



Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy

PROTECTING LAND AND WATER FOR PEOPLE, FOR WILDLIFE, FOREVER.

Pathways for People NCLC's Public Preserve Access Plan

Request for Proposals to Develop a Regional Preserves and Trails Plan

Overview

Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy (NCLC), a non-profit organization dedicated to safeguarding natural lands, drinking water resources, and public recreation areas across Litchfield and northern Fairfield Counties, invites qualified consultants to submit proposals for the development of a Regional Preserves and Trails Plan. This comprehensive master plan will guide the investment, improvement, and management of public nature preserves, totaling more than 3,600 acres, ensuring safe and equitable access, and connectivity to Connecticut's natural resources.

Scope of Work

NCLC is seeking expert guidance from qualified consultants to develop a Regional Preserves and Trails Plan (Plan). The Plan will establish standards for NCLC's public nature preserves, including trail design and signage, to enhance the visitor experience, promote equitable access, and ensure safety, while safeguarding ecological integrity and habitat for rare and sensitive species. The Plan is expected to include the following:

1. Establish standards across all public nature preserves regarding infrastructure, trail design, protection of sensitive habitats, and visitor access, safety, and engagement.

In consultation with NCLC staff, develop guidance and standards for a Preserve and Trail Design Guide that establishes:

- Standards for trail width, substrate, and blazing, wayfinding, signage, and kiosk designs, including symbology, coloring, dimensions, etc.;
- Guidance for trail construction and placement that addresses human needs and safety, as well as the protection of sensitive habitats (for example, rare plant surveys to complete before construction, minimum distances from rare habitat types);
- Guidance for multiuse trails (biking, equestrian, etc.);
- Guidance for the placement of ADA accessible infrastructure, including trails, boardwalks, and ADA-compliant signage to enhance user experience;

- Guidance on when and how multilingual, tactile, and Braille signage should be installed;
- Best practices for parking area development, including minimum preferred siting, desired size, substrate, and landscaping, if applicable;
- Best practices for other user needs, if applicable, such as bathrooms, trash cans, picnic areas, bike racks, etc.;
- Guidance for emergency access and safety.

Deliverable 1: Compilation of standards into a **Preserve and Trail Design Guide**.

2. Comprehensive review of existing conditions at 31 public nature preserves

NCLC staff will compile existing conditions at 31 public nature preserves using the list of metrics below. NCLC will provide this information (in a mutually agreed-upon format) to the selected contractor for review and assessment. The existing conditions, as well as contractor review, commentary, and analysis, will be compiled into an Existing Conditions Report, which will inform Deliverable 4 below. Compiled information will be delivered to NCLC in clear, concise written and electronic form that is easy to review and utilize.

Infrastructure

- ❖ Parking
- ❖ Signage
- ❖ Kiosks
- ❖ ADA compliance and potential
- ❖ Footbridges
- ❖ Boardwalks
- ❖ Benches/picnic tables
- ❖ Potential for multiple uses (biking, equestrian, motorized, passive, boating, fishing, etc.)
- ❖ Trail network
- ❖ Trail conditions and maintenance
- ❖ Trail sustainability

Natural Features (to enhance public use OR remain restricted from public use)

- ❖ Viewsheds/Vistas

- ❖ Water features such as rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, unique plant communities, wildlife habitat and corridors

Community and Trail Connections

- ❖ Current use and user groups
- ❖ Proximity to community centers, affordable housing, schools, and underserved communities (distance to these community resources)
- ❖ Proximity to public transit
- ❖ Proximity to greenways and other trail networks/connections (Appalachian Trail, CT Blue-Blazed trails, greenways, local land trust trail networks, etc.)

Deliverable 2: Compilation of metrics into **Existing Conditions Report**.

3. Prepare and Implement a Community Engagement Plan

Develop a Community Engagement Plan that collects information from constituents, addresses barriers to using NCLC's public nature preserves, encourages their use, and fosters an inclusive and welcoming experience for all visitors. Focus should be on improving access for underserved community groups within NCLC's service area. The Community Engagement Plan will:

- Recommend, design, and provide tools such as public surveys, meeting content, focus group materials, and related outreach resources (including printed and digital communications) to engage constituents, gather input, increase awareness, and promote access to NCLC's public nature preserves for everyone.
- Determine, design, and supply multilingual materials needed to execute the community engagement plan effectively.
- Identify geographic locations for at least two public meetings, focus groups, and other engagement activities, along with a possible timeline for implementation.
- In collaboration with NCLC staff, implement the Community Engagement Plan throughout NCLC's service area.

Deliverable 3: Community Engagement Plan and a detailed work plan for its execution, including analysis and compilation of results to inform the Regional Preserve and Trails Plan.

4. Recommendations for Improvements at 31 Public Nature Preserves

Using the standards developed in the **Preserve and Trail Design Guide**, identify needed improvements and provide prioritized recommendations for public preserve improvements at no less than 31 public nature preserves, including:

- Parking and access improvements,
- Trail improvements and opportunities for multi-use trails and ADA accessibility,
- Informational signage (including multilingual) and kiosks, maintenance improvements, and possible connections to other trail networks and greenways; (see attached list of potential recommendations)
- Public safety improvements
- Budget estimates
- The Preserve and Trail Design Guide, Existing Conditions Report, information from the Community Engagement process, and preserve improvement recommendations will be compiled into a written and electronic Regional Preserves and Trail Plan, including budget

estimates and prioritization of preserve improvements, emphasizing equitable, safe, sustainable access.

Deliverable 4: Compile results into the **Regional Preserves and Trail Plan** final document. Finalize the master plan for the entire preserve portfolio, outlining existing conditions, deficiencies, necessary improvements, estimated investment costs, and public input.

5. Design “Shovel Ready” Design and Engineering Plans for four (4) NEW public nature preserves

In the next three years, NCLC will open four (4) new public nature preserves. The four properties are: Milde Farm, Litchfield and Torrington, CT, Strauss Morrissey/Glen Brook, Sherman and New Milford, CT, McEver, Salisbury, CT and Surdan Mountain, Sharon, CT. These plans should include an analysis of the metrics in section 2 of this RFP. These properties will require full site design development, including:

- Detailed design and engineering plans for parking,
- Access drives,
- Trail system(s),
- Kiosks, signage, and other public amenities
- Material specifications, cost estimates, phased implementation schedules, and all necessary permits and compliance documentation may also be included.

Deliverable 5: Four Shovel-ready Site Plans, including design and engineering plans, materials list, budget, timelines, required permits, etc.

Materials and Data Provided by NCLC

NCLC will provide the following:

- Existing conditions information as outlined in section 2.
- GIS shapefiles for all NCLC trails and preserve boundaries.
- Natural resource data, including wetlands, watercourses, rare species habitats, and other relevant ecological datasets.
- Preserve-specific information, including current rules and regulations, visitor guidance, and public access information.
- Property surveys and summaries of any existing legal restrictions impacting public use.
- Existing branding guidelines, including NCLC logos, color palettes, and font standards for consistent design application.

- Photos, informational and interpretive content (as needed) for inclusion in public outreach materials such as flyers, surveys, brochures, signage, brochures, or maps.

Proposal Requirements

Proposals may cover all deliverables or a subsection of deliverables. All proposals should include the following:

1. *Company Background*
 - Overview of the firm, including experience with similar projects.
2. *Understanding of the Project*
 - Description of the firm's understanding of the scope, objectives, and deliverables.
3. *Methodology*
 - Describe the deliverables the firm is proposing to execute, if not all of them
 - Approach to each requested deliverable
4. *Team Composition*
 - Key personnel and their roles in the project.
5. *Timeline*
 - Proposed schedule for completion of each phase.
 - Note: NCLC's contract with the CT Recreational Trails Grant program is for three years, ending May 2028. *Deadline for individual deliverables can be found below.*
6. *Budget*
 - Detailed cost estimate for services, broken up by deliverables, including a breakdown of fees.
7. *References*
 - At least three relevant references.

Project Timeline

- RFP Issued: January 5, 2026
- Proposal Submission Deadline: January 30, 2026
- Selection of Consultant: by February 28, 2026
- Project Start Date: Upon contract execution
- Completion of Deliverable 1, **Trail and Preserve Design Guide**, on or before December 31, 2026
- Completion of Deliverable 2, **Existing Conditions Report**: on or before December 31, 2026

- Completion of Deliverable 3, **Community Engagement Plan** by June 30, 2026 with a deadline for completion of the workplan by June 30, 2027;
- Completion of Deliverable 4, **Regional Preserves and Trails Plan**: on or before December 31, 2027
- Completion of Deliverable 5, **Four Shovel-ready Site Plans**: on or before December 31, 2027.

Proposal Submission Instructions

- **Deadline:** January 30, 2026
- **Submission Method:** Please email final proposals to Maria Grace, maria@ctland.org. For alternative submission methods, please contact Maria Grace prior to the deadline.
- **Proposals and Questions can be directed to:**
Maria Grace, Director of Stewardship
maria@ctland.org
860-927-1927 x.1504

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

1. Relevant experience and expertise.
2. Demonstrated understanding of the project scope and objectives.
3. Quality and feasibility of the proposed methodology and timeline.
4. Cost-effectiveness of the proposal.
5. Strength of references and past performance.

NCLC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals and to negotiate terms with the selected consultant.