

***Wildlands are lands that are 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.***

**D**espite being one of the most densely populated states, Connecticut is fortunate to still be 58 percent forested and to retain a relatively high proportion of old forests. Nonetheless, only 0.8 percent of the state is Wildlands and most of these are weakly protected state lands designated administratively as “Old Forest Management Sites.” Hence there is much potential to conserve and permanently secure a greater acreage of high-quality wildlands.

**Wildlands** covered most of Connecticut and New England for thousands of years. Wildlands are vital for nature and society as they:

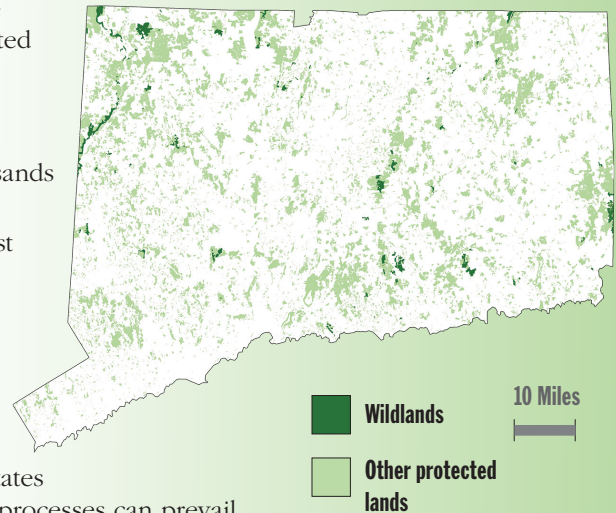
- **Acknowledge and support** the intrinsic value of wild nature to exist
- **Preserve** wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- **Mitigate climate change** by sequestering and storing carbon
- **Enhance landscape resilience** through ecological complexity
- **Offer quiet space** for spiritual and physical renewal
- **Serve as references** for science, management, and conservation
- **Support 30x30**, the global effort to protect biodiversity

*Wildlands in New England* is the first regional study in the United States to characterize all “forever wild lands” that are protected so that natural processes can prevail, with minimal to no active management. These lands—designated wilderness areas and diverse public and private natural areas and reserves—provide critical support to nature and society. In Connecticut, Wildlands are an overlooked and underrepresented part of the state’s land conservation strategy, which has focused primarily on forest management and preventing forest conversion.

To reach the goals for Wildlands and improve the landscape resilience of the region, *Wildlands in New England 2023* makes the following recommendations:

- **Center Wildlands** in an integrated approach to land planning and conservation that includes actively managed forests and farms.
- **Strengthen existing Wildlands** through permanent protection and landscape buffering.
- **Create more Wildlands**, thoughtfully and strategically, with a diversity of partners, through private and public action.

## Wildlands in Connecticut



**Only 0.8%**  
of Connecticut  
is considered  
**Wildlands**  
today.

## Three Connecticut Wildlands

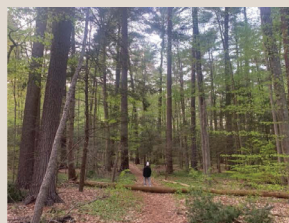
**Canaan Mountain Wilderness Natural Area Preserve** is a rugged, high-elevation section of Housatonic State Forest in the Northwest Highlands. Protected in 1972, and expanded in 1997, this 2,260-acre preserve is in the state’s Natural Area Preserve System and one of only two Wildlands protected by state statute. It is part of the largest roadless area

in Connecticut, and its remote location, cool temperatures, and northern forest composition make it ideal habitat for humans and for climate-sensitive species like moose.



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**Belden Forest** is a 40-acre town-owned forest in the center of Simsbury that is protected by donor intent and by a town management policy called Natural Area Stewardship. Belden is accessible via public transportation and was the first Connecticut forest added to the Old-Growth Forest Network (2019). The forest includes a large stand of old eastern white pines, with some over 150 years old and many over 100 feet tall.



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**Connecticut College Natural Areas** comprise three parcels of forest and salt marsh, totaling about 200 acres, in the state’s coastal lowlands. Established in 1952 through the leadership of Professor Richard Goodwin, the natural areas serve as outdoor classrooms, ecological research sites, and destinations of reflection for students, faculty, and visitors. As one of only five colleges in New England that protects Wildlands, Connecticut College is a conservation model for other institutions in the region.



© Connecticut College

## State, Regional, and Global Support for Wildlands

The following initiatives make strong cases for Wildlands and emphasize the need for increased permanent protection with measurable targets.

**The Connecticut GC3 Science and Technology Report (2020)** states that “protecting natural ecosystems and wild areas...is essential—across the State”—and recommends to “protect old-growth forests and remnants as they are essential to protecting the full range of native species.”

### Connecticut’s Natural Area Preserve Program.

Connecticut statute Section 23-5c states that “the commissioner shall establish a system of natural area preserves and shall... maintain such preserves in as natural and wild a state.”

### Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities

(WWF&C) provides a regional vision and state-specific land protection goals that call for at least 70 percent of New England to be protected as forest—at least 10 percent protected as Wildland and 60 percent protected as Woodland (managed forest)—and all existing farmland to be permanently conserved. This vision intentionally values wild and managed forests, farmlands, and communities and relies on the collaboration of conservation efforts across the region.

### 30x30

Wildlands form a central component of “30x30,” the national and international goal to protect 30 percent of Earth’s land and waters by 2030, addressing the looming challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and threats to human health and welfare.



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## What You Can Do:

- Visit [Wildlands in New England](#) to read the report and access related resources.
- Contact [Northeast Wilderness Trust](#) to learn about their Wildlands Partnership Program.
- Contact other Wildlands Conservation Partners to learn about their efforts and available programs.
- Support local, statewide, and regional conservation efforts in implementing the GC3 Science and Technology Report’s recommendations, the Natural Area Preserve Program of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), and the Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities goals.

## Connecticut’s Wildland Conservation Partners:

### Public

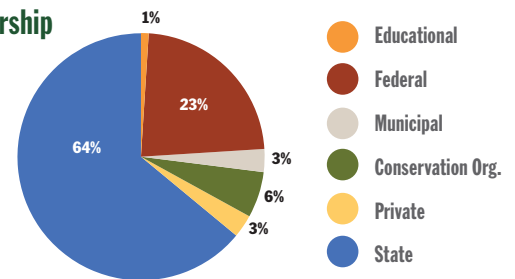
- **State:** Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), Connecticut legislature
- **Federal:** National Park Service
- **Regional and Municipal:** Town of Simsbury’s Natural Area Stewardship program, Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions

### Private

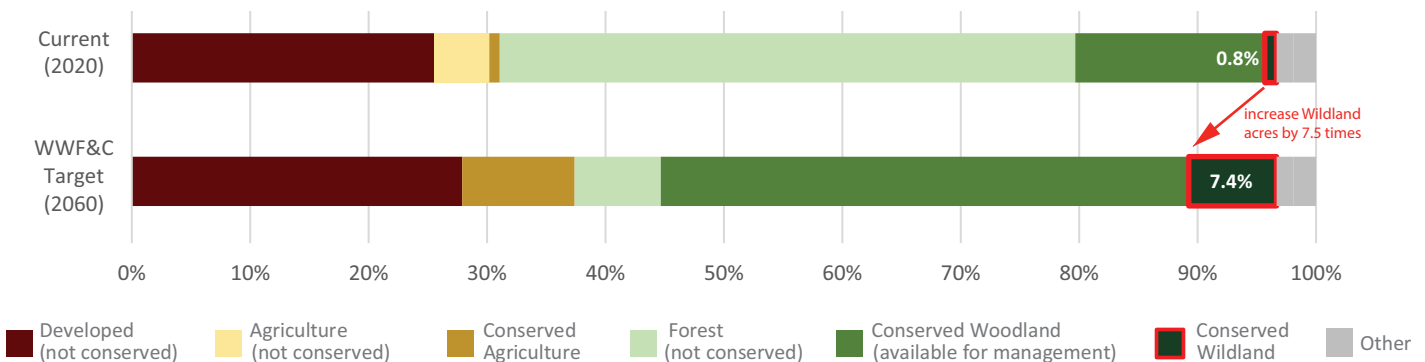
- Northeast Wilderness Trust, Connecticut College, White Memorial Foundation, Pond Mountain Natural Trust, Highstead Foundation, Avalonia Land Conservancy, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, Aton Forest, Cornwall Conservation Trust, Salisbury Association, and private families
- Regional and local land trusts
- Colleges, universities, public and private schools

## Wildland Ownership in Connecticut

24,333 acres



## Land Cover in Connecticut: Current and WWF&C Target



Copies of the full report, the Wildlands web map, and additional information are available on the website of Wildlands, Woodlands, Farmlands & Communities: [wildlandsandwoodlands.org/resources/wildlands-in-new-england/](http://wildlandsandwoodlands.org/resources/wildlands-in-new-england/)

To learn more about ways to directly support Wildlands conservation throughout New England, visit [newildernesstrust.org/](http://newildernesstrust.org/)

