



Connecticut Association of Conservation  
and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc.

# THE HABITAT

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Summer 2003

Editor: Tom Odell

## CACIWC'S 26<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, November 15, 2003

8:30 AM - 4:30 PM  
The Mountainside  
Special Event Facility  
Wallingford, CT

*YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND*

*the 2nd Statewide Educational Event  
for Municipal Conservation & Inland Wetlands  
Commissioners and Staff*

————— Keynote Address —————

by the **Honorable Richard Blumenthal**,  
Connecticut State Attorney General

on

*State Efforts to Preserve  
Wetlands and Open Space*

*For more detail see page 7.*

## OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT - Enhancing Forest Biodiversity: A Case Study

*by Jerry Silbert*

Volumes have been written about forest “management.” I can’t even scratch the surface in this short article. What I can do is tell you a story about the “management” of a particular 600 acre forest called the Guilford Timberlands.

Let me say that I use the word “management” with a good deal of skepticism. The term implies an industrial model of the forest as if it were a machine or a system that we can control, and predict the consequences of our actions. Not so. A forest is an dynamic, immensely complex relationship of living beings constantly adjusting to variable and unpredictable circumstances. Our interventions are more in the nature of an experiment rather than the exercise of control.

Now that you know my point of view, here’s the story. Several years ago, the Timberlands was rescued from a misguided scheme to turn a beautiful, productive forest into a golf course. This scheme was defeated by over a two to one margin by a referendum in my town of Guilford. The

Conservation Commission was given the responsibility to care for the forest. We held a forest festival to celebrate the forests of our town and as part of this, we conducted a survey that asked people how the forest should be used. The overwhelming majority supported the forest’s use for biodiversity, for protecting water quality, and for passive recreation. Harvesting trees for profit was not high on the priority list.

The survey reflected the sentiments of the Conservation Commission and we put out a request for a forest management plan that emphasized biodiversity, a healthy forest, and water quality protection. But before I continue allow me to digress about 400 years.

Prior to the European settlement, what we call Connecticut was almost entirely forested. There were large contiguous areas of forest in varying stages of succession. Beaver were plentiful and, over centuries, their damming of  
*Timberlands, continued on page 3*

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**MATCHING CHALLENGE GRANT  
DONATIONS REQUESTED TO TRAIN  
CONSERVATION COMMISSIONERS**

*President Tom ODell has challenged CACIWC to raise \$1,000 for conservation commission training. Tom will match all donations up to \$1,000. Please help us meet the challenge by donating \$25, \$50, \$100, or any other amount. It is a great investment—your contribution is doubled and used to protect and preserve community natural resources.*


Challenge Grant funds will provide resources to train the 600+ volunteers that serve on Connecticut’s Conservation Commissions. Training will focus on developing commission capacity for natural resource inventory, open space management, and providing land use recommendations to other municipal regulatory commissions. The funds will be used to match other grants and for conducting workshops.

Conservation Commissions are the most important volunteer organization in the community for ensuring the long term conservation, restoration and protection of the town’s natural resources; they are the environmental consciousness of the community. Please support their dedication and your community by making a contribution now.

*CACIWC is a non-profit organization given 501(c)(3) status by the IRS: Contributions made by individuals and organizations to CACIWC are tax-deductible, as allowed by law. Write checks to “CACIWC” and note at bottom left, “for CC-training.” Please send to CACIWC, Challenge Grant, P.O. Box 2373, Vernon, CT.* 

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*Timberlands, continued from page 1*

streams led to a succession of habitats: from ponds, to swamps, to meadows, to brushy meadows, to saplings, and ultimately to mature trees. The slash and burn agricultural methods of indigenous people also resulted in patches that when abandoned became a succession of meadow, brush, saplings and finally mature forest.

The Europeans brought with them a more settled form of agriculture. Eventually, seventy percent of the forests were cut down to clear the land, to supply fuel, and material for building and manufacturing. Since then farms have largely moved westward and wood is no longer our main source of fuel. Our forests have recovered (except for the Chestnut) and now Connecticut is 65-70% forested. Most of the forests we now see are fairly young as forests go, but have a closed canopy of trees. In other words, there is not much in the way of a mix of varying stages of succession in our forested areas. This results in less habitat diversity and consequently less biodiversity. More varied habitat leads to a greater diversity of all forms of life. One of the goals of our forestry plan was to create a more varied habitat. This meant cutting down some trees to allow a more natural succession of forest habitats.

Permit me another digression. In the early 1960s, this tract of land was owned by a company that wanted to build a large residential development. Fortunately, the town was able to purchase this land with the help of state and federal funds. Unfortunately, prior to the purchase, the developer liquidated the forest, cutting and selling all the high grade timber leaving only commercially worthless trees. For many years the land was used by the Yale School of Forestry as an example of how not to do a timber harvest. Fortunately, the town had the foresight to help the forest's recovery by collaborating with the Yale School of Forestry and developing a cordwood cutting program that, over time, removed the diseased and misshapen trees and allowed the healthy straight trees to grow faster.

By the mid 1990s the Timberlands was once more a healthy maturing forest at the closed canopy stage of succession. The fact that the forest was healthy with many good quality trees meant that since we were going to cut down trees anyway to create more varied habitat, we could also sell the mature timber and recover the costs of the detailed, professional plan for the forest. Our selectman agreed, we hired a forestry firm that inventoried the forest and developed a plan.

About one third of the forest was set aside for minimal management - no cutting and only trail maintenance as a kind of "control" to see the differences between this area and the areas that were thinned. We hired a forester to

handle the bids for the timber harvest and supervise the operation. I won't go into any great detail other than to say we did some patch cuts of two to three acres each and thinned some trees from about a third of the forest to provide space for healthy trees to grow. A no-cutting buffer of approximately 50' from wetlands was maintained. Here are the results.

The cost of the cutting plan and the supervising forester amounted to about \$6,000. The timber harvest brought in \$21,000, thus netting the town about \$16,000. The selectmen voted to put this money in a land acquisition fund. This is the third summer after the patch cuts and it is fascinating to see the succession of new plant life where there was once a closed canopy forest. A few mature oak seed trees were left standing in the patch cuts and one can see a goodly number of oak seedlings starting to grow.

A few trees that partially shaded vernal pools were harvested, with care taken to keep the tops out of the pools. The added light stimulated vegetation in and around the pools. The shrubs are flowering more prolifically, the forest floor is largely undisturbed, as are the migration routes for wood frogs and salamanders. Some of the logging roads are now side-by-side walking trails that connect to others in the no cut areas providing opportunity for enhanced passive recreation to observe, study and enjoy Timberlands' increase in biodiversity.

Overall, I would say that despite some setbacks due to weather and some minor glitches, the project was a great success. If we continue according to plan, we will be doing another series of patch cuts and thinning in another part of the forest in about two years.

Looking back on the project, here are a few suggestions based on our experience: Hire professionals with good reputations and references. Keep the public informed of your plans. Have local people keep an eye on the project. If it is a public forest, make sure the public understands that a timber harvest is a bit messy but that in a couple or three years the forest will look fine. With common sense, good will and sensitivity to environmental concerns, a timber harvest for increasing biodiversity can be an all-around winning proposition.

*Jerry Silbert was chairman of the Guilford Conservation at the time the timber harvest was planned and executed. He currently serves on the Guilford Inland Wetlands Commission and is Executive Director of the Quinnipiac Watershed Partnership in the greater New Haven area. For more information you can reach Jerry at 203-401-2718 or [jsilbert@rwater.com](mailto:jsilbert@rwater.com).* 🌿

# STATE'S SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS REORGANIZE TO PROVIDE MORE EFFECTIVE SERVICE TO COMMUNITIES

by *Suellen Kozey McCuin, Executive Director, Council on Soil & Water Conservation*

The state's soil and water conservation districts were recently reorganized from eight county-based districts into five watershed-based districts – to streamline more effective delivery of technical and educational services.

The services of the five reorganized conservation districts are available to help municipal leaders, boards and staff, and residential, commercial and agricultural land users to contend with the growing complexities of development pressures, regulations and natural resource issues.

The realignment was completed through the joint efforts of the Connecticut Association of Conservation Districts (CACD), the Council<sup>1</sup> on Soil and Water Conservation (Council) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Although boundary lines have been altered, *the five* watershed-based conservation districts' mission to provide comprehensive and professional assistance to its service area remains the same.

## Services of Conservation Districts to Local Government and the Community

Connecticut's nonpartisan conservation districts provide objective, accurate and timely assistance:

- Providing technical information and assistance on natural resource problems including: site plan review and on-site inspection, management of non-point source (NPS) pollution, erosion and sedimentation control, storm water management, and habitat restoration.
- Offering natural resource education and training on various land use issues. Topics offered by Conservation Districts this year include: "Training on Connecticut's 2002 Erosion and Sediment Guidelines for Municipal Staff," "Green Gardening Techniques for Homeowners," "Reading the Land – A Workshop for Realtors about Natural Resource Issues facing New Homeowners," "Pond Maintenance, and Landscaping for Improved Water Quality." Districts also annually coordinate and sponsor the nationally recognized Envirothon, a high school education and competition program in natural resource topics.
- Furnishing the public on-call or walk-in assistance, offering information, recommendations, and referrals to assist land owners, developers and home owners with

problems relating to soil and water conservation and other natural resource issues.

- Partnering with public and private stakeholders to formulate and implement watershed management plans and other local initiatives to preserve the health of watersheds.
- Partnering with the agricultural community, private environmental organizations, and municipal, state and federal agencies to protect and preserve sustainable farmlands, open space and woodlands.

## What is a Soil and Water Conservation District?

Connecticut's conservation districts, created by enabling legislation and established by state regulation, are part of a nationwide network of nearly 3,000 conservation districts; every state has soil and water conservation districts. They link local, state and federal agencies to coordinate and facilitate financial and technical assistance to address local priorities. In Connecticut district operations are under direction of a locally elected Board of Directors. District staff has a major role in planning and prioritizing assistance programs and is responsible for their implementation.

Connecticut's conservation districts, all non-profit 501(c) (3) organizations, receive fiscal support for their programs from three primary sources: (1) a portion of the land use fee collected on municipal land use applications; (2) municipal contributions and private donations; and (3) grants—primarily US Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act grants administered by the DEP.

## History of the Conservation District Network

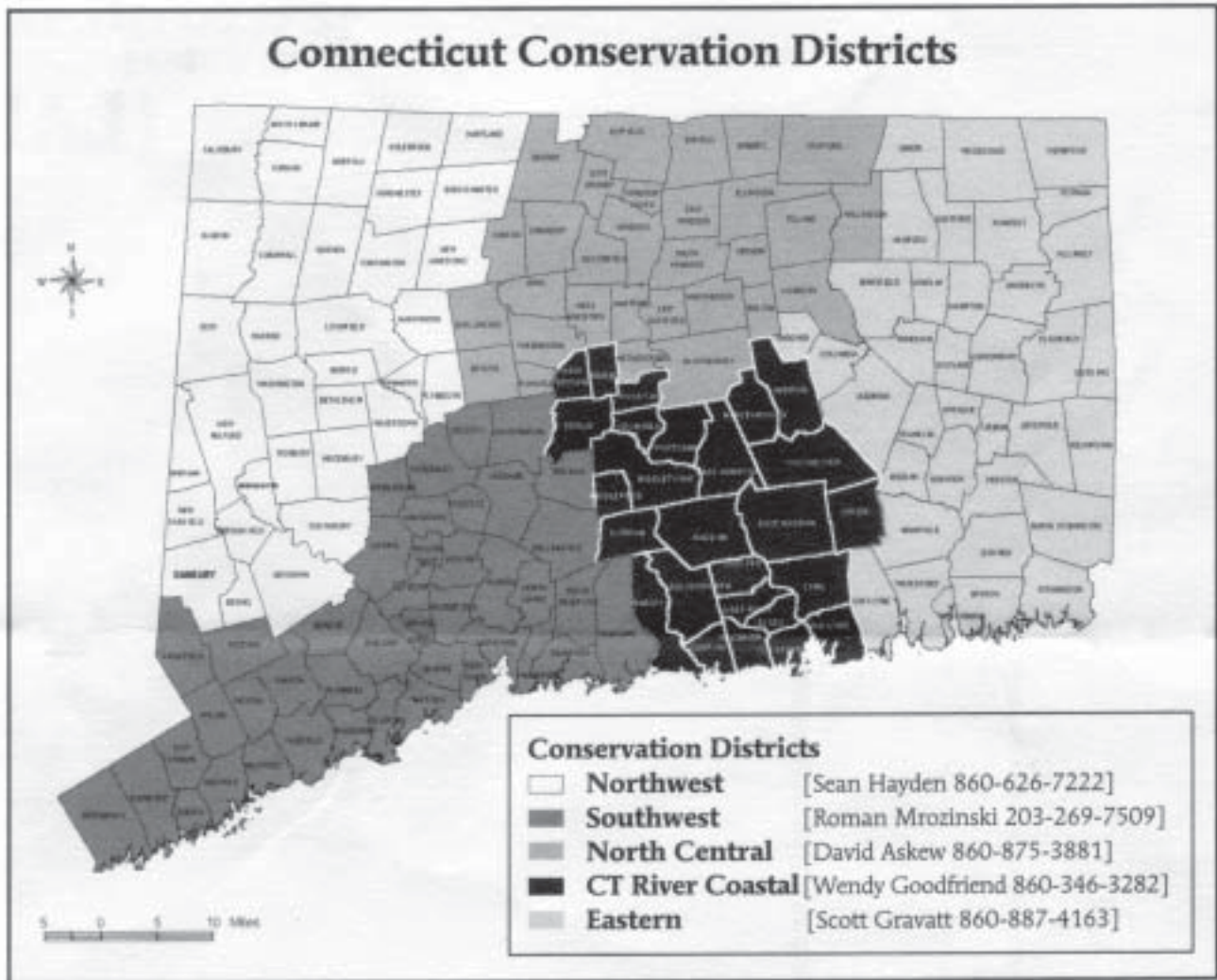
In 1935, Public Law 46, also known as the Soil Conservation Act, was enacted to provide suggestions for remedies for soil and water degradation that became apparent with the natural resource degradation problems of that era. Congress passed enabling legislation allowing each state to create soil and water conservation districts, to implement local practices to address soil and water quality issues. In doing so, Congress also declared soil and water conservation and sound land use a national policy.

- In 1937, President Roosevelt wrote to the governors of each state urging the creation of soil and water conservation districts by state law.



- 1945 marked the year Connecticut passed enabling legislation to create soil and water conservation districts in the state. By 1953 eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts were formed along county lines.
- Early district boards were primarily made up of agricultural producers who had first hand knowledge on how to protect natural resources. They worked in conjunction with the District's primary technical services

areas. In addition there are new state and federal regulations to implement. Municipal land use commissions depend on community volunteers—some 5000 strong in Connecticut—to make appropriate decisions that balance environmental protection, public health and economic viability. Conservation districts are now organized to more effectively assist municipalities in making these decisions as well as assisting private, commercial and agricultural land users to make informed land use decisions. 🍁



partner, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, (NRCS, formally the US Soil Conservation Service).

- Beginning around 1980, to meet the challenges of population growth and the complexities of land management, district boards became more diversified and technical staff were added. In addition to agriculture producers, natural resource specialists and other professionals were elected to boards.

*For more information, please contact any of the services areas referred to in the map above or Suellen Kozey McCuin, Executive Director of the Council on Soil and Water Conservation at (860) 767-9594; or visit the Connecticut Conservation Districts' Website at [www.conservect.org](http://www.conservect.org).*

### Conservation Districts Positioned for Future Challenges

The face of Connecticut is changing drastically due to tremendous development pressures on all types of land

<sup>1</sup> The Council on Soil and Water Conservation is established by regulation pursuant to Section 22a-315 of the Connecticut General Statutes, to coordinate the activities of the State's Soil and Water Conservation Districts with the activities of the Department of Environmental Protection and other local, state, and federal agencies, and propose regulations to said Department of Environmental Protection in matters of soil and water conservation.

# ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION - CONNECTICUT 2003

## *The Good*

**The Council of Environmental Quality** was saved. In a groundswell of environmental grass roots support, funding for CEQ was restored to the budget—after the budget was passed! The reversal shows that a collective effort can make a difference.

**An Invasive Plant Council** was established to study and make recommendations about controlling invasive plants including education, removal, and banning sales. The bill also bans some aquatic plants, requires boaters to clean their keels and stops the state from buying invasive plants. The council is expected to come back to the General Assembly next year with a list of recommendations regarding which invasive plants should be banned from sale.

**All Terrain Vehicles (ATV's)** operators are now required to carry a signed landowner permission letter when operating an ATV on private land. This requirement was added to a DEP technical bill after the original bill died in committee—see below.

## *The Bad*

**Open Space and Farm Land** funding that was supported by the legislature's Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee (see the spring issue of *The Habitat*) is still waiting action by the legislature. This will hold up action on municipal requests for DEP open space grants and funding for the Dept. of Agriculture's PDR farmland program. As we go to press the timing for bonding legislation is not clear.

**Watershed Lands Protection** legislation, sponsored by Endangered Lands Coalition (includes CACIWC), died in committee when differences between the environment community and the water companies could not be resolved. The Coalition, working with The Connecticut Fund for the Environment, will continue to work on this issue. For more information on the program contact Dan Lorimer at 205 Whitney Ave., 1st Floor New Haven, CT 06511, Telephone 203-787-0646, [www.cfenv.org](http://www.cfenv.org).

**The Department of Agriculture (DOA)** will be merged with the Department of Consumer Protection in the second year of the budget (2004-05). With very little savings this will effectively reduce the visibility of the DOA, diminish its ability to promote agriculture as an economic engine and have a negative impact on the farmland preservation program. There is opportunity to reverse this action next year.

## *The Ugly*

**All Terrain Vehicles (ATV's)** legislation written to reduce damage by ATVs on municipal, land trust and private land was hindered by amendments that diluted the requirements of the bill—particularly the requirements that protect the environment.

While it died in committee, there was some success (see above) and there is momentum for next year. 🍁

*Editor's Note: The legislation noted above was a CACIWC priority for support. Review of further 2003 environmental legislation will be in the next issue.*

## DUES ARE DUE

To ensure that your commission receives a copy of *The Habitat* for EACH commissioner, and to save CACIWC the cost of sending a "Second Notice," please send your membership dues as soon as possible. Membership forms for the 2003-04 fiscal year have been sent to each commission. If another is needed please contact Tom ODell, (860)399-1807; email [todell@snet.net](mailto:todell@snet.net). Thank You. 🍁

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## ABOUT OUR ANNUAL MEETING WORKSHOPS...

We're excited about our workshops this year – and grateful to willing participants! Here's a brief summary: Assistant Attorneys General **Janet Brooks** and **David Wrinn** will present three workshops on legal issues covering the topics of conducting hearings, permitting, and intervenor petitions. **Dr. Michael Klemens**, well-known scientist and author of "Best Development Practices: Conserving Pool-Breeding Amphibians in Residential and Commercial Developments...", will give a series of three workshops on integrating biodiversity into local land use decisions. **Jack Clausen**, Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resource Management and Engineering at UConn will do a workshop on stormwater management, incorporating data from the Jordan Cove project in Waterford. **Wendy Goodfriend**, Natural Resource Specialist, CT River Coastal Conservation District, and **Mike Ott**, Professional Engineer, will discuss controlling soil erosion and sedimentation in and near wetlands and watercoursees. **Mary Ellen Kowalewski**, Director of Community Development at CRCOG, will talk on smart growth issues and how to achieve development balance. **Brian Murphy**, Senior Fisheries Biologist at DEP Wildlife Division, will discuss fish impacts and stream restoration. **Kip Kolesinskas**, state soil scientist from NRCS, will present a workshop on wetland functions and value. **Dr. Jerry Silbert**, Executive Director of the Quinnipiac Watershed Partnership, will speak on management of open space - issues and solutions.

Similar to last year, we will have three sessions of workshops: 10:30 a.m., 1:15 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Each session will offer a choice of four workshops. Registration brochures will be mailed to commissions mid-September. Please register early! *Space for workshops will be provided on a first-come basis.*

Also, we listened to your evaluations from last year. We extended the workshops to a full hour each – and we will provide more in-depth information on each workshop on our website prior to the meeting. A one-page summary for each workshop, giving information about the workshop leaders, how to contact them, and a brief synopsis of workshop content, will be available on [caciwc.org](http://caciwc.org) by the end of September. 🍁





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## THE HABITAT

*Dedicated to constant vigilance, judicious management and  
conservation of our precious natural resources.*



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## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES!

### **Municipal Inland Wetlands Commissioners Training Program**

The Department of Environmental Protection will be offering Segment III of the 2003 Municipal Inland Wetlands Commissioners Training Program in October. Segment III will focus on invasive plant species and is designed for municipal inland wetlands staff. The segment will take place in the classroom and in the field. A brochure containing program information and a registration form, as well as one voucher allowing one person to attend at no cost, will be mailed to every municipal inland wetlands agency in September. For further information contact Darcy Winther, DEP Municipal Inland Wetlands Commissioners Training Program Coordinator at (860)424-3019.

### **Building Better Communities**

The Seventeenth Annual Rockfall Symposium will be held on October 10, 2003 at the Long Hill Estate Wadsworth Mansion in Middletown, Connecticut. The program, featuring regional experts on

intelligent growth and wise use of existing infrastructure and resources, continues the Rockfall Foundation tradition of providing information and inspiration to officials and interested citizens. For additional information call (860)347-0340 or check the foundation's web site, [rockfall.foundation.org](http://rockfall.foundation.org).

### **2002 CT E&S Guidelines Training**

Starting in October a series of 2-day training classes on the 2002 CT Guidelines for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control sponsored by DEP will be held for E&S plan designers, reviewers and inspectors of E&S controls. There will be five two-day sessions planned for October - December. For specific dates and registration information go to DEP's Calendar of Events on web page <http://www.dep.state.ct.us/>. Registration is through the UConn College of Continuing Studies and after September 14<sup>th</sup> can be made on line or the registration form can be downloaded from web page <http://continuingstudies.uconn.edu/professional/>. 