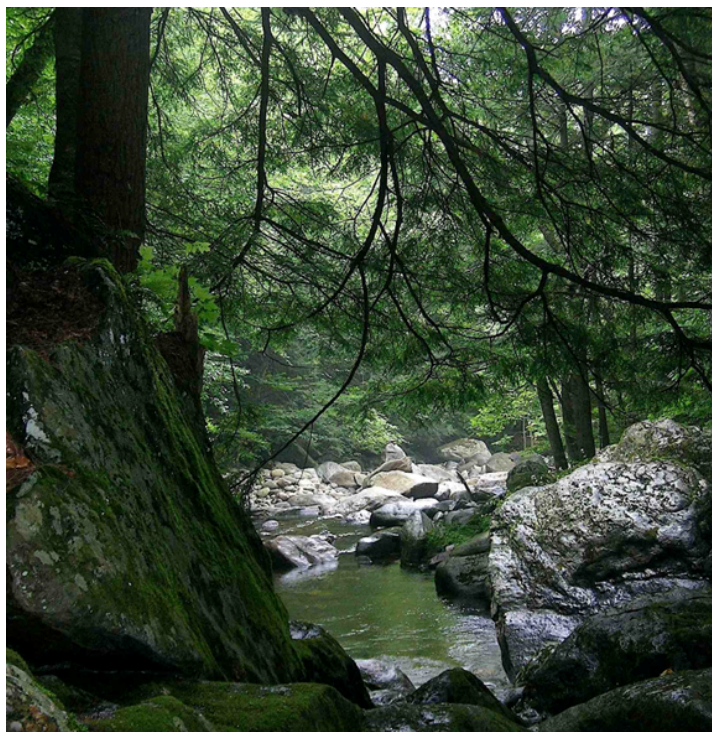


THE PROBLEM

Connecticut's forests are our natural lifeline, and vital to preserving the state's waters, clean air and wildlife. Yet even our most rare old and old-growth forests have no permanent protection, and they are reserves of carbon, biodiversity and public health. We are losing the ecological integrity of our forests, and the health and well-being of everyone is at stake.



Connecticut's forests are exceptional, but there are serious inequities in access to wild nature. Protecting old and old-growth forests as "Wildlands," including small "Community Wilds," ensures everyone has access to our natural heritage.

WHAT WE CAN DO NOW

Identify old/old-growth forests for preservation in conservation programs such as the Natural Area Preserve system (**CGS 23-5c**), a system of areas that shall be maintained "*in as natural and wild a state as is consistent with the preservation and enhancement of protected resources and educational, scientific, biological, geological, paleontological and scenic purposes.*" **This benefits everyone and all species.**

Engage an Advisory Committee to recommend areas for conservation programs such as Natural Area Preserves and coordinate with the statewide "Green Plan." **Provide communities a voice** in identifying areas they love as "Wildlands" or "Community Wilds."

Commit to long-term data collection and leverage mental health benefits, both strong recommendations of the Phase 1 Science and Technology Working Group of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) and many others.

Wildlands" are just 1% of Connecticut. This is not enough for long-term community well-being.

Connecticut is represented in the chart below showing the amount of developed (26%), conserved, and unconserved land. **Wildland (conserved) is just 1% of Connecticut in 2023.** Scientists are clear that we need much more for climate, biodiversity and health.

Schematic below is for Connecticut and was extracted from the New England "**Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities**" dashboard in January 2023 at www.WildlandsandWoodlands.org

■ Developed
 ■ Unconserved Agriculture
 ■ Conserved Agriculture
 ■ Unconserved Forest
 ■ Woodland (conserved)
 ■ Wildland (conserved)
 ■ Other (some conserved)

Current



FAST FACTS

Forests are the natural ecosystem in most of Connecticut. Yet just a tiny portion of Connecticut is preserved for natural processes and biodiversity based on criteria established by US Geological Service Protected Areas Database (US-PAD) and International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Forests accumulate and store carbon above and below ground for hundreds of years. On Earth Day 2022 President Biden signed Executive Order #14072 to inventory mature and old-growth forests on federal land within a year and develop policies to conserve them:

... Strengthening America's forests ... home to cherished expanses of mature and old-growth forests on Federal lands, is critical to the health, prosperity, and resilience of our communities. ... We go to these special places to hike, camp, hunt, fish, and engage in recreation that revitalizes our souls and connects us to history and nature.

"First Do No Harm" is real. New species and interconnections are still being discovered, especially in old forests and around old trees. Connecticut's forests are still recovering from extensive land clearing by European settlers. Today, "old-growth" forest is far less than 1% of our current forest and has long been listed as a "critical habitat." Forests greater than 100 years are only ~15% of our forests.

Most forests are owned privately: less than 30% are held in the public trust. Our long-term need for and clear commitment to equitable access to nature can be accomplished with dedicated public **"Wildlands"** and **"Community Wilds,"** similar to the successful "Urban Wilds" program in the Boston area since 1977.

INTERDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE

The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC, Sixth Assessment 2022) was clear: we **cannot** stabilize the climate without ecosystem integrity (i.e. loss of functional connectivity from human pressure (development, degradation, agriculture, etc)):

***"Planetary health is essential for human and societal health and a pre-condition for climate resilient development ... (protecting) all remaining areas with a high degree of naturalness and ecosystem integrity will help protect biodiversity, build ecosystem resilience and ensure essential ecosystem services ... Protection of existing natural forest ecosystems is the highest priority for reducing greenhouse gas emissions."* (IPCC, 2022)**

Scientists recommend strong protection of 30-50% of land and water by 2030 to address our global crises. In December 2022, 190 countries signed a strong, sweeping commitment at the United Nations biodiversity conference in Montreal, Canada. (<https://www.campaignfornature.org/>). We need to act as soon as possible to preserve fundamental building blocks in Connecticut and work to connect them to regional ecology and migratory corridors.

MORE INFORMATION

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