

**Representative Policy Board
Land Use Committee
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District
Place: Maltby Lakes, 585 Derby Avenue, West Haven**

AGENDA

Regular Meeting of Wednesday, June 8, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.

1. Safety Moment
2. Approval of Minutes – May 11, 2022
3. History of Maltby Lakes area: J. Triana
4. Updates on other land and RWA properties, including invasive species update
5. Other Land items
6. Notification of Committee Chair Election – July 2022
7. Next meeting – Wednesday, July 13, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.
8. Adjourn

Directions: The Maltby Lakes are on Route 34, 7/10ths of a mile west of Rt. 122 (Forest Road). (Forest Road is the second traffic light west of the Yale baseball stadium where the Ravens used to play.) Drive in through the double gate on the right and go about 3/10ths of a mile to the parking area. Coming from Stratford, the entrance is on Rt. 34, 3 miles east of Rt. 15 (Exit 57/58 of Wilbur Cross Parkway). Because the entrance is on the *north* side of Rt. 34, you will need to go about 3.2 miles from Rt. 15 to a cross-street where you can reverse direction.

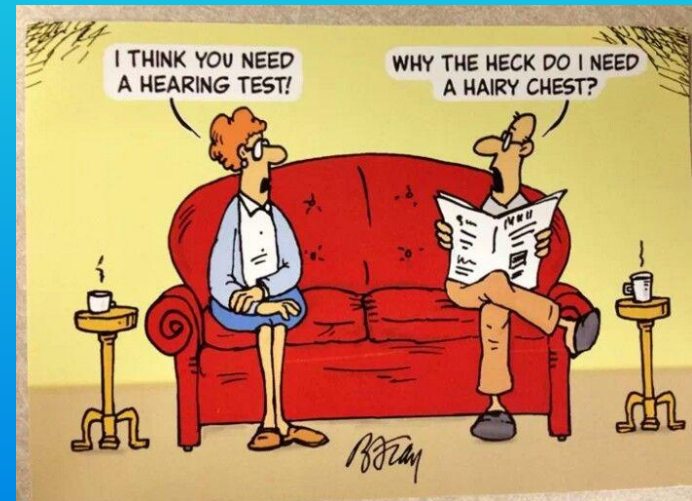
SAFETY MOMENT

Prevent Hearing Loss

Generally hearing loss is gradual and usually by the time you notice, it is too late. Prevent hearing loss before it happens:

Protect your ears:

- Limit exposure to noisy activities; monitor your listening levels
- Wear hearing protection while performing loud activities at work or home
- Have your hearing tested
- Watch for symptoms and early signs of hearing loss



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**

Minutes of May 11, 2022 Meeting

A regular meeting of the Land Use Committee of the Representative Policy Board of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District (“RWA”) took place on Wednesday, May 11, 2022, at the Waite Street Garden in Hamden, Connecticut. Chair Betkoski presided.

Committee Members: P. Betkoski, P. DeSantis, B. Eitzer, R. Harvey, M. Horbal, M. Levine, G. Malloy, J. Oslander, and J. Mowat Young

RPB Members: S. Mongillo

Authority: C. LaMarr

Management: J. Triana and R. Walters

Staff: J. Slubowski

Chair Betkoski called the meeting to order at 4:37 p.m. He reviewed the Safety Moment distributed to members.

Mr. Walters, the RWA’s Senior Environmental Analyst, provided an overview of the Pollinator Pathways Gardens, which included:

- Background
- Locations
- Planting & germinating process
- Collaborations and partnerships
- Effect on water storage protection and quality
- Three year plan

At 4:58 p.m., Mr. Walters withdrew from the meeting.

On motion made by Mr. Levine, seconded by Mr. Malloy, and unanimously carried, the Committee approved the minutes of its April 13, 2022 and April 18, 2022 meetings.

Update on *The Land We Need for the Water We Use Program* – Mr. Triana reported:

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
April 30, 2022	98%	98%	94%	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
April 2022	3.87	3.59	4.26
Fiscal YTD (6/1/21 –	44.57	37.18	42.62

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

- Cheshire, adjacent to Bis property – Murtha staff stated they would draft an affidavit for this matter. Talked to appraiser to get general value of the ~30 acres. Juliano circulated latest draft of the survey.
- North Branford, Beech St. and Poms La. properties (NB 4 and NB 4A) – Contacted Beth Evans to create the new preliminary assessment. Town Planner indicated that he would sign

the surveys. Later, he stated that we needed to submit the executed deeds with the maps in order for him to release and us to record. Informed him that the deeds would not be ready for many months. Discussed the matter with Murtha and our surveyor and determined to move ahead with the disposition application without the parcels carved out yet.

Rental houses:

- Hamden, 95 Ives St. – Received hardcopies of the closing documents and filed in the vault.
- Hamden, 233 Skiff St. (HA 9A) – Talked to Assistant Town Attorney multiple times about the condemnation. He was still researching it, not believing that it was possible. I supplied more information to him about the Seymour condemnation and asked him to contact Fred Stanek.
- Woodbridge, 1029 Johnson Rd – Found stolen doors on our property behind the house. Alerted the Tarlowski's.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 25% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – Not started yet. **Summer start time is anticipated.**
- Madison - Nathan's Pond Slash Wall Harvest (MA 6) – 95% complete. Slash wall complete and awaiting gate installation.
- Seymour - Silvermine Road Slash Wall Harvest (SE 9) – 100% complete. **Gate complete.**
- Killingworth - N. Chestnut Hill Patch Cuts, (KI 6) – Not started yet.
 - Planted Christmas tree seedlings in Great Hill Rd. field at Lake Gaillard.
 - Processed annual firewood renewals.
 - Dealt with drainage issues at the Seymour slash wall harvest at Haddad Rd. Operations put asphalt patch in potholes by the landing.
 - ISMT conducted a drone flight to create a map and get some photographs of the Seymour slash wall harvest.
 - Conducted field tour for Yale School of the Environment masters students in a Forest Health Class to discuss management concerns and options in stands suffering significant mortality from beech leaf disease and LDD impacts.

Recreation

- Responded to Yale student about her shooting part of a film at Lake Saltonstall.
- New signs for each recreation area were placed at six sites in April.
- Completed reblazing at Lake Hammonasset and started reblazing at Genesee.
- Continued to recruit people for the recreation staff. Rental boat days will be reduced for May. We are only able to offer boats on Fri., Sat., and Sun.
- Boat rentals started on April 30.
- Six people attended hike at Pine Hill on April 23.
- 1,800 trout were stocked at the Maltby Lakes.
- Two tagged trout were caught at Maltby Lakes and gift certificates were issued.

	April		March	
	2022	2021	2022	2021
Permit Holders	5,792	6,502	5,712	6,336

Special Activity Permits

- CTDEEP (Dr. Min Huang) – mallard nesting study; Maltby Lakes (4/4/2022-7/31/2022)

- Menunkatuck Audubon Society (Tom Kelly) - Monitoring of Barn Owl nesting boxes - North Guilford owl box locations: Menunkatuck Reservoir (RT 77); Beaverhead Road; (04/01/2022 to 07/01/2022).
- Branford Parks & Open Space Authority (Richard Shanahan) – to perform a field inspection of RWA property that may be subject of a sale to The Town of Branford and/or The Branford Land Trust, RWA property on Brushy Plains Road, north of Hosley Avenue and south of Lidyhites Pond, Branford (4/12/22-4/21/22).
- Quinnipiac University (Professor Scott Davies)-Study bird nest boxes and record bird nesting activity and success, band the adults and chicks, and collect tissue samples for analysis during breeding season, Lake Chamberlain Recreation Area, Sperry Rd. Farm Field, Lake Watrous, and Lake Dawson, (04/14/22 – 11/31/22)
- Hammonasset Fishing Assoc. (Mr. Vic Donahey, Manager)-road access for wildlife enhancement projects, Summerhill Road to South End of Hammonasset Fishing Assoc. Property, (4/19/22-5/31/22)
- New Haven Bird Club, (Mr. Patrick T. Leahy)-Fall bird walk to observe species that are wintering on Lakes along the West River, Lake Watrous, Lake Chamberlain (10/15/22)
- UCONN, (Dr. Chandi Witharana, Principal Investigator), drone mapping flights in support of RWA/UConn joint applied research on the use of remote sensing and drones for forest management, RWA timber harvest locations hear Haddad Rd., Seymour & Rt. 79, Madison (4/29/22-4/29/23)

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Agricultural agreements – Sent email to Cave’s approving their weed control plans. Spoke to one farmer about taking over the fields at Parish Farm Rd., Branford.
 - Woodbridge/Orange (WO 14/OR 7) - Documented increased trespassing of mountain bikers at Maltby Lakes.
 - East Haven, 167 Saltonstall Parkway (Route 1) (EH 7) – Responded to complaint about the fence from Lucido. Found it in good condition. Murtha responded through his attorney. Dealt with Lucido parking vehicles in front of our property again. His attorney asked for 30-day extension to answer our complaint. We will ask court to deny the request. In court filing from Lucido, it seems he admitted to doing the damage.
 - East Haven, 27 Virginia Rd. (EH 3) – NRA and REM remarked the boundary and further documented the encroachment.
- Invasive plants – Documented and/or treated invasive populations in North Branford. Cut down a red pine tree infected with southern pine beetle at Lake Bethany for CAES staff to examine. Met with researchers from UConn to begin the LIDAR drone studies of the slash wall harvests.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	37 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	3 acres

- Deer hunt – 150 applications were received by the end of the month. The lottery will be run in May, if needed.
- Boundaries – Remarkd boundaries in Woodbridge and Bethany.
- East Haven, Beach Ave. watermain – Alerted by the town engineer that the matter was not on the town council’s meeting agenda. Sent memo to the town attorney about the purpose of

- the project. Discussed need for DEEP permit with DEEP staff. Corresponded with affected property owners and continued to collect the easement documents for their properties.
- Regional Conservation Partnership – Discussed future of the RCP with Highstead staff and Dave Sargent.
 - Branford, Parish Farm Rd. (BR 19) – Responded to rumor of a parking lot being planned for our property at this location.

There were no other land items to report.

Chair Betkoski reported that the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 8, 2022 at 5:30 p.m.

At 5:10 p.m., on motion made by Mr. Harvey, seconded by Mr. Eitzer, and unanimously carried, the committee meeting adjourned.

Peter Betkoski, Chairman

June 8, 2022
Land Use Committee Meeting

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
May 31, 2022	96%	97%	9%	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
May 2022	2.24	5.08	3.92
Fiscal YTD (6/1/21 – 5/31/22)	46.81	42.26	46.54

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

- Cheshire, adjacent to Bis property – Discussed valuation to be used with the appraiser. Murtha still working on the affidavit.
- North Branford, Beech St. and Poms La. properties (NB 4) – Asked Murtha for update on status of the draft MOA. No word as of the end of the month. Worked on the disposition applications. Expect to submit to the FMA in June.
- Madison, Old Toll Rd. and Summer Hill Rd. properties – Received final payment from the Madison Land Conservation Trust for the two properties sold to them in 2017. Issued letter to MLCT acknowledging the note was paid in full.

Rental houses:

- (nothing to report)

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 25% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – Not started yet. **Executed change order to extend deadline.**
- Madison - Nathan’s Pond Slash Wall Harvest (MA 6) – 95% complete. **Seeded landing.**
- Seymour - Silvermine Road Slash Wall Harvest (SE 9) – 100% complete. **Addressed remaining invasive plants. Seeded landing.**
- Killingworth - N. Chestnut Hill Patch Cuts, (KI 6) – Not started yet.
 - Several fire departments responded to a brush fire in Prospect behind houses on Cornwall Ave. Supplied woods road maps to the town.
 - Met former judge at Haddad Rd. timber sale to show him the slash wall and address his comments.
 - Conducted planting of pitch pine seedlings at Lake Gaillard in an on-going afforestation project above the gatehouse.
 - Seeded landings at the slash wall, timber harvests in Seymour and North Madison with conservation mix, including spreading weed-free mulch.

Recreation

- Completed reblazing trails at Genesee. Cleared trails at Genesee and Hammonasset.
- Kids fishing derby was held at Maltby Lakes with 8 participants.
- Issued another gift certificate for a tagged trout at Maltby Lakes.
- Installed new picnic tables at Maltby Lakes and Lake Saltonstall.
- Met with NBLCT members to inspect the bridge and trail coming from the Harrison Preserve.
- Discussed correcting New England Trail locations at Genesee with CFPA staff.
- Revoked one permit for an angler using live bait at Lake Saltonstall.
- Investigated anglers fishing after dusk at Lake Saltonstall.
- Answered question from Woodbridge Conservation Commissioner about who maintains the Woodbridge Greenway.
- Corresponded with UConn staff about adding our trail data to a website they are building.
- Hired Jessica Shanley for the recreation staff over the summer.

	May		April	
	2022	2021	2022	2021
Permit Holders	5,676	6,337	5,792	6,502

Special Activity Permits

- The Eli Whitney Museum and Workshop (Mr. Ryan Paxton, Museum Director)-will learn the basics of ciphers and codes, how they can hide secrets, and how those secrets can be revealed. Drone will send live feed to a closed circuit for campers to surveille the land, 915 Whitney Avenue (8/2/22 – 8/4/22)
- New Haven Bird Club (Mr. Patrick T. Leahy and designees)-Spring Bird Walk to observe species that nest in the bluebird/tree swallow boxes, Lake Chamberlain and Lake Watrous, (5/17/2023)
- Bimble's Bluff 50K (Russell Hammond) - Annual 50K foot race - Use of trails through Genesee Preserve north of Guilford (10/23/22)

Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
 - Agricultural agreements – Met potential farmer at Parish Farm Rd. fields in Branford. Verified with the Cave's that they will continue the license agreement for Christmas trees by North St.
 - Bethany, Bethany Horsemen agreement – Executed annual agreement with BH.
 - Woodbridge/Orange (WO 14/OR 7) – Met with Yale Golf Course staff about increased trespassing of mountain bikers at Maltby Lakes.
 - East Haven, 167 Saltonstall Parkway (Route 1) (EH 7) – Reviewed documents from Lucido that Murtha forwarded. Murtha submitted our replies. Noticed that the property was for sale and then listed as “under contract” according to the MLS. Worked with Murtha staff to file affidavit for pre-judgement decision prior to the sale of the house.
 - East Haven, 27 Virginia Rd. (EH 3) – Sent letter to Coscenzo. Materials still over the line as of the end of the month.
 - Madison, (MA 12) – Kuck called and said the fence was moved to the property line.
 - Madison, Devonshire Dr. (MA 3) – Sent letters to two abutters about a tree stand that is on RWA behind their houses.
 - Hamden, Blake Rd (HA 32) – Roche sold property to Iscoe and Ledbetter. Signed new license agreement with them for use of the property and maintaining the sidewalk.
 - Woodbridge, 539 Amity Rd. (WO 7) – Stein sold property to Rivellini. Signed new license agreement with him for the patio and lawn area.
 - East Haven, 9 Pardee Place (EH 6) – Contacted abutter (East Haven Memorial Funeral Home) about numerous encroachments coming from their property,

- North Branford, 438 Sea Hill Road (NB 4) – Discovered and documented encroachment
- Trespassing – Forwarded many instances of trespassing to LT members including mountain bikes at Maltby Lakes, ATV’s and dumping in Woodbridge, tree stands in North Branford and Madison, burglary and vandalism at Lake Menunketuc, ATV’s and dirt bikes in North Branford, and Sugarloaf recreation gate being sawn in half.
- Invasive plants – Documented and/or treated invasive populations in North Branford, Woodbridge, Hamden, Seymour, Orange, and West Haven. Cut the knotweed at the Davis St. sediment basin in Hamden. Branford Land Trust staff reported that water chestnuts were removed from the property they recently acquired on Todds Hill Rd. Hosted walk at the Madison slashwall harvest for CIPWG members to discuss non-herbicide management options for controlling invasive species by limiting deer browse. Hosted walk at Lake Chamberlain for CIPWG members to show off four plant species that could potentially be invasive.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	99.5 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	5 acres

- Deer hunt – Ran the lottery after all applications received. There are 192 hunt participants this year; 139 at Lake Gaillard, 25 at Bethany, 20 at Prospect, and 8 at Ansonia/Seymour.
- Boundaries – Remarked boundaries in Killingworth, Hamden, Seymour, Bethany and Woodbridge.
- East Haven, Beach Ave. watermain – Received two more easement documents. Still waiting for documents from two property owners.
- Cell phone towers – North Haven, Rabbit Rock Tank (NO 1) – Continued discussion with T-Mobile about sharing a generator at this site. Reviewed updated plans from T-Mobile and sent them comments. Sent them a draft amendment to the agreement.
- Rare species reporting – Corresponded with State Botanist about narrow-leaved vervain found at Lake Gaillard last year.
- Prospect Reservoir – Met with Mayor Chatfield and Bob Harvey to talk about the issues at the dam and future potential scenarios for the Prospect System.
- Water main break, Paradise Ave. and West Shepard Rd., Hamden – Corresponded with town staff about the status of the town ROW where the water main break occurred.
- Rats near Lake Whitney – Responded to email from nearby resident of Lake Whitney complaining that we were the cause of a recent rat outbreak in their neighborhood. Explained that we have not altered the management of our property.

Attachments

- May 13, 2022 - California panel unanimously rejects proposal for plant to turn ocean water into drinking water – ABC News
- May 16, 2022 - What centuries of ice-out records can tell us about climate change on Maine's lakes – Maine Public Radio
- May 26, 2022 - Dog Park Cooperative, Regional Water Authority Bring Drinking Water to Fitzgerald Property – Woodbridgetownnews.com
- June 1, 2022 - Wading through revitalized rivers, in search of key link in food chain – WNPR
- June 5, 2022 - Deer Lake: Another round in the battle between conservation and sprawl – CTMirror.org

Upcoming Agenda Items

July 2022 –

California panel unanimously rejects proposal for plant to turn ocean water into drinking water

The plant would have produced 50 million gallons of water per day.

By Julia Jacobo - May 13, 2022 – ABC News

The water level at Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the country that provides irrigation and drinking water to 25 million people, has dropped to an all-time low.

California water officials unanimously struck down a \$1.4 billion plan to build a seaside desalination plant amid a water crisis sparked by megadrought and climate change.

The California Coastal Commission, which is responsible for protecting the state's shores, voted Thursday to deny a permit to seawater desalination developer Poseidon Water to build a desalination plant in Huntington Beach.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom was among the supporters for the plan, which promised to produce 50 million gallons of drinking water a day. Steve Sheldon, president of the Orange County Water District, said the plant would make the county "drought resilient."

Several environmental justice and ocean groups, as well as the commission itself, opposed the project for reasons including environmental conservation, marine life and the eventual increase in water bills.

"The project would kill marine life in about 275 million gallons of seawater per day," Tom Luster, the commission's desalination expert, told the panel on Wednesday, according to The Associated Press.

Among the critics were the Society of Native Nations, which spoke out to "defend, to honor and protect our oceans," and the Orange County Coastkeeper, which accused those in favor of the desalination plant of building it to "continue to hose down driveways and have lavish water wasting landscapes," according to ABC Los Angeles station KABC.

Freshwater sources in the Southwest are experiencing critical shortages after a decades-long megadrought, which is expected to intensify and expand east. Last month, "unprecedented" water restrictions were ordered for millions in Southern California, while human remains have been discovered in Lake Mead as water levels continue to recede to historic levels.

Desalination plants remove mineral components from saltwater to create sources for drinking and agriculture but are notoriously expensive. The cost of treating seawater is about \$2,000 to \$3,000 an acre foot. That is about two or three times the cost of the next cheapest source, which is water conservation -- such as buying water from farmers and reusing wastewater, Jay Lund, professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of California, Davis and the head of the school's Center for Watershed Sciences, told ABC News last year.

A desalination plant proposed by Poseidon Water two decades ago was built in San Diego County in 2015 and now accounts for 10% of the county's water supplies, according to the AP. Poseidon proposed a plant for Huntington Beach at the same time, but the commission expressed concern in 2013 that the proposed use of intake structures to quickly draw in large volumes of water from the ocean would damage marine life.

Poseidon then committed to conduct additional studies and resubmit a plan to mitigate damage to marine life through restoration of nearby wetlands, according to AP.

In a statement, Poseidon said it was discouraged by the decision.

"California continues to face a punishing drought, with no end in sight," the statement said. "Every day, we see new calls for conservation as reservoir levels drop to dangerous lows. We firmly believe that this desalination project would have created a sustainable, drought-tolerant source of water."

What centuries of ice-out records can tell us about climate change on Maine's lakes

Maine Public | By Robbie Feinberg, Esta Pratt-Kielley - Published May 16, 2022

Along the shores of Moosehead Lake, Roger Paradise revs the engine of a small 1964 Cessna 180 seaplane. Paradise is the chief pilot for Currier's Flying Service, which has been calling the ice-out on the 40-mile-long lake since at least the 1990s. "I doubt there's any ice left," Paradise says from beside the plane. "Anything that has been broken up, we've had some pretty big wind and rain."

It's early May, and Paradise says the ice was officially declared out about a week ago — on April 28th, a bit earlier than usual. To make the declaration, Paradise flies over Moosehead to see if there's enough open water for the steamship Katahdin to cross the lake, from Greenville to Northeast Carry.

"If the boat had to maneuver a lot, it's not out," he explains. "There's still too much ice out there. It has to be able to go up there, smooth sailing, the entire way up."

When Currier's took over the job, it was continuing a nearly 200-year tradition, one that began in 1848. According to Sue Currier, anticipation builds each spring as the lake ice melts. Contests are held at local businesses, and people call her with the same question: When is the ice out?

"It's still a big responsibility. I feel it! Big time," Paradise said. "It is!" Currier said. "Because it's an important date that you put down in history. So you want to be as accurate as you can."

Currier and Paradise aren't the only ice-out keepers in Maine. Records have been collected by generations of families, logging companies, general stores, and even dates etched onto barns. The tradition continues now, with volunteers still reporting the date each year.

"What's so amazing about it to me is that it was not collected for scientific reasons, as far as I know, ever," said Glenn Hodgkins, a research hydrologist with the U.S. Geological Survey based in Augusta.

More than two decades ago, Hodgkins began collecting historic ice-out data and looking at its relationship to air temperature and climate. Using records from 29 lakes, Hodgkins found that over 150 years, ice-out had gotten earlier by an average of nine days in northern and western Maine, and an average of 16 days farther south.

"But it's proved, because of Mainers keeping track of it and saving over the years, it's proved to be a valuable scientific record," Hodgkins said.

Hodgkins said the trend could affect winter recreation, from snowmobiling to ice fishing. And Linda Bacon, the leader of the lakes assessment section within the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, said earlier ice-outs also have a big effect on biology — specifically, phytoplankton, which can start to grow and multiply much earlier once the ice thaws.

"When you have a lake that has more nutrients in it, than it really should have in it, that gives a greater period of time for algal populations to just totally take over," Bacon said. "And you end up with lakes that are really kind of pea soup green for a longer period of time during the summer."

Bacon said big algal blooms have already started to occur in lakes along the south and coast: at Long Pond in Parsonsfield; and Georges Pond, in Hancock County, where residents spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in 2020 to treat the water. Until about 20 years ago, Bacon said cooler temperatures helped to mitigate that risk. But she said shorter ice seasons, and warmer waters, will make it worse.

"It doesn't take a whole heck of a lot for a lake to change," Bacon said. "We have a lot of lakes in the state of Maine that are kind of right on the edge."

For a large lake like Moosehead, Bacon said the concerns aren't quite as urgent, because it takes the massive volume of water a much longer time to warm up.

But Tristan Taber, with Lake Stewards of Maine, said Moosehead won't be immune from climate change. Taber said that if you extrapolate out historical trends, they show that the average ice-out could potentially occur about two weeks earlier by 2070, compared to about two centuries before. Add that to a likely earlier ice-in date in the fall, and Taber said the average ice season could potentially be cut by up to a month.

"There is the real possibility that there could be a risk here," Taber said. "And that risk comes with thoughts of cyanobacteria blooms, with thoughts of less availability of environments, of habitat for cold water fisheries, and then the risk of invasive species being able to find a foothold."

Taber and other experts say that to help mitigate those changes, local residents need to be stewards of their lakes and ponds. That means installing culverts near roads, adding vegetative buffers along lakeshores to help handle storm water, and carefully considering the effects of development and erosion near water bodies.

In the meantime, scientists say they'll continue to rely on ice-out data — and the local ice-out watchers across Maine — to carry on the centuries-old tradition.

Dog Park Cooperative, Regional Water Authority Bring Drinking Water to Fitzgerald Property

Date: May 26, 2022 – Woodbridgetownnews.com

Directors of the Woodbridge Dog Park Cooperative (WDPC) announced a successful collaboration with the Regional Water Authority (RWA) to bring a new source of drinking water to the Fitzgerald Property – often referred to as the cornfield – near the town center. The new water supply was installed – at no cost to the Town or the WDPC – as part of a RWA service program that assists non-profit community groups; the two-day installation was completed earlier this month.

The Woodbridge Town Plan and Zoning Commission and Board of Selectmen had each previously approved plans for this improvement to the property. Under provisions of a formal agreement with the Town, the dog park is open daily where there was formerly an asphalt pad and seasonal skating rink.

WDPC operations and finances are completely independent from town government; going forward, the WDPC has accepted responsibility for the monthly water usage fees. “On behalf of WDPC directors, members, and guests, I’m grateful to both RWA and town officials for their part in this welcome enhancement to the property we’re so pleased to share with other community members,” said Mary Beth Womer, WDPC board president. “This drinking water is now available for dog park users as well as Fitzgerald Property walkers, joggers, and nature lovers, and as a goodwill gesture by good neighbors, the WDPC will foot the bill.”

It must be noted however, that the potable water now available on the Fitzgerald Property is strictly intended for pets and humans, and not meant for agricultural or gardening purposes. The WDPC withholds the right to restrict access to the potable water should usage exceed anticipated volume due to abuse of privileges, unauthorized use, or vandalism.

The WDPC is in its third year of operations. It now has well over 100 member families.

Wading through revitalized rivers, in search of key link in food chain

Connecticut Public Radio | By Patrick Skahill - June 1, 2022 - WNPR

As spring winds down, so concludes the migration of two species of fish that travel from the ocean to spawn in freshwater.

While once abundant in rivers and streams, alewives and blueback herring have seen their migration routes fractured by dams over centuries of development. Conservationists are working to remove some of these barriers to help the fish find ideal spawning habitat.

On a recent morning in May, I met up with Jon Vander Werff, a fish biologist with Save the Sound, to watch him wade into a river and try to spot these migrating fish, which he said are small but hugely important.

“All of these animals depend on these river herring – these alewife and blueback herring – as a food source,” Vander Werff said. “If they’re deleted from the ecosystem, the entire food chain can collapse.”

He said everything from tuna and seals to ospreys and great blue heron depend on these fish, which return to freshwater from the ocean to spawn. Kind of like a salmon does, but “they’re a little bit cooler than a salmon because they have a salmon-like migration,” Vander Werff said. “Adult life in the ocean, but then they spawn inland. But they can do it multiple times. A salmon only does it once!”

But for years, a nearby dam stopped these fish from going upstream. In 2015, it was removed to mitigate local flooding concerns after Hurricane Sandy and also to help these fish return.

During our visit, Vander Werff checked his trap to see just how many are coming back.

“I was here a little earlier and there are fish there, so we’ll see what’s in there,” he said.

Stepping into the water, he waded around the fish cage made out of rebar and fencing. It’s all MacGyvered together with ties and carefully placed in the river.

“It’s deep enough to protect the fish from predation. So we don’t want birds to get in there, we don’t want a snake to get in,” he explained. “We need a spot a little bit deep enough for them to be protected. We want slow flow. So we’re not asking them to stay on a treadmill for an extended amount of time.”

Vander Werff said he comes out six days a week and checks the traps. Any fish caught are recorded and released immediately upstream. But he said the “no fish” days can be slow.

“Because you’re just staring at it. Is that a fish? Nope. That was algae. Is that a fish? Nope, that’s a shadow. Oops! That one’s a rock,” he said, laughing.

As he worked his net through the water, he said he thought he saw a sunfish in there – one of those small fish that kids catch.

He dipped the net in and poked around. “I thought there was a fish in here,” he said, before deciding “it got stage fright.” He pulled up his net, and worked his way back to the riverbank.

Afterward, he said the sunfish must have escaped through the front of the trap.

So overall, the news wasn’t great – no fish. But that wasn’t terribly surprising, because up to our visit, Vander Werff said, he’d seen no alewife or blueback herring all year at this spot.

It’s a bit of a mystery. Because last year, Vander Werff said he counted around 200 alewives here, which raises some interesting questions: “Where’d they go? What’s going on? What happened to them?” he asked.

He said ocean conditions, fishing and the year-to-year volatility of these runs could all be a factor. But bottom line, scientists don’t really know what’s going on, at least not yet.

“The only way to answer these questions is keep researching – the more research, the more people care about this – is how these questions get answered,” Vander Werff said.

Shortly after the visit, I messaged Vander Werff to ask if the Woodbridge spot turned up any fish. “I was honestly shocked,” he replied, saying he’d spotted three alewives just days later.

It was a surprising late-season revelation. A sign that scientists still have a lot to learn about the mysterious migrations of these small but important fish.

Deer Lake: Another round in the battle between conservation and sprawl

By Tom Condon // CTMirror.org - Published June 5, 2022

In Killingworth, environmentalists and public officials are trying to stop the Boy Scouts of America from selling its wooded 252-acre Deer Lake Scout Reservation to a developer.

To date, the Scouts' Connecticut Yankee Council has rejected two offers from nonprofit groups interested in preserving the land for open space or passive recreation, and it is entertaining an offer of \$4.6 million from a New York developer.

A lawsuit has been filed to preserve the bird sanctuary on the property. The Killingworth Board of Selectmen passed a resolution strongly supporting preservation of the property.

The Deer Lake situation, on which the Council declined to comment, is another example of the whack-a-mole approach conservationists are often forced to take to save some of the state's dwindling supply of open land. As with similar predicaments, it raises the question of how and where should the state grow and what lands should be protected.

Advocates say there's no time to waste.

"Wild places still exist in Connecticut, but they won't if we don't do something to protect them. Parks and conservation are components of thriving communities," said Walker Holmes, Connecticut state director of the Trust for Public Land.

State of sprawl

For much of the 20th century, especially in the go-go years after World War II, residents left Connecticut's cities in droves for new homes in the suburbs. For example, Hartford had nearly 180,000 people in 1950 but 122,500 in 2020.

Formerly sleepy rural towns hummed with lawnmowers and weed wackers. The split-level ranch with a lawn and patio fulfilled the American Dream for countless residents. However.....

Much of the new development was low-density, hastily planned and dependent on cars — a pattern known as sprawl. And, as officials belatedly learned, sprawl had a downside. "Sprawl is the most serious environmental problem facing Connecticut," Karl Wagener, then-executive director of the state's Council on Environmental Quality, told The Hartford Courant in 2005.

He and others in and out of government pushed for limits on sprawl. Some measures were enacted. A 2008 law created a "responsible growth cabinet," and Gov. M. Jodi Rell created an Office of Responsible Growth. The state's Plan of Conservation and Development was refocused on "growth management" principles. These measures were, at best, partially successful. "Sprawl continues," said Nathan Frohling of The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut, one of several nonprofits that work to preserve open space. "Connecticut has done a terrible job of reining in sprawl," said Sara Bronin, Cornell University law professor and founder of Desegregate Connecticut, a housing and land-use reform coalition.

Though Bronin and some others think sprawl is still the state's major environmental challenge, it has somewhat fallen off the radar screen. There's now more attention being paid to climate change mitigation. But they may be two sides of the same coin. "So many of the things we've been trying to do for conservation and the environment related to sprawl have a direct connection either to climate mitigation or adaptation," Frohling said.

A 30-member study group, the Commission on Connecticut's Development and Future, formed by the General Assembly a year ago to "evaluate policies related to land use, conservation, housing affordability and infrastructure," could offer solutions when it reports its findings next year, though it appears more focused on process than substance.

The new variant

The nature of sprawl has changed somewhat in recent years. For one thing, residential subdivisions tend not to be as big as they were a few decades ago, said Eric A. Santini, a builder and president of the Home Builders & Remodelers of Connecticut. He said developments now trend toward 20 or 30 units, rather than 80, 90 or more years ago. For example, a developer announced plans in April to build 34 three-bedroom houses on former farmland in Canton.

The bigger change may be the surge in multifamily construction, with major apartment complexes going up in suburban towns across the state. "Towns are starting to realize they need a variety of housing, not just single-family homes on one-acre lots," Santini said.

He said apartments give young adults or downsizing Baby Boomers the option to stay in town. He said multifamily housing helps both the tax base and local businesses. All well and good, said State Rep. Jason Rojas, D-East Hartford, chair of the Commission on Connecticut's Development and Future, depending on where it is built. He said the surge in apartments is a "two-edged sword — we need the housing, but if it is built in the wrong place, we get sprawl" and its negative effects. What would those be?

The downside

The effects of sprawl have been extensively studied over the past 25 years (see here, here and here). Most agree that sprawl:

- Causes the loss of forests, farmland and other open space. Connecticut has lost thousands of acres of forest and farms over the past half century. A major study by the University of Connecticut's Center for Land Use Education and Research, using satellite imagery, found that from 1985 to 2015, the state lost 115,200 acres of forested land and 39,680 acres of agricultural fields to development and related land covers, what the study calls "urban footprint." The state now has more land in grass and turf (8%) than farms (7%).
- Induces more driving, which translates to more congestion, greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollution, energy use and lost time. Spread-out development discourages both use of transit and walking, leading to issues with obesity and related illnesses.
- Necessitates the construction and expense of more infrastructure and increases the cost of services.
- Threatens the quality of streams and rivers, because the loss of vegetation and increase in paved surfaces causes more runoff.
- Abets segregation by race and class, isolating the poor in core cities and, sometimes, the elderly in the suburbs.
- Limits housing production, a situation belatedly being addressed in some communities with multifamily construction. Instead of big houses on large lots, more compact construction could have yielded more dwelling units at lower cost.

Smart growth

The antidote to sprawl is called smart growth, or responsible growth. The idea, in broad terms, is to draw development to town centers and transit corridors, where infrastructure and services already exist, and by doing so lessen the pressure to develop farmland and forest tracts.

State officials have taken steps consistent with smart growth in recent years, such as major investments in housing in downtown Hartford and other cities. The state's brownfield remediation programs have put urban land back in use. Two new transit systems have been developed, the Hartford Line rail service from New Haven to Springfield and CTfastrak, the bus rapid transit line from Hartford to New Britain.

The surest way to protect open space from sprawl is to own it or own the development rights to it. The state's open space and farmland acquisition programs continue, albeit slowly, toward their preservation goals.

In 1997, the General Assembly passed a law requiring that 21% of Connecticut's land area — a total of 673,210 acres — be preserved as open space. The deadline to complete the work is 2023.

Over at the state Department of Agriculture, its farmland preservation program is even farther away from its goal. In the late 1970s, the state set a goal of preserving 130,000 acres of farmland, a number thought necessary for the state to be able to feed itself. More than four decades later, 401 farms and 47,510 acres have been permanently protected through the program.

State Department of Agriculture Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt said the process in the first decades of the program was cumbersome and expensive. The department had to get individual bond approval for each farm and did not work with federal or private partners to leverage state funds. He said that has now changed and the process is moving more expeditiously.

He said it took the department 35 years to preserve 300 farms but only eight years to protect the next 100 farms. He noted that agriculture is a \$4 billion industry in the state that provides 22,000 jobs, growing everything from tobacco to tulips.

Zoning and taxes

Open space acquisition has never been able to keep pace with the demand for development, so it cannot be the sole means of controlling sprawl. Two other measures that would encourage smart growth, advocates say, are zoning reform and less reliance on local property taxes.

Bronin said zoning is a major factor driving sprawl in the state. Desegregate CT compiled a "zoning atlas" of all the state's zoning districts and learned that through zoning, "the vast majority of towns make it easiest to build single-family homes on large lots and difficult to build any other kind of housing." Nine towns allow nothing but single-family housing.

As a result, "we build ourselves into the sprawl we see all around us, with the destruction of farmlands and forests — zoning dictates these results," she said.

Sprawl means "you have to build roads, water and sewer facilities and streetlights, and the burden of paying for and maintaining them falls on the towns. Why wouldn't you want to offer an alternative? We need a complete rethinking of the way we approach land development in Connecticut," she said.

Desegregate CT successfully pushed for a bill in 2021 that made some zoning-related changes, such as allowing accessory apartments on single-family lots, and it created the Commission on Connecticut's Development and Future.

The coalition continues to push for changes that would allow mixed-use, mixed-income, multifamily development in town centers and transit corridors.

Another nonprofit working on zoning reform, The Open Communities Alliance, is promoting the concept of “fair share” zoning, in which towns would agree to build their share of the state’s affordable housing need. Towns would get to choose where to build the housing; Alliance director Erin Boggs thinks they would likely decide to construct multifamily housing in or near town centers, not sprawl in the countryside.

The Commission on Connecticut’s Development and Future is looking to develop model design guidelines for both buildings and streets that municipalities may adopt as part of their zoning regulations and which could help produce more mixed-use density in town centers.

‘Free-for-all’

Another driver of sprawl is the state’s heavy reliance on property taxes. The group 1000 Friends of Connecticut has focused on the property tax issue and released a report in December titled “Connecticut Property Taxes: Opportunity for Change.”

Connecticut, the report says, relies on the property tax to fund government services to a far higher degree than most other states. The study cited data on the distribution of tax burden, called tax incidence, that showed nearly 42% of the state and local taxes paid in the state were property taxes, and that, on average, municipalities realize an average 73.4% of their revenues from the local property tax.

The system taxes equivalent properties differently depending on which town they are in. It impedes economic development. It also drives sprawl.

“The over-reliance on property taxes fosters fragmentation ... forcing Connecticut’s 169 cities and towns to compete with one another ... land-use boards make decisions based on what members believe (often incorrectly) will increase property tax revenues such as attempting to attract high valuation properties at the expense of preserving farmland and open space,” the report states.

It won’t be met.

After the first several years, funding trailed off. At present, 513,310 acres, or 76.2% of the goal, have been preserved, according to Department of Energy and Environmental Protection figures. The plan is that the state would own 10% of the protected land, and its partner organizations, such as land trusts, towns or water companies, would own 11%. The state is at 71% of its 10% portion of the goal, and if the pace of acquisition — an average of 879 acres a year over the past 10 years — doesn’t pick up, it will take more than 60 years to reach it, according to the Council of Environmental Quality’s 2021 annual report.

But officials are buoyed by a grant of \$15 million from the legislature this year for open space.

“We will be taking a very ambitious approach over the next few years to get to that goal,” said Andrew Hoskins, DEEP’s chief of staff, who oversees the land acquisition program. It is guided by the Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy, or “Green Plan,” which targets the “highest value conservation and recreation lands.”

Gov. Lamont’s 2022 budget contained some modifications to the property tax but did not change its fundamental structure.

Elisabeth Moore, executive director of the Connecticut Farmland Trust, said heavy reliance on property taxes, coupled with a lack of strong regional or state planning, creates a “free-for-all, 169 towns driven by the need for tax revenue. Everybody wants a Walmart even if there is one in the next town.”

Good plan, no teeth

The state plan that directly addresses sprawl, at least theoretically, is the Plan of Conservation & Development. The plan, prepared every five years by the state Office of Policy and Management, “is an overarching statement of state policy in matters pertaining to land and water resource conservation and development,” as stated in a February report on the implementation of the plan.

Implementation is not a strong point. The plan is mostly advisory — it is supposed to guide the land use activities of state agencies. It apparently doesn’t do that very well.

Agencies are supposed to request an advisory opinion from OPM on all but minor projects. However, “agencies make their own determination of a project’s consistency with the State C&D Plan and only rarely seek input from OPM,” according to the February report.

“It’s a good plan, it checks all the boxes, but where’s the implementation? Where are the metrics to determine if it is working?” asked Stewart “Chip” Beckett of Glastonbury, a member of the Commission on Connecticut’s Development and Future, which among other things is looking at the planning processes for conservation and housing.

It's not clear that the Plan of Conservation and Development is a high priority with the legislature. The 2018-2023 plan was only adopted this year, four years late.

Lack of a strong implementation mechanism in the plan can create a disconnect between policy and practice. For example, one of the plan's growth management principles is to "concentrate development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors."

If compliance were made a condition of state investment, it might have resulted in the creation of an overlay zone along transit lines, to allow multifamily, multi-use development near the stations. As is typical in Connecticut, some towns have done this on their own, but most have not.

Desegregate CT proposed a bill this year that would have required towns to zone some of the land within a half-mile of transit stations for more diverse housing. The "transit-oriented community" bill was similar to one that was adopted in Massachusetts last year, but it did not pass in Connecticut.

Without more impactful state or regional planning, conservationists are often forced into the whack-a-mole mode, as in Killingworth, where they find out about land going on the market and try to save it before it is sold for development.

"Sometimes we have to act quickly," said Amy Blaymore Paterson, executive director of the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, which represents the state's 130 nonprofit land trusts, increasingly important players in land conservation.

The hit-or-miss approach to land conservation by definition includes some hits. A spectacular example was the protection of a nearly 1,000 acre coastal forest in the lower Connecticut River Valley called "The Preserve" in 2015 after many years of conservation efforts.

On the other hand, in nearby East Lyme, conservationists have been fighting for more than a decade, in and out of court, to stop development of a 236-acre portion of the Oswegatchie Hills, a heretofore undeveloped coastal forest along the scenic Niantic River. Coastal lands are among the "Green Plan" preservation priorities.

Climate

Though the battles continue, the war against sprawl seems to have taken a back seat to concerns about climate change. That's not necessarily bad, said Frohling, of the Nature Conservancy. The issues, he said, are not incompatible.

Climate change mitigation is about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which threaten to toast the planet. In Connecticut, according to a 2016 legislative study, the largest source of greenhouse gases is the transportation sector, at 38%. Residential and commercial buildings together add another 25%.

That would argue for transit-oriented development, to reduce driving and encourage more compact housing. Author David Owen reported in his 2009 book "Green Metropolis — What the City Can Teach the Country About True Sustainability" that for fossil fuel use per capita, the greenest city in the country is New York City, because most residents live in buildings with shared walls, which are more energy efficient than free-standing homes, and most walk, bike or use transit.

Another environmental daily double, a precept of both smart growth and climate mitigation, is preserving core forests. Frohling said preserving forests and preventing their fragmentation is vitally important for several reasons: carbon sequestration, water quality protection, plant and animal habitat and absorption of storm surges from the increasingly erratic weather patterns.

Lamont has taken some steps to address the climate issue. In December, he signed an executive order addressing greenhouse gas reduction on many fronts and involving many state agencies. He recently signed two bills, one calling for a carbon-free electric grid by 2040 and another promoting smaller renewable energy projects.

Reining in sprawl would help the cause. To do that, said David Anderson of Save The Sound, "We need to tackle it on both ends, by allowing high density in transit nodes and town centers served by water and sewer, and at the other end by protecting environmental assets that are inappropriate for development and more suited to conservation."

The latter would appear to describe the Deer Lake property in Killingworth. As to its fate, First Selectman Nancy Gorski said in an email Friday there was no news.