Representative Policy Board
**Land Use Committee**
Whitney Water Center
945 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06517

# AGENDA

**Regular Meeting of Wednesday, March 11, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.**

1. Safety Moment
2. Approval of Minutes – February 11, 2026 meeting
3. Whitney Water Center Update: Lisa DiFrancesco
   a. Introduction – Allison Stowe, WWC new staff member
4. Consider and act on recommendation to the Representative Policy Board regarding completeness, mode, and date of public hearing for approval of the Land Use Plan Amendment ("Application")
5. Updates on land and RWA properties, including invasive species update
6. Other land items
7. Upcoming Meetings
   a. Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. (LUC regular meeting)
   b. Monday, April 13, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. (Finance Committee regular meeting - review of FY 2027 Budget)
   c. Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. (Jt. Special meeting LUC/Consumer Affairs Committee - review FY 2027 Budget)
8. Adjourn

To view meeting documents, please visit https://tinyurl.com/3u3h9n3x. For questions, contact the board office at 203-401-2515 or by email to jslubowski@rwater.com

# SAFETY MOMENT

Tap Into Safety

Regional Water Authority

## PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

As winter transitions into early spring, roads can become more dangerous than many drivers expect. Even though conditions look better, these several hidden hazards appear when the snow begins to melt, and temperatures fluctuate:

1. Increased pedestrian, cyclist and outdoor activity
2. Joggers and dog walkers
3. Children playing outside

Drivers must stay alert and reduce speed in residential areas and near schools or parks. They should avoid these common mistakes:

1. Overconfident driving after winter
2. Risk of complacency on road surfaces
3. Melting conditions and standing water

In all circumstances, use caution and drive defensively, even when conditions seem safe.

Service – Teamwork – Accountability – Respect – Safety

**Safety is a core company value at the Regional Water Authority .**
**It is our goal to reduce workplace injuries to zero.**

Regional Water Authority

Representative Policy Board
**Land Use Committee**
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
February 11, 2026

Minutes

The regular meeting of the Land Use Committee ("Committee") of the Representative Policy Board ("RPB"), of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District ("RWA"), took place on Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority, 90 Sargent Drive, New Haven, Connecticut, and via remote access. Chair Levine presided.

**Committee Members Present:** M. Levine(R), P. Betkoski(R), P. DeSantis(R), G. Malloy, and J. Mowat Young

**Committee Members Absent**: B. Eitzer and J. Olsander

**RPB**: R. Harvey, N. Campbell, C. Havrda(R), S. Iacuone(R), and C. Mancini(R)

**Authority:** T. Cort(R)

**Management:** V, Benni, W. Henley, J. Hill, J. Tracy, J. Triana, S. Vitko(R), and I. Brooks

**Staff**: J. Slubowski

Chair Levine called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He reviewed the Safety Moment distributed to members.

On motion made by Ms. Young and seconded by Mr. Malloy, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of its January 14, 2026 regular meeting, with Mr. Malloy abstaining.

Mr. Henley, the RWA's Aquatic Resource Scientist, and Mr. Tracy, the RWA's Forester II – Drone Manager, provided an update on the RWA's Water Chestnut management, which included an overview of the history, initial locations, and efforts to address the invasive species. They noted that the water chestnut, identified as an invasive species, spreads through seed reproduction and raises concerns for its potential impact on water sources. The RWA first discovered the species at Furnace Pond, located at Lake Saltonstall, which led to the implementation of a management plan in 2018. The plan led to annual harvesting efforts using mechanical methods beginning in 2020.

They also provided information on harvesting efforts from 2023 to 2025, analyzing pre- and post-harvesting results to assess the impact on water chestnut growth. Predictions and expectations for the 2026 season were also discussed. Other affected areas include the Lake Whitney upper basin, where the species' impact on nearby water bodies is being monitored using aerial imagery. In addition, the RWA is assisting the owners of Mill Pond in Branford, using drone imagery, to monitor the water chestnut growth in the area.

The Committee discussed management planning, mechanical harvesting, costs and funding, and a possible site visit to observe the harvesting process.

Update on *The Land We Need for the Water We Use Program* – Mr. Triana, the RWA's Real Estate Manager, reported:

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average | Drought Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| January 31 | 65% | 76% | 77% | None |

Rainfall (inches)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average |
|---|---|---|---|
| January 31 | 2.12 | 0.72 | 3.56 |
| Fiscal YTD (6/1/24 – 1/31/26) | 18.68 | 26.41 | 30.66 |

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Cheshire – Corresponded with property owner of 20+/- acres.
- Cheshire, former Bis property (CH 5) - Received check for OSWA grant. Title company filed the CE's on land records in Cheshire and Prospect.
- Hamden condemnations (HA 5A and HA 7) – DOT staff sent updated surveys. Re-executed deed and sent to DOT.
- Killingworth, Abner Lane Rd. (KI 6) – Killingworth Land Trust indicated a lack of interest based on incorrect assumptions of how the deal would work. Briefed our proposal again for reconsideration.

Rental houses:

- Woodbridge, 1029 Johnson Rd. – Owner reported that they have yet to start the variance application for since they were still working on an A2 survey of the property.
- Hamden, 233 Skiff St. – Compiled material for the public bid.

Forestry Update

- Coordinated with timber harvester about clearing the area of the new North Branford tank.
- Completed marking timber for the Saltonstall slash wall harvest. Collaborated with herpetologist about allowing access/egress for box turtles.
- Inventoried two sugarbushes for the Bird Friendly Maple program and created habitat management plans.
- Worked with the New England Forestry Foundation and Farm Service Agency (FSA) to enroll forest stands with FSA to ensure eligibility and compliance with USDA environmental protection programs.

Recreation

- Held New Year's Day hike at Lake Bethany with 6 people.

| | January | | December | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2026 | 2025 | 2025 | 2024 |
| Permit Holders | 4,833 | 4,775 | 4,813 | 4,787 |

Special Activity Permits

- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station-(Ms. Susanna Kerio, Assistant Agricultural Scientist)-research for management of chestnut blight, Bethany (Hilldale Rd.); Madison (Genesee Recreational Area, Goat Lot Rd., Durham Rd.); Guilford (Goat Lot Rd., Durham Rd.); other possible locations on RWA lands with American chestnuts; (1/6/2026-12/31/2026).

- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station –(Joseph Barsky) continuation of existing forest research studies, remeasurement of vegetation and sampling of ticks for vector-borne diseases. Seymour Slash Wall, Hosley Brook, Bethany RT. 42, Nathan's Pond, Lake Chamberlain, Lake Gaillard; (1/1/2026-12/31/2026).

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
  - Agricultural agreements – Signed new license agreement to use the fields in Prospect. Sent consent form to Sperry Rd. field tenants to apply for a grant to install a fence around the field.
  - Madison, 702 Summer Hill Rd. (MA 9) – Abutter refused to agree with our survey. Preparing title report for an adversarial case.
  - East Haven, Barberry Rd. fields (EH 9, 10, 11, & 13) – Sent proposal for a smaller footprint.
  - West Haven, Shingle Hill tanks (WH 7) – Murtha sent email to West Haven about the expired agreement.

- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in North Branford.

| | |
|---|---|
| Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac) | 3 acres |
| Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH) | 3 acres |

- Deer hunt – Post-hunt surveys due date is February 6.
- West Haven, 600 Derby Ave. – Reviewed proposal from YNHH and did not encroach upon open space area. Environmental Planning to track when the application goes before land use boards.
- Land Use Plan – Submitted draft letter and resolution to Authority to add to their February agenda.
- Armory St. PS – Responded to an information request regarding an art installation at the pump station in the 1890's.

Mr. Triana reported that next month's meeting will include a Whitney Water Center Update and April's meeting will take place at an offsite location and will include the annual Deer Hunt update.

Committee members inquired about a site visit to see the Madison or Seymour slash wall.

The next regular meeting is Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

At 6:24 p.m., on motion made by Mr. Malloy and seconded by Ms. Young, the Committee voted to adjourn the meeting.

_____
Mark Levine, Chair

(R) – Attended remotely.

# Whitney Water Center

The Whitney Water Center in Hamden offers free, hands-on water science programs for K-8 students within our district.

- Public and Private Schools
- Homeschool Organizations
- Girl and Boy Scout Troops
- Libraries
- Community Organizations

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# Whitney Water Center

We offer outreach and onsite programs, Project WATER field study, and water science loan boxes.

- In-school programs are most popular with early elementary educators.
- Project WATER is the most popular option for middle school educators.
- Loan boxes are underutilized and will be revamped to act as extension activities for our current education programs.

# Whitney Water Center

Since the Whitney Water Center's inception in 1990, over 395,000 students have participated in our programs.

Included in that total:

- 18,800 students participated in Project WATER
- 57,000 students have used our Water Science Loan Boxes

# Welcome, Alison!

The Whitney Water Center is happy to welcome Alison Stowe!

- Over 25 years of experience in the environmental education field.
- Former director of the Ansonia Nature Center.


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# Classroom Programs Trends

| | |
|---|---|
| **Pre-COVID Average**<br>*School Years 16-17, 17-18, 18-19* | **4,200 students** |
| **COVID Average**<br>*School Years 20-21 and 21-22* | **2,015 students**<br>*(-52%)* |
| **Last School Year**<br>*Programs booked for SY 24-25* | **5,017 students**<br>*(up 18% from Pre-COVID average)* |
| **Current School Year**<br>*Programs booked for SY 25-26* | **4,710 students**<br>*(up12% from Pre-COVID average)* |

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# Program Growth - Second Educator

**2024-2025**

**3,074 students**

154 classes

**2025-2026**

*Begining December 1*

**3,576 students**

177 classes

*(17% increase from last year)*

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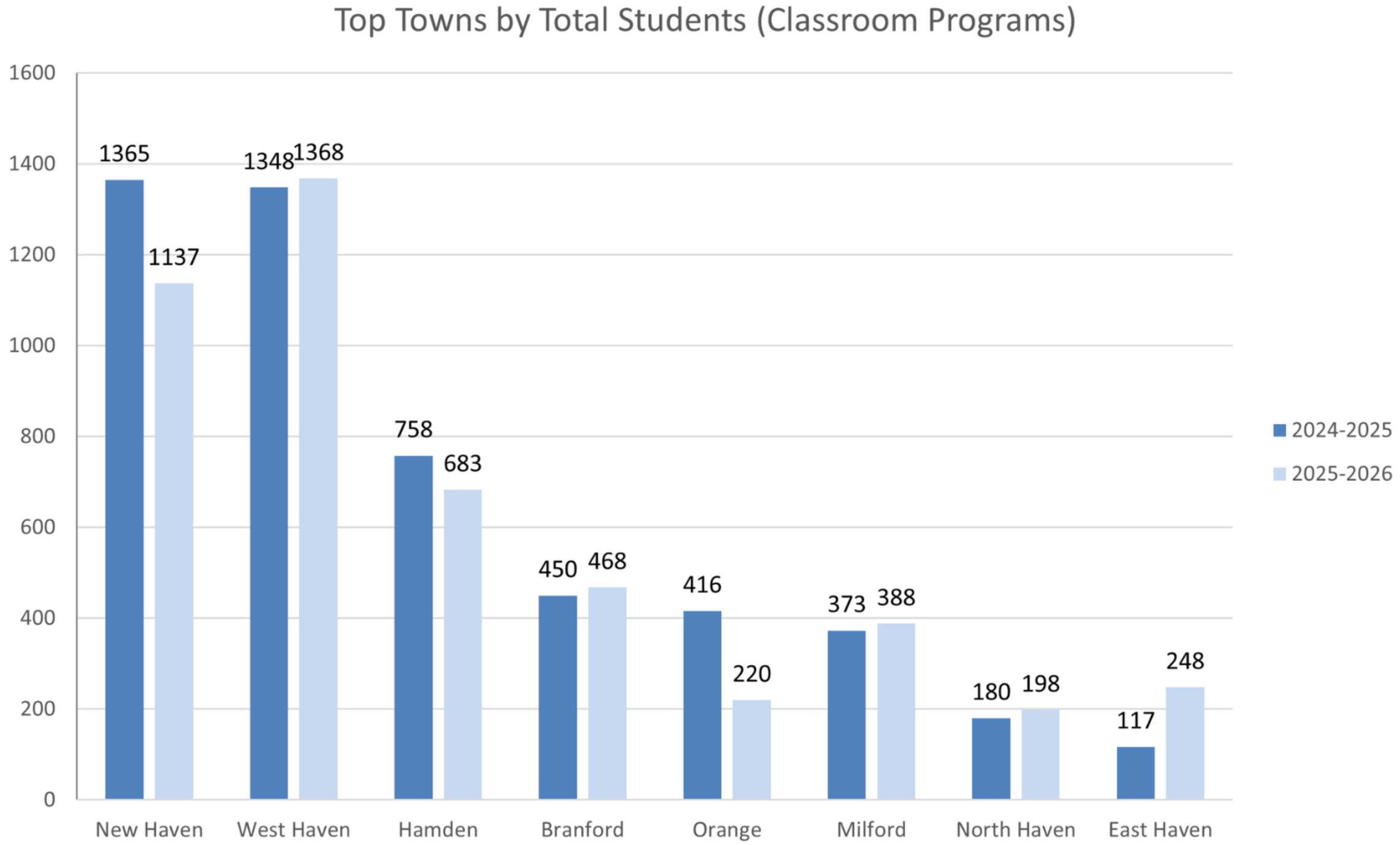
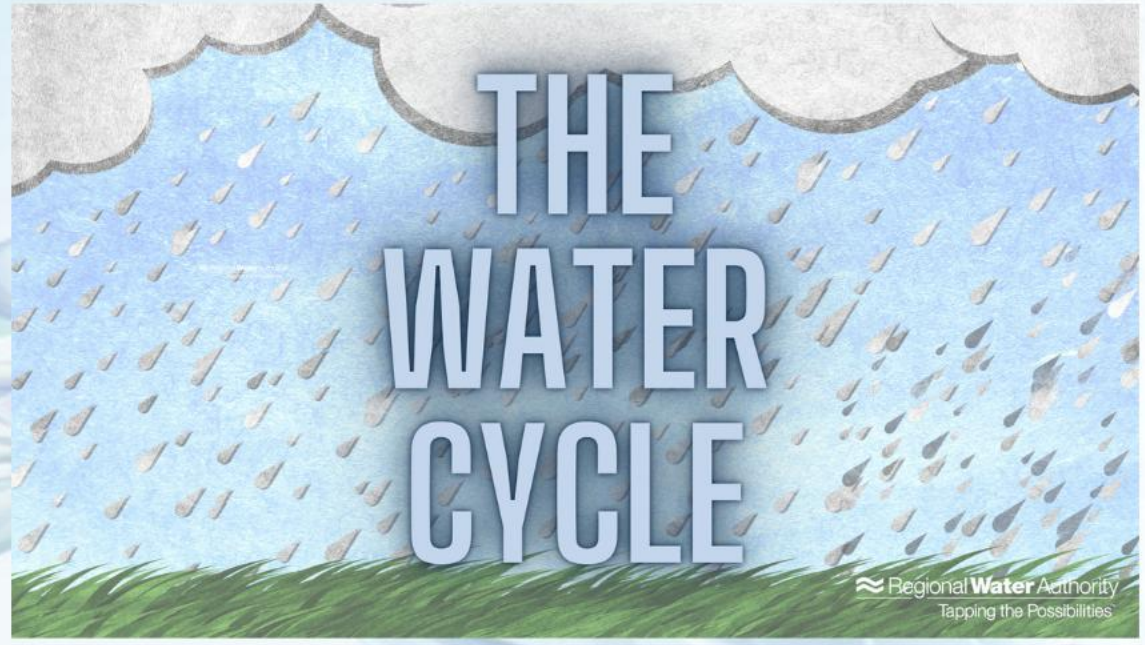

Top Towns by Total Students (Classroom Programs)
1600
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
1365
1137
1348
1368
758
683
450
468
416
220
373
388
180
198
117
248
New Haven
West Haven
Hamden
Branford
Orange
Milford
North Haven
East Haven
2024-2025
2025-2026

# Popular Classroom Programs

These two classroom programs are 30% of the booked programs this year.




The Water Cycle


Problem with Pollution

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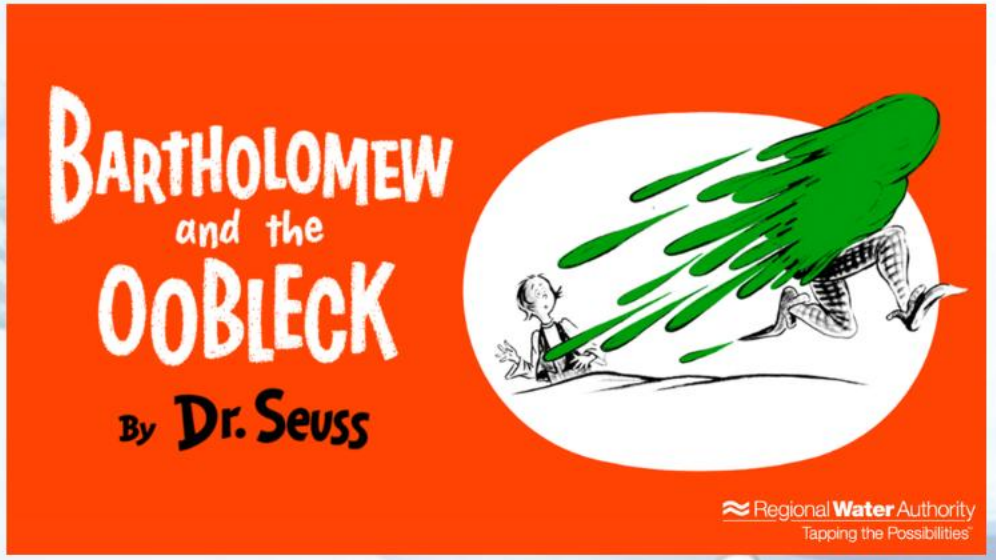
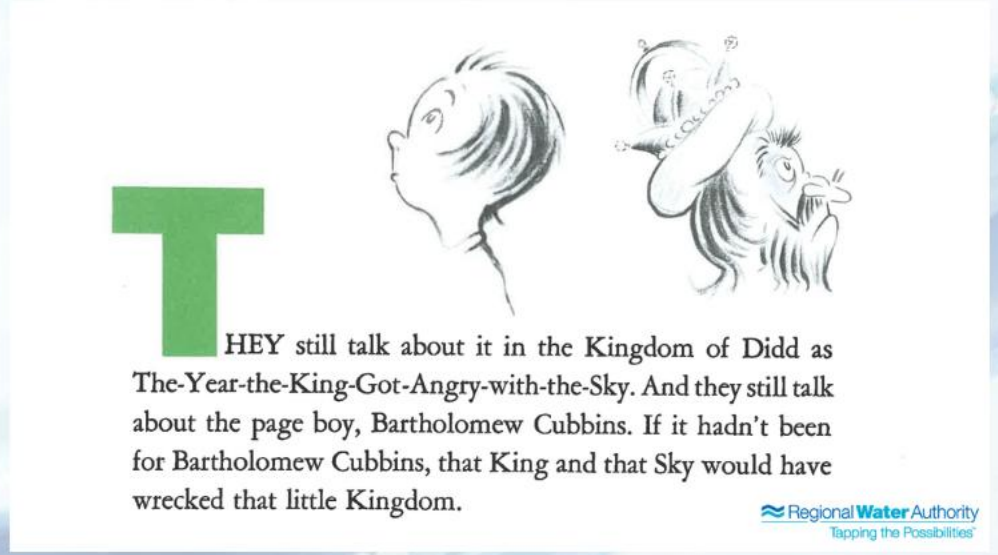
# YouTube Trending

The narrated video of *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* continues to grow in popularity and has over 238,000 views, reaching over 2.4 million viewers, and is the top search result on YouTube.

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# Project WATER Trends

| | |
|---|---|
| **Pre-COVID Average**<br>*School Years 16-17, 17-18, 18-19* | **800 students** |
| **COVID Average**<br>*School Years 20-21 and 21-22* | **676 students**<br>*(-15%)* |
| **Last School Year**<br>*Programs booked 24-25* | **717 students**<br>*(down 10% from Pre-COVID average)* |
| **Current School Year**<br>*Programs booked 25-26* | **700 students**<br>*(down 12% from Pre-COVID average)* |

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# Future Plans

Continue Vacation Career Program

Build High School Career Awareness Program

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# Questions?

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REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD

**LAND USE COMMITTEE**

PROPOSED RESOLTUION

MARCH 11, 2026

*(2026 Land Use Plan Amendment Application)*

**WHEREAS** the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority, on February 27, 2026, filed an Application with the Representative Policy Board ("RPB") for approval to amend the Land Use Plan in its entirety (the "Application"); and

**WHEREAS** the Land Use Committee of the Representative Policy Board reviewed the Application and found it to be complete and recommended that the Application be accepted by the RPB; and

**WHEREAS** the Land Use Committee recommended that a public hearing be conducted by a Presiding Member; and

**WHEREAS** the Land Use Committee proposed a public hearing date of April 23, 2026, at 7:00 pm., in accordance with Special Act 77-98, as amended, and the RPB Bylaws and Rules of Practice.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,** that the RPB accepts the Land Use Committee's recommendation to consider the Application and determined to hold a public hearing, to be conducted by a Presiding Member, on April 23, 2026 at 7:00 p.m., in accordance with Special Act 77-98, as amended, and the RPB Bylaws and Rules of Practice; and

**RESOLVED FURTHER,** that the Chairperson is hereby directed to give notice of said hearing in accordance with Section 11 of the Rules of Practice, as amended.

**March 11, 2026**
**Land Use Committee Meeting**

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average | Drought Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| February 28 | 65% | 81% | 82% | None |

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

Rainfall (inches)

| | Current Year | Previous Year | Historical Average |
|---|---|---|---|
| February 28 | 1.30 | 3.08 | 3.29 |
| Fiscal YTD (6/1/24 – 2/28/26) | 19.98 | 29.49 | 33.95 |

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Hamden condemnations (HA 5A and HA 7) – Completed the condemnations of the easements along Treadwell St. and fee simple property at Hartford Tpk./Davis St.
- Killingworth, Abner Lane Rd. (KI 6) – Communications continue between Killingworth Land Trust and the Club.

Rental houses:

- Woodbridge, 1029 Johnson Rd. – Tarlowski reported that they are working with the potential buyer about plans for the building. Their Avon house was being sold and if the buyer falls through, the money from the sale of the Avon house will fund the Johnson Rd. house.
- Hamden, 233 Skiff St. – Surveyor updating the map and to include an access easement to the retained acreage. Waiting for comments from Murtha to finalize the bid package.

Forestry Update

- Foresters attended workshop at Yale Meyers Forest to discuss acceptable practices for completing the management goals in the AMP grant through NEFF.
- Yale grad student interested to study soils at our slashwalls, and the RWA is working to assist the experiment while planning the harvest at Lake Saltonstall.
- Completed NRCS's form regarding the NEPA environmental evaluation process that is completed for all federally funded projects. This is to secure funding for pre-commercial thinning of young forest stands through NEFF's Advancing Markets for Producers grant.

Recreation

- Maple sugaring event had over 70 people attend during the day. Included talk by Audubon's forester on their Bird-Friendly Maple program.
- Started receiving comments about Sugarloaf that were solicited through the newsletter.
- Contacted summer groups to ascertain interest in fishing programs at Maltby Lakes.
- Recreation activity permit renewals were sent to DPH for Lake Chamberlain (hiking and fishing) and Genesee (hiking - Mattabesset Trail).

| | February | | January | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2026 | 2025 | 2025 | 2024 |
| Permit Holders | 4,811 | 4,730 | 4,833 | 4,775 |

Special Activity Permits

- UConn, Dept of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology (Dr. Mark Urban) – Research on pond amphibians - Totoket mountain in Northford; ridge north of Lake Gaillard; 60 ponds distributed to the west and east of Big Gulph Brook (3/1/2026- 3/1/2027).
- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (Dr. Chris T. Maier, Agricultural Scientist)-Conduct research on insects, particularly longhorned beetles (continuation of 2025 project), and flower flies and to survey for abnormal emergencies of periodical cicadas, Near Lake Gaillard and Totoket Mountain complex (North Branford); near Beaver Head Road, especially Beaver Head Swamp (Guilford); River Road Hamden (3/15/2026-11/30/2026).

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
    - Madison, 702 Summer Hill Rd. (MA 9) – Abutter requested permission to have Eversource pull the wires in the conduit that is over the property line. RWA replied that it was not allowed, and they are not to add to any of the encroachments.
    - West Haven, Shingle Hill tanks (WH 7) – Murtha sent email to the City Council Administrator which included the latest draft agreement.
    - Seymour, EMS equipment at SWF – Town to execute new agreement for emergency radio equipment at the wellfield.

- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in North Branford. In-house discussions were held about water chestnut harvesting logistics associated with Lake Whitney upper basin.

| | |
|---|---|
| Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac) | 0.5 acres |
| Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH) | 0.5 acres |

- Deer hunt – Post-hunt surveys were received by the due date of February 6. DPH annual report was submitted.
- Killingworth, Kroupa Pond – DOT obtained permission from the RWA to have surveyors go over our property to investigate the dam and plan for repairs.
- Land Use Plan – Authority approved the updated Land Use Plan and forwarded it to the RPB.
- New Haven, Quinnipiac River watermain crossings – Investigating permissions for the 24” and 36” watermains across the Quinnipiac River. There were no easements. There were permits from the federal government and board of harbor commissioners.
- Drone flights - Flew drone at Armory Street pump station to inspect the north side of smokestack for Engineering.

**Attachments**

- February 6, 2026 - The science behind Connecticut's road pretreatment before winter snowstorms – CT Insider
- February 6, 2026 - Will freezing temperatures kill ticks in CT? The answer is complicated, scientists say – Hartford Courant
- February 20, 2026 - As snow melts across Connecticut, road salt and pollutants head into streams and L.I. Sound – CT Insider
- February 23, 2026 - After blizzard, Connecticut temporarily allows snow to be dumped in waterways – Ct Insider
- March 5, 2026 - Remember how cold the winter was? Meteorologists beg to differ – USA Today

Upcoming Agenda Items:
April 2026 – Deer Hunt Update – Nicole Smith

**The science behind Connecticut's road pretreatment before winter snowstorms**

*CT Insider (Hearst) | By Dan Amarante | Feb. 6, 2026*

In the days before a snowstorm, drivers across Connecticut may notice the white streaks of pretreatment along the roads, acting as an informal warning to the public that winter weather is in our forecast.

Put simply, it's a concentrated salt mixture.

Connecticut's Department of Transportation (CTDOT) uses a 23% sodium chloride brine solution, also known as salt brine. Other salts like magnesium chloride and calcium chloride are also mixed into the solution to lower the freezing point to allow for more melting on roadways.

This combination of chlorides is effective in temperatures as cold as minus 10 degrees, an air temperature so cold that the Hartford area has only reached it twice in the last 25 years.

Timing is critical when preparing for a winter storm, and one major advantage of salt brine is that it can be applied up to three days before winter weather arrives. According to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), "when brines are applied to pavement before a winter storm, they help to prevent the snow and ice from bonding to the pavement surface, make plowing more effective, and reduce the amount of salt required throughout the storm."

As weather forecasts improve and storm lead time increases, crews are often out on the roads days before a storm, as opposed to the frantic, last-minute scramble to sand the roads.

Why don't they use sand anymore?

Around 2006, the CTDOT began shifting from a sand/salt mixture to the salt brine they currently use, citing environmental and practical concerns.

According to the agency, sand "provides limited, short term, traction which quickly becomes worn down and ineffective. This means that roads still need to be treated with salt or other chemicals to effectively clear ice and snow."

So, you'd need to use salt anyway, but even if you only used sand, you'd need a lot of it. All that sand on the roads has to go somewhere once the snow melts, and it often ends up in places it shouldn't be, harming aquatic habitats or clogging drainage systems.

Is all this salt corroding my car?

Yes it is, but it may be the price we pay for safer roads during winter storms.

All chloride-based de-icing chemicals (sodium chloride rock salt, magnesium chloride brine) used on Connecticut roads increase corrosion rates on vehicles, infrastructure and equipment by promoting electrochemical rusting when metal is exposed to moisture and chloride ions. In simpler terms, it's not great for your car.

Chlorides accelerate the rust process beyond what would normally occur from oxygen and moisture alone, leading to both cosmetic and structural corrosion.

A 2015 study from the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering (CASE) looked into this issue, finding no other reasonable alternative to using salt brine. The report says, "while use of chloride-based

de-icing chemicals for winter highway maintenance has raised concerns regarding impacts on vehicles, infrastructure and the environment, alternative products also have environmental, corrosion and expense impacts."

What can I do to protect my car?

Before winter, waxing your car can help protect the paint from salt-based de-icer during the winter season. Similar to how moisturizing your face can help prevent wrinkles, a "skincare routine" for your car can keep it looking younger.

The CTDOT recommends frequently washing your vehicle during winter to prevent salt from causing rust, especially the underbody and wheel wells.

A bit of preparation can go a long way to keep your car sparkling, even in the harshest of winters.

Is the pretreatment bad for the environment?

There are certainly environmental concerns, but compared to the alternatives, a salt brine is considered one of the lesser evils.

Introducing excess chloride levels to the local environment can pull nutrients from the soil, potentially killing grass and other vegetation along the state's highways. As some of that salt inevitably seeps into the ground, residents drinking well water could potentially see an increase in sodium content.  Additionally, the impact to aquatic animals can be detrimental as elevated sodium levels enter nearby watersheds.

To mitigate this impact, the state has focused on minimizing the amount of salt they use on roads, without jeopardizing public safety. They offer a course titled CT Green Snow Pro, aimed at training winter maintenance professionals on best practices for reducing salt usage.

Unless a cheaper, more effective and environmentally friendly option appears, the CTDOT is set on using salt brine to keep the state's roads snow free, stating that "balancing road safety and environmental impact is a complex challenge, and currently, chloride-based de-icers provide the most practical solution."

**********

**Will freezing temperatures kill ticks in CT? The answer is complicated, scientists say**

*Hartford Courant | By Stephen Underwood | Feb. 6, 2026*

As Connecticut experiences a historic stretch of below freezing temperatures, ticks in the state may see a moderate decrease in their population but may not be as affected by the cold snap as expected, scientists said.

Dr. Goudarz Molaei, an entomologist with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, said ticks have many defenses against freezing temperatures. One big reason why they may not be as affected this year has to do with the amount of snow on the ground. Snowfall acts as an insulator, trapping heat on the ground allowing many types of ticks to keep isolated against the cold.

“In general, ticks can enter a dormant stage. Not all ticks species can, but a number of them can,” Molaei said. “Cold temperatures are not going to have a big impact on their population in the following year. But if the temperature gets close to under 10 degrees for a sustained period, they may suffer some mortality. Particularly if the drop in temperatures is sustained for at least 10 days with no shelter, they will suffer some mortality. The problem this year is that there is a lot of snow cover. Snow substantially protects ticks. It acts as a warmth shield that keeps them out of the freezing air.”

Ticks frequently shelter under leaf litter or snow to survive freezing temperatures in winter, he said. Snow acts as a more insulating barrier than leaves, as it creates pockets that hold in warmer air on the ground. If Connecticut didn’t have snow covering the ground, Molaei said he believes that would create a higher mortality rate.

Blacklegged ticks, also known as deer ticks, are highly adjusted to surviving cold temperatures by producing a type of natural antifreeze to prevent their cells from rupturing, according to Moleai. Other invasive or non-native ticks, like the Lone Star or Gulf Coast ticks, may be more impacted by colder temperatures, he said. He said that Connecticut has a number of invasive ticks that are most likely more prone to mortality in colder temperatures.

“I suspect this cold will have a marginal impact on the tick population,” Molaei said. “In 2025, we had a record number of ticks, it surpassed 6,000 submissions. Our average each year is around 3,000 ticks. People can send the ticks they find on them to us to get tested. My feeling is we may not have that high a number this year, but I don’t think the cold will have a big impact on the population, largely because of the snow cover.”

Molaei said that so far this year, the CAES has received three ticks for testing as temperatures climb during the day to around freezing. Blacklegged ticks can become active and start looking for hosts to feed on when temperatures climb just above freezing. Most other ticks become active again whenever temperatures rise above 35 degrees Fahrenheit.

“It is important for people to know that ticks are still active when temperatures get to around freezing,” Molaei said. “So if you’re out and about, particularly if in the woods hiking, be cautious that tick bites are still a possibility. People should continue to take tick prevention measures.”

**As snow melts across Connecticut, road salt and pollutants head into streams and L.I. Sound**

*CT Insider (Hearst) | By Austin Mirmina | Feb. 20, 2026*

As Connecticut thaws from a brutal stretch of winter storms, towering snowbanks are starting to shrink, leaving behind slushy sidewalks and muddy lawns.

What's less visible, however, is the winter's buildup of road salt, dirt and other debris – even dog poop – that scientists say is now washing into nearby streams, rivers and, eventually, Long Island Sound.

"Snow is a form of precipitation and needs to be managed as stormwater runoff, which is known to hold many harmful contaminants as it washes into our waterways, especially in urbanized areas," said Peter Linderoth, director of healthy waters and lands at Save the Sound, a nonprofit advocacy group.

Over the course of a winter, plowed snowbanks collect pollutants. When temperatures rise, the snowmelt flows into storm drains, carrying road salt and chemicals, tire particles, oil, lawn fertilizers and other contaminants downstream before being discharged into local waterways and wetlands, Linderoth said. The process is similar to what happens after a heavy rainstorm, when runoff can wash bacteria into coastal waters, prompting beach closures.

A key difference is that snowmelt runoff contains sodium chloride – the most commonly used road salt that keep roads and sidewalks from icing over. While it's essential for public safety, it can also pose risks to wildlife and water quality.

Fish that thrive in Connecticut's streams aren't built to handle salt, Linderoth said. Just as a brook trout wouldn't survive in the salty waters of Long Island Island, sudden spikes in sodium chloride can stress freshwater species, disrupt feeding and, in extreme cases, prove fatal, he added. Elevated salt levels can also contaminate drinking water – particularly in areas that rely on private wells – and corrode cars, roads and other infrastructure.

"We all appreciate when we can get back on the road after snow and ice events, but it's important to remember that excess salt does have adverse impacts to the ecology of our waterways," Linderoth said.

Michael Dietz, director of the Connecticut Institute of Water Resources at the University of Connecticut, said a growing body of research shows road salt is harming groundwater, surface water, plants and aquatic life. He led a 2020 study that found adverse effects of salt contamination in a freshwater stream near UConn's Storrs campus.

This season aside, Connecticut's winters have been milder in recent years, which might suggest less salt use. But that hasn't necessarily been the case, Dietz said. The more frequent mix of snow and rain can create icy, hard-to-manage conditions that require just as much, if not more, salt than lighter, fluffier snow storms, he said.

Since a late January storm, much of Connecticut has been blanketed with more than a foot of snow – and more than two feet in some areas, according to Hearst Connecticut Media meteorologist Dan Amarante. A subsequent two-week stretch of below-freezing temperatures has prevented much of that snow from melting until this week's warmer air arrived.

In some communities, the harsh conditions strained their supply of road salt, prompting them to coordinate or barter with neighboring agencies.

Experts recommend a few solutions to reduce pollution from melting snow.

Linderoth, of Save the Sound, said alternatives to traditional rock salt should be used – or at the very least explored – in areas with sensitive ecosystems, though they tend to be more expensive. Salt brine, a mixture of salt and water, is another option. The state switched from a sand-salt mixture to brine about

a decade ago and, according to Linderoth, many municipalities have since followed suit. Applied before a storm, brine helps prevent ice from bonding to pavement, reducing the amount of salt needed, according to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. "That should be applied as a first line of defense," Linderoth said.

He also pointed to permeable pavement, a type of green infrastructure that allows water to soak into the ground rather than flowing into storm drains. He called it a "great solution" to limiting the amount of salt-laden runoff entering waterways.

UConn's T2 Center offers a "Green Snow Pro" training program that teaches municipal maintenance crews and contractors about the science of salt, its effects on the environment and how to apply it responsibly. Proper application, Dietz said, can save money "because the towns aren't wasting salt when it's not helping" and also reduce environmental harm.

DEEP also provides guidance for municipalities on its website. It advises that snow removed from roads and parking lots only be placed in upland areas – and away from waterways, storm drains and wells.

While Connecticut is likely past the snowiest stretch of winter – typically late January through mid-February, Amarante said – the season isn't over. Another storm with a potential for significant snowfall is forecast for this weekend.

**After blizzard, Connecticut temporarily allows snow to be dumped in waterways**

*CT Insider (Hearst) | By Austin Mirmina | Feb. 23, 2026*

State officials are temporarily allowing towns and cities to dump snow in certain waters due to the “extraordinary winter conditions” sweeping across Connecticut, including a blizzard.

Normally, municipalities are advised to place snow removed from roads and parking lots in upland areas, away from waterways, storm drains and wells, according to guidance from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. This is to prevent pollutants — such as road salt, dirt and pet waste — from entering waterways and harming wildlife.

But in a press release Monday afternoon, DEEP announced that Commissioner Katie Dykes was granting municipalities and government entities more flexibility because of the Sunday-into-Monday blizzard that has dropped more than a foot of snow in many areas, creating significant cleanup and disposal challenges.

“DEEP is offering this flexibility to governmental entities, including towns and state agencies, to ease snow disposal challenges that may pose a threat to public safety,” the release stated. “This additional flexibility will allow towns to more easily clear road access for emergency vehicles, and will prevent negative impacts from blocked drainage infrastructure, like localized flooding.”

The more relaxed rules will remain in effect “until further notice,” the agency said.

Under the temporary guidelines, snow can be dumped into specific waterways only in accordance with DEEP’s guidance, and only after all land-based disposal options have been “fully exhausted,” the release states. It must be done solely for public safety reasons, such as ensuring access for first responders.

Towns and cities wishing to dispose of snow in water must first notify DEEP’s Water Permitting and Enforcement Division, either by submitting a survey, which is preferred, or by emailing deep.waterpermittingenforcement@ct.gov.

“If advance notification is not possible, then contact the department as soon as possible after beginning snow disposal,” the agency said.

**Remember how cold the winter was? Meteorologists beg to differ.**

**East Coast residents may remember polar vortex forecasts and blizzards, but U.S. weather data was dominated by warm temperatures in the West.**

USA TODAY - March 5, 2026

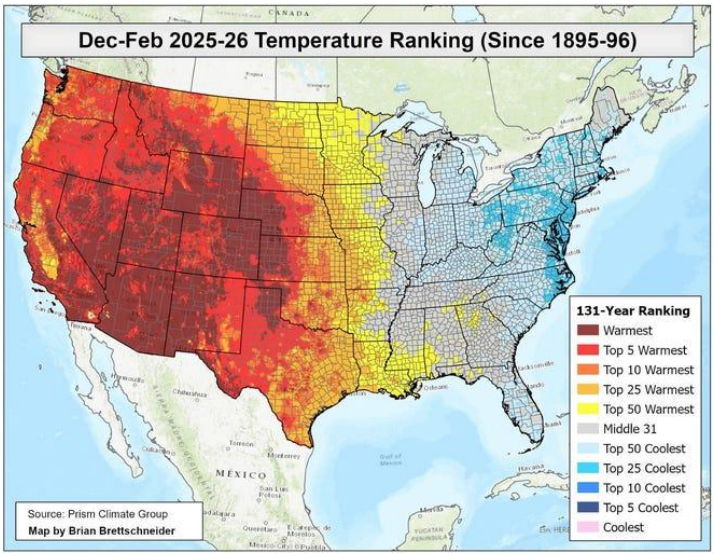
The three-month meteorological winter period that just ended will be remembered for its wild extremes in temperature across the United States, including deadly, persistent polar blasts and winter storms in the East.

But for much of the nation west of the Mississippi River, it was either the warmest winter on record or one of the warmest. In the West, the temperatures were sometimes blazing hot.

The preliminary data available shows the three-month winter was warmest on record “by a ridiculous margin in many locations throughout the American west,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist with the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources and founder of WeatherWest.com.

“Collectively, the West was by far the warmest it has ever been in the recorded record for winter," Swain said during a YouTube podcast on March 3. As he calculates it, you could get in a car at the westernmost point on the coast and drive east for more than 20 hours at highway speeds and still be in a location that saw one of its warmest winters on record.

In Texas, a new record was set for the nation’s warmest winter day on Feb. 26 when a weather station at the Falcon Dam on the Rio Grande reached 106 degrees, according to the National Weather Service. A stretch of about 30 miles along the river saw temperatures soar into the triple digits that day. In much of the West, if it wasn’t record warm, it was the second warmest winter period on record, he said. “There wasn’t really any corner of the West that escaped highly anomalous warmth," he said, except for some areas in the California valleys that saw periods of heavy fog that prevented records from being set.




**Around the nation**

Wild swings in temperature were noted even within weather service office regions. In Wisconsin, the La Crosse weather service noted a 98-degree range between its warmest and coldest temperatures, from minus 32 degrees near Owen on Jan. 25 to 66 degrees at Prairie du Chien on Feb. 17.

Similar swings between hot and cold temperatures were seen in other locations, including South Bend, Indiana, which flipped from a low of minus 10 on Feb. 1 to a high of 65 on Feb. 18th. Overall, it was the region's 45th coldest winter since records began in 1893, the weather service said.

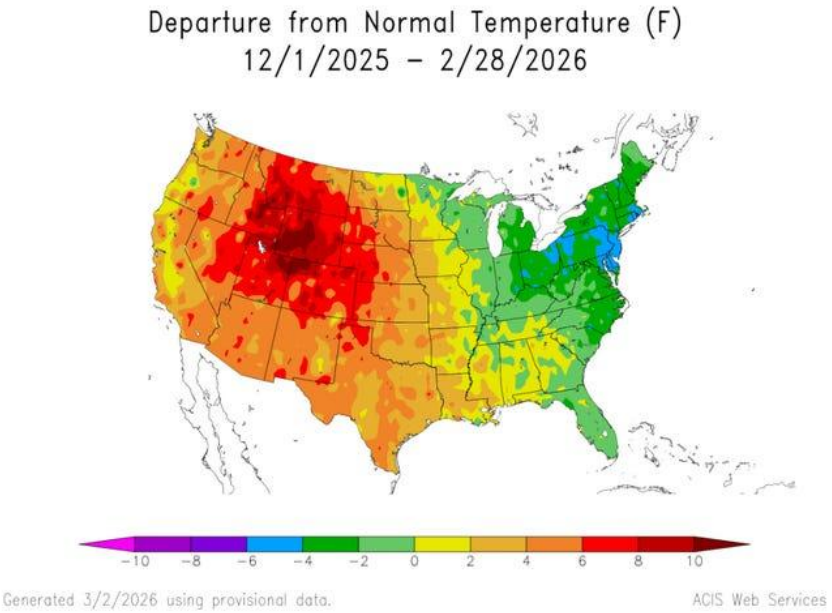
Among the summaries of the December through February period emerging from weather service regional offices this week were the following highlights:

- Phoenix – Not only was it the warmest winter on record, but March also started warmer than normal. The high temperature on March 1 was the earliest 93-degree day on record, beating the record set in 1972 by four days.
- Great Falls, Montana – Five of the seven monitored stations saw the most ever 50-degree days this winter. In Bozeman, 37 days of daily highs topped 50 degrees, contributing to its record warm winter.
- Sheridan, Wyoming – The daily high temperature beat 50 degrees 44 times and 60 degrees 20 times, both setting records.

More wild swings are looming in early March as the Eastern U.S. experiences a major pattern change.

**See the maps**

The official climatological summaries from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, parent agency of the weather service, aren't expected to be released for a few days, but several preliminary maps illustrate seasonal and daily temperature trends over the three-month meteorological winter.




**Wildfire risks rising**

In many locations, meteorologists are also concerned about rising wildfire risk due to drier-than-normal and warmer-than-normal temperatures, as well as the arrival of spring weather.

Year-to-date, the nation has recorded 7,895 fires and 385,991 acres burned, well above the 10-year average to date of 4,323 fires and 91,529 acres, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

"Numbers alone do not tell the whole story, but they do reinforce an important truth: Conditions, fuels and weather patterns vary widely across the country at any given time," the fire center stated in its Feb. 27 weekly update.

**Fingerprints of climate change**

Although natural variability played a role, Swain sees the fingerprints of climate change in several aspects of winter weather, including cold snaps. “We don’t get winters like that very often anymore in the Eastern U.S.,” so they seem more unusual to the people experiencing the winter weather, he said. While many cold daily high temperatures were set − along with consecutive days with temperatures below freezing − there was no widespread trend this winter among locations with their coldest winter ever.

It's also noteworthy that the West exceeded what has become “a high bar” for higher-than-normal temperatures, Swain said.

Without climate change contributions, it's almost impossible that the United States would have seen the extreme plumes of water vapor that contributed to heavy snow and flooding in some locations or the low snowpack in parts of the West, he said. That's just the "not so cold, hard truth."