

# CONNECTICUT FOREST HISTORY

*The forests that early settlers found when they arrived were very different from what we see today. Our forest history reflects how both Connecticut and the United States grew, how land-use changed over the centuries, and how both natural occurrences and human actions changed our landscape and forest composition. It is a story of deforestation-regeneration-deforestation-regeneration which continues today.*



The Harvard Dioramas illustrate the forest history of Central New England in great detail. They mirror what took place here in Connecticut.

<https://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/dioramas>



As we hike our forests today, we are surrounded by evidence of both natural events and human interaction that changed our forests over time. Tom Wessels, terrestrial ecologist and professor emeritus at Antioch University New England, refers to the study of this evidence as “Forest Forensics”. Again, what he describes for Central New England mirrors what took place here in Connecticut.

*Tom Wessels – Part 1*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zclQz-oR6sw>



Dr. Robert Fahey from The University of Connecticut connects Forest Ecology to Forest History , from early settlement to present-day forests. Start with page 16 of this PowerPoint to see the timeline.

[ctenvirothon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Forest-Ecology\\_Envirothon2018.pdf](http://ctenvirothon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Forest-Ecology_Envirothon2018.pdf)



In the 1800's the iron industry was fueled by the forests of Connecticut. Countless trees were needed to meet the demands for production of the charcoal used at the furnaces. Both charcoal and iron were produced here in our state.

- *Hopewell Furnace, Pennsylvania*  
<https://www.nps.gov/hofu/index.htm>
- *Charcoal at Hopewell Furnace*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtIr0FI4vbo>
- *Charcoal in Connecticut*  
<http://www.cornwallhistoricalsociety.org/exhibits/forests/iron.htm>
- *A CT Furnace*  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Beckley-Furnace-Industrial-Monument>



In the early 1900's, the American Chestnut was decimated by the chestnut blight. The loss of this tree extremely affected our forests.

- *Jack Swatt, American Chestnut Foundation, CT*  
The Demise and Resurrection of the American Chestnut  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-NwAYTB1XY>
- *Tom Wessels – Part 2*—Start at 6:55 and go to 15:08 for American Chestnut  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L81Ihhqe0gY>



Less well-known is what FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps contributed to **reforestation** in Connecticut and across the country, 1933-1942. Connecticut greatly benefitted from this work. CCC campsite and structural remains can still be found in our forests.

- *CCC history*  
<https://www.history.com/news/civilian-conservation-corps-projects>
- *CCC Shenipsit Forest History*  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Forests/Shenipsit-State-Forest/Overview>
- *CCC Camps*  
<https://www.cga.ct.gov/PS99/rpt/olr/htm/99-R-0955.htm>

## SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE:



As part of meeting the requirements for certification as a Goodwin Conservation Center Master Naturalist, Lance Hansen, DEEP Wildlife Division, completed a *Demonstration Charcoal Mound Project at the James L. Goodwin State Forest* in November, 2016. A PDF of the brochure accompanying this project which explains charcoal production is available upon request. Contact Lynn Kochiss, Forestry Station Leader, at [forestryctenvirothon@gmail.com](mailto:forestryctenvirothon@gmail.com) if you are interested in a copy.

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Wessels, Tom. (1999). *Reading the Forested Landscape*, Woodstock, VT, The Countryman Press.

Wessels, Tom. (2010). *Forest Forensics*, Woodstock, VT, The Countryman Press. (A field guide of photographs to accompany *Reading the Forested Landscape*. You will never look at stonewalls the same way again.)

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More can also be found at  
<http://ctenvirothon.org/study-guides/forestry/>

go to

**[FORESTRY LEARNING GUIDE-STUDY MATERIALS:](#)**

**[1. CONNECTICUT FOREST HISTORY](#)**