

The Habitat

A newsletter of the Connecticut Association of Conservation & Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.

Spring 2024

volume 36 number 1



Join us in Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of CACIWC and *The Habitat*!

This is a very special year for us and our members as 2024 marks the **50th Anniversary of CACIWC** and our publication, *The Habitat*! As part of the anniversary celebration, CACIWC will be reviewing the many decades of progress in conservation and habitat protection by our member commissions as we all prepare for future efforts impacted by climate change and other challenges.

A major part of our celebration will be our **2024 Annual Meeting & Environmental Conference**, which is scheduled for Saturday, November 16, 2024. We

are very pleased to announce that we are returning to the **Bristol Event Center** for this special 50th anniversary celebration conference. Additional details will be posted at www.caciwc.org.

As part of our anniversary celebrations, we will be including articles in *The Habitat* on the history of CACIWC along with stories on commission activities throughout the past five decades. Please contact us at Board@caciwc.org if you wish to include stories and photos of early years of habitat protection by your town commissions. 🍁

CACIWC's 46th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference held on November 11, 2023

The CACIWC Board of Directors extends their appreciation to the many members and guests who were able to participate in our **46th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference**. This conference, held on Saturday, November 11, 2023, was our first conference hosted at the spacious, newly opened **Bristol Event Center** in Bristol, Connecticut. The conference theme, "*Celebrating Connecticut's Conservation Commissioners*," focused on the important work of our conservation commissioners and staff, while recognizing the anniversaries of several key Connecticut legislative initiatives which expanded the scope and size our state's municipal Conservation Commissions.

We were pleased to welcome **James O'Donnell, PhD, University of Connecticut Professor of Marine Sciences and Executive Director of the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA)** as our 2023 conference keynote speaker.

As a physical oceanographer studying the various physical processes that determine the circulation and transport of materials in the coastal ocean, Dr. O'Donnell was uniquely qualified to present his keynote address, entitled: "***Climate Change in Connecticut (and what we are going about it).***"



Keynote speaker James O'Donnell, PhD.
Photo by Jeff Mills.

Professor O'Donnell earned a BSc. (Hons) in Applied Physics from Strathclyde University in Scotland, and a MS and PhD in Oceanography from the University of Delaware. After two years as a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Applied

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www.caciwc.org

CACIWC News

Anniversary years are always a time for both a reflection back and a look forward to the future, and this year is no exception for us as CACIWC prepares to celebrate the **50th Anniversary** of our organization. While the Connecticut Association of Conservation Commissions (CACC) was organized in 1964, the approval of the Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act (IWWA) by the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) in May 1972, led to the formation of local inland wetlands commissions to work alongside existing conservation commissions in towns throughout Connecticut. Two years later in 1974, CACC became CACIWC to also provide support to these new land use commissions.

Our newly expanded organization recognized the need for a publication to provide important information to the increasing numbers of conservation commissions and recently authorized inland wetlands commissions. After working to design a useful initial format for this publication, the first issue of *The Habitat* was distributed in 1974. Many revisions and upgrades have led to the latest full color, web-link enabled electronic format that you are reading today.

As mentioned on the cover story of this issue, CACIWC plans a series special of articles on our early history in *The Habitat*, along with the dedication of our upcoming 47th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference to celebrate this anniversary year. We are requesting stories and photos of the early years of habitat protection by both inland wetlands and conservation commissions in your town. Please watch our website for periodic updates. We hope to highlight your town's many decades of service as part of our year-long celebration!

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Protecting the Public Trust in Connecticut: Focus on Wildlands and Water

by Susan A. Masino, PhD

Natural land and the clean water it protects are the foundation of our common, long-term ecological lifelines. In Connecticut there is an explicit public trust in air, water, and other natural resources. Per Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 439, Sec. 22a-15:

“It is hereby found and declared that there is a public trust in the air, water and other natural resources of the state of Connecticut and that each person is entitled to the protection, preservation and enhancement of the same. It is further found and declared that it is in the public interest to provide all persons with an adequate remedy to protect the air, water and other natural resources from unreasonable pollution, impairment or destruction.”

Protecting the public trust in the 21st century means identifying, protecting, and connecting our common lifelines wherever possible across Connecticut’s urban, suburban, and rural communities. Protecting land is the best (and in some cases only) way to ensure that our air, water, and other natural resources are not unreasonably impaired or destroyed.

Unfortunately, these critical public trust lifelines can be overlooked: as a neuroscientist, I know that we have powerful habits, we get stressed and distracted, we consistently look for things to “do.” “Doing more” is a bias of our modern brains, whereas protecting natural land and water is a clear example

of where we can practice restraint and humility: do less, monitor and take data, and establish the foundation of our collective wellbeing, including our brain health. We are then best poised to make better - and even best - decisions for siting energy, housing, resource production, research, transportation, infrastructure and more.

Conservation Commissions and the Public Trust

Conservation Commissions play a vital role in safeguarding the public trust. Per Chapter 97, Section 7-131a of the Connecticut General Statutes the commissions are tasked with “the development, conservation, supervision and regulation of natural resources, including water resources” within their town. Conservation Commissions can identify and advocate for key pieces and critical habitats, including headwaters and old-growth forests.

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Connecticut's Solid Waste Crisis and What Towns Can Do About It: Food Redistribution and Recycling

The Crisis:

Since Connecticut's municipal landfills filled and closed, most of our solid waste has been sent to in-state waste-to-energy incinerators. A solid waste crisis has been brewing for years, and was exacerbated when Hartford's Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority, MIRA, closed its waste-to-energy incinerator in 2022, significantly reducing in-state waste processing capacity. This has resulted in **40% of Connecticut's waste** being shipped out of state for disposal, mostly to **landfills in Pennsylvania and Ohio**. The rest of CT's solid waste goes to other CT waste-to-energy incinerators, which are at various stages of end-of-life. (Most incinerators close **within 30 years** and CT hasn't built one since **1995**). The CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and their consultant, Waste Zero, project that disposal costs could **quintuple by 2050** (NVCOG, 2024).

The Role of Food Waste:

22% of CT's solid waste by weight is food waste, and **58% of methane emissions** from landfills are from food waste. Food scraps are wet, heavy, expensive to transport and don't burn well in incinerators. And much of that food is edible. **A 2022 study** estimated that 17% of CT residents are **food and nutrition insecure**. In other words, they don't have access to sufficient, safe, affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods.

What needs to be done?

Behavior change: CT needs to decrease solid waste and wasted food and increase recycling of food scraps and other recyclables. CT's first line

of defense should be preventing food waste and redistributing food, not throwing it away.

How can we change behaviors?


The most expeditious way to change behaviors is to enact and enforce laws that require food redistribution, ban food scraps in solid waste and require unit-based pricing. Such legislative bills have been and will be proposed to the CT Legislature. In fact, there is already **a law** (CGA, 2023) that requires CT establishments that produce 26 tons+ of food scraps/year to recycle food scraps. This law now includes healthcare facilities, schools, hotels, convention centers, supermarkets, etc. Thus far State legislators have been reluctant to go farther, but towns such as <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/act/Pa/pdf/2023PA-00170-R00HB-06664-PA.PDF> **Stonington** and **Mansfield** have been using Unit Based Pricing (otherwise known as Pay As You Throw/PAYT) for 40+ years, with good results.

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Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University, England, he joined the faculty of the University of Connecticut in 1987 and was appointed Professor in 1999. He was elected to the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering in 2009 and was appointed to be Executive Director of the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) in 2014.

During his keynote address, Professor O'Donnell outlined evidence that the climate of the earth is changing. He noted that, even if global greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced soon, the world will be warmer, the ocean deeper, storm winds stronger, and high rainfall events will be more intense. He emphasized that since the patterns of development and the extensive infrastructure of Connecticut didn't anticipate these conditions, much is at risk. During his presentation, he described the science and engineering challenges that CIRCA has undertaken. Professor O'Donnell summarized the changes that we expect, and the process we have used to create a what he terms a "Pipeline of Projects" and illustrated the key components of this approach by discussing some specific projects. He concluded with a summary of important lessons about effective adaptation planning and highlighted some outstanding issues that need attention.

WORKSHOPS

Following the fascinating keynote presentation, our 2023 annual conference proceeded to our twelve workshops, organized in four tracks designed for both new and experienced conservation and inland wetlands commissions and their staff. These four tracks included our conference theme along with several other key focus areas: *A. Assessing & preserving our forests, wetlands, & their inhabitants; B. Inland wetlands & water-course agency evaluation of applications, training, & wetlands law; C. Climate impact, increasing resiliency, and the role of CT conservation commissions; and D. Helping our commissions evaluate and respond to evolving issues.*

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Three workshops of interest to Connecticut commissions were scheduled in Track A, entitled, *Assessing & preserving our forests, wetlands & their inhabitants*.

The first track A workshop, “**Morticulture: The Abundant Life in Old & Dead Trees**,” was presented by Margery C. B. Winters, Chair, Simsbury Conservation Commission/Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency, President, Simsbury Land Trust & Assistant Director, Roaring Brook Nature Center. In her workshop, Ms. Winters noted that dead trees and logs are now known to be valuable and essential parts of a healthy, mature forest ecosystem. In addition to providing essential habitat and food for many terrestrial and aquatic species, these senescing trees serve as a vital source of soil moisture, soil carbon, and nutrients for the entire forest. She also emphasized the importance and benefits of allowing our existing older and “middle-aged” forests to reach their full ecological potential and develop into a forest that has its full complement of environmental services, a process called proforestation.

The second track A workshop, “**The Connecticut State Wildlife Action Plan: A Blueprint for Collaborative Conservation**” was presented by Brian Hess, Acting Director, Wildlife Division, State of Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). He described how Connecticut has begun the process of revising its State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) ahead of the 2025 due date. Brian explained the importance of these plans, emphasizing the major goal of the 2025 revision is to produce a plan that is more useful, relevant, and implementable by a wider range of conservation partners including local conservation commissions.

The third track A workshop, “**Conserving amphibian and reptile diversity – a collective responsibility**,” was presented by Hank Gruner, Herpetologist, and member of the Andover Conservation Commission & Dennis Quinn, owner of Quinn Ecological, LLC. The presenters explained how responding to rapidly changing climatic conditions has become an increasingly significant challenge facing populations of many

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amphibians and reptiles. They emphasized how dispersal capabilities, coupled with an increasingly fragmented landscape, limit the capacity of these populations to rearrange themselves in response to climatic changes that impact habitat suitability. This session also provided an update on the status of various amphibians and reptiles in Connecticut and illustrated the critical role municipal commissions can play in fostering climate change resiliency for Connecticut's herpetofauna.

Three workshops of interest to Connecticut commissions were also scheduled in Track B, *Inland wetlands watercourse agency evaluation of applications, training, & wetlands law*.

The first workshop entitled “**Advanced Topics in Wetlands Enforcement**,” Janet Brooks, Attorney at Law, LLC with Mark Branse, Halloran & Sage, LLP, and Darcy Winther, State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), as moderator. They discussed how some commissions are using Notices of Violation incorrectly and how to best issue an order when you don't know the remediation that is required to correct the violation. The workshop reviewed the template developed by Attorney Brooks and distributed through *The Habitat*. They emphasized using a wide-ranging approach to enforcement, from incremental steps using your “soft” power to formal legally defined actions, along with the importance of being civil to those who appear before your commission.

Our second track B workshop, “**2023 Wetlands Law & Regulations Update with Question & Answer Session**,” presented by Mark Branse, Halloran & Sage, LLP, Janet Brooks, Attorney at Law, LLC, and moderated by Darcy Winther and Kristen O'Neil, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), was brought back by popular demand. This workshop included its lengthy question and answer session which received many questions from those in attendance.

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The third B workshop, entitled “Stormwater Management in Connecticut: An update on efforts to reduce impacts and enhance resiliency,”

was presented by Dave Dickson, Extension Educator & Director, UConn CLEAR; & Mary Looney, Municipal Stormwater Educator, UConn CLEAR. The

workshop leaders outlined how the State of Connecticut has been working to shift how we manage stormwater to help reduce the water quality and quantity

impacts of increased stormwater runoff. They provided a detailed update on the status of these efforts, including the MS4 and other regulatory permits; a new Stormwater Quality Manual; and the advent of stormwater utilities.



Lunch break at the BEC. Photo by Laura Magaraci.

Three workshops of interest to conservation commissions were scheduled in Track C. *Climate impact, increasing resiliency, and the role of CT conservation commissions.*

The first track C workshop, “**Sustainable CT: Supporting and Celebrating Sustainability Initiatives in Connecticut Communities**” was presented by Jessica LeClair, Senior Program Director, Sustainable CT. Ms. LeClair provided an overview of Sustainable CT, including the new Climate Leader Designation. The Climate Leader Designation celebrates municipalities that are reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions and preparing their communities for the impacts of climate change. Her workshop also focused on the how Connecticut Commissions can use the Sustainable CT framework as a resource to accomplish their commission goals, and help commissioners understand how to access funding and support for sustainability projects through Sustainable CT’s Community Match Fund.

The second track C workshop, “Conservation Commissions and Climate Resilience”

Was prepared by Louanne Cooley and Kayla Vargas from the CT Institute of Resilience and Climate Adaptation (UConn CIRCA) & Michael Stankov, Environmental Planner/Inland Wetland Agent, Town of Mansfield. The workshop reviewed how

Conservation commissions should consider the effect of climate change on natural resources and the solutions these resources provide, when undertaking their duties of protecting and preserving bio-

logical diversity and natural resources. The presentation emphasized how conservation commissions

conference, continued on page 9

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can act to increase municipal climate resiliency to impacts like flooding, heat, and drought by protecting present and future natural resources and the ecosystem services they provide. They discussed ways that Conservation Commissions can act within their legal authority and in concert with other town, regional, and state boards, commissions, and agencies to promote climate resilience and nature-based solutions.

A third track C workshop, “**The CT Natural Diversity Database: What We Do and an Introduction to Our New Tools,**” was presented by Robin S. Blum, Supervising Wildlife Biologist, Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDDB), Wildlife Division, State of Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). In her workshop, she reviewed how the Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) serves as the repository for data related to Connecticut’s Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species. She explained how these data are an essential component of any Natural Resource Inventory (NRI). This presentation offered a description of the program and its services, along with a demonstration of their new online application portal.

Three workshops of interest to conservation commissions were scheduled in Track D. *Helping our commissions evaluate and respond to evolving issues.*

The first track D workshop, entitled “**The Benefits of Preserving Greenways and Enhancing Outdoor Recreation,**” was presented by Kimberly Bradley, CT Trails and Greenways Program Coordinator, State of Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). Ms. Bradley explained how trails and greenways positively impact individuals and improve communities by providing not only recreation and transportation opportunities, but also by influencing economic and community development. She outlined how the DEEP Connecticut Trails and Greenways Program provides opportunities for collaboration, funding, and education in coordination with the Connecticut Greenways Council and how DEEP works with municipalities to enhance outdoor recreation across the State of Connecticut. She also reviewed the DEEP grant application process.

The second track D workshop, entitled “**Solutions to the Food Waste Crisis in Connecticut,**” was presented by Sherill Baldwin, Sustainable Materials Management Environmental Analyst, State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), and Pippa Bell Ader of Sustainable Westport. Attendees of their interesting workshop learned about food waste, including how municipalities and DEEP are responding with innovative pilots, programs, and other initiatives to reduce, reuse and recycle the organic portion of our municipal solid waste. Sherill Baldwin provided an overview of the challenges, programs the state is implementing with municipalities and food waste prevention and food recovery policy ideas, while Pippa Bell Ader discussed how Westport’s voluntary food scrap recycling program got started, progress made, challenges and ideas for the future.

The third track D workshop, entitled “*GPS Mapping Using the Avenza Maps App*” was presented by Emily Wilson, Geospatial Educator with UConn Extension and CLEAR, and the UConn CT Trails *conference, continued on page 10*



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Program & Adelheid Koepfer, UConn CT Trails Program (CT Trail Census and CT Trail Finder). In their workshop, they reviewed the functions of the free Avenza Maps smartphone app, which allows for collection of lines and points at the same time using tracking, and easily adds smartphone photos as points on the map. The workshop included a demo of the app and how it works for trail mapping, along with example uses of the collected data.

Please note that the PowerPoint presentations of our keynote speaker and workshop leaders are available



Exhibitor Lori Brown of the CTLCEV. Photo by Jeff Mills.

on our website 2023 annual conference page, at: [CACIWC Annual Meeting 2023](#).

CACIWC once again hosted a variety of nonprofit and commercial **exhibitors** to provide their infor-



At the AI Morticulture workshop. Photo by Rod Parlee.

mative displays in an easy to view arrangement between the entrance and main ballroom.

We again thank the conference sponsors and attendees of our **2023 Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference**. We look forward to your participation at our 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference! 🌿




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In other news:

1. During this past year, the CACIWC Board of Directors and its Annual Meeting Committee have reviewed the many comments and suggestions submitted as part of our 2023 conference evaluation. In response to these suggestions, we are beginning to select speakers for our **47th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference**, scheduled on **Saturday, November 16, 2024**. We are pleased to be able to return to the **Bristol Event Center (BEC)** for this special conference to celebrate our 50th Anniversary. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any additional suggestions for speakers and workshops to schedule during this conference at AnnualMtg@caciwc.org. Watch our website for the additional detailed conference news at www.caciwc.org.

2. As previously mentioned, 2024 is also the **50th anniversary of *The Habitat***. The article on the front page of this issue outlines the many opportunities for our member commissions to participate in this celebration. Please watch our website for updates on anniversary activities including information on how to submit your stories and photos of the early years of your commission activities. We will also be distributing questionnaire to our members designed to receive suggestions for article topics and other feedback, which you can also send to us at Board@caciwc.org.


3. Although expenses for our conference and publication continue to grow, the Board of Directors have decided not to increase our **CACIWC membership dues for our 2024-25 fiscal year** to help limit the yearly expenses of your municipal commission budget. We will again offer a substantial discount on the annual conference registration fee for member commissioners. CACIWC members will also receive substantial discounts on registration fees to attend our mid-year training programs being scheduled this year. Watch for our emails that will provide details on your membership renewal history and look for the 2024-25 online and mail membership renewal forms on our website: www.caciwc.org.

4. **Improved membership communication** is an important goal of our strategic plan. Our

Membership Coordinator & Database Manager Janice Fournier extends her thanks to all of you who provided us with their updated email addresses as part of their 2023-24 membership renewals and 2023 annual conference registrations. Please be certain to provide us with updated emails and other contact information to help Janice maintain an up-to-date membership list. These updated emails and other contact information will also help us develop a new and expanded **CACIWC Listserve** to provide you with important information and urgent updates.


All of us on the CACIWC Board of Directors continue to thank you and your fellow commissioners and staff for your local efforts and your ongoing support. We hope that you will help us celebrate our 50th anniversary by joining us at our 2024 Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference on Saturday, November 16, 2024!

Thank you,
Alan J. Siniscalchi, President, CACIWC 🍁




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www.ct-botanical-society.org

wildlands, continued from page 3

To this end, Conservation Commissions in Connecticut are charged with ongoing research. Some actions and opportunities could include identifying special and important pieces, shaping local policies, and offering recommendations for the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Being proactive prevents harm to our ecological lifelines.

A Regional Overview Reveals that Connecticut Lacks “Wildlands”

Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmland and Communities is an integrated vision for New England with a dynamic dashboard of current land use / allocation: developed lands, agricultural lands, woodlands

climate-resilient, and these self-sustaining areas are powerful green infrastructure that prevents floods and offers refuge for people and all species.

With the exception of areas near rivers and along the shore, prior to European settlement and widespread land-clearing New England was predominantly a forested Wildland. After regional deforestation, patches of “virgin” forests remained and should now be designated with a Wildland intent and receive the highest level of protection. A larger portion of older public and private forests in Connecticut now meet (or will soon meet) the latest US Forest Service definition of “old-growth” for our region based on tree size, density, and age threshold of 100-160 years

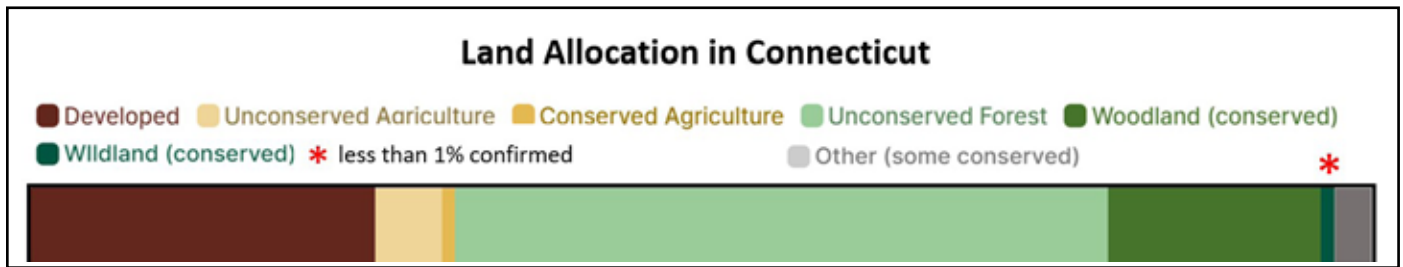


Figure 1. On average, Connecticut has more developed land, less protected land, and not nearly enough land identified as a Wildland (less than 1.0% of the state). Adapted April 2024 from www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org.

(potentially “working” or multiuse forests) and wildlands (protected natural areas). Wildlands are the foundation of the landscape, and the history, science, location, and ownership of Wildlands in New England and within each state is reviewed in a recent report titled, “*Wildlands in New England: Past, Present, and Future*.” As noted in the report,

“Wildlands are tracts of any size and current condition, permanently protected from development, in which management is explicitly intended to allow natural processes to prevail with “free will” and minimal human interference. Humans have been part of nature for millennia and can coexist within and with Wildlands without intentionally altering their structure, composition, or function.”

In short, Wildlands can be any size, and part of any community, and should be a top priority on public trust lands that welcome people and protect water and critical habitats. The power of Wildlands is supported by extensive science: they are rated as highly

old (depending on forest type). This is a legacy we inherited and should not squander: these forests cool and stabilize our region, and develop beautiful, complex and resilient ecosystems and habitat niches when they experience and recover from disturbances like insects, drought, and storms – as they have for hundreds of millions of years.

Where are the Wildlands in Connecticut?

Right now, designated Wildlands in Connecticut are few and far between - in small, disconnected fragments. This is a call to action for all landowners to consider if all or part of their property is better suited as a Wildland instead of a multi-use woodland. Connecticut has tremendous opportunities: Wild and Scenic Rivers, coldwater streams and headwaters, critical habitats, and some of the oldest and most carbon-dense forests in the region – even in cities, like the Ten Mile Woods in Keney Park in Hartford, the childhood landscape of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted.

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With less than 1.0% of Connecticut identified as a Wildland, and only about 0.25% with strong protection, every piece matters (See figure 2). Missing pieces with a Wildland intent should get on the map, and Conservation Commissions can help with policies on town land that help protect the public trust. For example, several forests in Simsbury (~5% of the town) are designated Wildlands based on a common-sense management policy called Natural Area Stewardship, and leases on town land require conservation buffers along all water resources, even for farming. Any town can adopt similar policies, and land trusts can add to the map by making Wildlands intent explicit.

Among many benefits outlined in the report, Wildlands align with science: they are needed as long-term reference conditions, baselines, and control groups. We need Wildlands in all ecoregions, and we need to connect them. Most Wildlands allow a range of human activities and interventions (typically for public safety, trails, invasives, hunting, etc.), and they are explicitly not irresponsible, exclusionary, or anti-forestry: people can enjoy Wildlands in multiple ways, and they support and complement working lands.

In sum, Wildlands are for everyone, and establishing aspirational policies and incentives is urgent. As the pace and scale of land use and manipulation accelerates, so does flooding, heating, ecoanxiety, and more. Wildlands are a visible and tangible solution, and the only proven long-term way to safeguard our water and our ecological lifelines. A Wildlands intent

can establish a burden of proof on our urge to “do something,” and thereby provide space to trust and respect the processes of nature that have evolved over millennia. It shows humility and respect for the mystery and beauty of life, and advocates for the future of our children that is held in the public trust of local Wildlands and water.

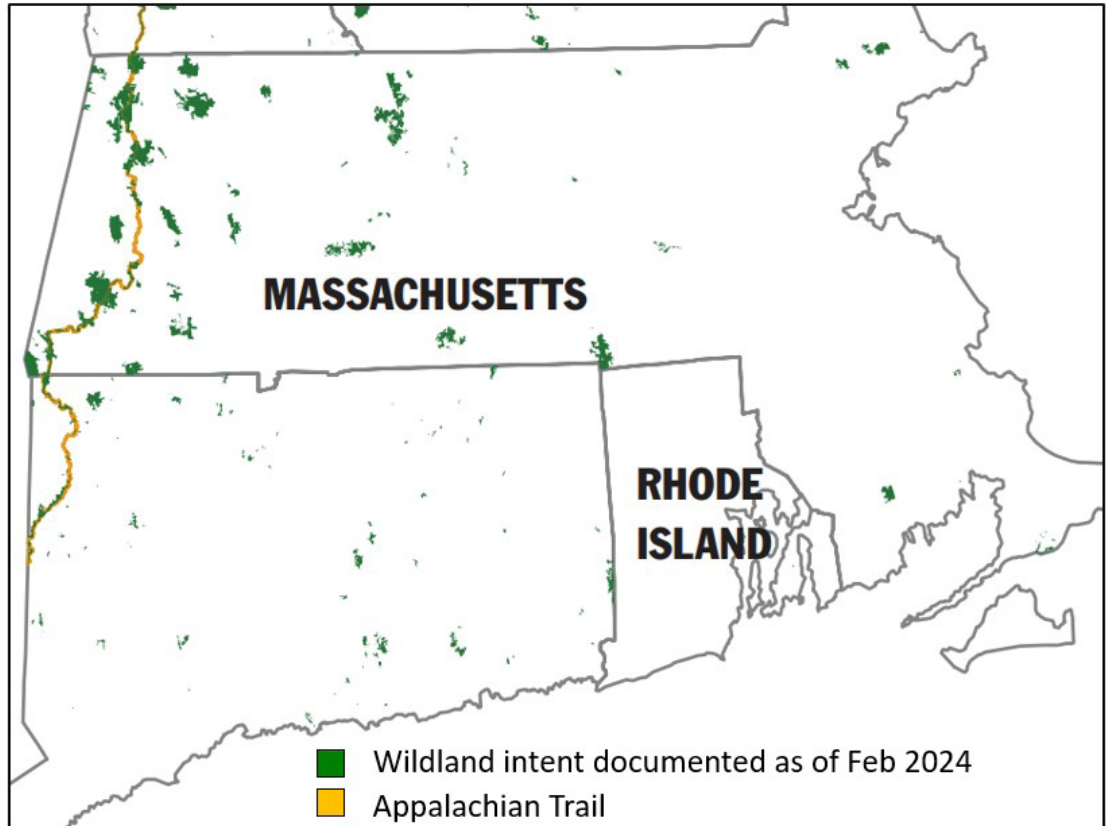


Figure 2. Wildlands in Connecticut (CT) are small and scattered, with various levels of protection. Left: Wildlands (0.8% of the land) are protected from development; most have weak protection (i.e. a reversible policy). Right: Strongly protected Wildlands (~0.25% of the land) are concentrated in the northwestern corner. Adapted from the reference, below, see www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org.

I welcome further discussion, and can be reached at susan.masino@trincoll.edu.

About the Author: Susan A. Masino is a Professor of Applied Science at Trinity College, the Hartford County Coordinator for the Old Growth Forest Network, and a member of the Open Space Committee in Simsbury.

Reference:

Foster, D., E. E. Johnson, B. R. Hall, J. Leibowitz, E. H. Thompson, B. Donahue, E. K. Faison, J. Sayen, D. Publicover, N. Sferra, L. C. Irland, J. R. Thompson, R. Perschel, D. A. Orwig, William S. Keeton, M. C. Hunter Jr., S. A. Masino, and L. Howell. 2023. *Wildlands in New England. Past, Present, and Future*. Harvard Forest Paper 36. Harvard University. 🍂

waste, continued from page 4

As food scraps from our homes make up about **38% of all wasted food**, a good place to start is with educating the community. People report that they become more aware of ALL solid waste when separating food scraps from the trash: This practice is a gateway to better management of solid waste and appears to improve recycling, and awareness of wasteful behaviors. While towns may be able to measure the amount of food waste diverted from an incinerator or landfill, some people choose to compost on their own property. It is impossible to measure how many food scraps end up in home compost sites, but the good news is that we know home-composted food scraps sequester greenhouse gasses locally and aren't transported by truck- two benefits!

What can towns do to decrease solid waste, especially food waste?

Start by providing a town site for voluntary food scrap drop-off, which can feed animals, become compost or go to an anaerobic digester for energy production. Make sure to encourage residents to **decrease wasted food**, to consider **food redistribution** (DEEP, 2022) and **home composting**. More and more towns in CT have access to private food scrap hauler pick-up, for a fee, another option.

Identify a defined group (e.g. school, residential or geographic area) to implement a solid waste and/or food scrap recycling project: Keep an eye out for **grants** that can help defray the cost of set-up and maintenance. (Find a town to act as your mentor. There is no need to reinvent the wheel).

Implement Unit-Based Pricing, where you pay for the amount of solid waste you dispose of. Stonington residents currently generate about **380 pounds** of solid waste per person per year, whereas residents in other nearby towns, who do not have a PAYT program, generate about 700 pounds per person per

year. On average, a unit-based priced solid waste disposal program decreases solid waste by **25-50%**.

And lastly, **provide smaller totes for trash**, charge significantly more for larger totes or increase the per unit or per ton fee for transfer station solid waste drop-off. Another option is to decrease the frequency of trash pick-up to **every other week** as this tends to increase recycling.



West Hartford food scrap collection bags

What is Pay As You Throw/ Unit Based Pricing/SMART (Save Money and Reduce Trash)?

Instead of paying a flat rate for solid waste disposal (with a private hauler or by the Town), one pays a per-unit fee for disposal of the solid waste that one generates. This is similar to how one is

charged for other utilities such as electricity, fuel and water. **157 of 351** communities in Massachusetts are using this Unit Based Pricing system. **Some Connecticut towns** (West Hartford, 2023) are even combining, in one solid waste pick-up, trash in one bag, and in a separate colored-bag, food scraps! (**These are pilot programs**).

How do municipalities manage Unit Based Pricing/PAYT?

In most cases, two sizes of colored PAYT bags are sold to members of the community, often at local businesses: a smaller bag (15 gallons) and a larger

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The advertisement features a close-up photograph of a bumblebee on a purple flower. The text 'Restoring the Native Habitat' is prominently displayed at the top. At the bottom, there is a white banner with the Ernst Seeds logo, a phone number (800-873-3321), an email address (sales@ernstseed.com), a QR code, and a website URL (https://ernstseed.co/adHab).

Restoring the Native Habitat

ERNST SEEDS 800-873-3321 sales@ernstseed.com https://ernstseed.co/adHab

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bag (32 gallons). Different colored stickers or twist ties can be used instead of the plastic bags. The cost of the bags/stickers/ties can cover the town's cost of solid waste disposal, including extra staff time to monitor the PAYT program and to distribute the bags. All trash goes in a small or a large bag, and is either dropped off at a transfer station or picked up by the municipal service or private hauler.

How do Low/Moderate Income (LMI) Residents afford Unit-based Pricing?

Some residents may not be paying directly for solid waste disposal, especially LMI renters. Middletown, CT gives a tax break to apartment owners and asks owners to pass the savings on to tenants. Other options include selling PAYT bags at a reduced price or giving a defined number of bags/year to LMI families.

Public Perception that the Fee is a Tax: (MASS DEP, 2021)

Residents in some communities may perceive the unit-based pricing program as a new tax. To avoid this perception, many communities make their programs revenue-neutral by reducing the flat fee to dispose of solid waste by the amount that unit-based fees are expected to generate. Many residents wind up paying less for trash disposal with a PAYT program as they can control their costs by throwing away less.

Building Public Support

Public acceptance and support are the most important components of a successful unit-based pricing program. Key players from the municipal government, elected officials, and environmental /community organizations must be involved from the beginning of the planning process. Taking the time and committing resources, holding public forums and meetings, and responding to questions and concerns of residents, municipal officials, and employees will minimize confusion about the program.

In Summary:

CT Towns and cities have the ability to decrease the State's solid waste tonnage, food waste and disposal costs, and increase food redistribution.

- Promote behaviors that decrease wasted food and increase food scrap recycling. The more you get the word out, the better.
- Watch out for grant opportunities to implement a program for Unit-Based Pricing and/or food scrap recycling.
- Find a mentor town near you that has done food scrap recycling and/or unit based pricing. Start a program. Promote the program extensively and provide educational opportunities. It's about saving money, decreasing greenhouse gasses and increasing sustainability (financial and environmental).

No one said change is easy, but it is necessary. And it will be easier for communities in the long run if we start now.

By Pippa Bell Ader, Co-Leader, Sustainable Westport Zero Food Waste Challenge

Note: For those who want more information on food waste diversion and Unit based pricing, look at this excellent storymap, written by the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (reference below).

NVCOG (2024, February 7). Connecticut has too much trash and not enough room. There are solutions -- but not without you.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/be24e917780f42909ddb3248384a2b90>

CGA (2023, June 29) Public Act No. 23-170, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MANAGEMENT OF SOLID WASTE AND ESTABLISHING THE MIRA DISSOLUTION AUTHORITY.

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2023/act/Pa/pdf/2023PA-00170-R00HB-06664-PA.PDF>

DEEP (2022, June 7). Food Waste Reduction and Recovery <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Reduce-Reuse-Recycle/Waste-Reduction/Food-Waste---Reduction-and-Recovery-#Food>

West Hartford (2023, May). West Hartford Pilot Program for Food Scraps and PAYT Waste Collection

<https://www.westhartfordct.gov/town-departments/public-works/payt>

MASS DEP (2021, May). FACT SHEET: PAYT/SMART BASICS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/paytsmart-basics-for-municipalities/download> 🌿



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CT DEEP Seeks Feedback on State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Species List!

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) is continuing its efforts in preparing for the 2025 revision of Connecticut's [State Wildlife Action Plan \(SWAP\)](#). As DEEP Wildlife Division Director Brian Hess presented in our 2023 annual conference, these plans are developed to identify vulnerable species and habitats, threats affecting those species and habitats, and actions to address those threats, also see: Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan.

Staff from the DEEP Wildlife Division were very appreciative of the feedback received from CACIWC and our members, especially those who completed the SWAP survey last year.

The DEEP Wildlife Division is now looking for your feedback on their recently prepared draft list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The list is

available on their website in both a PDF and sortable Excel version: [CT SWAP Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#).

The draft list includes two classifications: Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are native species that are declining or vulnerable and would benefit from conservation action. State Assessment Priority Species (SAPS) are species about which we need more information. They might be vulnerable or declining, but we don't know enough to make that determination.

Please use this fillable form provided by DEEP to answer all their questions and provide additional feedback on their new draft list: [Public Feedback Form for Draft List of 2025 CT SGCN](#).

Thank you! 🍁