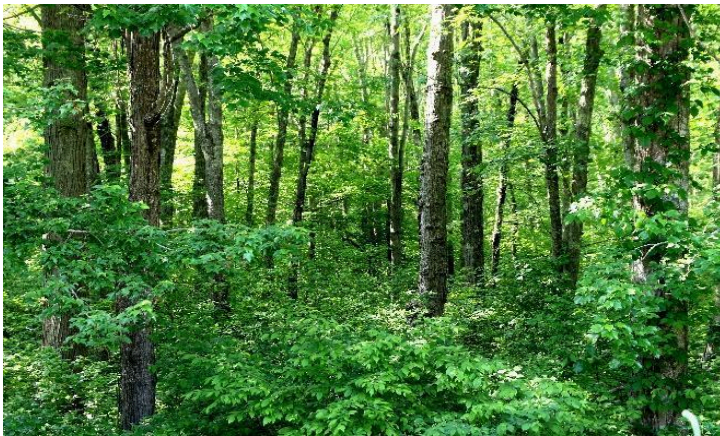


THE PROBLEM

Connecticut is heavily forested, with approximately 61% of the land identified as forest. 72% of this forestland is in private ownership with no protection and is experiencing increased fragmentation and parcelization.

Although land conversion has slowed somewhat since 2018, forest conversion to other land uses continues. Other threats include invasive and nonnative species, disease, and severe weather, including windstorms and drought. Together, these stressors are impacting forest health and the functional value of these natural systems. Climate change is accelerating these impacts.



All forests, from young to old and including core, urban, and roadside forests, are part of our “green infrastructure” and provide essential services necessary for our health and welfare. These services include providing clean air, clean and abundant water supplies, carbon sequestration and storage, moderation of temperatures, and biodiversity.

Simply put, forest health directly impacts human health and welfare. We must act now to protect all forests and the natural systems that will make us resilient to climate change and loss of biodiversity.

WHAT WE CAN DO NOW

Keep Forests As Forests

Forests are nature’s solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss. Both Connecticut’s 2020 Forest Action Plan and the GC3 Forest Subgroup Report recognize the need to protect our existing forestland. Connecticut should authorize and incent the use of nature-based solutions and appoint an interdisciplinary scientific advisory council to help establish and inform the use of nature-based solutions including keeping forests as forests.

Add Healthy Forest strategies to local Plans of Conservation and Development (POCD)

Most land use decisions are made at the local level and start with planning in the POCD. Cities and towns concerned with air quality, water supply, flooding, drought, heat islands, etc., should incorporate forest protection, restoration, and stewardship into planning and implementation. Forests provide nature-based solutions to address these critical needs and help create sustainable and resilient communities. State statutes should be updated to require consideration of forests and natural systems in local POCDs.

Adopt New Management Strategies for Urban and Roadside Forests

Urban and roadside forests often find themselves in conflict with other public safety goals. These forests are often clearcut without regard for the benefits they provide, including air quality, shade, windbreaks, and wildlife corridors. New strategies for managing these small but important forests have been developed, including at the StormWise program at UConn. They should be required for work conducted by ConnDOT and electric utility companies.

FAST FACTS

Forests, Faucets, and Fish!

From source water protection to Long Island Sound, healthy forest ecosystems, starting with the soil, ensure that we have clean, abundant water for drinking, bathing, and swimming and to support fisheries and other aquatic habitats.

Teal Carbon Mitigates Climate Change

Many people have heard of blue carbon found in coastal wetlands, but do you know that carbon in inland wetlands is called **teal carbon**? Forested inland wetlands, such as red maple swamps, contain highly organic soils that sequester and store carbon. Although tidal wetlands store and sequester more carbon per acre, there are more acres of inland wetlands, making them a significant carbon sink in the northeastern United States, including Connecticut.

Connecticut has over 111,932,409 miles of roadways.

Roadside forests line many of these miles. A quick estimate assuming a conservative 10 ft (5 ft/side) per mile results in over 25,696 acres of roadside forest. These forests provide essential protection from air and noise pollution and should be managed for multiple benefits.

StormWise

UConn has developed a vegetative management program that balances the need to ensure the lights with keeping forests as forests. Although developed to address utilities, similar strategies can be used to manage roadside forests. For more information, go to <https://stormwise.uconn.edu/>



JOBS, JOBS, JOBS!

It is an exciting time to work in natural resource management. Keeping our forests healthy requires proper management and trained personnel to ensure these natural systems function as productive ecosystems. As a heavily forested state, we need certified foresters and other environmental professionals to develop and implement forestry management plans on both public and private lands.

Investing in forest land protection, urban and community forests, and roadside forests should be part of an overall jobs creation act. In addition to foresters, we need environmental educators, neighborhood organizers, environmental health advocates, watershed planners, communication specialists, and outdoor enthusiasts focused on the forests, environmental justice, and nature-based solutions.

THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MANAGE A FOREST!

That's right! Forest management can be passive or active depending on the existing condition of the forest and what is needed to maintain a healthy forest ecosystem.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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