

Path to 30x30 in Connecticut

Exploring Case Studies of Promising Conservation Policies and Strategies in the United States



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INTRODUCTION

The target of conserving 30% of Earth's land and ocean by 2030, first proposed in 2019, has been adopted by over 90 countries worldwide. The Global Deal for Nature (GDN), introduced in *Science*, is a plan to protect 30% of the world and designate an additional 20% as climate stabilization areas, with the aim of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C¹.

The 30x30 goal has since become a central focus of the High Ambition Coalition (HAC) for Nature and People. The HAC is an intergovernmental group of over 90 nations that aims to achieve the GDN and push for more ambitious climate and conservation action². The HAC asserts that we must conserve at least 30% of the planet, improve management of protected and conserved areas, increase public and private financing for conservation, and create clear implementation mechanisms for conservation goals.

In May of 2021, the Biden Administration released its vision for achieving the 30x30 goal in the United States³. The *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful* report proposes a “ten-year locally led campaign to conserve and restore the lands and waters upon which we all depend, and that bind us together as Americans.” The report introduced eight principles to guide the campaign:

1. Pursue a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation
2. Conserve America's land and waters for the benefit of all people
3. Support locally led and locally designed conservation efforts
4. Honor tribal sovereignty and support the priorities of tribal nations
5. Pursue conservation and restoration approaches that create jobs and support healthy communities
6. Honor private property rights and support the voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and fishers
7. Use science as a guide
8. Build on existing tools and strategies with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive approaches

An additional principle proposed by the Nature Conservancy points out the importance of “ensuring adequate funding⁴.” This is a particularly relevant focus in Connecticut, where private land conservation is limited by lack of public funding. Connecticut had the 5th lowest environmental spending of all 50 states in FY 2015, followed only by South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee⁵.

¹ A Global Deal For Nature: Guiding principles, milestones, and targets. (2019).
<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aaw2869>

² *High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People*. HAC for Nature and People.
<https://www.hacfornatureandpeople.org/home>

³ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Commerce, & Council on Environmental Quality. (2021). *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful*.
<https://www.doi.gov/priorities/america-the-beautiful>

⁴ *America the Beautiful, in Action*. The Nature Conservancy.
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/who-we-are/how-we-work/policy/america-the-beautiful-action/>

⁵ *Environmental spending in the 50 states*. Ballotpedia.
https://ballotpedia.org/Environmental_spending_in_the_50_states

Connecticut set a goal of protecting 21%, or over 673,000 acres, of the state's land area by 2023⁶. However, to date, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has acquired approximately 264,000 acres. At its current rate, it will take the State of Connecticut another 65 years to meet its conservation goal⁶. Almost 1/5th of the land area of the state is developed⁷, and though Connecticut is identified as having strong policies for farmland preservation, it is ranked as the 7th most vulnerable state to farmland conversion⁸. However, the efforts of land trusts in the state have contributed to a 32% increase in the amount of land protected in the state since 2010, indicating the importance of increasing the amount of resources available to these organizations⁹.

In this report, we seek to outline key policies, initiatives, and conservation strategies that states and municipalities outside of Connecticut have implemented toward achieving 30x30. Since its inception, the 30x30 initiative has seen widespread support at a variety of levels. California is the most far along in its pursuit, having signed an executive order committing significant funding and resources towards the goal in October 2020. Seven other states have either passed or are in the process of passing legislation officially supporting it, and several other state-level conservation organizations have developed strategies towards achieving the goal. In addition, there have been multiple demonstrations of support at the local level, including the Clark County Commission¹⁰ in Nevada, Las Cruces City Council¹¹ in New Mexico, and several county commissions in Colorado.

We have focused the majority of our research on five case studies of New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Maine. These states, which we look at from both the state and municipal levels, offer a diversity of conservation strategies, successes, and failures. Although Connecticut has its own unique characteristics and barriers in the conservation field, there are many initiatives in each of these states which we believe can inform future planning and strategic development towards Connecticut's pursuit of 30% of lands and waters saved by 2030.

BROAD STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING LAND ACQUISITION

Leverage points for expanding conservation exist at the state level, municipal/local level, and at the organizational level. Most of the strategies for achieving 30x30, however, are reliant on financing from state or local governments that can either directly fund conservation or help build organizational capacity.

⁶ Connecticut State Council on Environmental Quality. (2020). *CEQ Annual Report*. CT.Gov - Connecticut's Official State Website.

https://portal.ct.gov/CEQ/AR-20-Gold/2020-CEQ-Annual-Report-eBook/Land-Preserved_Land
⁷ *Connecticut's Changing Landscape*. University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research. <https://clear3.uconn.edu/viewers/ctstory/>

⁸ *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*. (2020). American Farmland Trust.
<https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/farms-under-threat-the-state-of-the-states/>

⁹ Land Trust Alliance: Find a Land Trust. <https://findalandtrust.org/land-trusts/gaining-ground/connecticut>

¹⁰ Resolution of the County of Clark in Support of Protection of 30 Percent of Nevada's and the United States' Lands and Waters by 2030.
<https://clark.legistar.com/View.ashx?GUID=27A6BD34-C227-45D5-9C11-59CE487C2819&ID=9309682&M=F>

¹¹ Resolution 21-025, A Resolution of the city of Las Cruces of Dona Ana County, New Mexico Supporting the 30x30 Campaign to Protect 30 Percent of Lands and Oceans by 2030.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/589e56be46c3c44d745ac992/t/5f35be94fda7261aa04748bd/1597357719387/Las+Cruces+City+Council%2C+NM.pdf>

At the state level, conservation finance can be increased by: a) amending the state constitution, b) passing legislation, and c) re-allocating funds in the state budget. At the municipal level, most increases in conservation finance are achieved through municipal bonds and taxes, where revenues are directed towards conservation projects. Finally, organizations can help garner greater conservation support and attract more private financing by creating partnerships within the state and increasing community engagement.

The table below provides more detail on what specific mechanisms exist for increasing land acquisition and funding for conservation at the state and municipal/local levels, as well as strategies states have used to improve communication and collaboration around conservation. For each mechanism, an example is provided that is provided in more detail in the case study section of this report.

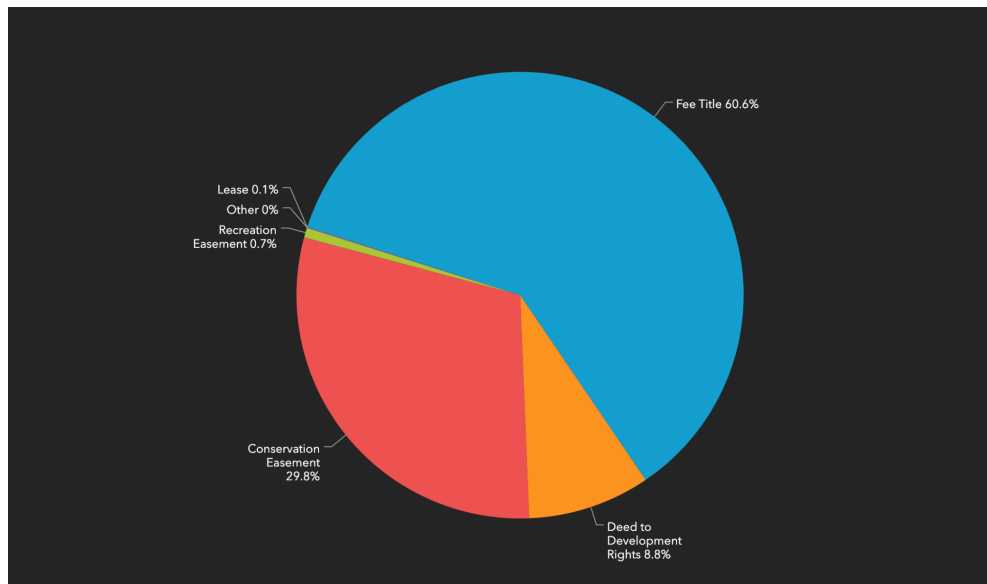
	Policy/Finance Mechanism or Initiative	Example
State Level	Sales Tax	Wildlands Conservation Stamp, Massachusetts
	Lottery Funds	Oregon Lottery Funds
	State Bond Measures	Rhode Island State Beaches and Water
	Real Estate Transfer Tax	New York Real Estate Transfer Tax
	Special Tax Assessment Programs	Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program, Oregon
Municipal/Local Level	Municipal Bonds	Rhode Island municipalities exhibit relatively large support for conservation-focused municipal bond measures
	Real Estate Transfer Tax	Block Island Land Trust, Rhode Island
	Property Tax	Community Preservation Act, Massachusetts
Communication and Collaboration	Why Pursue Conservation?	See Massachusetts’ “Communicating the Value of Conservation”
	Cost of Ecosystem Services Studies	See Rhode Island initiative to update these studies, as well as Rhode Island’s “The Value of Rhode Island’s Forests”
	Climate-centric Communication	Maine Won’t Wait climate report

CASE STUDIES

Rhode Island

State of Conservation

Rhode Island has not formally signed onto the 30x30 initiative, but similar to Connecticut, they are exploring avenues towards its pursuit. In light of this, and the two state's similar levels of state and federal funding, Rhode Island offers a valuable case study state. A total of 92,149 acres have been conserved in the state of Rhode Island, out of 776,900 acres (12%). The majority of conserved land is held by fee title (60.6%), followed by land held in conservation easements (29.8%).



Conserved Lands in Rhode Island¹²

The majority of land acquisition deals and conservation financing comes from general obligation bonds at the municipal level. A few of these bonds are outlined in more detail below, paying close attention to those that may be feasible in Connecticut. The Local Open Space Grant Program is integral to municipal-level conservation in Rhode Island, providing 50% of the appraised value of a parcel, including closing costs¹³. Since 1988, this program has distributed 519 grants to every single city and town in Rhode Island, with allocations totalling over \$73 million¹⁴.

How does it compare to CT?

¹² DEM Rhode Island, Land Conservation
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/planning/landacquisition/index.php>

¹³ DEM Rhode Island, Local Open Space Grants
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/planning/grants/index.php>

¹⁴ Sayles, K., personal communication, 2022

Federal - Connecticut and Rhode Island receive comparable levels of federal funding toward conservation, although Connecticut still receives significantly less per capita, on average (CT = ~\$0.84 per capita per year; RI = ~\$1.64 per capita per year)¹⁵.

State - Connecticut and Rhode Island have similar state conservation funding programs, allowing for a close comparison of the effectiveness of each. Rhode Island's state program, the Farm, Forest, and Open Space program has conserved nearly 5,000 acres since 2010, raised through state bonding measures to a total of \$22 million and matched with \$4 million federal dollars¹⁶. Connecticut's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program has funded a similar dollar amount since 2010.

Municipal - In comparison to Connecticut, Rhode Island utilizes municipal-level bonding to a much higher extent. As noted above, the Local Open Space Grant program facilitates match funding for local bond measures, offering up to 50% of the appraised value, title, and survey costs. This is a key area for development within the state of Connecticut.

Policies and Initiatives

Farmland Preservation Program

Through the Farmland Preservation Program, which is operated by Rhode Island's Agricultural Land Preservation Commission, over 8,100 acres (124 farms) have been protected from development, enabling farmers to retain ownership of their lands and remain in agricultural use. Since its inception in 1985, the program has provided \$36.9 million, which has been leveraged to provide a total \$77.3 million in funding¹⁷. Supplemental funding for farmland preservation has come from local land trusts, The Nature Conservancy, the Forest Legacy Program, USFW's State Wildlife Grant, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund¹⁸. This program is vital to conservation in Rhode Island, especially given that its agricultural land is the most expensive in the country (\$16,400/acre). However, Connecticut is not close behind with the 3rd most expensive agricultural land (\$12,500/acre)¹⁹. Given this expense, Rhode Island is seeking additional funding for farmland preservation through wildlife programs, as well as advocating for additional dollars alongside the Food Policy Council. Connecticut could similarly look into both of these avenues in supplementing its own Farmland Preservation Program.

Value of Rhode Island's Forests

[The Value of Rhode Island Forests](#)²⁰ is a project by the Rhode Island Forest Conservation Advisory Committee and the Rhode Island Tree Council, funded by the USDA Forest Service. The project evaluated the state's forest resources, threats, economic and cultural value, and laid out 10 policy

¹⁵ Highstead Foundation, Public Conservation Funding in New England: Recent Trend in Government Spending on Land Protection

¹⁶ Sayles, K., personal communication, 2022

¹⁷ Sayles, K., personal communication, 2022

¹⁸ DEM Rhode Island, Farmland Preservation <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/agriculture/farmpres.php>

¹⁹ Land Values 2021 Summary (August 2021), USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

²⁰ The Value of Rhode Island Forests, USFS, DEM Rhode Island, Rhode Island Tree Council <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/forest/pdf/forest-value.pdf>

recommendations for forest conservation. One policy recommendation is to “devote more public funding to forest conservation” with a list of local and state funding sources that could be leveraged and/or created. This report may be of particular interest, given the comparable price of forest land in the two states, as well as similarities between it and Connecticut’s PRFCT Future Report.

ARPA Funding for Forest Resiliency

Rhode Island is currently securing a substantial amount of one-time funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021. Primarily being used for agricultural and farmland preservation, the state is attempting to use some toward forest resiliency efforts as well, given their priority for conservation in the state. The outcome of this effort is still unknown, but given the amount of funding available through the ARPA, this would be a worthwhile avenue for Connecticut to investigate as well.

Cost of Ecosystem Services Studies

There is growing interest in evaluating the total value of services that ecosystems and nature provide to humans (e.g., water filtration, cooling, pollination, etc.). By doing so, land protection agencies can more effectively advocate for dollars toward conservation by demonstrating the economic value of any parcel of land. Rhode Island completed such evaluations in 1995, specifically looking at the economic benefits of conservation vs. development. This report found that when a town becomes developed, there is an initial boost in income from a growing tax base, but this boost eventually levels off when community reinvestment is then needed. However, when land conservation is incorporated, property values, health, and town income tend to rise sustainably. Although useful, these studies are outdated, and the Rhode Island Land Trust Council, along with Grow Smart Rhode Island, is pushing for an updated report. This study would allow for more effective advocacy for sustainable development alongside conservation and is a key area for research for Connecticut.

State Beaches and Water Bond Measure

This state bond measure, approved in March, 2021, authorized the state of Rhode Island to issue bonds for up to \$74 million in a variety of land and water conservation projects, including state beaches and parks; working forest and farmlands preservation; and matching grants for coastal habitat, river and stream floodplains, and watersheds. Although passing a state bond measure in Rhode Island differs from Connecticut, a similar measure could still be researched and reviewed.

Municipal Bonds

Since 1998, 45 municipal bond measures toward open space preservation have passed, totalling \$89,550,000 in funding²¹. These measures are an especially important strategy for reaching Rhode Island’s state conservation goals. Many of these bonds are largely supported by the municipal land trusts in the state, which are subject to a specific set of bylaws and statutes within the town’s government. For

²¹ Trust for Public Land, Land Vote, <https://tpl.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct?a=dbpage&pageID=8>

this reason, municipal bond funding can be somewhat unreliable, more closely tied to the political leanings of the town than to any one organization's conservation goals and actions²².

Real Estate Transfer Tax

Of the 39 municipalities in Rhode Island, two have real estate transfer taxes. The Block Island Land Trust offers one example of this tax being leveraged. The BILT was established in 1985 by a group of citizens and in 1986, voters of the Town of New Shoreham adopted a resolution which authorized 3% transfer fees on property in Block Island. The BILT is currently authorized to issue up to \$6 million in bonds and has thus far conserved 47% of land on the Island.²³

Looking Forward

Looking to Rhode Island as a model, there are a few key initiatives taking place across the state that Connecticut can and should consider in its strategic planning towards achieving 30x30.

1. Cost of Ecosystem Services Studies
2. Leveraging ARPA Funding
3. Municipal-level bond measures
4. Report and study modeled after the Value of Rhode Island's Forests

New York

State of Conservation

New York has proven to be successful in leveraging state fiscal policy for conservation, creating reliable dedicated funds for land acquisition projects, and bolstering land trust capacity. A recently introduced bill, SB S4629, would commit the state to conserving 30% of its land by 2030²⁴. About 20%, or 1,976,650 acres, is currently protected²⁵. New York also passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act) in 2019, which requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emission 40% by 2030 and no less than 85% below 1990 levels by 2050²⁶. Achieving New York's climate and conservation goals requires significant public and private finance. However, New York is one of the top three states in terms of environmental spending, allocating over \$1.2 billion to environmental programs in FY 2015⁵.

How does it compare to Connecticut?

²² Sayles, K., personal communication, 2022

²³ The Town of New Shoreham, Block Island Land Trust.

<https://www.new-shoreham.com/displayboards.cfm?id=14#:~:text=The%20Block%20Island%20Land%20Trust,real%20property%20on%20Block%20Island>

²⁴ NY State Senate Bill S4629. (2021, February 8). NY State Senate.

<https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s4629>

²⁵ New York. Land Trust Alliance. <https://findalandtrust.org/land-trusts/gaining-ground/new-york>

²⁶ New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). NYSEDA.
<https://climate.ny.gov/>

One of the defining similarities between Connecticut and New York is the means by which a ballot measure can be introduced. In New York State, like Connecticut, citizens do not have the power to initiate statewide ballots or referendums. The New York State Legislature must refer ballot measures in the form of either constitutional amendments or bond issues²⁷. In Connecticut, the legislature must refer the measures in the form of constitutional amendments or through legislation²⁸. To introduce a ballot measure to the voters, the Legislature must vote to approve it by simple majority in two legislative sessions. This process is the same in Connecticut, unless the ballot measure is approved by 75% of the legislature in the first session. A total of 50 measures appeared on statewide ballots in New York between 1985 and 2020. Over the same period there were 13 measures in total on the ballot in Connecticut.

Connecticut, like New York, has committed to action on climate change in the form of greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Connecticut passed Governor's Bill No. 10, which states that Connecticut shall reduce its emissions of greenhouse gasses to at least 45% below 2001 levels by 2030 and 85% below 2001 levels by 2050.

Policies and Initiatives

NY Clean Water State Revolving Fund

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) is part of a state-federal partnership created by the 1987 amendments to the Clean Water Act (CWA)²⁹. CWSRF funds provide interest-free or low interest loans to projects focused on constructing municipal wastewater facilities, controlling nonpoint sources of pollution, building wastewater treatment systems, creating green infrastructure, protecting estuaries, and other water quality improvement projects. In New York, the CWSRF is also authorized to finance the acquisition and preservation of land as open space for objectives related to water quality. New York Codes, Rules and Regulations Section 2602.9(m) states that the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation is “authorized to provide CWSRF financing for land acquisition... Land acquisition includes, but is not limited to the outright purchase of a fee simple interest in land, or the purchase of conservation easements.” Connecticut has no statement to the same effect in its General Statutes. In fact, Section 22a-475 of the General Statutes states that acquisitions are only eligible for a “water quality project” if they involve acquiring a “water pollution control facility.”

New York's CWSRF financing scheme gives much more leeway for projects aimed at conserving land more broadly. Though projects that set water quality improvement as the primary objective are the only projects eligible for full financing, even those projects that are related to water quality but aren't focused primarily on that goal are eligible for partial financing³⁰. This creates more flexibility in the program and allows for more holistic assessment of project value.

Real Estate Transfer Tax

²⁷ *New York 2021 ballot measures*. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/New_York_2021_ballot_measures

²⁸ *Connecticut 2022 ballot measures*. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/Connecticut_2022_ballot_measures

²⁹ US EPA, O. (2015, April 13). *Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)* [Collections and Lists]. <https://www.epa.gov/cwsrf>

³⁰ *Clean Water State Revolving Fund*. Environmental Facilities Corporation. <https://efc.ny.gov/cwsrf>

New York's real estate transfer tax imposes a \$2 tax on every \$500 worth of real property or interest in real property sold³¹. There is an additional tax of 1% on the sale price of residences that are valued at \$1 million or more (mansion tax). The burden of paying the tax falls on the seller. The transfer tax is a substantial source of funds for conservation, as the revenue is funneled through the Environmental Protection Fund. In FY 2020, the New York state real estate transfer tax generated \$1.12 billion in revenue³². Real estate transfer tax revenues allocated to the Environmental Protection Fund have been capped at \$119.1 million since 2010, though that still comprises 79 percent of the total appropriated funds³³.

Environmental Protection Fund

The Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) is a dedicated fund in which monies for conservation are held, separate from other state money³³. EPF funds are allocated through the Department of Environmental Conservation; Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; the Empire State Development Corporation; the Department of Agriculture and Markets; and the Department of State. Through the end of State FY 2016-2017, over \$3.4 billion had been appropriated to the Fund³³. Over \$2.6 billion of that total amount has been spent on environmental projects. The Fund comprises five accounts: 1) solid waste, 2) parks, recreation, and historic preservation, 3) open space, 4) climate change mitigation and adaptation, and 5) EPF transfer³³. The 2017 budget appropriation of \$302 million to the EPF was the highest ever and \$123 million more than was appropriated in 2016. Appropriations between 2017 and 2022 remained constant at \$300 million per year. However, for FY 2023, the state is appropriating a record \$400 million to the Fund³⁴. The EPF is an incredibly important source of funds for land acquisition in New York, as most of the monies in the Fund are kept in accounts for Open Space and Parks.

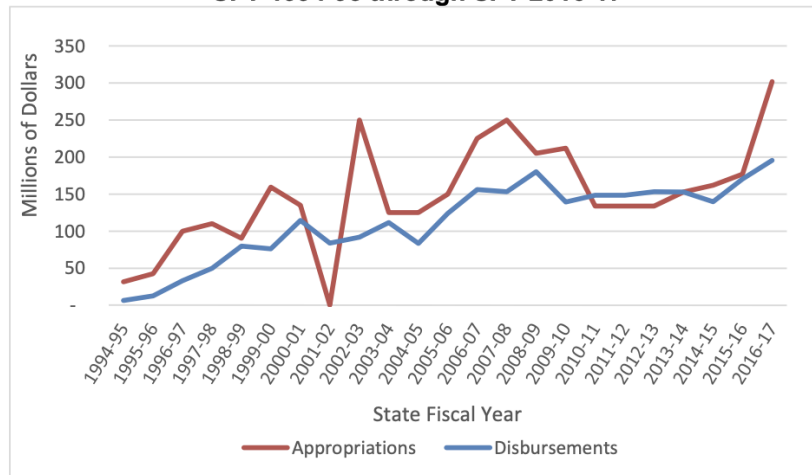
³¹ *Real estate transfer tax*. New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.
<https://www.tax.ny.gov/bus/transfer/rptidx.htm>

³² *Fiscal Year Tax Collections: 2019-2020*. New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.
https://www.tax.ny.gov/research/collections/fy_collections_stat_report/2019_2020_annual_statistical_report_of_ny_state_tax_collections.htm

³³ New York State's Environmental Protection Fund: A Financial History. (March, 2018). *Office of the New York State Comptroller*.

³⁴ *Environmental Conservation, Department of | Agency Appropriations | FY 2023 Executive Budget*. New York State Division of the Budget.
<https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/archive/fy23/ex/agencies/appropdata/EnvironmentalConservationDepartmentof.html>

History of EPF Appropriations and Disbursements SFY 1994-95 through SFY 2016-17



Source: Office of the State Comptroller

New York State Conservation Partnership Program

The New York State Conservation Partnership Program, funded through the EPF, was created in 2002. The Land Trust Alliance administers the program in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The program provides competitive, matching grants to help advance local conservation efforts and support community outreach programs³⁵. The program also enables local conservation organizations to hire more staff and interns, increasing local capacity. Grants are available in 5 categories:

1. Capacity and Excellence: to develop land trust programs and build organization capacity
2. Conservation Catalyst: to support collaborative projects that catalyze partnerships and build up community-supported conservation, stewardship, and outreach
3. Professional Development: to help land trusts professionalize and strengthen programs and services by adding more permanent staff
4. Stewardship and Resource Management: to assist land trusts seeking to make significant capital investments in public access improvements and on-the-ground stewardship
5. Transaction: to help cover the indirect costs associated with acquiring and managing new conservation easements and fee-acquisition projects

From 2003 to 2020, the Program awarded almost 1,000 grants totaling \$21.7 million to 91 land trusts across the state³⁵. As a result, 85 percent of land trusts in New York have reported that over the past 5 years they have increased their community engagement²⁵.

³⁵ New York State Conservation Partnership Program. *Land Trust Alliance*.
<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/land-trusts/field-services/new-york-program/new-york-state-conservation-partnership-program>

Looking Forward

New York provides a promising example of how to generate substantial funds for conservation without passing a large number of bond measures. To more closely follow this model, Connecticut can explore the following strategies:

- Dedicated fund for conservation, where monies for conservation are kept separate from other state monies
- Real estate transfer tax
- Dedicated programs to support conservation organization capacity building efforts

Massachusetts

State of conservation

To date, Massachusetts has conserved or protected 27% of its total land area³⁶. Contacts we spoke with in Massachusetts discussed how the state is not formally pursuing the 30x30 goal, seeing as they are well on their way as it stands, and the goal could perhaps set an arbitrary limit on its current conservation initiatives. Massachusetts has robust state-wide support toward large-scale conservation initiatives, which have allowed for this kind of success. In March of 2021, Massachusetts Governor Baker signed “An Act Creating a Next Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy” into law. This law sets ambitious limits on greenhouse gas emissions for 2025 and 2030 and, importantly, contains specific language around conserving natural and working lands for its benefits in carbon sequestration³⁷. Although no funding toward conservation has been tied to the law yet, it paves the way for increased land acquisition in the coming years, essentially assuring the state’s success in achieving 30% conserved by 2030.

In addition to robust legislative support, Massachusetts also has a high capacity for conservation advocacy. The Environmental League of Massachusetts is a statewide environmental advocacy group that has contributed to some significant policy and budgeting wins for the state. MassLand, the state’s land trust coalition, uses its position to raise advocacy and awareness with land trusts in the state, to enable advocacy work by groups like ELM, the Nature Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land. In this way, Massachusetts has a well organized and structured group of groups at the local, state, and federal levels to push through meaningful conservation policies.

How does it compare to CT?

Federal - Massachusetts and Connecticut utilize federal funding sources to markedly different extents. For instance, Massachusetts was one of the primary recipients of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act funding, and 82% of the total program spending of the Wildlife Restoration Program was awarded to the state. By contrast, Connecticut has historically had the lowest per capita federal funding contributions toward conservation in New England.

³⁶ Johnson, R., personal communication, 2022.

³⁷ MA Legislature, An Act Creating Next Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy. <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2021/Chapter8>

State - In comparison to Connecticut, Massachusetts has far more avenues for acquiring state funding toward land conservation. They have a variety of state programs involving conserved lands, e.g. Local Acquisitions for Land Diversity, the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, and the Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant Program, as well as funds from the sales of Wildlands Conservation Stamps.

Municipal - Massachusetts has exceptional levels of municipal-level funding toward conservation, in large part due to the Community Preservation Act detailed below. In addition, there is strong support from municipal bond measures. These local contributions combined with funding from CPA contributed a total \$117.4 million to conservation projects from 2004 to 2014 (CPA - \$15.1 million; municipal bonds - \$102.6 million)³⁸.

Policies and Initiatives

Resilient Lands Initiative

Currently delayed in the legislative process due to concerns over whether this harms the housing initiative. Learning from this process, it is key for any similar initiative that Connecticut pursues to include language in housing. Conservation and housing can go hand in hand if done thoughtfully, and there are burgeoning examples of community-centric conservation initiatives, such as CommonGround, who partner with community services to advocate for these initiatives in tandem³⁹. In addition, Community Land Trusts, which seek to conserve land and provide affordable housing simultaneously, are a key area of interest for an era of conservation that centers justice, equity, and sustainability. The Resilient Lands Initiative holds key similarities to Connecticut's PRFCT Future Report, and we recommend collaboration with Rhode Island to discuss any potential threats to its success.

No Net Loss of Farms and Forests

The "No Net Loss of Farms and Forests" is one of eight strategies within the Resilient Lands Initiative and seeks to address concerns over housing and inequitable green space access. The strategy aims to reduce suburban sprawl through smart growth incentives and prioritizes forest and farm conservation efforts in areas with disproportionate levels of low-income residents. This strategy is particularly relevant to Connecticut, given the need for sustainable growth in a limited land area and the high prices for farm and forest lands.

Wildlands Conservation Stamp

³⁸ Highstead Foundation, Public Conservation Funding in New England: Recent Trend in Government Spending on Land Protection

³⁹ Land Trust Alliance, Common Ground Initiative Asks How Can Land Conservation Support Healthy Thriving Communities.

<https://www.landtrustalliance.org/news/common-ground-initiative-asks-how-can-land-conservation-support-healthy-thriving-communities#:~:text=Common%20Ground%20seeks%20to%20shed,Aldrich%2C%20former%20community%20conservation%20manager.>

The Wildlands Conservation Stamp is a \$5 stamp that must be purchased with any fishing, hunting, or trapping license. All funds from the sale of these stamps goes directly to the Massachusetts Wildlands Fund, which funds the acquisition of wildlife habitat. Since the program began in 1991, the Stamp has raised somewhere between \$1 million and \$1.5 million each year. Given the number and combined revenues of hunting and fishing clubs in the state (76 clubs; \$11 million in revenue/year)⁴⁰, advocating for a similar law and program could be an especially relevant area to look into.

Community Preservation Act

Passed in 2000, the Community Preservation Act has allowed for substantial conservation gains at the local level. This law enables communities to conduct a referendum within their town on whether to add a surcharge to local property taxes. When combined with matching funds from the statewide Community Preservation Trust Fund, these funds can be used toward community benefits, including land protection. Through this program, \$2.65 billion has been raised, and 32,566 acres of open space have been conserved in the state⁴¹. An extremely successful program, emulating a similar law for Connecticut would be a massive benefit to both land conservation and safe development.

Communicating the Value of Conservation

As opposed to the other states covered in our case study, Massachusetts is not actively supporting the 30x30 initiative. Instead, Robb Johnson, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, stressed the state's focus on the "why" conservation. Instead of advocating for a specific goal in lands conserved, the organization is pushing to communicate the value of conservation and why it's essential for the ecologic, social, and economic resilience of communities. To this end, Massachusetts is developing a "Communicating the Value of Conservation" tool, which should be released in the coming months. Developing a similar tool, which demonstrates the economic, social, and ecological value of conserved lands, would be a keen first step in Connecticut's pursuit of increased land conservation.

Looking forward

1. Focusing on the "Why" of Conservation
 - a. "Communicating the Value of Conservation" Tool
2. Wildlife Conservation Stamp Program

Oregon

State of Conservation

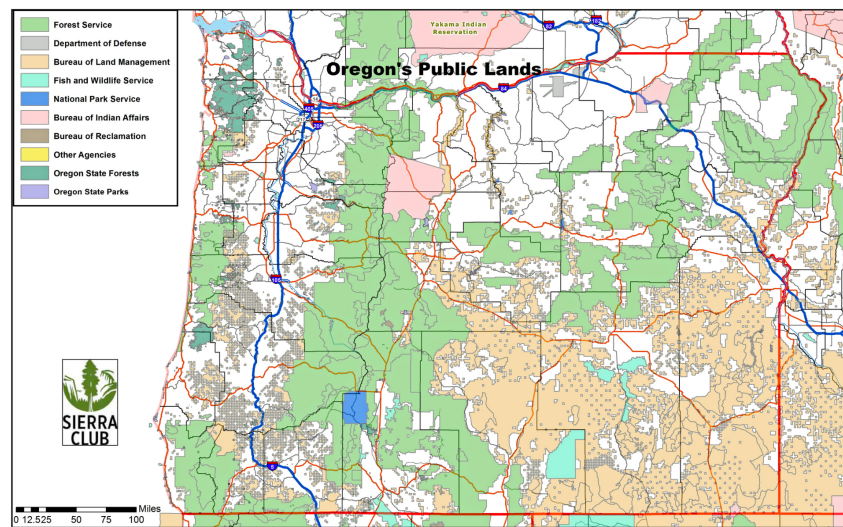
Approximately 54.3 percent of land in Oregon is owned and managed by either the state or federal government⁴². Of the remaining 28.15 million acres of private land, almost 869,000 acres have been

⁴⁰ Argus Times, Wildlands Stamp Offers Open Land to Sportsmen. https://www.timesargus.com/news/wildlands-stamp-offers-open-land-to-sportsmen/article_5bcedd0a-4ea3-533b-ad11-a0fb2ef61b2d.html

⁴¹ Community Preservation Coalition, CPA: An Overview. <https://www.communitypreservation.org/about>

⁴² Federal land ownership by state. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/Federal_land_ownership_by_state

protected⁴³. There has been a 23 percent increase in private lands conserved since 2010⁴³. Also promising is the allocation of dedicated funding for climate change to land conservation organizations across the state. Almost 80 percent of land trusts in Oregon are receiving funding to address climate change⁴³. The Pacific Northwest Resilient Landscapes Initiative, comprising the Land Trust Alliance, Oregon Community Foundation, Seattle Foundation, Idaho Community Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, supports land trust projects that increase environmental and community resilience in the face of climate change⁴⁴. Only 13 percent of land trusts in Connecticut report receiving funding for climate change mitigation projects. Oregon also has some of the highest overall environmental spending in the country. In FY 2015, the state spent the fourth highest amount on environmental programs, at \$875,485,989⁵.



Oregon's Public Lands

How does it compare to Connecticut?

Land ownership is significantly different across Oregon and Connecticut. Over 50 percent of the land in Oregon is owned by the federal government. In Connecticut, that federal land ownership drops to 0.4 percent⁴². There are also over 10.3 million acres of private forestland in Oregon, most of which is harvested for timber and therefore not protected⁴⁵. The timber industry in Oregon is a huge factor in the state economy, generating over \$18 billion in 2016⁴⁶. In contrast, Connecticut has less than 1.8 million acres of forestland, about 71% of which is private⁴⁷. The timber industry in Connecticut only generates about \$25 million per year⁴⁸.

⁴³ Oregon. Land Trust Alliance. <https://findalandtrust.org/land-trusts/gaining-ground/oregon>

⁴⁴ Pacific Northwest Resilient Landscapes Initiative. <https://www.landtrustalliance.org/pacific-northwest-resilient-landscapes-initiative>

⁴⁵ Oregon Forest Facts: 2017-2018 Edition. Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

⁴⁶ Oregon's Forest Economy: 2019 Forest Report. Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

⁴⁷ Forests of Connecticut, 2019. United States Department of Agriculture.

⁴⁸ The Economic Importance of Connecticut's Forest Based Economy. (2015). North East State Foresters Association.

Another significant difference in land ownership between Oregon and Connecticut is the average parcel sizes. Generally parcels in Oregon are much larger. Connecticut has experienced substantial fragmentation and parcelization over the past century, causing areas of interest for conservation to be split up into many small parcels⁴⁹. As a result, land trusts must engage in many more transactions in Connecticut to conserve the same amount of land.

Finally, citizens have greater power in Oregon to introduce new legislation and bonds via ballot measure. Citizens of Oregon have the power of both initiation and referendum⁵⁰. In Connecticut, the power of introducing measures lies with the Legislature, and they must approve it as a constitutional amendment.

Policies and Initiatives

Oregon Lottery

One of the most substantial and consistent sources of conservation in Oregon is the state lottery. In 1998, Oregon voters added a constitutional amendment that allocates 15 percent of lottery dollars to projects that protect natural resources⁵¹. Half of these allocated funds go to Oregon State Parks and the remaining half support Oregon's natural habitats, through projects administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. Lottery funds have supported more than 7,000 watershed restoration projects across the state⁵¹.

Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program

The Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program is a partnership between state and local governments aimed at incentivizing private landowners to conserve wildlife habitat on their property⁵². The Program offers a property tax incentive to landowners to encourage them to set aside land for conservation that could otherwise be used for farming, harvesting timber, or various forms of development. Under the WHCMP, landowners, working together with a cooperating agency must develop a wildlife habitat conservation and management plan. This plan must describe in detail the conservation and management practices that will be undertaken to conserve and restore native habitat and protect native species. The cooperating agency can be the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Oregon State University extension service, soil and water conservation district, or a qualified contractor.

Landowners must then submit their plans to both ODFW and their county or city planning department for review. Once their plan is approved, they can apply for wildlife habitat special assessment through their local county assessor. To remain in compliance with the program and continue to benefit from the special assessment, landowners must submit an annual status report to ODFW and continue to steward their land

⁴⁹ Connecticut's Forest Legacy Problem. (2002). <http://www.ecfla.org/connecticuts-forest-legacy-problem/>

⁵⁰ *Laws governing the initiative process in Oregon*. Ballotpedia.

https://ballotpedia.org/Laws_governing_the_initiative_process_in_Oregon

⁵¹ *Oregon Wins*. Oregon Lottery. <https://www.oregonlottery.org/oregon-wins/>

⁵² *ODFW Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management*. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/lands/whcmp/>

according to their management plan. Non-compliance may result in disqualification from the program and landowner liability for back taxes.

Looking Forward

Though Oregon and Connecticut are far apart geographically, Oregon can offer some potentially innovative solutions to increase conservation. Some promising mechanisms that could translate over to the policy environment in Connecticut include:

- Lottery fund allocations for conservation
- Private landowner habitat management plans

Maine

The State of Conservation

To date, Maine has conserved about 21% of its lands⁵³. The state has formally signed onto the 30x30 initiative through a commitment in the Maine Won't Wait Report, a four-year plan around climate policy. Maine receives significant federal funding, especially through the Forest Legacy Program⁵⁴. The Land for Maine's Future program is the primary state-led funding source, and is funded through voter-approved bond measures. This program has led to the conservation of over 600,000 acres of land in all 16 of Maine's counties⁵⁵.

Policies and Initiatives

Maine Won't Wait

The Maine Climate Council was signed into law in 2019 with the main goal of reducing emission in the state by 45% by 2030 and by 80% by 2050. The Maine Won't Wait report details the comprehensive four-year plan to accomplish these goals, and it includes ambitious goals around land conservation. Strategy E in the report is to "Protect Maine's Environment and Working Lands and Waters: Promote Natural Climate Solutions and Increase Carbon Sequestration." The first initiative within this strategy is to conserve 30% of the state's lands by 2030, through purchases of lands or work forests and farms conservation easements. Key to this initiative is the call to revise the scoring criteria for state conservation funding, which would place more precedence on state funding allocation toward climate mitigation and resiliency through land conservation⁵⁶. Although thus far this has not changed the funding allocation for

⁵³ Maine Public, To store greenhouse gases, Maine looks to protect more than 2 Rhode Islands' worth of forest by 2030. <https://www.mainepublic.org/environment-and-outdoors/2021-12-24/to-absorb-greenhouse-gases-maine-looks-to-protect-more-than-2-rhode-islands-worth-of-forest-by-2030>

⁵⁴ Highstead Foundation, Public Conservation Funding in New England: Recent Trend in Government Spending on Land Protection

⁵⁵ Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry, Land for Maine's Future. <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lmf/aboutus.shtml>

⁵⁶ Maine Climate Council. <https://climatecouncil.maine.gov/about>

the state, it demonstrates the statewide legislative support of the 30x30 initiative and significant momentum toward achieving the goal. Connecticut could consider drafting a similar climate-focused report, building off of the momentum from Maine and Massachusetts both and focusing the conversation around climate mitigation.

The Maine Won't Wait report calls for a few key laws and initiatives to be put in place through the Maine legislature, which are especially relevant to its 30x30 goal:

1. Establishment of a voluntary, incentive-based forest carbon program for woodland owners of 10 to 10,000 acres and forest practitioners
2. Engagement in regional discussions around multistate carbon goals
3. Statewide carbon sequestration study to determine baseline for future monitoring of carbon sequestration achievements
4. Incentives to farmers practicing sustainable agricultural practices that increase soil carbon sequestration

Farmland and Tree Growth Property Tax Law

These two programs allow farms and forests, under certain criteria, to be taxed at a reduced rate by assessing the property value at its “current use” rather than at market value⁵⁷, much like Connecticut's Public Act 490. These laws provide financial assistance to those who continue to keep their properties as working farms and forests, ensuring this land stays undeveloped. The Maine Won't Wait report calls on the Farmland Current Use Tax Law to be updated to include carbon sequestration targets.

Looking Forward

1. Focusing conservation communication and marketing around climate resiliency i.e., Maine Won't Wait
2. Researching incentive program around carbon sequestration for forests and farms
3. Current use tax laws

CONCLUSION

This report details many options and pathways toward the 30x30 initiative, with examples from other states to serve as a guide. Many of the actions taken by these case study states could be emulated by Connecticut, while others may not be politically or logistically feasible. The goal of this report was to demonstrate the many mechanisms available to organizations at the state and local level in pursuing an increased pace of land conservation and acquisition. There is no one defined path or strategy, and a mix of diverse actions will be needed to reach Connecticut conservation goals. At its broadest, increasing conservation in Connecticut is imperative to the health of human and ecological communities alike. Conservation pathways should center the livelihoods and wellbeing of all people in Connecticut and will necessitate expansive collaboration and partnership-building. Achieving 30% of land conserved by 2030

⁵⁷ Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry.
https://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/farmland_protection/farmland_tax_law.shtml

is a worthy, yet ambitious goal, and Connecticut's pursuit of it depends on collaboration, innovation, and commitment to action at the state, local, and organization level.

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