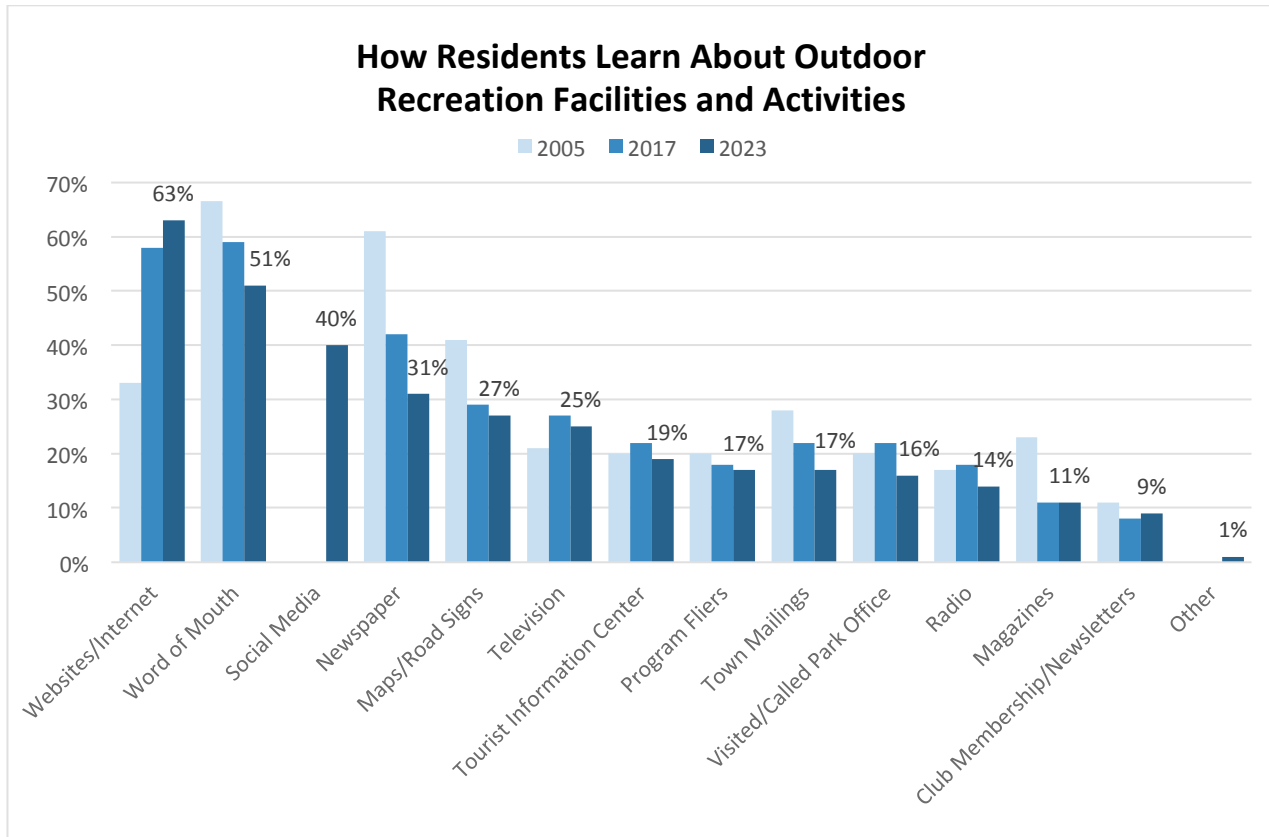


*Dog-walking at Air Line State Park Trail, Hampton (CTvisit)*

## How Residents Learn About Recreation Facilities and Activities

Figure 59 shows how respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey learn about Connecticut’s outdoor recreation facilities and activities.

Participants in one of the Limited Recreationist Focus Groups suggested customizable text messaging from DEEP. Participants sought the ability to select the facilities about which they could receive information. Also desired was receiving text updates regarding parking lot closures at beach locations and special events being held at their favorite facilities.



**Figure 59. How Residents Learn About Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Activities**

In 2022, DEEP was allocated \$80M for the new Restore CT State Parks program, which provides funding for improving and restoring state park infrastructure. The state budgets of 2022 and 2023 provided unprecedented levels of capital funding for much-needed reinvestments in scores of facilities and more than 1,000 buildings upon which the public relies to enjoy public lands.



*Equestrians at Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (Instagram@\_allylund\_)*

## SECTION V: FUTURE TRENDS AND FUNDING DIRECTIONS

### Municipal Officials Project Trends and Needs

Municipal officials were asked which outdoor recreation activities provided by their department were predicted to gain or lose popularity in the next five to ten years. The results are presented in Table 26 along with predictions from the 2017 SCORP. Open-ended responses were coded, with multiple responses being accepted.

**Table 26. Municipal Officials Predict Activities That Will Gain or Lose Popularity in 5-10 Years**

Year	Gain Popularity	Lose Popularity
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Walking/Hiking</li> <li>- Day/Summer Camps</li> <li>- Beach Activities</li> <li>- Disc Golf</li> <li>- Cycling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organized Youth Sports</li> <li>- Other (Triathlon, Pickleball)</li> <li>- Tennis/Golf</li> <li>- Playgrounds</li> <li>- Fitness/Dance Classes</li> </ul>
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pickleball (67%)</li> <li>- Sports (Indoor/Outdoor) (19%)</li> <li>- Walking/Biking/Cycling/Skating (6%)</li> <li>- programming/Group Activities (4%)</li> <li>- Other (4%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- N/A or Unsure (39%)</li> <li>- Tennis (24%)</li> <li>- Other Outdoor Sports (Football, Baseball/Softball, Basketball) (20%)</li> <li>- Sports Activities (Camps/Youth/Organized, etc.) (12%)</li> <li>- Other Activities (Fishing/Arts and Crafts/Skating) (5%)</li> </ul>

### Residents Rank the Most Important Facilities to Develop

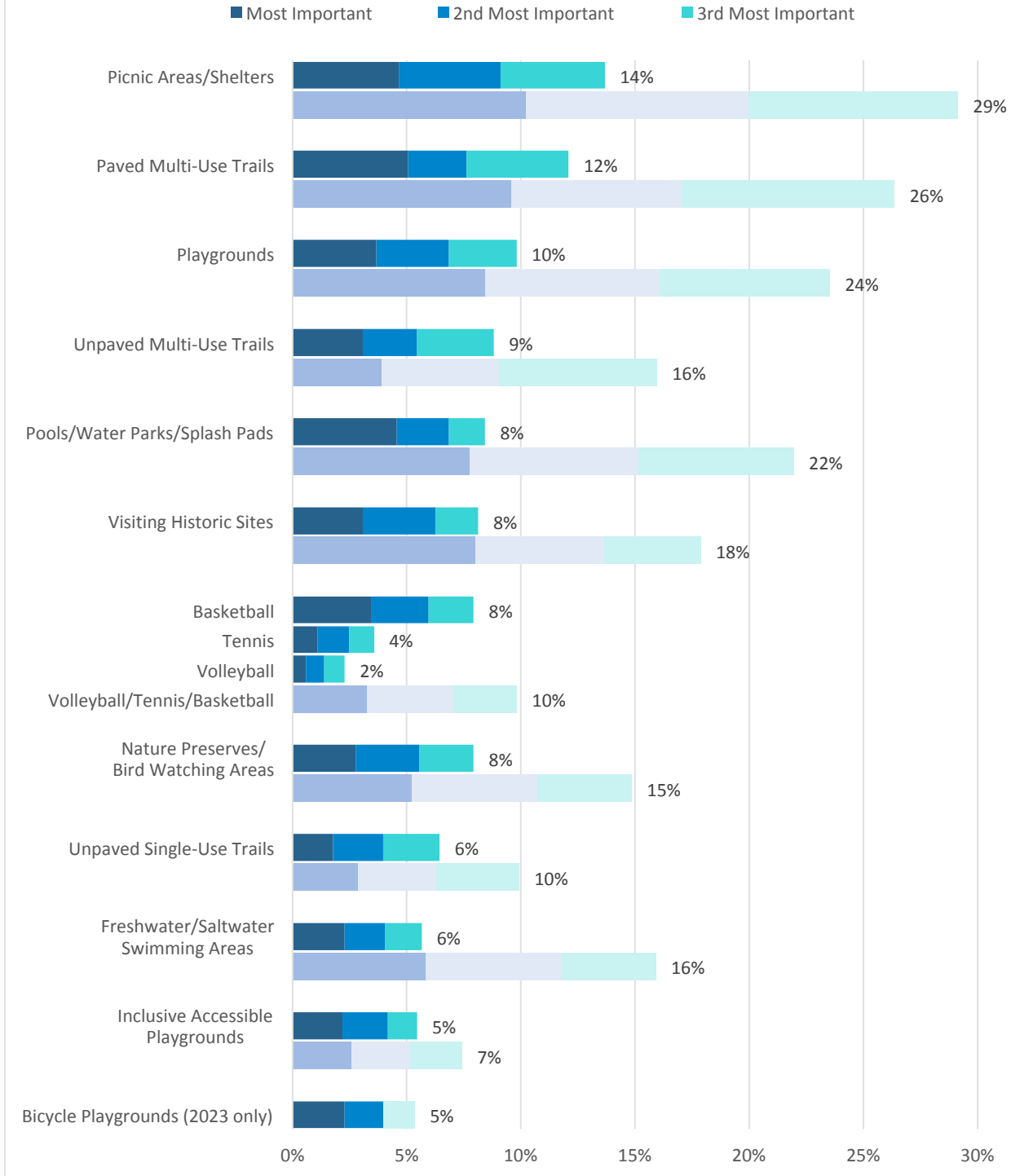
To assess the demand priorities for outdoor recreation facilities among Connecticut households, respondents to the 2023 Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey were asked to identify the top three most important facilities to develop in municipal-owned and state-owned outdoor recreation areas. Figures 60 and 61 show the percentage of respondents who chose each of the 18 recreation facilities as their first, second, and third choices for municipal-owned outdoor recreation areas, while Figures 62 and 63 show the same information for state-owned recreation areas. Comparison data from the 2017 SCORP report is also included.



*Covered bridge at Chatfield Hollow State Park, Killingworth (Flickr-15592133297\_6ac5ddfd62\_o)*

## Municipal-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having >5% Household Support

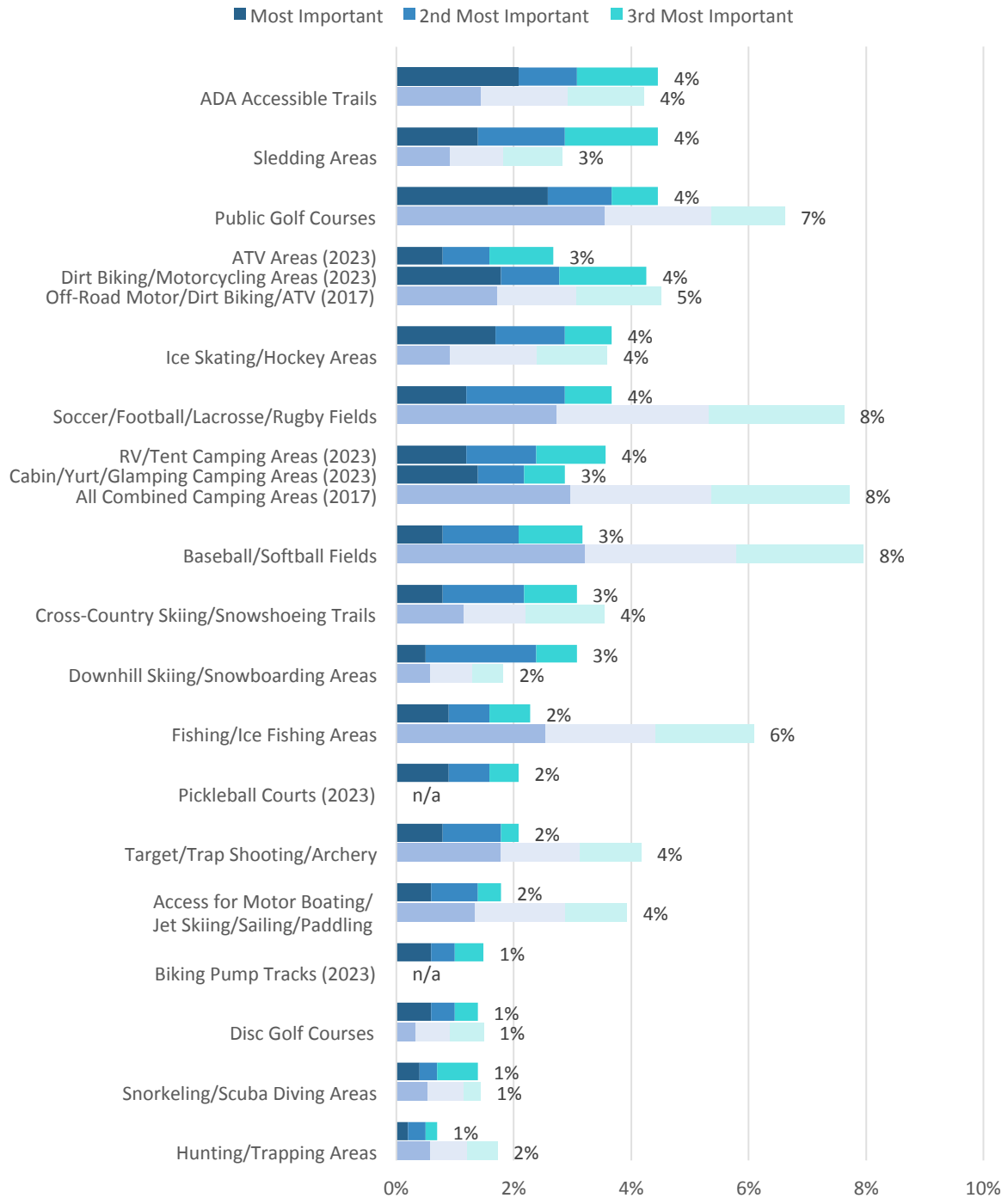
(upper bars represent 2023 and lower bars represent 2017)



**Figure 60. Municipal-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having >5% Household Support**

## Municipal-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having <5% Household Support

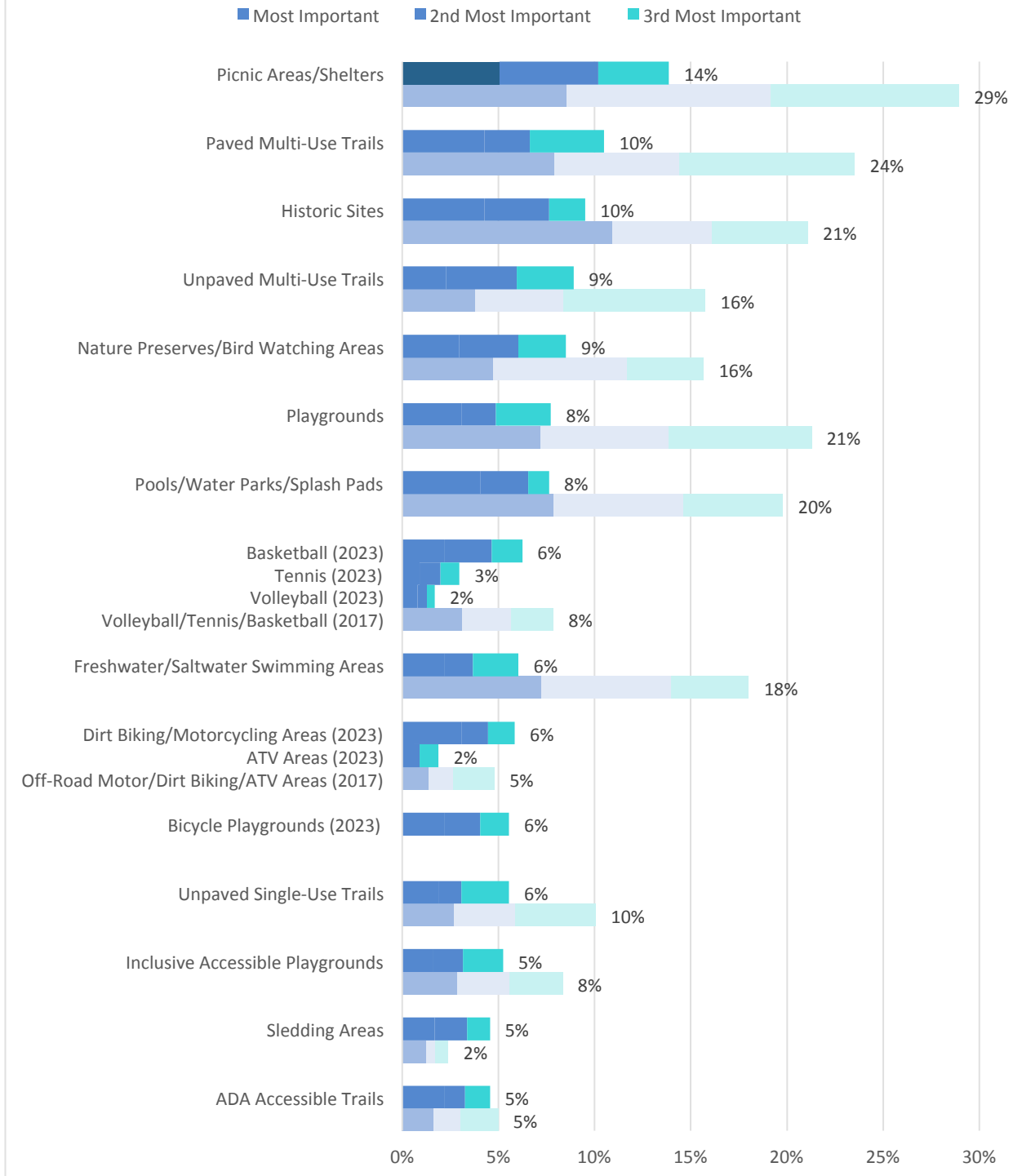
(upper bars represent 2023 and lower bars represent 2017)



**Figure 61. Municipal-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having <5% Household Support**

## State-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having >5% Household Support

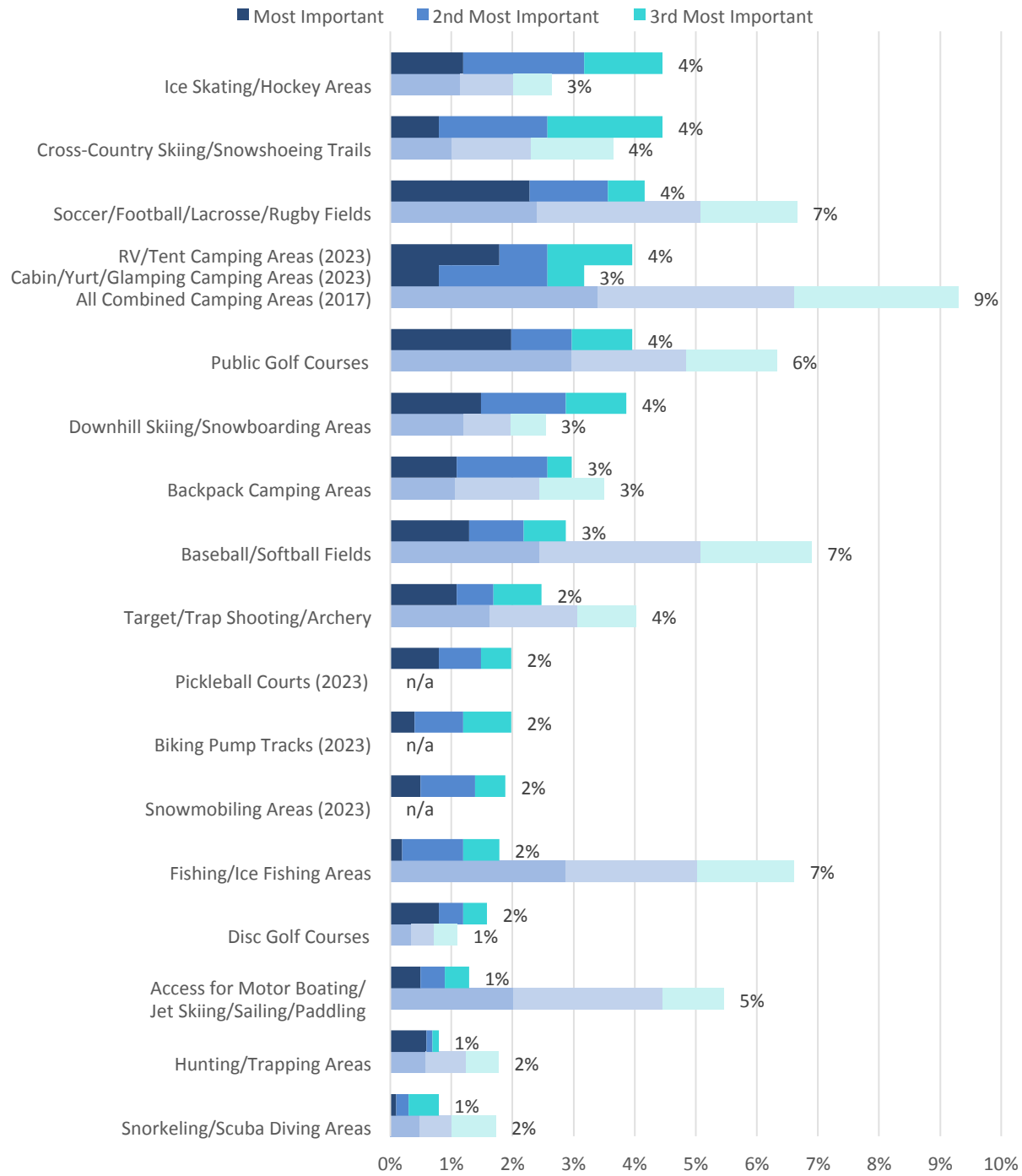
(upper bars represent 2023 and lower bars represent 2017)



**Figure 62. State-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having >5% Household Support**

## State-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having <5% Household Support

(upper bars represent 2023 and lower bars represent 2017)



**Figure 63. State-Owned Facility Proposed Developments Having <5% Household Support**

## Funding Priorities for Outdoor Recreation

Connecticut residents have an interest in how funding is allocated to outdoor recreation, both locally and statewide. Respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey were asked to consider the following outdoor recreation funding priorities:

1. Maintain and Improve Existing Outdoor Facilities
2. Develop New Outdoor Recreation Activities
3. Provide Additional Recreation Programs or Activities
4. Improve Advertising/Information for Existing Outdoor Facilities and Programs
5. Acquire Open Space
6. Sustain or Enhance Natural Habitats That Support Activities Such as Hunting, Fishing, Wildlife Viewing, Birding, Hiking, etc.
7. Other Actions

Respondents were asked whether the state of Connecticut or their municipality should increase, maintain, or decrease funding for each action. The results appear in Figure 64.

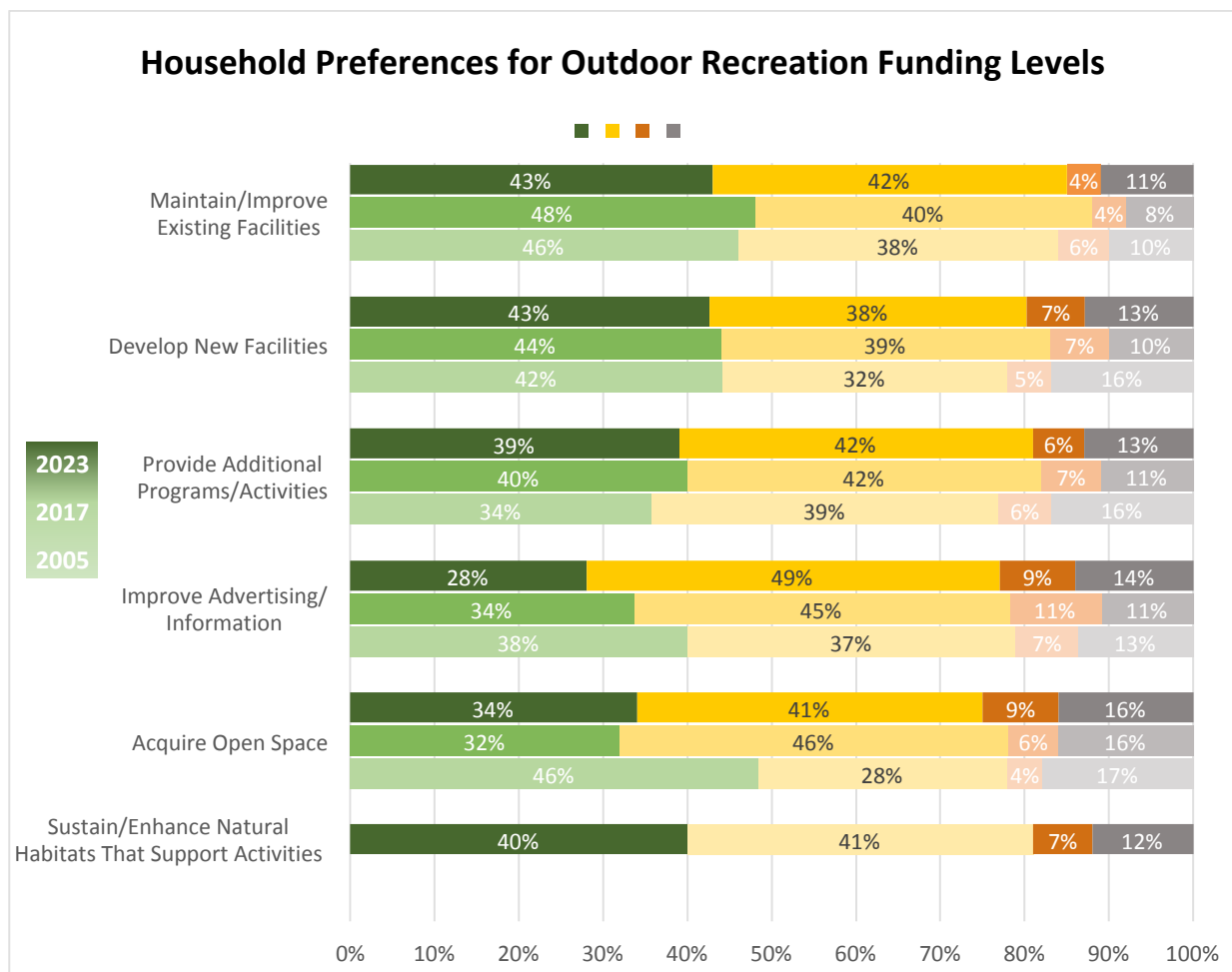


Figure 64. Household Preferences for Outdoor Recreation Funding Levels



*Boardwalk at Silver Sands State Park, Milford*



*Morning mist at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (CTvisit)*

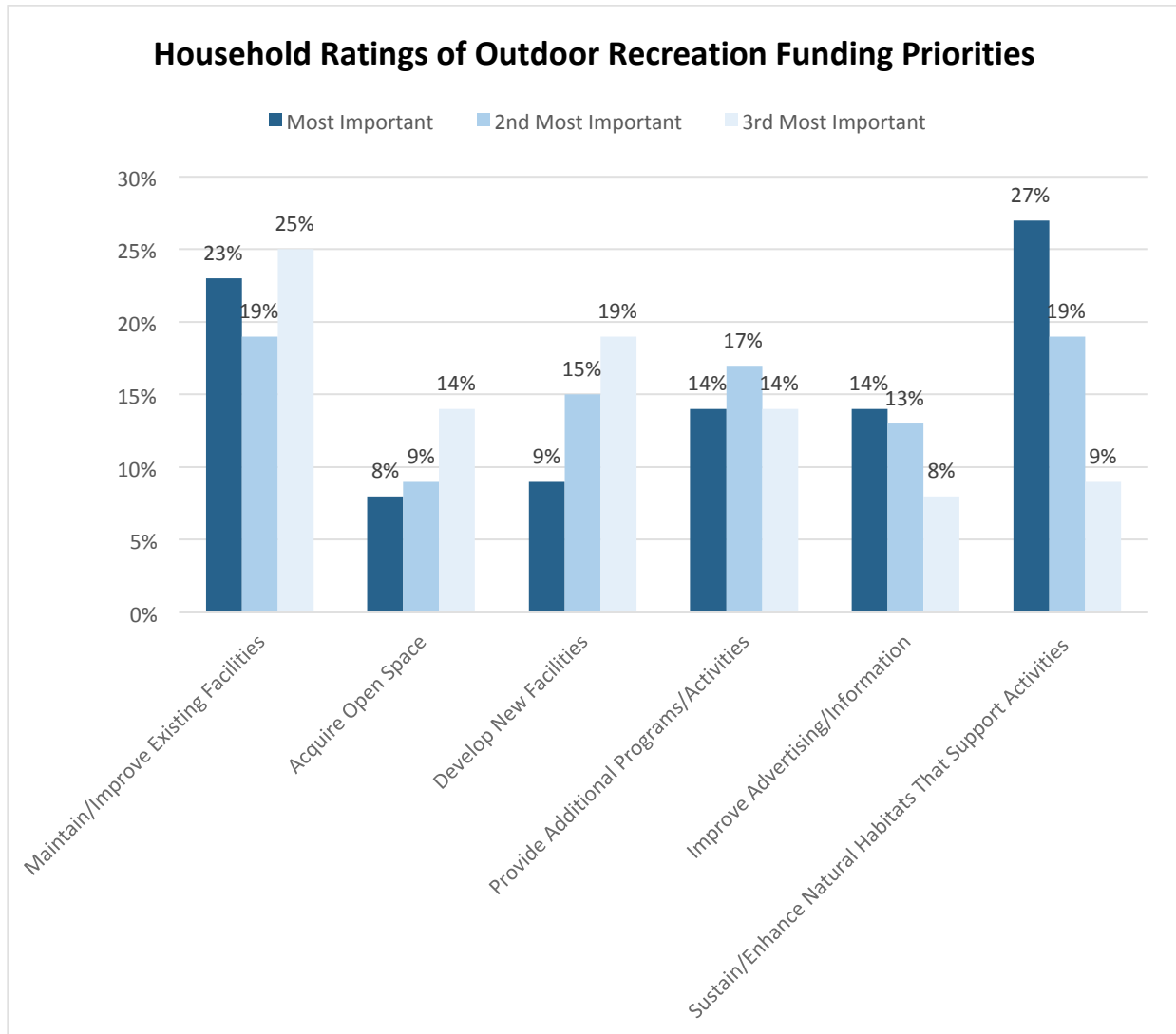


*Seaside State Park, Waterford (Instagram@somecuriousnyer)*



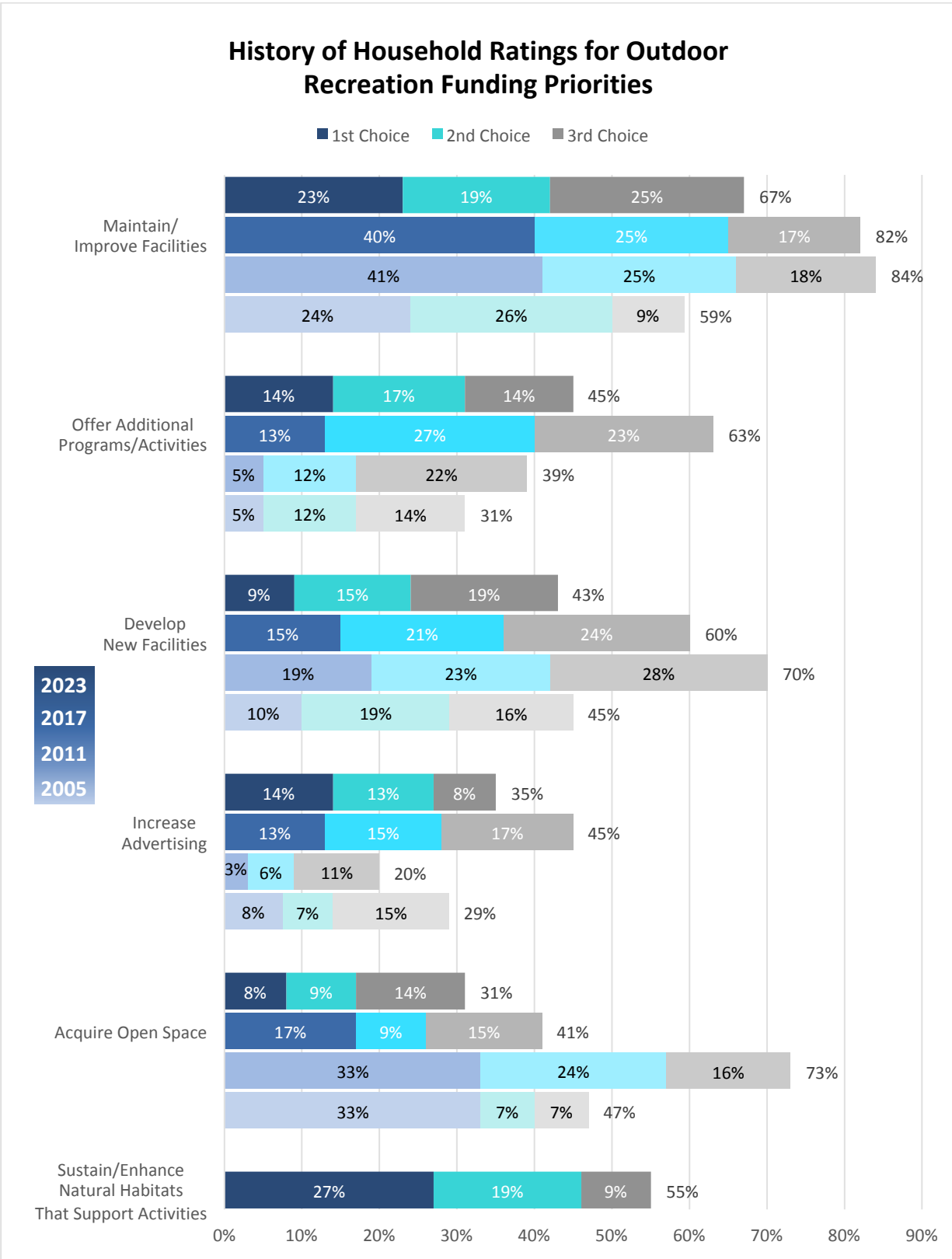
*Mashapaug Lake, Bigelow Hollow State Park, Union (Instagram@skamaniasteel)*

Respondents were asked to rank the three categories they most supported for funding out of the seven categories presented. Figures 65 and 66 display the results from the 2023 survey as well as from previous SCORP years.



**Figure 65. Household Ratings of Outdoor Recreation Funding Priorities**

The increased interest in outdoor recreation provided an avenue to teach about the importance of caring for natural resources and recreating responsibly. The Wildlife Division participated in a national #ResponsibleRecreation initiative and developed a webpage dedicated to the care and use of state parks, forests, wildlife management areas, and natural area preserves.

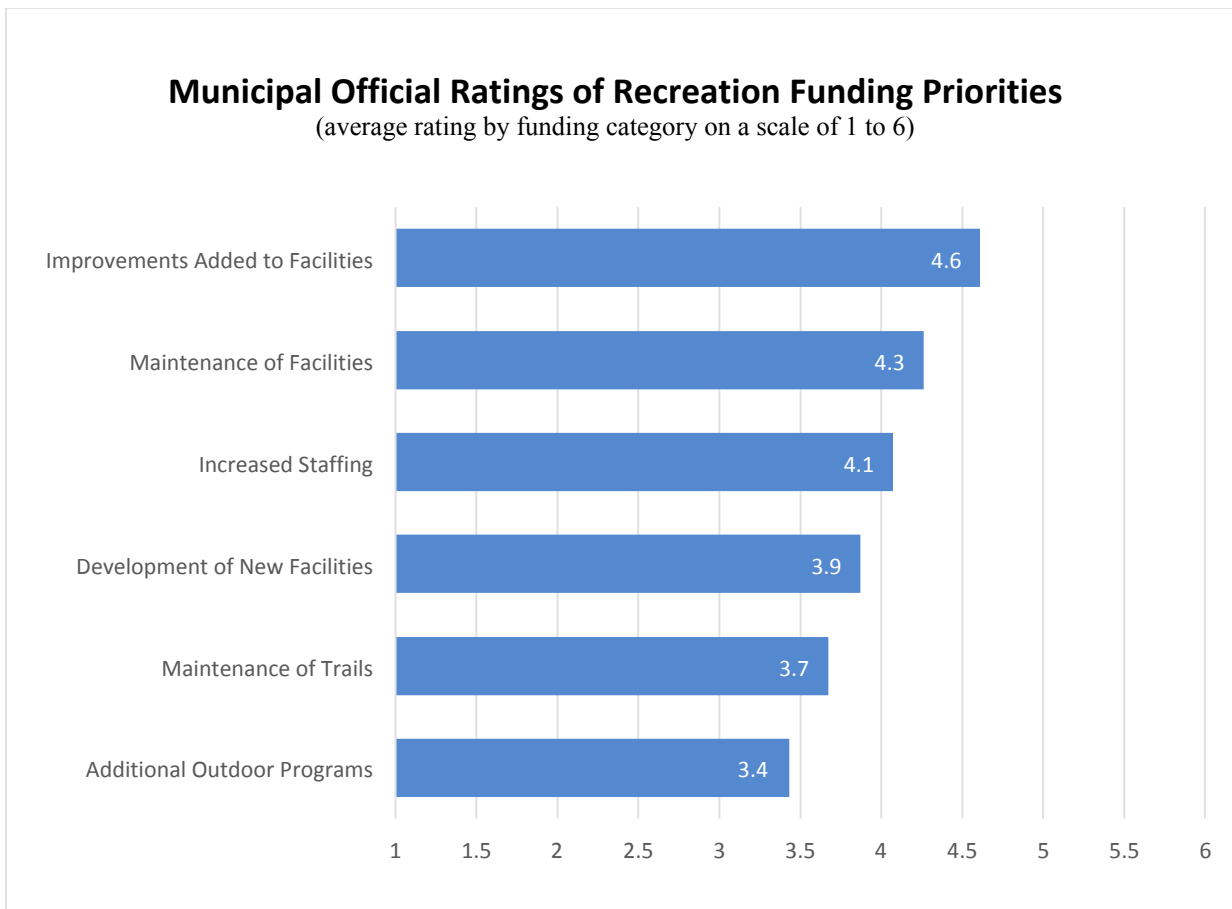


**Figure 66. History of Household Ratings for Outdoor Recreation Funding Priorities**

## Municipal Official Ratings of Recreation Funding Priorities

Municipal officials were asked to rate six outdoor recreational needs in their community on a scale of 1–6, with 1 being the least pressing and 6 being the most pressing need. These needs closely mirror the funding categories presented to Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey respondents. They include *Improvements Added to Facilities*, *Maintenance of Facilities*, *Increased Staffing*, *Development of New Facilities*, *Maintenance of Trails*, and *Additional Outdoor Programs*. The results are presented in Figure 67.

The results are consistent with those from the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey, in which residents indicated a clear preference for maintaining or improving existing facilities. Connecticut is already host to a wide variety of outdoor recreational resources that collectively possess significant maintenance needs. In both the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey and the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Focus Groups, avid outdoor recreationists identified improvements such as better parking accommodations, better trail signage, better trail connectivity, and provision of more amenities such as bathrooms, water sources, and rest stations as some of the most pressing needs of recreational areas.

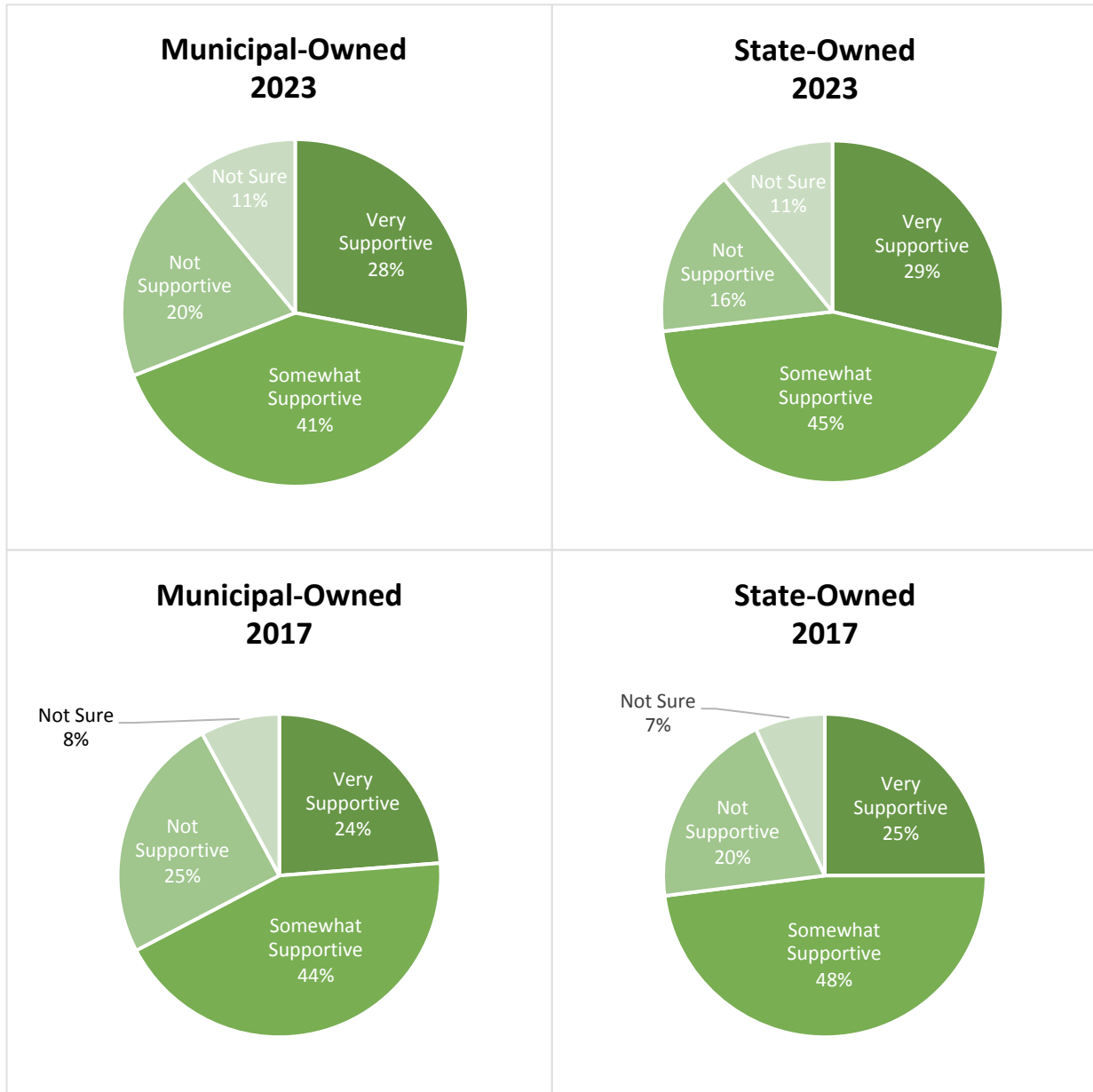


**Figure 67. Municipal Official Ratings of Recreation Funding Priorities**

Connecticut is already host to a wide variety of outdoor recreational resources that collectively possess significant maintenance needs.

## Measuring Household Support for Fee Increases

Respondents to the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey were asked how supportive they would be of fee increases to help maintain or improve outdoor recreation facilities and resources. The results are shown in Figure 68, including results from 2017 for comparison.



**Figure 68. Household Support for Funding Through Increased Facility Fees in 2017 and 2023**



*Tea Room, Eolia Mansion, Harkness Memorial State Park, Waterford (CTvisit)*



*West Garden, Eolia Mansion, Harkness Memorial State Park, Waterford (CTvisit)*

## SECTION VI: FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

### Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts

Avid outdoor enthusiasts were asked whether their needs were completely met while engaging in their favorite activity, and if not, why. Participants expressed mixed opinions regarding the extent to which their needs were met. In one focus group, a comparison quickly emerged between Covid-19 pre- and post-pandemic feelings. Many participants reported feeling that their outdoor recreation experiences in Connecticut have changed substantially since the pandemic. When prompted to elaborate by CCESR staff, two related themes emerged as prominent responses.

First, avid outdoor enthusiasts pointed to an increase in fellow users who disregard facility policies. They described a dramatic increase of selfish behavior, with other users being inconsiderate of shared spaces. Second, participants expressed frustration at the lack of enforcement of facility regulations, which they felt emboldened users to continue disregarding the regulations. Avid outdoor enthusiasts welcomed the idea of stricter enforcement as a means of making their outdoor recreation experience more enjoyable, as well as a means of maintaining the conditions of the facilities that they frequent. They want facility managers to have more power in dealing with facility users when they see violations occurring.

Avid outdoor enthusiasts expressed concern over their inability to practice preferred activities safely, legally, or as freely as they desired. This finding was especially true of ATV riders and hunters. Enthusiasts who enjoy these activities voiced concern over several legal barriers. Hunters described regulations concerning the type and number of animals they can hunt, land-use laws, and Sunday hunting restrictions. ATV enthusiasts pointed to being prohibited from riding on public land. These criticisms then transitioned to a discussion of how Connecticut does not have a welcoming culture towards certain activities. This was expressed by hunters, mountain bikers, and ATV riders. New Hampshire was praised for how the state embraces these activities, evidenced by their laws and facilities. Their multi-use trail system that allows for regulated ATV riding was cited as one example of an activity-friendly facility. Avid outdoor enthusiasts called for an easing of restrictions so they could have legal access to their activity (ATV riders) or an expansion of existing legal access (hunters).

Both of the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Focus Groups concluded on a similar note—with participants expressing a love for the natural beauty of the state. A primary challenge the groups saw for DEEP was to effectively promote the fact that Connecticut has such natural beauty available for residents to enjoy. Echoing sentiments expressed in 2017, participants expressed concern that fellow residents might be unaware of the natural resources right in front of them.



*Whitewater canoeing in Scantic River State Park, Somers  
(Instagram@rkblue123)*



*Sunset over boardwalk at Silver Sands State Park, Milford*

## Limited Recreationists

Limited recreationists are those who self-identify as experiencing significant barriers to outdoor recreation. Some limited recreationists engaged infrequently in outdoor recreation, such as walking on a multi-use trail once a month, while others never engaged in outdoor activities.

Participants described the challenge of fitting recreation into their busy schedules. Many participants held numerous jobs and had family or caretaking responsibilities. Some were going to school as well. Some participants described not having a good time at state-owned facilities, particularly beach locations, which negatively influenced their desire to engage in future participation at any location. Limited recreationists pointed to the behavior of other users as a major concern. They described other facility users as selfish and inconsiderate. The presence of loud music and illegal drug use, including the unwelcome smell of marijuana, were cited as barriers to participation.

At the same time, limited recreationists described having quality outdoor recreation choices available to them locally. Municipal parks and trails were seen as convenient alternatives to state facilities. The ease of parking at these local facilities was seen in a highly favorable light, as was the versatility of these facilities. The common sentiment was that when participants found room in their busy schedules to enjoy the outdoors, the time savings offered by local facilities were very important.

Limited recreationists were asked to comment on the degree to which they felt facility overcrowding was an issue at the outdoor recreation facilities they visit. They felt it was a big area of concern, especially during the summer. Some valuable ideas emerged when participants were asked to brainstorm suggestions on how facility managers could better navigate crowding concerns. One popular idea was making a text-messaging system available to outdoor recreationists. Users could specify the types of updates that they would like to receive via text, including parking lot closures. Participants warned against an over-reliance on social media communication, suggesting that it would not reach certain demographics.



Cycling at Hop River State Park Trail, Columbia (Instagram@cyclesnack)



Visitor kiosk at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (CTvisit)

## SECTION VII: METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

It is important to point out the methodological limitations of this study—including the implications of those limitations for readers of this report. This section identifies the most prominent limitations of each survey, but this discussion should not be considered exhaustive. Every effort was made to minimize limitations during the data collection process. With that said, recruiting a survey sample that precisely mirrors a target population is often unrealistic and not possible due to practical considerations such as participant availability, project timelines, and more. In that vein, while the research team sought to maximize data precision, exact precision was not a realistic expectation.

### Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey

The 2023 Statewide Outdoor Recreation Survey (SORS) was designed to approximate opinions of the Connecticut population based on demographic quotas pertaining to gender, ethnicity, county of residence, and household income. While these quotas were generally satisfied, they were not universally met to the exact specifications. As one example, looking at household income, the SORS skews slightly (3-4%) to a lower income population compared to the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) results for Connecticut. Ethnicity is another example, Caucasians are underestimated (65% in the 2023 SORS vs. 74% in the ACS), while those with Hispanic ancestry are overestimated (18% in the ACS vs. 27% in the SORS). These are just two of many examples that can be observed in the data. While best efforts were made to meet the demographic quotas, ultimately, the 2023 SORS does not precisely mirror Connecticut’s population. This report therefore uses the term “closely mirrors” in describing the extent to which the 2023 SORS represents the Connecticut population. This is an acknowledgement that the survey sample is reflective of the Connecticut population in many ways, but not in totality.

### Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey

The 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey was designed to capture the sentiments of self-identifying Connecticut “avid outdoor enthusiasts.” This survey was distributed using non-probability sampling, meaning that every element of the population did not have an equal chance of selection for this study. It is not possible to approximate the margin of error in this survey’s findings, as the true population is not known. This means that the findings presented throughout this report may vary to unknown degrees compared to the actual population of Connecticut avid outdoor enthusiasts.

One of the areas of ambiguity in this survey is that there is no firm definition for what constitutes an “avid outdoor enthusiast.” This means that individuals who received this survey had to discern, without guidance from the researchers, what that term meant. The lack of guidance was purposeful. Ultimately, participation hinged on whether or not a survey recipient identified with a subjective term—which raises a clear concern of self-selection bias. Beyond actual outdoor activity participation levels, there may be systematic differences in the types of people who are more likely to self-identify with the “avid outdoor enthusiast” label. For example, the sample for the 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey was comprised of significantly more men than women (68.2% men to 30.7% women, with the remainder identifying as non-binary/gender diverse or other). With 4,732 individuals responding to this gender question, a very sizable participation number, this finding raises questions about why the gender disparity exists. While it cannot be stated definitively, it is possible that men are more culturally inclined or motivated to identify as an “avid outdoor enthusiast.” Ultimately, it is not possible to measure the degree of error introduced by this self-selection bias, thus the research team does not know how far the opinions expressed by participants may stray from the those held by the actual population of Connecticut avid outdoor enthusiasts.

Further, this survey was distributed in a non-random way. This means that the researchers did not have direct control over how this survey was disseminated. The survey link was initially shared by the researchers through identifiable channels. However, the link was subsequently shared widely among interested parties, networks, and organizations. This introduces a bias of unknown extent into the findings. One example of how bias manifests in the data can be seen in Figure 27, which illustrates the preferred activities (i.e., first and subsequent choices) of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts. The findings suggest that 16% of 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts identified hunting or trapping as their first-choice activity (a 300% increase compared to 2005 and

2017, when hunting was 5-6% of first-choice activities), with an additional 11% citing hunting or trapping as their second through fifth preferred activity. This means that, collectively, 27% of all survey-takers identified hunting or trapping as one of their top-five preferred activities. Meanwhile, approximately 1.4% of Connecticut residents obtain hunting licenses each year, and DEEP's Wildlife Division has an active program to reverse the measured decline in hunting participation during recent years (R3: Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation). Given the nonrandom method of the survey's distribution, it is reasonable to conclude that hunters and trappers, as one example, were overrepresented in the Avid Outdoor Enthusiast sample. This could easily result from the hunting community sharing the survey link more widely among its members than the sharing behavior of other outdoor recreation communities with respective members. It should be noted, however, that activity overrepresentations are interesting datapoints in themselves, as they speak to a motivation to be heard.

The term "Avid Outdoor Enthusiast" is used throughout this report as a designator of the opinions collected in the 2023 Avid Outdoor Enthusiast Survey. This descriptor references the 5,210 individuals who elected to participate in this survey. It is unknown how, or the extent to which, the findings from these individuals may vary from the actual population of Connecticut Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts.

## Municipal Officials Survey

The 2023 Municipal Officials Survey was designed to capture the opinions of municipal officials from all of Connecticut's 169 municipalities. While every effort was made to encourage participation from all 169 municipalities, including both email and phone call inquiries, only 55 municipalities responded to the survey. It is important to note that these 55 participants do not constitute a representative sample of all of Connecticut's towns and cities.

In 2023, 33% of Connecticut municipalities participated in the Municipal Officials Survey. The municipalities represented are collectively less populous than the actual average population of Connecticut's 169 municipalities. More specifically, the average population of the 55 participating municipalities was 19,772, with a median of 12,336. The actual average population of Connecticut's 169 municipalities, according to 2022 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, is 21,457, with a median of 12,537. The five most populous cities in Connecticut (Stamford, Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, and Waterbury) did not participate in the 2023 survey. Looking more broadly, of the 25 most populous municipalities in Connecticut, only six responded to the 2023 survey: *Norwalk (#6), Danbury (#7), West Hartford (#9), Bristol (#14), Middletown (#20), and Wallingford (#21)*. *The underrepresentation of urban communities is one example of the limitations in generalizing the sample of 55 to all 169 municipalities in the state.*

*When comparing the 2017 and 2023 Municipal Officials Survey samples, clear demographic departures exist.* The average population of the municipalities represented in the 2017 Municipal Officials Survey sample is 28,070, with a median of 19,791. Contrasted with the same measures of central tendency observed in the 2023 sample (average 19,772, median 12,336), sizable differences are apparent. This is particularly notable for a state in which the largest municipal population is 148,377 (Bridgeport) and the smallest is 794 (Union). While 24 towns and cities participated in both the 2017 and 2023 surveys, the majority of areas represented did not overlap. When coupled with possible changes to town staff members responding from year to year, the limitations of this study's comparative data become even more pronounced.

There are sections of this report in which sizable differences are observed between the 2017 and 2023 Municipal Officials Survey results. When considering results like this, it is important to remember that the 2017 and 2023 Municipal Officials Survey attracted a largely different set of participating municipalities. The data differences observed between 2017 and 2023 are at least partially due to the natural variability inherent between the two samples and not to actual differences between sample years. When looking at 2023 findings in isolation, it is important to remember that the sample is not a mirror of all Connecticut municipalities—only a mirror of those that elected to participate. When attempting to interpret comparisons between 2017 and 2023 findings, these departures become even more relevant.

## Focus Groups

Finally, this research involved the assembly of four focus groups. The objective of these focus groups was to capture more in-depth perspectives from members of two different study cohorts—Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts and Limited Recreationists. The groups were assembled after all quantitative data was collected, allowing the research team to further investigate some of the survey findings.

Looking at the Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts, two groups, each consisting of five individuals, convened virtually on Microsoft Teams. Individuals were identified through two means of recruitment—via informal conversations Center for Community Engagement and Social Research (CCESR) staff had with facility visitors while advertising the Current Recreationist Survey, as well as via emails and phone calls that the staff received regarding this project more broadly. The results of these focus groups are non-representative beyond those who participated in this portion of the study. The enthusiasts participated in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities, including mountain and road biking, trail running and walking, pond hockey, lake and ocean swimming, ATV riding, hunting, and outdoor archery.

Demographically, the first group was comprised of three males and two females. Three individuals were Caucasian, one was Hispanic, and one was African American. The ages ranged from 22 to 58. The second focus group of Avid Outdoor Enthusiasts was comprised of three males and two females. Two participants were African American, one was Asian, and two were Caucasian. The ages ranged from 20 to 62.

For the Limited Recreationists, two groups, each consisting of five individuals, convened on the Central Connecticut State University campus in New Britain. Recruitment was via three main outlets: emails that the CCESR staff received concerning this project, word-of-mouth from CCESR staff, and through informal conversations that transpired while recruiting for other elements of this project. Demographically, the first group was comprised of three females and two males. Three individuals were Caucasian and two were Hispanic. The ages ranged from 19 to 48. In the second group, three males, one female, and one non-binary individual participated. Four participants were Caucasian and one was African American, with ages ranging from 19 to 53.

The purpose of this focus group methodology was not to produce findings that could be extrapolated to an entire population. Rather, the purpose was to get a glimpse into perspectives that could be further considered and measured more systematically moving forward. To that end, the focus group findings solely represent the opinions of those who participated in each respective group. They are not to be generalized beyond those individuals.



*Sunset on the pond, Osbornedale State Park, Derby (Flickr@Sunday-Drive)*

The ultimate standard for project merit should be for the greatest service provided to the people of Connecticut.



*Paddling at Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison (Instagram@lensofsoulphotography)*

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Division Action Plans

### Long Island Sound Blue Plan

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Coastal-Resources/LIS-Blue-Plan/LIS-Blue-Plan-Final-Draft>

### Green Plan

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Open-Space/The-Green-Plan>

### Wildlife Action Plan

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/CT-Wildlife-Action-Plan/CT-2015-Wildlife-Action-Plan#Review>

### Clean Water Fund Priority List

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Municipal-Wastewater/Financial-Assistance-for-Municipal-Wastewater-Projects>

### Comprehensive Energy Strategy

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Energy/Comprehensive-Energy-Plan/Comprehensive-Energy-Strategy>

### Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Waste-Management-and-Disposal/Solid-Waste-Management-Plan/Comprehensive-Materials-Management-Strategy>

### Connecticut Coastal Land and Estuarine Land Conservation Program Plan

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Coastal-Resources/Coastal-Management/Coastal-Land-Use-Planning>

### CT Forest Action Plan

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Forestry/CT-Forest-Action-Plan>

### Connecticut's Plan for Conservation and Management of Wild Trout

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/fishing/fisheries\\_management/Wild-Trout-Management-Plan-Final-01202022.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/fishing/fisheries_management/Wild-Trout-Management-Plan-Final-01202022.pdf)

### Conservation and Load Management

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Energy/Conservation-and-Load-Management/Conservation-and-Load-Management>

### Climate Change Roadmap

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Climate-Change?page=2>

### Connecticut Integrated Resource Planning

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Energy/Integrated-Resource-Planning/Integrated-Resource-Planning>

## Appendix B: Open Project Selection Process

Resources made available to Connecticut through the Land and Water Conservation Fund's State and Municipal Assistance Program will be allocated to projects that align most closely with the recommendations presented in this SCORP.

To objectively facilitate this process, Connecticut has developed a systematic Open Project Selection Process (OPSP). The OPSP is designed to provide equal opportunity to all interested parties for the consideration of their project proposals, and to assist program administrators with identifying the proposals that best contribute to the fulfillment of this SCORP's recommendations.

When a grant round is announced, the OPSP is a progression of the following stages:

- Notification to interested grant applicants that funding is available.
- Communication of project eligibility requirements to grant applicants.
- Assistance with the preparation of grant applications.
- Ranking of proposals by applying an impartial scoring system.
- Review of top ranked proposals.
- Selection of projects that provide the greatest benefit to the people of Connecticut.

The ranking system numerically scores proposals by awarding point values to more than 50 separate criteria falling into the following 12 categories:

- Previous grant performance of the applicant.
- Current ownership status of the proposed facility.
- Relevance to general statewide SCORP issues.
- Contribution to specific SCORP recommendations.
- Applicability to public demand for facilities.
- Relevance to local or regional facility needs.
- Extent of public participation in proposal development.
- Project funding and relative prosperity of the community.
- Project location relative to accessibility by targeted or distressed communities.
- Environmental and historical quality considerations.
- Capital development or renovation considerations.
- Facility acquisition considerations.

While the ranking system seeks to objectively incorporate considerations for all merits of a proposed project, the final selection of projects must sometimes account for contingencies not anticipated by the standardized ranking criteria.

- Key properties can only be acquired when they are placed on the market by willing sellers.
- Market conditions with low property values and low interest rates are encountered very infrequently.
- Natural disasters can suddenly undermine critical infrastructure.

Connecticut's OPSP is intended by design to provide equal consideration and opportunity for all project proposals, and in most cases the impartial ranking system serves this purpose. But the ultimate standard for project merit should be for the greatest service provided to the people of Connecticut.

## Appendix C: Wetlands Management Information

Within the state's borders there are approximately 450,000 acres of wetlands, 6,000 miles of streams and rivers, more than 2,000 lakes and reservoirs, and 600 square miles of estuarine water in Long Island Sound. Managing these precious resources for today and tomorrow is one of DEEP's most critical missions.

Water is Connecticut's most precious natural resource, critically important to public health, the environment, and the economy, while supporting rich and diverse water-based recreational opportunities. Water is also Connecticut's most vulnerable natural resource, as expanding development places increasing pressure on water supply, water quality, and the very lands that support the many ecological functions essential to both. In the context of land and water conservation priorities, the conservation value of wetlands is second to none.

Hydrologically, wetlands function like sponges by temporarily absorbing surface runoff and gradually releasing it. This helps not only to moderate flood events, it also helps stabilize the water supply for the plants and animals that depend on it. Wetlands also function like filters for surface waters as they seep through complex ecological communities on the way to recharging underground freshwater aquifers. The same underground aquifers, in turn, supply critical base flows in rivers and streams during the hot, dry summer months, when surface runoff is limited, and tree roots rapidly pull moisture from the soil during transpiration.

Ecologically, wetlands of all kinds support highly diverse and abundant biological communities, from Atlantic White Cedar Swamps to tidal marshes to open lakes and flowing rivers.

While all plants and animals rely on some amount of water for survival, many of Connecticut's threatened and endangered species rely entirely upon the unique ecological communities that exist only in wetlands. Many other migratory species rely on them seasonally as part of their annual migration corridors. Recreationally, wetlands are prime destinations for many users pursuing a variety of activities. The complex ecological communities that arise from various types of wetlands provide abundant bird watching and other wildlife viewing opportunities. Waterfowl hunters are drawn to wetlands for the many resident and migratory game species found there, and anglers in Connecticut pursue a wide variety of game species in lakes and streams across the state. Boaters of all kinds naturally rely on surface water resources for everything from sailing to waterskiing to personal watercraft, but those who choose to paddle to their destinations often find the greatest access to the widest variety of settings. Some visitors are simply seeking a cool swim on a hot day, while others visit wetlands for nothing more than the tranquility derived from their aesthetic appeal.

Economically, wetlands not only supply crucial water needs for Connecticut agriculture, commerce, and industry, they help to mitigate expensive property damages resulting from flood events and they contribute substantially to providing local, potable drinking water to a great many residents. Aside from the hydrologic benefits to the state's economy, wetlands create jobs in the outdoor recreation industry for those who provide equipment, supplies, and services to the sporting public, as well as for others in the general community who provide sporting visitors with basic services such food and lodging.

Unfortunately, wetlands in Connecticut are not nearly as abundant today as they were historically. In the centuries since European settlement began, the total area of wetlands in the state has decreased from an estimated 800,000 acres or more to less than 466,000 acres.

Connecticut has developed a systematic Open Project Selection Process (OPSP). The OPSP is designed to provide equal opportunity to all interested parties for the consideration of their project proposals ....

## Wetland Management Legislation and Implementation

The Connecticut DEEP acknowledges the importance of wetland management and protection and thereby commits to Floodplain Management and Wetland Protection, federal Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.

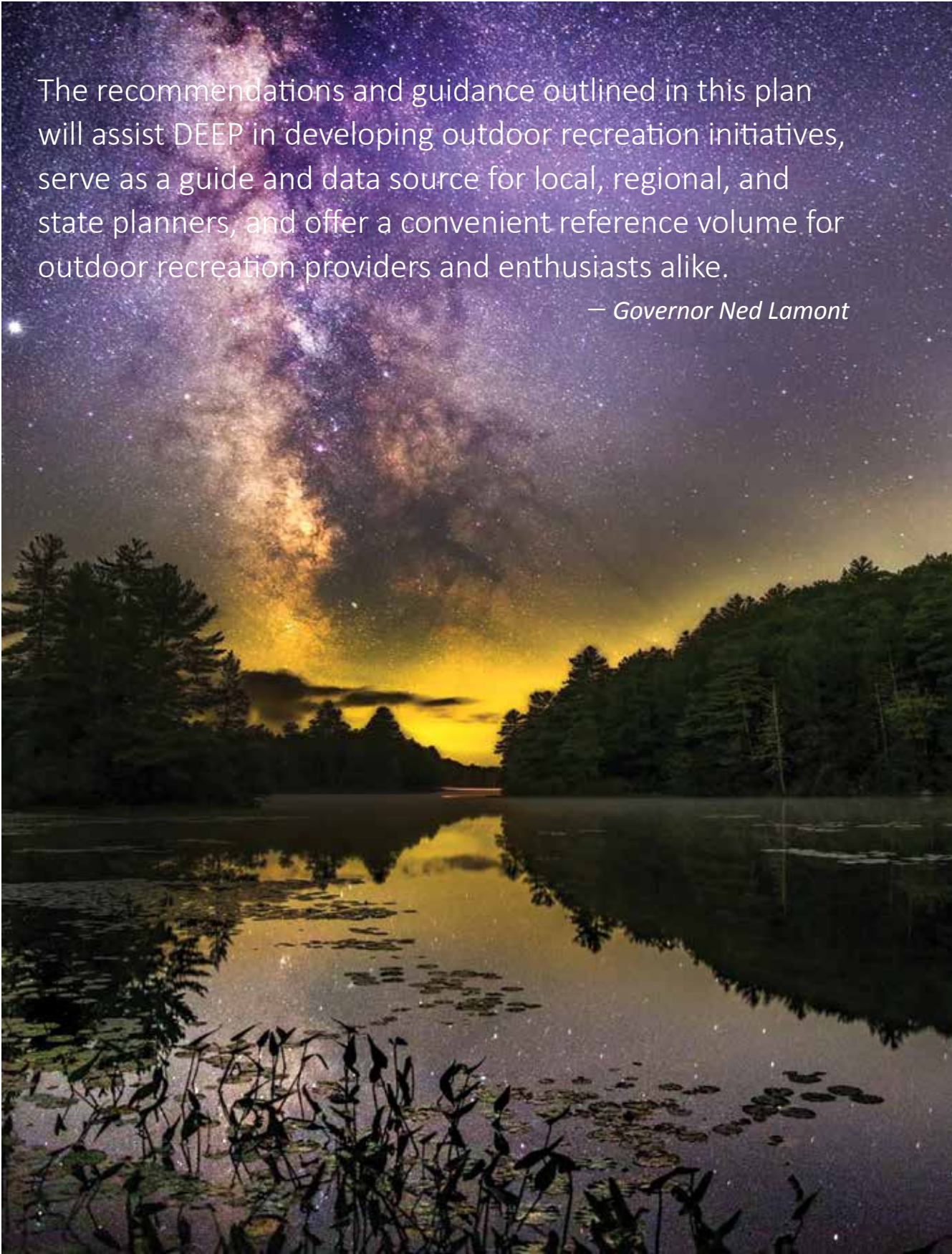
Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 direct the federal agency to avoid, to the extent possible, the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with modifying or occupying floodplains and wetlands. They also require federal agencies to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain or wetland development whenever there is a practical alternative.

For Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) purposes, the State or other project sponsor must comply with these executive orders. If implementing the LWCF project would result in an adverse impact to a federal or state regulated floodplain or wetland, a statement of finding must be included in the Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement documenting the project sponsor's coordination efforts with responsible state or federal authorities, a description of the affected floodplain or wetland resources, the alternatives considered to developing in the floodplain or wetland, and actions to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts.

Early in the conceptual development of an LWCF proposal, the State shall encourage LWCF project sponsors to document their planning and analysis process, including all efforts to reach out to the interested and affected public and agencies. These stakeholders should be invited to provide input early in the planning process and before any environmental analysis formally begins so the sponsor can clearly communicate the purpose and need for the project and give sponsors an opportunity to provide any information that could be useful for scoping out the LWCF proposal and considering its potential impact on resources.



*Tidal Estuary at Bluff Point State Park and Coastal Reserve, Groton (DEEP)*



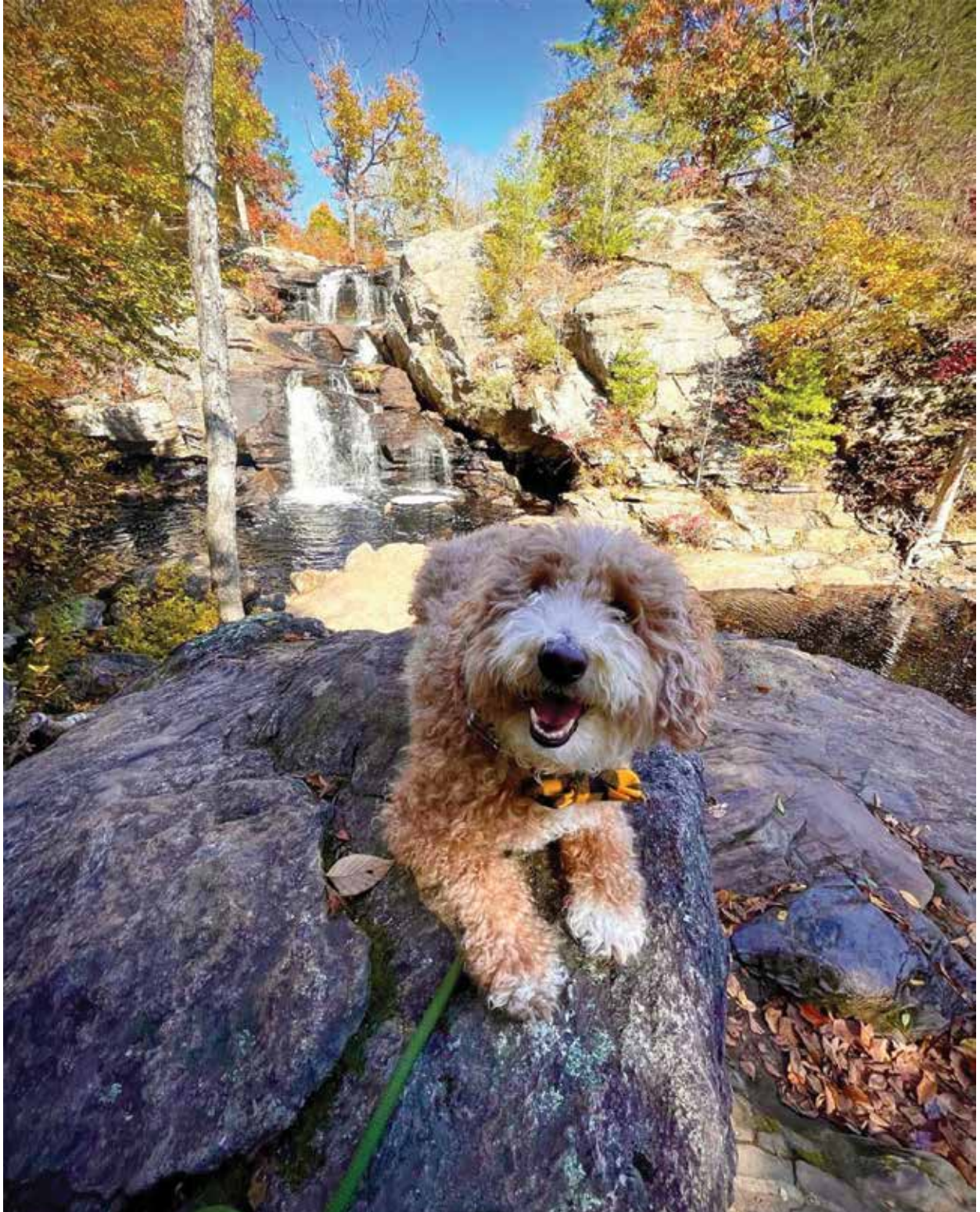
The recommendations and guidance outlined in this plan will assist DEEP in developing outdoor recreation initiatives, serve as a guide and data source for local, regional, and state planners, and offer a convenient reference volume for outdoor recreation providers and enthusiasts alike.

— Governor Ned Lamont

*Milky Way from Bigelow Hollow State Park, Union (Instagram@mcliffmanzone)*

Nature's greatest gift isn't anything you can take but the memories you'll keep forever.

—Akiebia Hicks



*Chapman Falls at Devils Hopyard State Park, East Haddam (Instagram@nkline)*



**SCORP**  
**The Statewide**  
**Comprehensive**  
**Outdoor**  
**Recreation**  
**Plan**  
**2024–2029**

State of Connecticut  
Department of Energy &  
Environmental Protection  
79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5127  
[www.ct.gov/deep](http://www.ct.gov/deep)