

Connect the Connecticut

A set of data and tools that individuals and communities can use to make informed decisions about conservation, planning, and development in the Connecticut River watershed with an understanding of broader regional context and long-term implications. Products include:

- Partners' collective prioritization of high priority core areas and the connections between them, and supporting assessments and data that were used to create this network of core areas
- Tools that provide context for making more strategic decisions in anticipation of future changes associated with land use and climate change
- Tools that can inform efforts to reconnect and enhance connectivity in streams and rivers, as well as between blocks of terrestrial habitat that are separated by roads
- Additional GIS layers that can be used as base layers or overlays to facilitate viewing and interpreting the landscape design products

DEVELOPED BY:

University of Massachusetts Designing Sustainable Landscapes Project, based on direction from a Core Team of partners representing 20 different organizations, including state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions

WHO IS USING IT?

Bill Labich, Senior Conservationist, Highstead Foundation, and Coordinator, Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network Member of *Connect the Connecticut* Core Team

HOW IS IT BEING APPLIED?

Highstead is one of seven partners that have received funding from a \$10 million federal grant from the USDA Regional Conservation Partners Program (RCPP) to reduce agricultural runoff into Long Island Sound in part by protecting key riparian and headwater areas. "For the Long Island Sound RCPP, we are figuring out what parcels



will be eligible, what proves that a piece of land contains habitat that can support rare, threatened, and endangered species," explained Labich.

Although many of the conservation partnerships that Highstead works with have their own strategic plans that address these kinds of questions, not all of them do. "In areas of the Long Island Sound watershed that overlap with the Connecticut River watershed, where there is no overarching conservation strategy, we want to lean on *Connect the Connecticut* as the plan that diverse partners are promoting and using," he said. "In those areas, the data from the design can help us identify the best prospective parcels for the RCPP."

WHAT NEED DOES IT ADDRESS?

For Labich, the design provides a catalyst for conservation. "Everybody has their own priorities and activities, so the only way you can engage people in something new is to attach opportunity to it," he said, pointing out that a plan that aligns federal agencies, states, and NGOs behind shared goals represents an opportunity to contribute to larger outcomes.

"If you are working locally, you should know what is going on regionally - where there is going to be energy for conservation. This design offers that bigger picture, and the data allows both conservation partnerships and individuals to figure out where they can link into it," said Labich.

LEARN MORE:

- **Connect the Connecticut:**
<http://connecttheconnecticut.org/>
- **Highstead Foundation:**
<http://www.highstead.net/>
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program:**
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>