

Impact Report 2025

Discover how the Connecticut Land Conservation Council is helping land trusts protect the state's natural and working lands.

CT Conservation

November 3, 2025

Our Great Green Connecticut

On the final night of Connecticut's 2025 legislative session, I was at the Capitol, meeting with legislators and advocating until the very last minute. One of the bills voted on that last day included the state bond package—which held essential funding for a critical state land conservation and urban greenspace grant program for land trusts and their communities.

As we do every year, we worked hard to ensure that the funding was included, and although I was confident the bill would pass, I still felt nervous.

And I wasn't the only one! As the votes came in, a board member sent me a short message:

— *"Voting now in House. Lots of green on the board."*

—

Those words stayed with me. In that moment, "lots of green" meant a resounding win for land trust funding and for the communities, wildlife, and future generations who will benefit from conserved lands. But more than that, it became a powerful metaphor for the year we've had at the State Capitol.

This session delivered many "green victories": the codification of Nature-Based Solutions as part of the state's climate action plans; a long-overdue increase in funding for the Community Investment Act, which supports local land-use projects; and, of course, the renewed commitment to bonding for land conservation. At a time when federal conservation, climate, and environmental protection programs have faced freezes, cuts, and setbacks, Connecticut charted a different course – one that lifts up the environment, equity, and resilience.

For me, this was a personal highlight of the year – a reminder that even in challenging times, progress is possible when people come together for a cause they love. Thanks to your support, CLCC was there every step of the way: advocating, testifying, building relationships, and ensuring that "lots of green" isn't just a moment in the legislature – it's a movement for the future of Connecticut.

As you read through this report, I hope you will enjoy the many shades of "green" we achieved together as told through the perspectives of conservation friends and colleagues – from policy victories to the projects and partnerships that continue to shape a more resilient, equitable, and connected Connecticut.

Thank you for your continued support in making all of this possible.

With gratitude,

Amy Blaymore Paterson

Executive Director

Connecticut Land Conservation Council

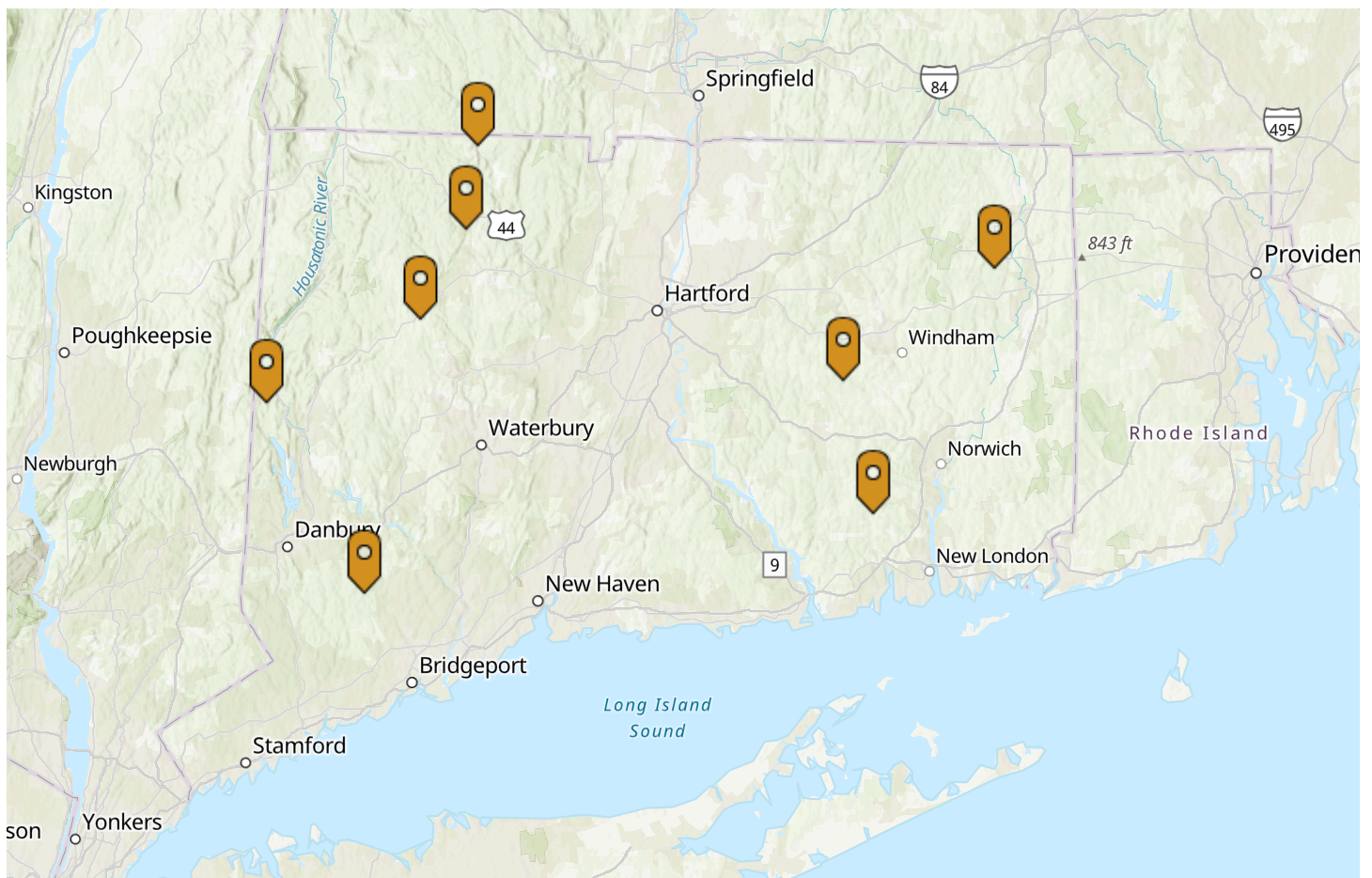


Second-graders hike along a muddy path at Groton Open Space Association's Sheep Farm Preserve.



Land

Connecticut is a green state, a testament to the collective efforts of a vibrant conservation community. This past year the state has made remarkable strides in land acquisition, community engagement, and environmental advocacy. From safeguarding critical habitats to fostering inclusive access to nature, CLCC and its partners have worked tirelessly to protect and enhance Connecticut's natural beauty and ecological health for all.



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Introducing the Land & Easement Acquisition Program (LEAP)

To empower land trusts to swiftly protect Connecticut's invaluable land and water, CLCC launched the **Land and Easement Acquisition Program (LEAP)** in January 2025. LEAP addresses the critical need for new and matching funding for land and easement acquisitions, helping land trusts bridge funding gaps and move at the speed of the real estate market. CLCC requires LEAP projects to close within 12 months or less, ensuring prompt conservation action.

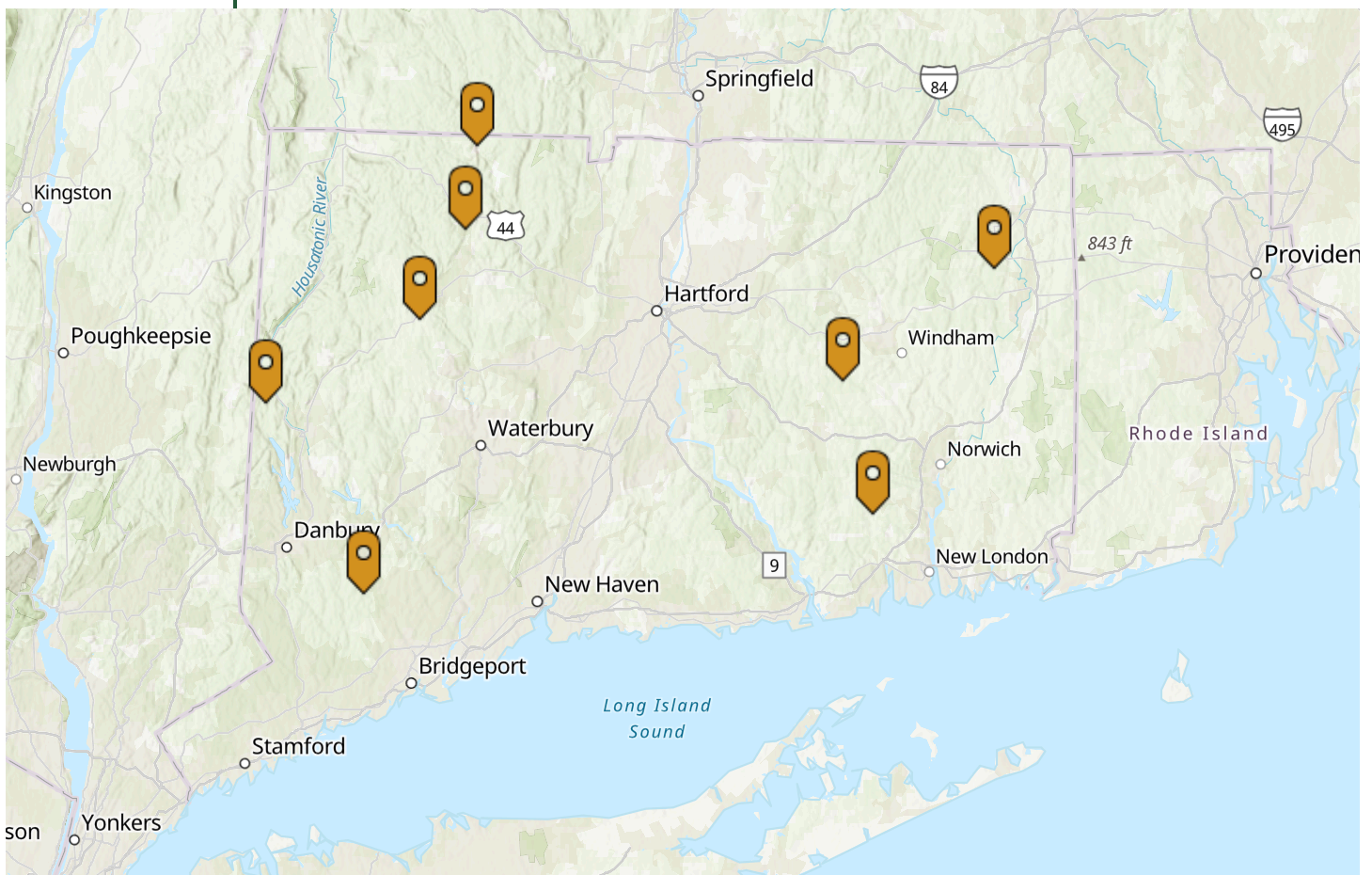
For land trust leaders, LEAP grants fill a gaping hole in conservation finance - fast access to capital. For private landowners, LEAP makes land trusts more viable buyers. And for the officials at the **Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection** (CT DEEP), LEAP creates more viable projects for its

Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) Grant Program.

“CLCC’s grant programs foster crucial partnerships and provide vital gap funding for smaller organizations. This enables a larger pool of conservation projects and expands our collective impact.”

Andrew Hoskins

Chief of Staff, CT DEEP



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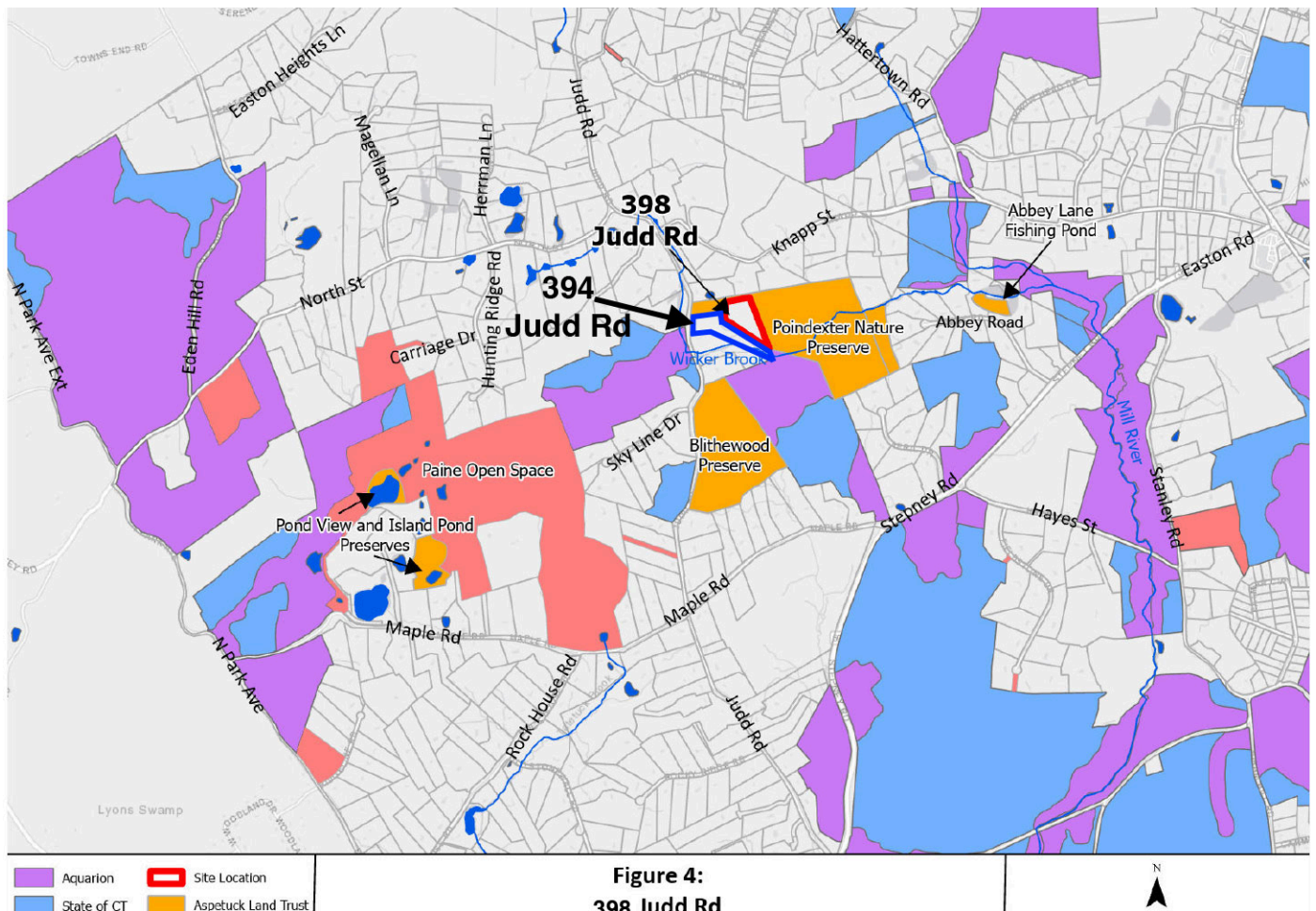
Since its launch, LEAP has awarded \$1,539,719 through nine grants, leading to the permanent protection of 7,278 acres across the state. This significant investment accelerates land conservation, safeguards critical habitats, enhances biodiversity, and expands public access to nature.

"LEAP provided crucial gap funding for our flagship Bond project. Land trusts need programs like this so that we can move faster and close more land deals."

Dennis Main

Board Chair, Avalonia Land Conservancy

Examples of LEAP projects follow. For more details on each LEAP grant-funded project, visit our [LEAP StoryMap](#).



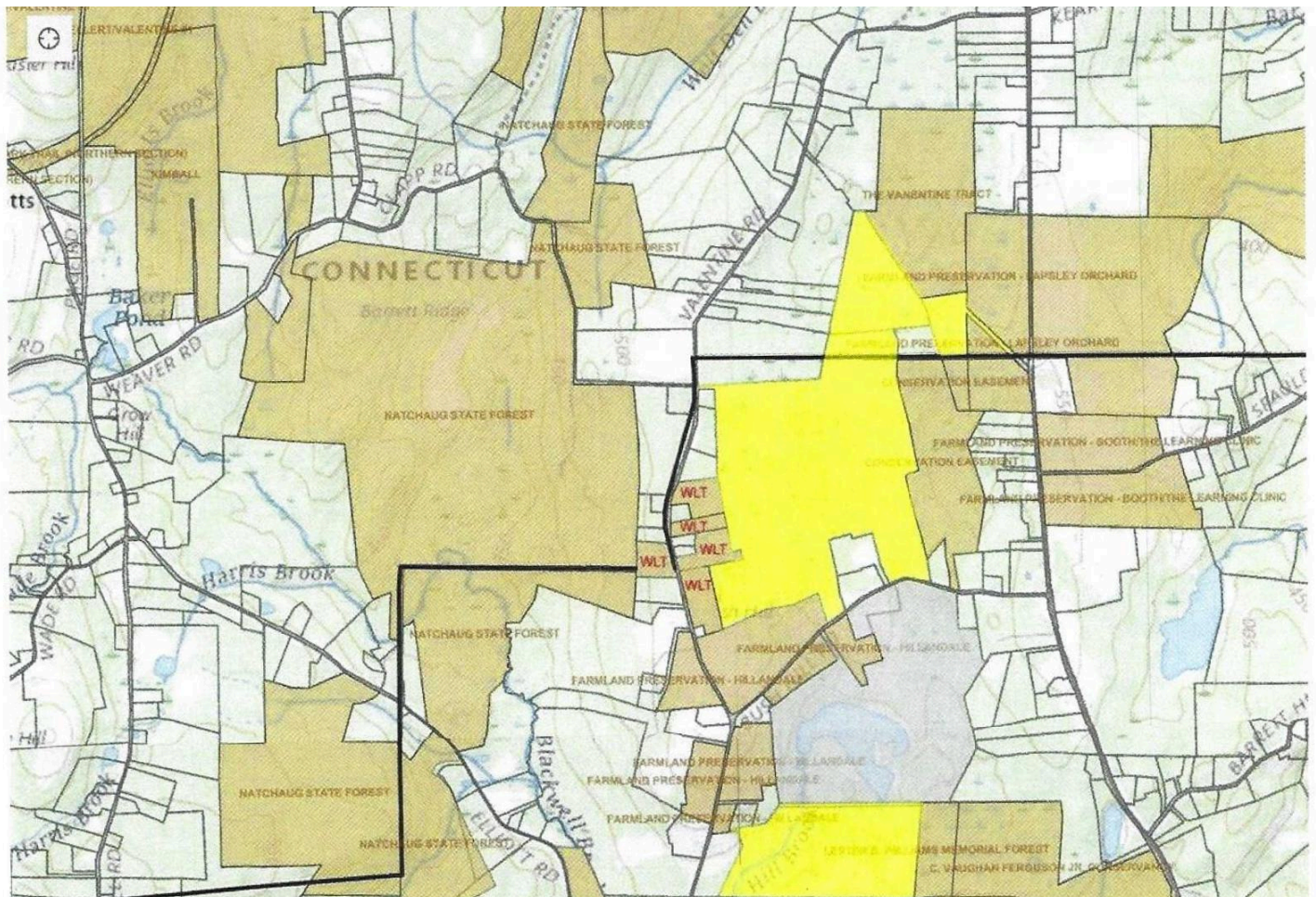
Aspetuck Land Trust was awarded \$50,000 for acquisition of a ~6-acre addition to Poindexter Preserve, and \$59,850 to acquire a second parcel that further expands the preserve by another ~4 acres.

These acquisitions will expand the popular preserve by over 15%, safeguard diverse wildlife habitats, scenic rock walls, a wetland and grassland meadow cherished by nature enthusiasts, and establish

The map displays the Sherman Wildlife Refuge in orange, situated between the Wimisink Preserve to the north and the Sherman area to the south. To the west is the Pawling Nature Preserve, and to the east is the Hunt Preserve. The Delaware River flows along the eastern boundary. Major roads 22, 39, and 55 are marked. The towns of Dover, New Milford, and Sherman are labeled. A thick black line runs diagonally across the map, likely representing a county boundary.

The Glen Brook property is a critical remaining farmland and forest parcel, featuring core forests, wetlands, and vital habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species like the Eastern Box Turtle, Wood Turtle, and Spotted Turtle.

The project will establish a public parking area and a new trail network, connecting to existing trails for a total of 4.5 miles of passive recreation opportunities.

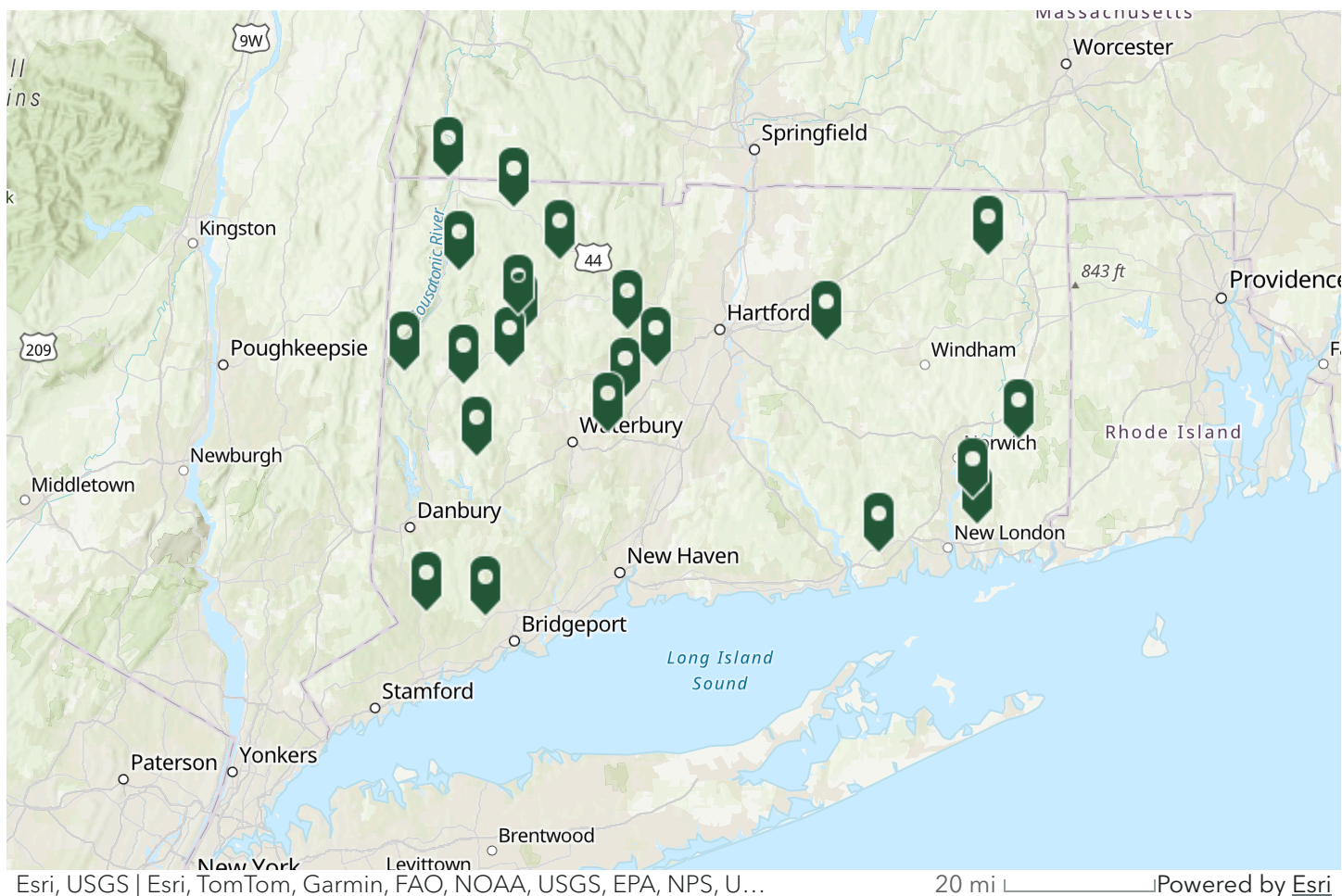


Wyndham Land Trust was awarded \$75,000 for the acquisition of the 320-acre Hillandale Woods property located in Pomfret and Brooklyn.

This project is significant for its connectivity, linking previously protected conservation lands and enhancing regional wildlife corridors.

For residents of Brooklyn, a town with a very low percentage of protected land, Hillandale Woods will offer opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, and bird watching on existing logging roads.





Transaction Assistance Grants (TAG)

CLCC's **Transaction Assistance Grants** (TAG) help land trusts cover essential due diligence costs such as land surveys, appraisals, and environmental assessments. These grants are indispensable for land trusts, helping close the gap in funding for due diligence activities that are challenging to fund.

From July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, CLCC awarded 22 TAG grants totaling \$233,488, facilitating the protection of 2,837 acres. Since launching the program in 2023, CLCC has provided a total of \$517,000 in TAG grants to 40 land trusts, helping them protect ~5,300 acres across Connecticut.



Conservation Advocacy

CLCC continued to be a leader in land conservation policy at the Capitol, working closely with legislators, CT DEEP, and CT Department of Agriculture to advance 2025 funding and policy priorities including restoring bond authorizations for the open space grant program; integrating nature-based solutions into the state's climate action, response, and preparedness policies; increasing funding to support open space and urban greenspace projects; and establishing a new grant program supporting farmland access for under-served farmers.

“For the state, CLCC’s leadership on the Natural Heritage and OSWA Review Board is invaluable, as it guides and informs decision-making on legislative changes and policy that directly impact land trusts.”

Lindsay Suhr

Director, Office of Land Acquisition and Management, CT DEEP



CLCC's Amy Blaymore Paterson at CT DEEP's OSWA grant announcement.

Along with Governor Lamont, CT DEEP Commissioner Dykes, and Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam, CLCC celebrated \$14.3M in OSWA grant funding to land trusts and municipalities. This funding was used to purchase and protect more than 2,270 acres of green

space across 25 properties in 22 towns and cities across Connecticut.

“Our role as the voice of Connecticut’s land trusts allows us to publicly advocate on issues that state agencies cannot directly address. It’s an empowering position, and one that delivers real, tangible results for land trusts and the broader land conservation community.”

Amy Blaymore Paterson

Executive Director, CLCC

Advocacy Goal: Support Funding & Staff For Land Conservation & Farmland Preservation

Policy Priority	Progress & Results
Champion consistent bond funding for CT DEEP land conservation, trails, and parks programs, including Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA), Urban Green & Community Garden (UGCG), Recreation & Natural Heritage Trust Program, and Recreational Trails Program, to protect wildlife, habitats, and clean water while providing equitable access for public recreation and local food production.	Bond authorizations for conservation programs have been renewed for the next two years. The bond package included \$10MM per year in authorizations for OSWA and UGCG. Also included in the bond package are authorizations of \$3MM per year to support the Recreation & Natural Heritage Trust Program, and \$10MM for the Recreational Trails Program.
Champion increased funding for the Community Investment Act and ensure the funds remain dedicated to supporting state programs for open space, agriculture, historic properties, and affordable housing.	The Community Investment Act received an increase after nearly 20 years! Twenty-five percent of the funds are allocated to CT DEEP to support the OSWA and UGCG programs.
Strengthen CT DEEP's capacity to streamline grant administration and engage in public-private partnerships that help the agency meet its mission.	CLCC's Executive Director, Amy, continues to serve as Chair of the state's Natural Heritage, Open Space, and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board. Yaw, CLCC's Director of Grants and

Policy Priority	Progress & Results
	Programs, continues to Co-Chair of the Land Subcommittee of the Connecticut Equity & Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC). In these capacities, Amy and Yaw represent the land trust community and support collaboration between land trusts and state agencies.
Support authorization for the CT Department of Agriculture to administer a farmland access program, including financial assistance to land trusts, new and historically marginalized farmers, and other tools to increase farmland access opportunities for farmers seeking land.	Public Act 25-141, An Act Establishing a Grant Program for Agricultural Preservation and Farmland Access Purposes, was passed overwhelmingly by the General Assembly. It authorizes the Department of Agriculture to create a new grant program to encourage and retain agricultural lands for agricultural purposes, supporting new and historically marginalized farmers.

“CLCC’s guidance and support in purchasing land is crucial for land trusts, especially the small land trusts I work with in Northwestern Connecticut. From completing due diligence to raising the funds, many acquisitions couldn’t happen without CLCC.”

Shelley Harms

Co-President, Norfolk Land Trust

Public Policy & Program Guidance



Colin Piteo of CLCC; Shelley Harms of Norfolk Land Trust; Sharon Lynch of Avalonia Land Conservancy; and Aaron Lefland of CLCC at Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C.

Member land trusts take advantage of several opportunities throughout the year to learn about public conservation policy and program. At the state level, CLCC partners with CT DEEP to help land trusts navigate application requirements for the OSHA and UGCG Grant Program. At the federal level, CLCC represents Connecticut's land trusts at the Land Trust Alliance's **Advocacy Days** event, sharing policy priorities with legislators and bringing guidance on federal regulations back to member land trusts.



2025 Katchen Coley Award for Excellence in Conservation

David Sargent of the North Branford Land Conservation Trust

CLCC was honored to present the **Katchen Coley Award for Excellence in Land Conservation** to **David Sargent**, President of the **North Branford Land Conservation Trust** (NBLCT). Under his guidance, NBLCT has navigated unique challenges to achieve remarkable success, acquiring key properties including the 22-acre Harrison Farm Preserve, the Starry Lane property, which created a crucial trail connection for the community, the 16-acre Angeloni Woodland Preserve, and a 37-acre parcel near Lake Gaillard. His dedication and vision make him a truly deserving recipient of this award.



Snapshots from the Katchen Coley Award Celebration and ribbon-cutting at the new Starry Lane Trail.



People

Land trusts and conservation allies across the state look to CLCC as an indispensable partner and leader, providing critical training and resources while fostering a collaborative and forward-thinking land conservation community. With CLCC and our network of partners in their corner, land trusts can achieve much more than they could working alone.

Building Land Trust Capacity

There are ~120 land trusts in Connecticut. Approximately 75% service a single town, with the rest operating regionally or on a statewide basis. That means that staff and board members are intricately connected to the community and adept at navigating local conservation challenges and opportunities. This grassroots strength, however, is also a barrier to success because most of the land trusts across the state are small, volunteer-run organizations with operating budgets of less than \$50,000. In a complex, costly, and changing conservation landscape, limited capacity is a persistent constraint felt by many land trusts.

That's why CLCC continues to build out training, technical assistance, and resources that help land trusts serve Connecticut's communities with excellence. This year, land trusts and conservation allies accessed several new resources, including:

"CLCC is an educator, a convener, and a source of financial and technical support that is indispensable to conservation in Kent and statewide."

Connie Manes

Executive Director, Kent Land Trust

Resources for Land Trusts

Board Development Toolkit: Land trusts often face challenges in maintaining a high-functioning board, recruiting new board members, orienting them to the organization, and sustaining high levels of engagement. That is why CLCC partnered with the **Land Trust Alliance** to create a Board Development Toolkit, a comprehensive, seven-part resource to help land trusts build stronger, more effective boards.

Strengthening Land Trusts Through Smart Fundraising: CLCC partnered with Danosky & Associates to develop and deliver a four-

part webinar series that equips land trust board members and staff with the tools and strategies for building a strong and sustainable fundraising program. From understanding donor behavior and building a reliable donor base to identifying prospects and cultivating major gifts, each session offers practical insights to help land trusts and conservation organizations raise the funds needed to acquire, protect, and steward land.



Anatomy of a Land Transaction :

Acquiring land and conservation easements is complex and time-consuming. To help land trusts navigate this process, CLCC created Anatomy of a Land Transaction, a seven-part webinar series designed to give land trust staff and board members a practical, well-rounded foundation in the core components of land conservation deals, from project selection, appraisals, and environmental due diligence, to surveys, closings, and post-closing responsibilities.



Technical Assistance Tailored to Land Trust Needs



Advanced Collaboration and Merger Assistance Program

CLCC's **Advanced Collaboration and Merger Assistance Program** is designed to help land trusts achieve stronger organizational health and effectiveness by pursuing structural realignment, advanced forms of collaboration, or merger with other organizations. In the past year, CLCC helped three groups of land trusts join forces for long-term sustainability and impact.



The **Norwalk Land Trust** merged with **Aspetuck Land Trust**, a regional organization serving Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Redding, Weston, Westport, and Wilton.

By joining Aspetuck, the Norwalk community will benefit from greater access to conservation resources, expertise, and capacity to protect and care for its open spaces.

By acquiring Norwalk's protected lands, Aspetuck will advance a regional vision for land conservation, the **Green Corridor 2030 Initiative**, which aims to connect and protect natural areas across Southwestern Connecticut.

“This merger is about securing the future of land conservation in Norwalk. ALT brings ten full-time staff, decades of expertise, and a proven track record in protecting land and connecting people to

nature. Together, we'll be able to do more, and do it better — forever.”

Lisa Shanahan

Board President, Norwalk Land Trust



The Barkhamsted Land Trust and Hartland Land Trust joined together to create the **Northwoods Land Conservancy**. By merging into a single entity, these two volunteer-led organizations seek to better serve their communities and protect and steward more land.

“We (Barkhamsted Land Trust) didn’t have any capacity, we were pretty much a defunct organization, and we were concerned about what’s going to happen to our properties if the land trust couldn’t continue to operate. Joining forces with

Hartland Land Trust was extremely worthwhile for land conservation in both towns. It's the way to go."

Roger Behrens

Board Member, Northwoods Land Conservancy

The New Roxbury Land Trust merged with **Wyndham Land Trust**, providing enhanced protection and preservation of land in Woodstock and Union. For Wyndham Land Trust, the merger expands its footprint and forms one of the largest land trusts in the state, encompassing land in eleven towns in Northeastern Connecticut.





The Housatonic River by the Housatonic Valley Association

Celebrating Land Trust Leadership: Lynn Werner, CLCC's 2025 Conservation Hero Award Winner

Land conservation is a local endeavor, with each community presenting its own challenges. That's what makes Lynn Werner's legacy so remarkable. CLCC honored her with our 2025 Conservation Hero Award for her transformative leadership at the **Housatonic Valley Association** (HVA), where she served as Executive Director for three decades. Lynn's collaborative approach fostered partnerships that have protected vital landscapes across town and state borders. She co-founded the **Litchfield Hills Greenprint**, which has conserved thousands of acres across Northwest Connecticut. She served as a key player in the Stanley Works effort, preserving over 5,000 acres along the Housatonic River. Her vision led to the Wild and Scenic designation for a 41-mile stretch of the river and the Follow the Forest initiative to connect forest habitats across the Northeast.

Congratulations, Lynn. Your expansive and enduring impact inspires us all.



Cultivating Conservation Connections & Collaboration



"CLCC is a great convener, and its annual conference and workshops provide invaluable training and resources that help land trust leaders acquire new skills, connect with peers, and talk through challenges and successes. It's really good content that improves overall the capacity and effectiveness of land trusts."

If you were to ask the staff and volunteers of your local land trust, "Where's the best place to learn about land conservation in Connecticut?", chances are their response will include CLCC's Connecticut Land Conservation Conference. The annual event, the largest gathering of conservation professionals in the state,

welcomed over 600 participants in 2025, marking the largest turnout in its 41-year history. Representatives from land trusts, conservation groups, municipal commissions, state and federal agencies, students, and allies passionate about conserving Connecticut's natural and working landscapes gathered to make connections and learn from one another on topics such as land acquisition and conservation funding; protecting biodiversity and wildlife; land use planning, tools, and technology; and stewardship and natural climate solutions.





Snapshots from the 41st annual Connecticut Land Conservation Conference in March, 2025.

“Wherever I choose to be, I belong.”

Dudley Edmondson

Photographer, Filmmaker, Writer, Activist

The keynote address, delivered by photographer, filmmaker, writer, and activist Dudley Edmondson, focused on community-centered conservation. Dudley reminded the attendees that nature is everywhere. Whether in a park in Hartford or a preserve in Northwest Connecticut, every outdoor space can spark a lifelong love for the natural world. The future of conservation depends on our community’s ability to foster these connections and ensure

everyone has access to nature's benefits and cares about protecting them for generations to come.

SAVE THE DATE!

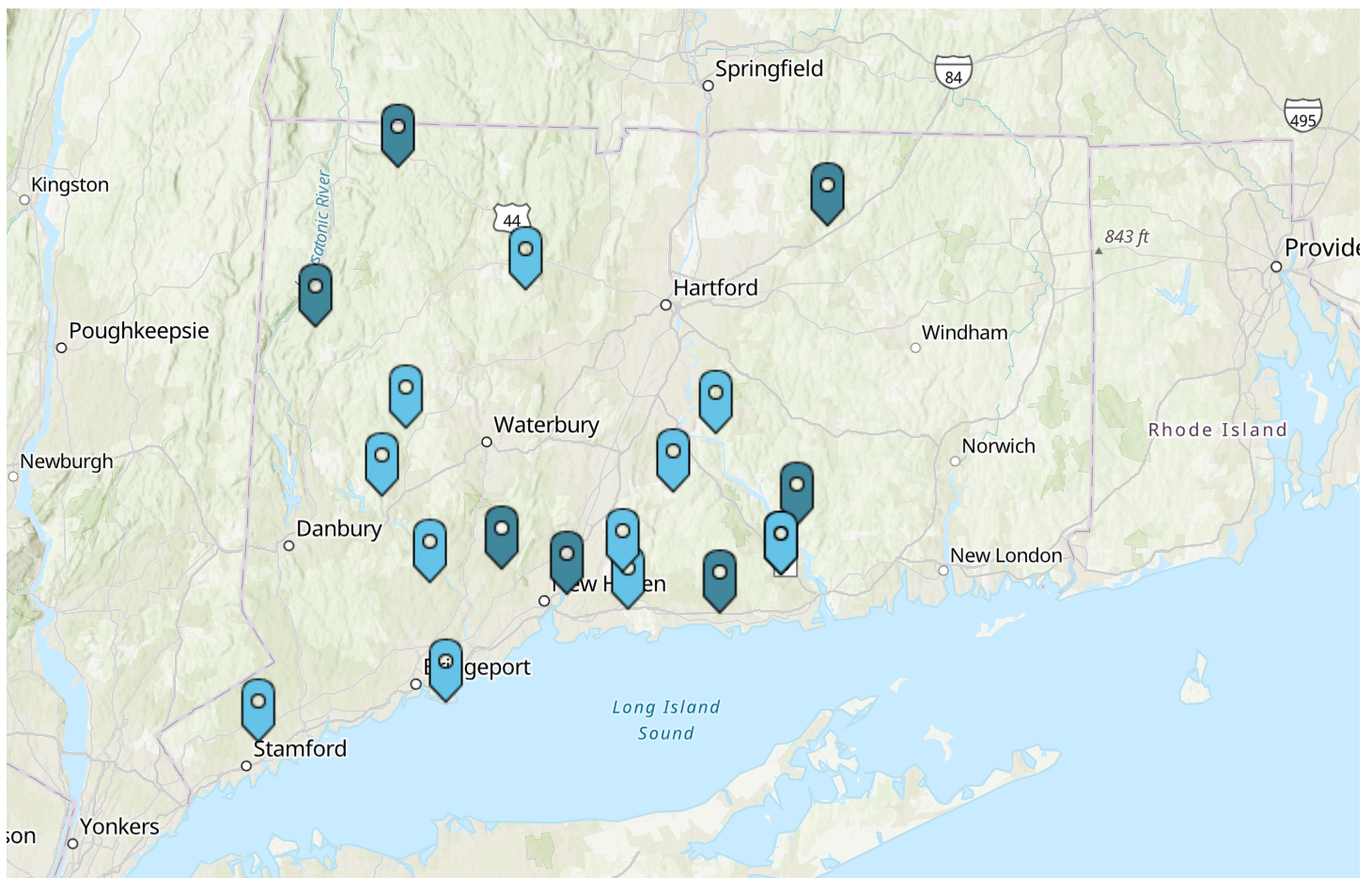
The 2026 Connecticut Land Conservation Conference will take place on March 21 at Wesleyan University!



Connie Manes and Angus Gracey of the Kent Land Trust at the East Kent Hamlet Nature Preserve

Stewardship

Land trusts are at the forefront of addressing the environmental threats of climate change. Land stewards are charged with the long-term care of Connecticut's natural lands. They are leading the way in testing and deploying climate-smart stewardship practices that strengthen environmental resilience, enhance biodiversity, and safeguard land from stressors such as invasive species and extreme weather events.



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Advancing Climate-Smart Stewardship Practices

CLCC's **Climate-Smart Land Stewardship Grant Program** helps land trusts integrate climate mitigation, resilience, and adaptation into the stewardship of conserved lands. This program provides grants for developing and executing stewardship plans that support landscape resilience, sequester carbon, and nourish biodiversity.

In 2025, CLCC awarded 17 grants to land trusts - eleven planning grants and six implementation grants - totaling \$280,000. The funded projects demonstrate proactive, practical, and innovative nature-based solutions, which may involve creating forest management plans, restoring pollinator meadows and early successional habitats, and implementing climate-smart forestry demonstrations.

“Climate-smart projects are tangible ways to take direct local action through stewardship and channel climate anxiety into something hopeful. As we witness real-time changes and drastic climate events unfolding around us, this work gives us a way to think about the future, support the health of our landscapes, and connect others with resources to do the same.”

Ricky Bentley

Program Manager, CLCC

Funding for CLCC’s Climate-Smart Stewardship Grant Program was paid for by the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Grant program, established through Public Act 22-118, and awarded and administered by the **Connecticut Department of Agriculture**.

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council was one of twelve organizations selected to distribute sub-grants to land trusts. In 2025, CLCC completed distribution of its Climate-Smart funds.

Examples of climate-smart projects follow. For more details on each Climate-Smart Land Stewardship grant-funded project, visit our **Climate-Smart StoryMap**.



Joshua's Trust is utilizing an implementation grant to advance a restoration project at the **Madeline Regan Preserve** in Tolland, focused on regenerating pitch pine and oak, removing invasive species, and increasing biodiversity in an area currently dominated by white pine.

Pitch pine-scrub oak barrens are among Connecticut's most threatened terrestrial habitats. The aim is to open up the area to promote regeneration, potentially using prescribed burns to remove pine duff and create space for seedlings.

This project will enhance climate resilience by reducing the risk of blowdown and pest outbreaks typical in dense, even-aged pine stands, while fostering a more diverse and structurally complex forest.

“Land trusts don't have many options for funding that supports land management, and that's a big

problem. We have a lot of forests in Connecticut and across New England, but they're facing serious threats from climate change, invasive species, and ongoing development pressure. CLCC's climate-smart program is enabling us to proactively care for and strengthen our forests."

David McCarthy

Executive Director, Joshua's Trust



Great Mountain Forest's climate-smart project is enhancing the resilience and productivity of its forest by addressing several areas with stalled growth and low diversity. Techniques include planting climate-adapted native trees, and thinning overcrowded young trees to accelerate succession, supported by invasive species removal.

With funding from a CLCC implementation grant, GMF is improving structural complexity and fostering a diverse, multi-aged forest. These efforts will significantly enhance carbon sequestration and serve as a model for climate-smart forestry.

“As New England faces intensifying climate pressures, resilient and diverse forests are more important than ever. Funding from CLCC enables us to pursue proactive, climate-smart forest management practices that support diverse, adaptive ecosystems capable of withstanding unpredictable climate disruptions.”

Mike Zarfos

Executive Director, Great Mountain Forest



The **Woodbridge Park Association** (WPA) is working to promote forest health, resilience, and climate mitigation through climate-

smart forestry and invasive species control at **Alice Newton Street Memorial Park**. This project marks the first step in implementing WPA's ten-year Climate-Smart Forest Stewardship Plan, focusing on “ **Beech Treatment for Forest Resilience** .”

The project is designed as an experiment to learn and disseminate effective strategies for controlling beech affected by beech leaf disease, a new threat to forest health in Connecticut. Through demonstration, signage, guided hikes, newsletters, and educational presentations, WPA will raise awareness about beech disease, invasive plant impacts, and climate-smart forestry, engaging residents in caring for the health and resilience of local forests.

“CLCC's support acts as a stamp of approval, giving our forest stewardship efforts greater credibility. Because CLCC is helping fund our work, the community is more willing to trust and support the Woodbridge Park Association's efforts.”

Andrea Urbano

Board Member, Woodbridge Park Association



Climate-Smart Advocacy

Advocacy Goal: Protect and Incentivize Nature-Based Solutions and Resilience

Policy Priority	Progress & Results
Champion Nature-Based Solutions as a priority and preferred alternative in state policies, goals, and legislation to allow Connecticut’s ecosystems to naturally sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase biodiversity, and protect against climate change impacts that negatively affect the state’s public health and infrastructure.	The CT General Assembly passed major climate legislation, including provisions regarding Nature-Based Solutions: - Public Act 25-125 (HB 5004), the Climate Action Bill codifies the use of Nature-Based Solutions (forests, trees, meadows, wetlands, riparian buffers, healthy soils, etc.) as part of the state’s comprehensive climate action strategy. - Public Act 25-33 (SB 9), the Climate Resiliency Bill provides planning tools for municipalities to address climate preparedness and response. The bill includes prioritizing Nature-Based Solutions in municipal resiliency improvement districts. It also bans neonicotinoids on turfgrass and restricts the use of rodenticides to certified professionals.
Ensure public lands, including state parks, forests, wildlife management	Legislative victories protecting public lands included:

Policy Priority	Progress & Results
areas, and other natural and working lands of high conservation value, are protected.	- Passing Special Act 25-22 (SB 1565) transferring ~47 acres of floodplain along the Shetucket River, deemed surplus property by the Department of Transportation, to the Avalonia Land Conservancy. - Defeating HB 7282 which would have conveyed a portion of the Mattatuck State Forest in Plymouth to a private entity contrary to state conservation goals.



CLCC's Yaw Darko leads a Bird & Hike outing with the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network at Riverside Park in Hartford.

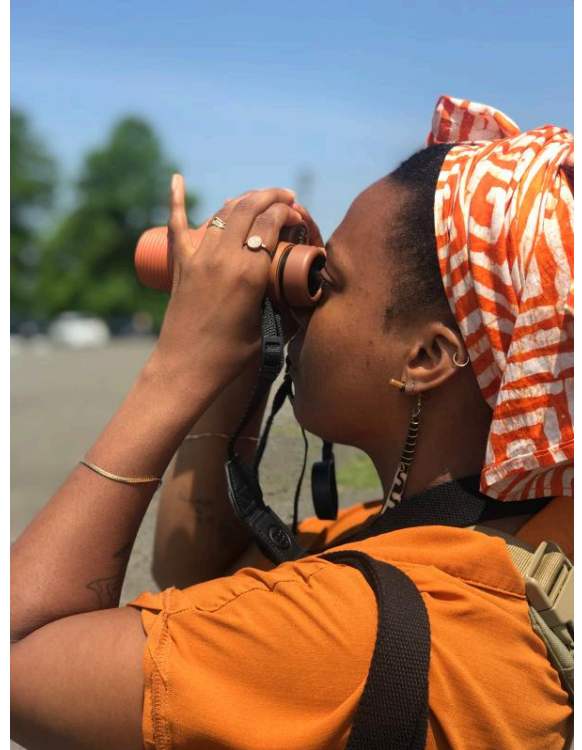
Community

Community-Centered Conservation aims to broaden the conservation movement to include people as well as large-scale landscapes and ecological connectivity. People have too often been sidelined or excluded from the equation, thus overlooking a critical link between healthy ecosystems and healthy communities.

CLCC defines this approach by centering people—their voices, needs, and lived experiences—in order to achieve a more inclusive and effective conservation movement. By engaging more groups, CLCC seeks to help land trusts build stronger communities and strengthen long-term support for the land itself, underpinned by the belief that conservation must be for everyone.

Bird & Hikes

CLCC's **Bird & Hike Program** aims to provide opportunities for guided birding outings on land trust preserves, municipal parks, and other green spaces specifically aimed at historically marginalized groups and communities. These events are designed to be a cornerstone of CLCC's community conservation efforts, helping to connect people with nature in welcoming environments to ignite the passion of new environmentalists and conservationists.



Amar'e, sixth grader at Adam J. Lewis Academy in Bridgeport, experienced birdwatching for the first time on a bird and hike led by CLCC's Yaw O. Darko at Seaside Park.

Now, he's hooked on birds and wants to learn more and do whatever he can to help. For an independent project, he wanted to build a nest platform for ospreys, one of the species he encountered on his bird and hike.

First, he interviewed Yaw to learn a little more about how he got involved in birding.

What made you want to help birds?

Birds are fascinating creatures—they come in all shapes, sizes, and colors; they embark on incredible migration journeys; and their interactions with each other and their habitats are mesmerizing to watch.

As I spent more time observing birds and appreciating their role in ecosystems, I developed a deep sense of connection with them. Seeing how human actions can both harm and help birds made me want to take an active role in conservation. Habitat destruction, pollution, and climate change threaten many species, but thoughtful conservation efforts—such as habitat restoration, nest protection, and community education—can make a real difference.

This realization motivated me to ensure that others are aware of the birds around them, whether in urban, suburban, or rural spaces. By

helping people see and understand birds, I hope to inspire more individuals to care for and protect them.





An Osprey nest in Bridgeport

What has been your experience with ospreys?

Ospreys are one of my favorite birds to watch, especially when they are hunting. They are incredible fish hunters, often seen hovering over the water before diving feet-first to catch fish.

I've observed them in Bridgeport at Ash Creek and Seaside Park; in Wethersfield and Hartford along the Connecticut River; and at different points along the Long Island Sound. I look forward to seeing them during Springtime when they return to their nest and raise their young.

Thank you to each of the organizations that partnered with us to get people outside and interested in bird matters.

Bird & Hike Partners	Location	Town
Great Meadows Conservation Trust, Dudley Edmondson, Men of Color Hike CT, Outdoor Afro, Keney Park Sustainability Project	Wood Parcel	Wethersfield
Sovereign Land Trust, Outdoor Afro	Westmoor Park	West Hartford
Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, Sierra Club Connecticut	Knowlton Park	Bridgeport
Hamden Land Conservation Trust, African American Society 024	Brooksvale Park	Hamden
Gather New Haven, Outdoor Afro	Quinnipiac Meadows	New Haven
Great Mountain Forest	Great Mountain Forest	Norfolk
Aspetuck Land Trust, Sierra Club Connecticut, AJ Lewis Academy	Seaside Park	Bridgeport
The Carver Foundation	Jefferson School	Norwalk

Bird & Hike Partners	Location	Town
Sierra Club Connecticut, Boy & Girl Scouts	Northwest Park	Windsor
Interreligious Eco-Justice Network	Riverside Park	Hartford
Connecticut Forest & Parks Association, Milner Middle School, Leadership Greater Hartford	Keney Park	Hartford



A Red-tailed Hawk at Strickland Property in Middlefield/Middletown by AnneMarie Goenne.



Land Trusts & Affordable Housing

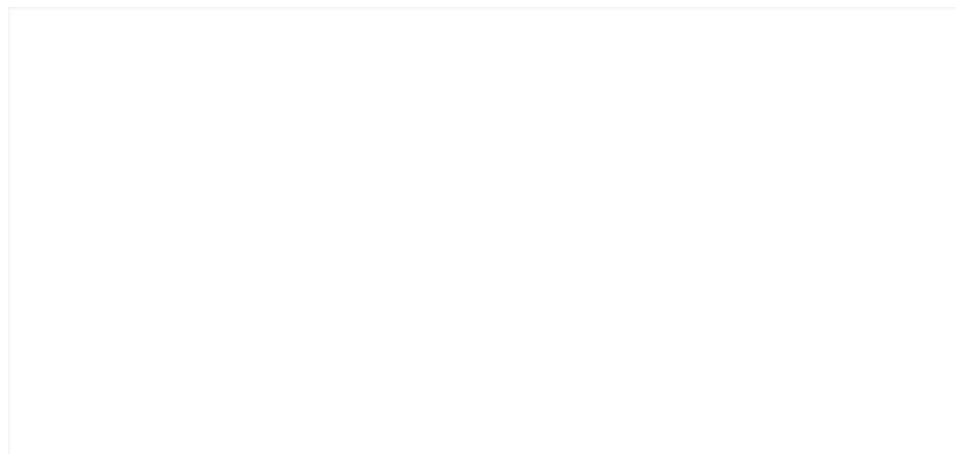
If Connecticut values a vibrant and green Connecticut, its residents must ensure everyone has a place to live. Our new report, **Connecticut Land Conservation Trusts & Affordable Housing**, offers a fresh perspective on how land trusts can help address the state's housing crisis.

"This report is both a recognition of the thoughtful work many land trusts are already doing and an opportunity to learn more and take action for our broader community. Land trusts have an opportunity to expand their impact by embracing partnerships that support affordable housing – work that complements our conservation values and deepens our relevance in the communities we serve."

Amy Blaymore Paterson

Executive Director, CLCC

CLCC's role is to demystify this issue and inspire action. By fostering dialogue, CLCC aims to help land trusts find common ground with housing groups. "The most important thing is to make this a normative part of our conversation," said Connie Manes of the Kent Land Trust. "We need places where everyone who contributes to our community can live. There is no charity implied in that. It's a matter of equity."

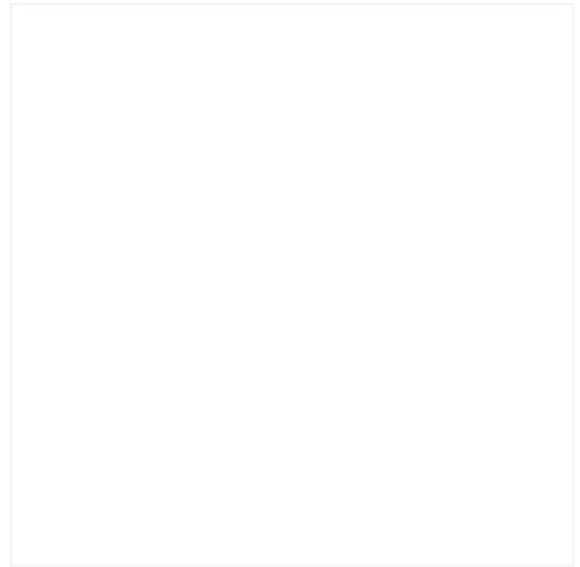




Land Trusts & Food Insecurity

In partnership with **Steep Rock Association** (SRA), CLCC launched a project to connect land trusts with social service organizations, aiming to achieve a common goal: growing and distributing healthy food to people and families who need it most.

Funded by the **Connecticut Community Foundation**, the effort centered on relationship- building between land trusts and food security organizations in Waterbury through a series of roundtables and a Bird & Hike at SRA's Macricostas Preserve. The groups came together and forged new alliances to discuss how to better meet the need for more hands-on education and the growing demand for fresh food.



CLCC's Ricky Bentley with Brian Hagenbuch, Executive Director of the Steep Rock Association

To build on this momentum, SRA hosted workshops for community groups at its Judea Garden, offering practical experience in operating a community garden that addresses local food needs. This project has laid the groundwork for future collaboration, showing how land trusts can use their resources—beyond acquiring and protecting land—to help build more resilient and equitable communities.

Another community organization hoping to inspire land trusts to start community gardens on their land is **Healing By Growing Farms**. The East Haven-based organization maintains a small farm in a residential neighborhood that provides support for brain injury and trauma survivors. Produce grown at the farm is donated to neighbors in need and distributed by local community groups.



2025 Excellence in Community Engagement Award

Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) with special recognition of Lynn & Dan O'Connell

Remember the first time you saw a real waterfall? A group of second graders experienced one for the first time when they hiked at Sheep Farm North, a preserve managed by the **Groton Open Space Association** (GOSA). The students were visiting through the GOSA/Groton Public Schools hiking program, which annually introduces over 600 students in grades K-3 to local preserves and green spaces. Lynn and Dan helped create and launch the partnership in 2023, and organize volunteer-led hikes that allow kids to explore and enjoy their natural environment, boosting their interest in outdoor activity, science, and land stewardship.

"It's fun to spend time in nature, and to be in a tech-free environment."

Connor

Second Grade, Groton



Snapshots from the GOSA Award Celebration and hike with two busloads of students.



About Us

Progress Towards a Strategic Vision

In a world where environmental challenges are ever-evolving, CLCC remains steadfast in its mission to elevate and strengthen land

conservation in Connecticut.

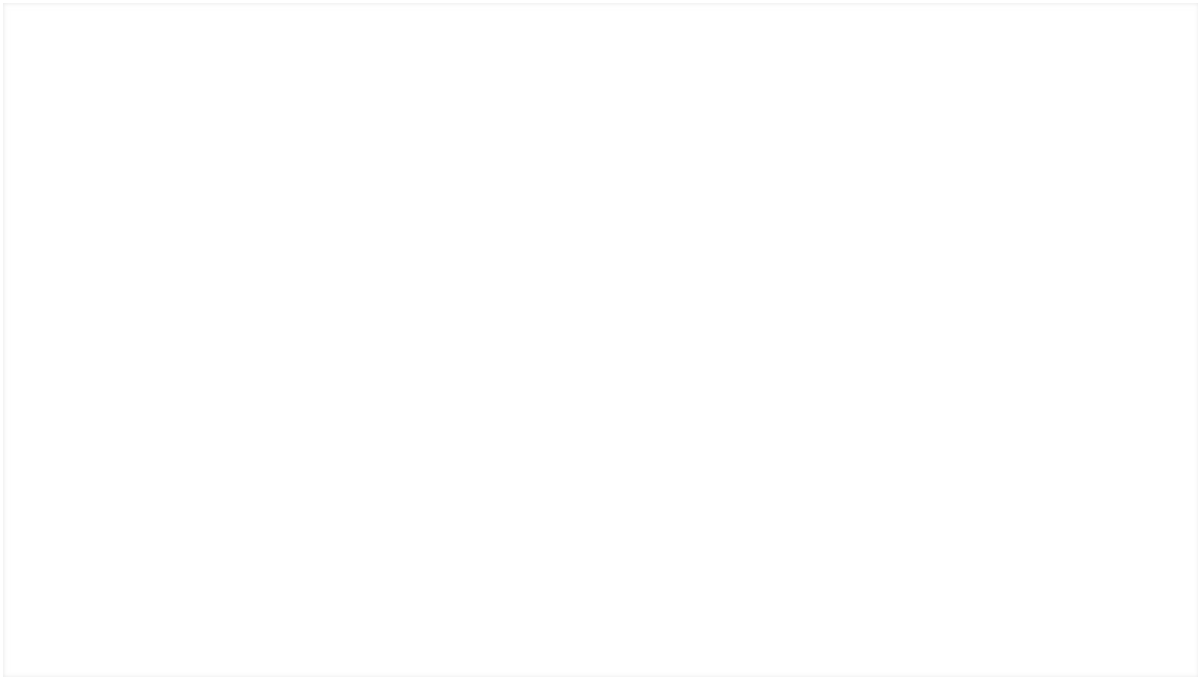
Connecticut's land trusts are doing extraordinary work conserving 200,000+ acres of natural lands - more than half of all protected land in Connecticut. Unfortunately, Connecticut's green space and its wildlife have never been more threatened. From the climate crisis to increased development pressure, natural lands are becoming degraded, disconnected, and destroyed. Limited public investments in land conservation and barriers to equitable access further challenge efforts to keep Connecticut green.

Connecticut's land trusts and land conservation community are poised to respond to these threats by accelerating the rate of land protection and using their land to address community needs. CLCC is here to help, and we are working to expand our role as a primary resource for Connecticut's land trusts.

Our **strategic goals for 2023-2027** include:

1. Dramatically increase the pace and amount of land protected in Connecticut.
2. Build a strong, sustainable land conservation community with capacity to permanently conserve and steward natural and working lands.
3. Enhance permanence of protected lands.
4. Integrate diversity, equity, inclusivity, and environmental justice into all aspects of land conservation.
5. Strengthen CLCC's organizational capacity and sustainability to lead the state's land conservation community.

Thank you for being a crucial part of this journey.



CLCC's Board and Staff gather in Lyme.

Board of Directors & Staff

Visit our website to learn more about CLCC's **Board of Directors** and **staff**.

New Board Leadership: Congratulations to Jonelle Reynolds of Coventry, CLCC's new Vice-Chair.

New Board Members: We added two new members to our governing board. Welcome to CLCC's Board of Directors, Celina Vansetti of Killingworth and Charlie Stebbins of Fairfield.

Thank You: Two members of our governing board completed their terms. Thank you to Mandi Careathers of Bloomfield and Doris Johnson of Windsor for all you do to make Connecticut green for everyone.



Staff Promotions: Congratulations to Yaw O. Darko and Ricky Bentley, who earned promotions to Director, Grants & Programs and Program Manager, respectively.

New Staff Members: Welcome to CLCC, Vanessa Daye, Community Conservation Coordinator; Rebecca Dorsey, 2025-2026 Sandy Breslin Conservation Fellow; Michael J. Sikora, Manager of Communications; and Brett Thompson, Office & Operations Manager.

Thank You: Thank you to Colin Piteo, 2024-2025 Sandy Breslin Conservation Fellow! We are grateful for your contribution to our mission and vision for land conservation in Connecticut.



Land Trust Members (2025)



“As a board member of my small town’s land trust, I have experienced CLCC’s relevance by way of its advocacy, technical and educational support, and access to much needed funding for land conservation.”

Celina Vansetti

Vice President, Killingworth Land Conservation Trust
Board Member, CLCC



A Mockingbird snacks on a blackberry at Fire Island in Wallingford. Photo by AnneMarie Goenne.

Financials

This past year, CLCC bolstered its resources, expertise, and collaborations to better equip our 120 land trusts to meet today's complex conservation challenges.

Through the steadfast dedication of land trusts, partners, and your invaluable support, we stand financially prepared for this pivotal time. Every gift, whether immediate or recurring, directly funds the technical resources and grants land trusts need to make conservation happen across the state.

Visit CLCC's website for its full **financial statement**.

About CLCC

The **Connecticut Land Conservation Council** is a nonprofit dedicated to strengthening and uniting land trusts and communities to permanently protect the state's natural and working lands.

Our **mission** is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut.

We pursue our mission by serving as the **voice and support system for Connecticut's land trusts**. We provide programs and services that help land trusts succeed, including grant funding, technical assistance, and advocacy.

Our **vision** is a future where every Connecticut community is supported and sustained by a diverse mix of conserved land, and land conservation is embraced as an essential community value.

Connect

- **Find Your Local Land Trust**
- **Sign Up for our Newsletter**
- Find Us on **Instagram**, **Facebook**, and **LinkedIn**