

THE PROBLEM

Scientists recommend protecting at least 30-50% of our land and water by 2030. The need for "30x30" was emphasized at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montreal (December 2022). (Source: <https://www.campaignfornature.org/why-30-1>) Despite bipartisan public support, Connecticut (and New England) is behind. Definitions are far too vague. Specific policies and education are needed to protect the ecological lifelines in every community. A recent regional report titled "Wildlands in New England: Past, Present, and Future" reviews the history, science, and current status of natural land, termed "Wildlands." Wildlands can be any size and can welcome people - like National Parks.

The Wildlands report found that **less than 1% of Connecticut** has a specific intent for natural processes. There are clear opportunities but no plan for more and Connecticut's protection was rated as "weak" and "impermanent." In contrast, Vermont passed The Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act with a goal to permanently conserve 30% of Vermont by 2030 and 50% by 2050.

Public trust natural areas can be designated as Natural Area Preserves—*immediately*. Headwaters of rivers, all water sources, critical habitats, legacy trees, wildlife corridors, areas without invasives, and natural buffers are top priorities. A network of public trust preserves prevents accidental damage and loss to ecological lifelines and our natural heritage.

Protecting and connecting an equitable and ecological "30x30" across the state recognizes our land and water as the lifeline that supports everything we need. This lifeline works within and alongside the areas we use for food, water, resources, housing, energy, transportation, and more.



Currently, permanent "Wildlands" are far less than 1% of Connecticut. This is not enough to ensure long-term community well-being, i.e, wildlife habitat, clean air and water, flood protection, public recreation, and spiritual refuge.

A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

There are immediate and common-sense opportunities:

- ❖ **Protect and expand** temporary Wildlands on state-owned public land.
- ❖ **Evaluate and protect** areas of critical habitat and natural biodiversity as natural area preserves.
- ❖ **Prioritize Wildlands** on existing public land and for new land acquisitions intended as a natural area.
- ❖ **Develop and publish** maps and educational material about Wildlands as a public ecology and health resource.
- ❖ **Establish and fund** comprehensive protocols for long-term data collection in Connecticut's ecosystems.

Wildlands stewardship like National Parks welcomes people and helps achieve 30x30. Connecticut's Natural Area Preserve program (NAP) can work toward "30x30." Forests are the predominant ecosystem in Connecticut.

In 2022, President Biden signed Executive Order 14072 to map federal mature and old-growth forests: *"... Strengthening America's forests, ... home to cherished expanses of mature and old-growth forests ..., is critical to the health, prosperity, and resilience of our communities. ... places to hike, camp, hunt, fish, and engage in recreation that revitalizes our souls and connects us to history and nature."*

MORE INFORMATION

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