

# CONNECTICUT Land Conservation Council

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Also sent via email: [governor.malloy@ct.gov](mailto:governor.malloy@ct.gov)

Honorable Governor Dannel P. Malloy

Office of the Governor

State Capitol

210 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Malloy:

On behalf of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, I am writing to respectfully request that you convene the State Bond Commission and authorize the release of bond funding for the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) and Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program (RNHT).

As the umbrella organization for the state's land conservation community, including its 137+ land trusts, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) advocates for land conservation, stewardship and funding, and works to ensure the long-term viability of the land conservation community statewide.

The state's goal to preserve 21-percent of Connecticut's land area or 673,210 acres (the 21% goal) was created by the legislature in 1997 (Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-23(b)), with recommendations that 10-percent be acquired by the state and 11-percent by "others" (land trusts, towns and water companies).

While it is highly unlikely that the state will meet these land conservation goals by the target date of 2023 (*CEQ 2014 Annual Report, page 3*), DEEP and its conservation partners have remained steadfast in their efforts to continue to preserve and protect the places that make Connecticut special – and the OSWA and RNHT programs are absolutely essential to their work.

### **Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program (OSWA)**

OSWA is the state's only matching grant program for land trusts, towns and water companies seeking to protect open space, forests and farms. Funded through bonding and the Community Investment Act (CIA), the OSWA program provides for a grant which may cover up to 65% of the purchase price for a property -- 75% for targeted and distressed communities.

The OSWA program has supported the purchase of 471 properties comprised of over 29,000 acres in 127 communities since 1998 and continues to foster strong collaboration amongst state and local governments, land trusts and private landowners. (*DEEP 2014 Annual Report to the Environment Committee*) The 2014 grants announced late last year will permanently protect 950 acres in 17 municipalities.



The state's investment in land acquisition through the OSWA program has leveraged millions of matching municipal, federal and private dollars in return. Even during these years of tumultuous economic times, residents have consistently approved open space bonding referenda at the polls and otherwise voiced their support for land protection. The public is committed to protecting open space because of the obvious benefits such projects provide to our environment, quality of life and state and local economies.

After years of inconsistency (no grant rounds were offered in 2009 and 2011), under your administration the OSWA program has returned to a predictable schedule of annual grant rounds. This much needed consistency in the availability of funding has helped towns and land trusts get back on track to strategically plan, effectively negotiate and budget annually for conservation transactions.

Yet with recent sweeps of the Community Investment Act, the integrity of the OSWA program is once again in jeopardy. Bonding is essential to the ongoing survival of the OSWA program and the ability of land trusts, towns and water companies to continue to plan for and pursue high caliber conservation projects throughout the state.

The OSWA program truly is the backbone of land conservation efforts in Connecticut. Rarely a day goes by without my fielding at least one question from a land trust or town regarding the OSWA program. These inquiries relate to pending or prospective conservation projects in every part of the state. The land conservation community is anxiously awaiting the announcement of the 2015 grant awards and is assembling their next projects in anticipation of the 2016 grant round. **When OSWA projects close, entire communities celebrate.**

#### **Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program (RNHT)**

The RNHT program is DEEP's primary vehicle for acquiring state lands for parks, forests, wildlife, fisheries, water access and natural resource management areas. Funded exclusively by bonding, the RNHT program has enabled DEEP to conserve 78,000 acres of land since 1986.

Like the towns, land trusts and water companies with which it partners, DEEP also has a list of properties in the queue which it seeks for conservation, recreation and/or agricultural purposes; yet without funding for the RNHT program the state's opportunity to purchase those properties may be lost forever to development.

With real estate still affordable and conservation projects primed to move forward all across the state, funding for OSWA and RNHT is needed now more than ever. We respectfully urge you to authorize the allocation of bond funding to support the tireless work of Connecticut's conservation community to protect the resources that ensure clean air and water, help offset climate change, provide local food, and offer opportunities for recreation -- making our towns more attractive for people to live and for businesses to operate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Amy Blaymore Paterson  
Executive Director