CONNECTICUT ENVIROTHON



2026 Annual Report

Non-Point Source Pollution: It Begins at Home!

Mission

The mission of the Envirothon is to promote environmental awareness, knowledge, and active personal stewardship among high school students through educational workshops and team competition. The Connecticut Envirothon program began in 1992 as part of the North American Envirothon program.

The 2025-2026 school year marked the 33rd consecutive year the program has been offered to Connecticut high school students attending public, private, and agricultural/technical schools, clubs, and homeschool programs.



Volunteers make a considerable difference on competition day

Steering Committee and Station Leaders

The Connecticut Envirothon Program is guided by a volunteer steering committee comprising natural resource professionals from various federal, state, and local agencies, private environmental groups, and active and retired educators. Monthly committee meetings are held virtually to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from members' travel to meeting locations. The annual meeting is held in person as a picnic get-together, which offers an opportunity for committee members to socialize and brainstorm ideas.

There are members of the Steering Committee who are Station Leaders for each of the core topics —Soils, Forestry, Aquatics, Wildlife —and a Current Issue that changes each year. These station experts plan the curriculum and training workshops for each of the main subject areas. The station leaders also prepare and administer the station exams during the Field Day competition in May.

An important factor in the success of the Connecticut Envirothon Program is the time and dedicated efforts of the following members of the 2025-2026 Connecticut Envirothon Steering Committee:

Paul Benjunas	Chair	CT DEEP
Jillian Gunderson	Co- Vice Chair	HVA
Chris Sullivan	Co-Vice Chair/National Chair	SWCD
Sandy Weiss	Secretary	CTRCCD
Pam Huntley	Treasurer	CT DEEP (Retired)
Ginny Patsun	Program Coordinator	NCCD
Amelia Magistrali	Soils Station Leader	UConn
Frank Cervo	Forestry Station Leader	CT DEEP
Susan Quincy	Current Issue Station Leader	CT DEEP
Kelsey Sudol	Aquatics Station Leader	NWCD
Melissa Mostowy	Aquatics Station Co-Leader	CT DEEP
Peter Picone	Wildlife Station Leader	CT DEEP
Emily Picard	Career Fair Coordinator	UConn
Kate Preston	Co-Volunteer Coordinator	CFPA
Sydnee Foster	Co-Volunteer Coordinator	CT DEEP
Alyssa Barroso	Member	NCCD
Audra Leach	Member	NWCD
Jane Seymour	Member	CT DEEP
Joanna Shapiro	Member	NCCD
Kirsten Martin	Member	University of St. Joseph
Susan Quincy	Member	CT DEEP
Kristen Ponak	Webmaster	Private Consultant



Treasurer's Financial Report

A proposed budget for 2025-2026 was developed and approved by the Steering Committee at the beginning of the 25-26 academic year. Both the proposed budget and actual expenditures are included.

CONNECTICUT ENVIROTHON
FISCAL YEAR SEPT 2025 TO AUG 2026

	BEGINNING	$30,020.72
	ENDING	$12,317.04

RECEIPTS	PROJECTED 26	YEAR TO DATE
Interest	$50.00	$14.89
Team Registration $75 per team	$2,100.00	$1,875.00
Misc. Payments	$0.00	$0.00
Council on Soil and Water Conservation	$20,000.00	$20,000.00
Sponsors/Donations	$22,330.00	$600.00
TOTALS	$44,480.00	$22,489.89

EXPENSES	BUDGETED 26	YEAR TO DATE
Supplies/Educational Materials	**$5,000.00**	**$477.62**
General Supplies (binders, paper, etc	$250.00	$322.21
Soils	$100.00	$0.00
Aquatics	$100.00	$0.00
Forestry	$100.00	$0.00
Wildlife	$100.00	$0.00
Current Issue	$100.00	$0.00
Teacher Orientation	$250.00	$155.41
Innovation & Technology	$4,000.00	$0.00
T Shirts & other merchandizing	$3,600.00	$3,313.64
Outreach Materials (Brochure, Social Medi	$500.00	$0.00
Postage	$200.00	$47.27
Awards	$1,500.00	$1,472.00
National Dues	$450.00	$450.00
National Meeting Travel Expenses	$2,400.00	$4,806.03
Registration for National Event	$2,300.00	$2,650.00
Team Travel to National	$8,000.00	$6,202.22
Event	**$6,950.00**	**$8,213.20**
Lunch	$5,100.00	$5,800.00
Breakfast, snacks	$500.00	$484.33
Tables, chairs, tent, sound system	$1,050.00	$1,869.84
Site rental	$250.00	$0.00
Miscellaneous	$50.00	$59.03
Workshops	**$1,680.00**	**$1,457.45**
Soils	$240.00	$216.25
Aquatics	$240.00	$349.63
Forestry	$240.00	$115.87
Wildlife	$240.00	$775.70
Current Issue	$240.00	$0.00
Map Reading	$240.00	$0.00
Judge's Training	$240.00	$0.00
Program Assistant	$10,000.00	$9,792.67
Program Director	$0.00	$0.00
Web Site/Internet Service	$1,100.00	$1,154.05
Mileage	$300.00	$0.00
Instate Meetings	$500.00	$157.42
TOTALS	$44,480.00	$40,193.57

Study Materials

All essential curriculum materials are posted on the CT Envirothon website (www.ctenvirothon.org), with each station team maintaining and updating a materials list through the webmaster. Materials provided from the stations range from journal articles to fact sheets, from web-links to PowerPoint files, examples of previous exam questions, and other study guides.

Station Kits for Soils, Forestry, Aquatics, and Wildlife are available for loan from each of the five CT conservation districts. Each kit contains posters, maps, activity kits, and tools used in the field.

Workshops

Each of the five Station Leaders organized and facilitated either remote, in-person or hybrid workshops throughout the school year leading up to the competition. The workshops are an integral part of the CT Envirothon. The workshops help the students not only prepare, but also become well-informed in the five topics by implementing hands-on experiences and learning how to use online tools. The Station Leaders and their assistants are professionals in their field working for various agencies, including CT DEEP and USDA-NRCS.

Soils Station

The CT Envirothon's Soils Station is led by Amelia Magistrali, Associate Extension Educator at the University of Connecticut, and Jacob Isleib, State Soil Scientist at USDA-NRCS Connecticut. This year the annual soils station workshop was held at UConn's main campus, utilizing classroom space in the Wilfred B. Young Building and nearby permanent soil pits on Horsebarn Hill. The ongoing goal for soil station workshops is to be exciting, interactive experiences, enabling students and teachers to collaborate and learn about soils and surrounding landscapes. The station was fortunate to have a great group of instructors for the workshop: Donald Parizek (Private Consulting Soil Scientist and retired soil survey office leader, NRCS), Avishesh Neupane (Assistant Extension Professor and Soil Lab Director, UConn), Nora Doonan (Soil Science PhD Candidate, UConn), Megan Woytik and Alison Baranovic (Environmental Scientists, Fuss & O'Neill), and Kate Angelopolous (Soil Conservationist, NRCS-Connecticut) along with Amelia and Jacob.



Example of a soil pit with visible horizon changes

The soil station at the 2026 Envirothon competition featured a soil pit in a glacial till deposit over bedrock, which was dug by the DEEP staff at Rocky Hill State Park. Students were asked to estimate soil textures, soil color, and identify soil horizons. They were also asked questions relating to a custom soil survey report and general soils knowledge related to this year's current issue. Proctoring the soil pit were Megan Woytik, Gabriella DiNardi (UConn), Mark Alfano (North Central Connecticut Conservation District), and Jacob Isleib. Alison Baranovic and Nick Shagrue (Northwest Connecticut Conservation District) graded the soil station exams. We saw a few teams perform very well on the soils exam this year. Soil science can be a challenging topic, but we occasionally see teams score in the 90's as a result of hard work on the part of the students and advisors.

Amelia Magistrali delivered a presentation and rainfall simulator demonstration at the advisors' workshop that runs concurrently with the competition. The presentation was provided at the request of the Steering Committee as next year's Current Issue is Soil Health Management: Agricultural Principles and Stewardship. Advisors who attended the workshop learned about soil health principles and management practices in agriculture, participated in a tabletop rainfall simulator demonstration and discussed concepts related to global agriculture.

The soil station staff always enjoy seeing all the students excited to compete, working together at the stations, and, of course, getting their hands dirty.

Forestry Station

This year's Forestry station kicked off with another joint workshop with Aquatics. This collaboration is becoming a staple on the calendar and we hope to continue it into the future. Forestry programming filled the second half of the agenda with topics including Connecticut forest history, pests & pathogens, tree ID, and tree measurements, which covers 4 of our 7 learning objectives for the year. The event was well-attended, with over 70 students cycling through the stations.

The annual statewide competition took place at Rocky Neck State Park in Niantic. The forestry station was situated up on a dry, rocky ridgeline. These woods are barely a stone's throw from the Long Island Sound, but you can't reach it without crossing the main railroad line which services coastal Connecticut. The forest faces a unique suite of challenges in this context, and it passed that challenge right on to the students. This year's forestry station winners were the Housatonic Valley Regional High School Oaks group with a score of 87.5. Though the Oaks outscored their classmates from the Shads group by over 10 points in forestry, the latter wound up outscoring all other groups in their total points and went on to represent our state at the international competition in July.



Students completing the Forestry Station on competition day

Aquatics Station

This year began with an in-person fall workshop at Chatfield Hollow State Park in Killingworth, CT, thanks to the help from partner organizations, including the Conservation Districts, CT DEEP and the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition. This workshop was co-hosted with the Forestry station and consisted of six stations (two aquatics, four forestry) that provided students with an opportunity for field-based learning. Students were able to build their skills in aquatics-related knowledge by learning about

nonpoint source pollution best management practice implementation (CT DEEP), as well as macroinvertebrate sampling and identification as bioindicators for surface water quality (Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition).

A second workshop that was supposed to be held in the winter at the Connecticut River Academy in East Hartford, CT was unfortunately canceled due to a snow storm. To make up for this, we released three recordings in March from presenters who were supposed to present at this workshop. The first was, "Bioaccumulation: The Aquatic Conveyor Belt" by Luis Gonzalez, a DEEP Seasonal Office Assistant from 2024-2025, which gave an overview of bioaccumulation and the aquatic food chain (found here). The second was, "Amphibian Identification: Using Dichotomous Keys" presented by Emily Picard, 4-H Extension Educator, who presented on how to use a dichotomous key (found here). Also thank you to the students from the MHS 4-H club that assisted with the creation of this video, using 3-D models provided by CT Envirothon! Last was, "Invasive Aquatic Plants of Connecticut" from Summer Weidman at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. She gave an introduction of invasive aquatic plants and their identification, while also discussing negatives of the plants, prevention methods and management strategies (found here). We also added a few questions to each of these features, testing out the quiz feature on YouTube. The media committee also created two shorts highlighting and promoting these videos.

In addition to our workshops, we released two additional videos asynchronously on our CT Envirothon YouTube channel (all videos are on our Aquatics Station YouTube playlist found here). ZZ Khalid, 2025 Outreach and Education Intern for the Northwest Conservation District, created two short videos that were released in Fall 2025. The first was, "What is a Riparian Buffer" where she gave an overview of Riparian Buffers (found here). The second was "What is a Watershed", where she gave an introduction to Watersheds and why they are important (found here). Shorts from these two videos were also created and released. Several videos were recorded at the Fall workshop that will be released in the 2026-2027 school year.

Overall, we added 5 new videos to our aquatic playlist, creating a total of 22 original videos. The goal for next year is 3 additional videos for a total of 25. While we are planning on hosting in-person workshops, the continued development of the virtual library will continue to be an important resource.

The in-person competition was a success and, as with previous years, included several hands-on components from partner organizations. CT Envirothon bought from the Peabody Museum of Natural History (Yale University) 3D-printed Amphibian specimens

and borrowed fish specimens from the Southwest Conservation District - both which students used for identification questions. Several questions also referenced a watershed tabletop simulator (Enviroscape) to explore non-point source pollution and watershed science. The Enviroscape was provided by the CT DEEP. The Lake Waramaug Conservancy also provided two pieces of lake monitoring equipment for the test. We again provided a study guide this year to better organize our information for the students.

Based on the feedback, our workshops and resources provided this year were well-received. Next year, we will continue to build on previous materials and programs, and strive to provide fun and rewarding learning experiences through our workshops and online content.



Macroinvertebrate Sampling at the Aquatics / Forestry Workshop



Enviroscape watershed simulator for nonpoint source practical test questions



Students working on the Aquatics test during the 2026 competition



Photo of Aquatics Station Leaders Kelsey and Melissa on competition day

<u>Wildlife Station</u>

Connecticut Envirothon Station Leader and CT DEEP Wildlife Biologist Peter Picone had a wildlife educational seminar at DEEP's Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center on March 21, 2026 for the CT Envirothon students and their advisors. The seminar included the following 4 concurrent educational talks:

- ***"The Status of the American Bald Eagle in CT"***
  By Brian Hess, DEEP Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist

- ***"The Monarch Butterfly: Conservation and Restoration Recommendations That Align With Monarch Butterfly Behavior and Habitat Needs" By Dr. Kelsey E. Fisher***
- ***"CT Birds of Prey Rehab and Falconry",*** by Christine and Betsy Peyreigne, Christine's Critters, Inc
- ***"Native Wildflower and Grass Seeds: Participants will do a hands on activity and learn about the technique of native seed germination (winter sowing) using transluscent 1 gallon water jugs "*** by DEEP Wildlife Biologist Peter Picone, Betsy Corrigan and Mark Rudewicz and DEEP Resource Assistants
- ***"CT Furbearers, Identifying Pelts",*** by Art Potwin and Peggy Lareau DEEP Master Wildlife Conservationists
- ***"Collecting Biological Data from Bobcats: techniques in gathering information including necropsy/food habits/reproductive condition/morphology"*** by DEEP Furbearer Program Samantha Lewis Wildlife Resource Assistant.



The students took a 30 question wildlife quiz that required them to hike through the Sessions Woods Conservation Education Center to identify wildlife specimens and answer practical questions.
Students also had access to wildlife-related talks on Connecticut Envirothon's YouTube channel.
Refreshments for the wildlife workshop were made possible by a donation from the Friends of Session Woods, Inc.

At the May 2026 field day competition, Mr. Picone administered the wildlife test consisting of 50 questions of 2 points each. A practical component of the wildlife test included identification of life-size taxidermy mounts of animals or a skin or skull of an animal. Teams also needed to identify pictures of animals and habitat types and match an animal to its habitat requirements. Other sections of the test required teams to identify parts of an animal, or be a "detective" and determine what disturbance an animal caused by piecing together evidence.

Current Issue and Oral Presentations

The 2026 Current Issue was “Non-Point Source Pollution: It Begins at Home”. The topic focused on the source of and actions to address non-point source (NPS) Pollution. The topic focused on understanding both the mechanisms of the natural transport of material into water systems and the impact of the materials within the system, altering natural patterns and hindering balances within the environment. To provide guidance on the topic Housatonic Valley Authority, (HVA), Jillian Gunderson joined the Envirothon team as Current Issue coordinator providing insight on the issues in Connecticut and the methods being used to mitigate change.

The topic is widely addressed in Connecticut through a collection of local, municipal, and state organizations all working on addressing causes and implementing practices to reduce effects from NPS. This collection of professionals and the information they provided served to build the large resource material that served as the base for teams to use. Focus was placed on building accessible information for the students to use to prepare them for the scenario and challenge.



Students completing their presentation on competition day

A single one-day workshop was planned for the teams in cooperation with the Aquatics Section held on Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend. Sections focused on defining methods on mitigation and the need to address the issues that arise from NPS, the impact of outreach programs and education, methods to build a plan for implementation within a watershed region, and sections on professional speaking skills and how to build their presentation. Unfortunately, this workshop was snowed out. A recording on the implementation section and the power of outreach program development was provided. This was added to the resource access page.

The competition was held at Rocky Neck and planned for three presentation rooms in order to accommodate the number of teams. Our challenge in providing this portion of the competition sits with the ability to provide the technology needed. Locations for the future must have the space for three sections and the equipment needed. Cameras were updated this year by the Conservation Districts which helped greatly. We are grateful to the partners and friends of the event coordinators dedicated to judging this event. They draw from DEEP, local universities, Water Authorities, Conservation Districts and longtime volunteers. A training for the judges was held prior to the event and proved very helpful in preparing the judges in advance.

Connecticut Envirothon Field Day Event

The 2026 competition was held on May 21st at Rocky Neck State Park in Niantic, CT. Lunch was provided by The Country Butcher from Tolland, CT. Thirty-five teams, which include six Wildcard teams, took part in the competition. Nisha Patel, Director of the Water Planning and Management Division at the CT DEEP, was also able to attend and deliver a speech about the importance of teaching natural resources at this level to prepare students to become future environmental leaders.

First Place was awarded to Team Shads of the Housatonic Valley Regional High School Agricultural Science & Technology Education Center, Second Place was awarded to Team Oaks of the Housatonic Valley Regional High School Agricultural Science & Technology Education Center, and Third Place was awarded to Team 2 of the CT River Academy.

Pyrographic wooden medals were awarded to the top ten teams, and all participants received certificates of participation. Engraved plaques were awarded to the top three teams and to the teams that achieved the highest scores for each station.



First place plaque

Career Fair

The following organizations and businesses set up booths and engaged students in potential future careers in different environmental fields:

CT Agricultural Experiment Station
CT Land Conservation Council
UConn 4-H
University of Saint Joseph - Environmental Science
CT DEEP - Water Planning and Management Division
Tree Wardens' Association of CT and CT Urban Forest Council
UConn Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
Connecticut Forest and Park Association
Two Coyotes Wilderness School
Paul Smith's College
CT DEEP State Parks
Teach Ag
CT DEEP EnCon Police
Save the Sound
CT DEEP Boating Division
CT Professional Timber Producers Association, Inc.
NWCD

The Neil Picone Memorial Wildlife Award

The Neil Picone Memorial Wildlife Award is given each year to the team that wins the Wildlife Station. This year's award was presented to Housatonic Valley High School, Team Laurels. Neil Picone, son of long-time Envirothon steering committee member and CT DEEP Wildlife Biologist Peter Picone, was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed creating and turning Connecticut-grown hardwood products on a wood lathe. This year's award was a Great Horned Owl, created by a local woodcarver.



National Envirothon Competition

After winning the Connecticut State Envirothon event, the State Champion team from Housatonic Valley Regional High School Agricultural Science & Technology Education Center got busy with preparations to represent our State at the NCF International Envirothon Competition. This competition features the State and Provincial winners from across the United States, Canada, China, and Singapore. These teams come together in July and square off against each other on a series of tests in similar fashion to the Connecticut event.



Team Connecticut in their Registration Photo

The NCF Competition this year was hosted in Starkville, Mississippi at Mississippi State University. The competition was held from July 19-25, with a total of forty-three teams competing at the event. After team registration and check in, the Opening Ceremonies took place and welcomed all the teams to Mississippi. Next was the trading session: this event features the teams trading items (often T-shirts) from their home states or provinces with members of other teams. Interesting economies form, and the kids have a lot of fun during this chaotic kickoff to the event.

Monday featured the teams going to a training site off-campus and learning from resource professionals about the content areas of Envirothon. It was quite a hot day (96°F) but the students stayed focused on the lessons and materials presented at the various stations.



Event Photo taken on Mississippi State campus

This was important, as the next day would feature testing for the teams on all content areas. Tuesday was another hot day (97°F) with teams going off campus for their testing at each of the 5 content areas (current issue also includes a written test). After several hours rotating through exams, the teams returned back to campus for dinner and some decompressing. A trip to a water park was just what the Doctor ordered, and that is exactly what everyone got to do on Wednesday.

Thursday featured Team Connecticut getting back to work with introduction to the current issue scenario and materials in the morning. This was followed by lunch and then 6 hours of sequestration with their teammates in rooms with a laptop and no internet. The team worked diligently to build a powerpoint presentation focused on non-points source pollution issues. The student teams represented a consulting firm that was hired to review development plans for housing with potential stormwater issues. The team was fueled on pounds of sugary snacks and drinks to sustain them through the development of their presentation.

On Friday the team delivered their presentation to a panel of judges and waited for the results of the week to be delivered during the evening awards ceremony. The top 3 teams for the competition were North Carolina, North Dakota and New York. Each re-delivered their presentation to the entire event audience and New York was crowned the winner of the 2026 NCF Envirothon. The teams celebrated with a dance party that went late into the night and everyone went home on Saturday morning. On to Maryland 2027!

Thank you for your support!

We thank the following organizations and individuals who contributed cash, in-kind, or material donations to the Connecticut Envirothon program:

Connecticut Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts
Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation
Society of Soil Scientists of Southern New England
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
UCONN Cooperative Extension System
CT River Coastal Conservation District
Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition
Brenda Wichrowski – Award Creation
Peabody Museum of Natural History
North Central Conservation District
Tolland County Agricultural Center
Eastern CT Conservation District
Northwest Conservation District
Southwest Conservation District
Connecticut River Conservancy
Friends of Sessions Woods, Inc.
Lake Waramaug Conservancy
cinder + salt – Shirt Printing
Jim Moore – DEEP Sawyer
The Country Butcher
USDA Forest Service
Christine's Critters

2026

www.ctenvirothon.org