

APPLICATION FOR 2023-2025 NOAA Coastal Management Fellowship

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

LAND AND WATER RESOURCES DIVISION

BUREAU OF WATER PROTECTION AND LAND REUSE



ImPACT: Improving Public Access in CT

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1. Background and Introduction

Connecticut's coast provides a vast array of marine ecological, commercial and recreational resources. In recent years, coastal access has become an increasingly important resource as the state seeks to increase and maintain opportunities for open and equitable recreational and aesthetic enjoyment of its shoreline for the *general* public, and not just private property owners. Municipal and state officials face a multitude of considerations and challenges when it comes to balancing the protection of coastal resources, increasing public access to the shoreline, and managing property rights and neighborhood privacy concerns.

One of the goals of the 1972 CZMA (Coastal Zone Management Act) is to help preserve and protect the continued recreational use of the nation's shoreline. Through the CZMA, Connecticut receives funds to aid in implementation of the CCMA (Connecticut Coastal Management Act), passed in 1979. Under the CCMA, Connecticut provides statutory developmental preference to water-dependent uses, which includes public access. This allows for land use decisions to incorporate public access as a condition of waterfront development, especially in proposals that involve conversion of a site to a non-water dependent use.

Under the leadership of Governor Ned Lamont and Commissioner Katie Dykes, environmental justice is a priority for the State and Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection. Equity and environmental justice are a focus of the Governor's Council on Climate Change (GC3) and through the Governor's Executive Order 21-3 the state has recently established a Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council (CEEJAC). The GC3 Equity and Environmental Justice Working Group established a set of public participation guidelines to improve engagement with EJ communities. In addition the DEEP and the University of Connecticut are developing an Environmental Justice Screen Mapping tool to assess those areas of the state that are overburdened by pollution and are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Connecticut has developed and maintained a robust program to identify and communicate opportunities for coastal public access (CPA) since the early 1990s, and regularly updates an online [web guide](#). In Connecticut, coastal access opportunities on properties not directly owned by the State are largely the result of recommending or requiring water-dependent uses through the above-mentioned regulatory or municipal planning review components of the Connecticut Coastal Management Program (CMP) within the Land and Water Resource Division (LWRD) of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). Recognizing that this is an opportune time to promote sustainable, equitable access to coastal resources in Connecticut and assess and improve how the CMP advances coastal access, the Coastal Fellowship proposal will take a two-phased approach, seeking first to conduct a thorough assessment and recommendation and then working through a process to implement select recommendations.

2. Goals and Objectives

Goal: To recommend and develop programmatic, policy and funding outcomes intended to improve the quality and quantity of open and equitable coastal access opportunities in Connecticut, focusing on innovative approaches and broadening the ways coastal access can better address the needs of underserved communities and groups.

Objectives:

- A. Become familiar with history, limits, components, and approaches of the CPA program.
- B. Assemble a project steering committee of key DEEP and external stakeholders and establish a regular meeting schedule.
- C. Develop a suite of example approaches for use in stimulating stakeholder ideas and discussions.
- D. Engage in meaningful public participation with groups representing but not limited to CMP staff, other DEEP divisions (e.g., Wildlife, Fisheries, Environmental Justice), the CEEJAC and external stakeholders (e.g., Long Island Sound Study, CT NERR, non-profits, municipal officials/boards/commissions, community leaders and neighborhood groups, outdoor recreation interests, neighboring states, etc.) to gain insight on needs, gaps, and potential opportunities. Groups should contain a focus towards underserved communities.
- E. Develop a suite of prioritized recommendations geared towards improving both internal CMP approaches as well as outcomes for external stakeholders.
- F. Design a grant program that can assist groups and communities, particularly those in underserved locales, address themes suggested by assessment recommendations or other projects/efforts that increase coastal access opportunities.
- G. Develop guidelines and processes for conducting an initial round of funding.
- H. Implement a select number of recommendations (leveraging the advice of mentors and the steering committee regarding those which may be most valuable and achievable).

3. Milestones and Outcomes

NOTE: Milestones in *italics* are project deliverables.

Time Frame	Milestones
August – Sept 2023	Initial onboarding and public access program review
<i>October 2023</i>	<i>Steering Committee Established</i>
October 2023 – April 2023	Conduct Stakeholder Engagement planning and outreach
May 2023 – July 2023	Conduct Stakeholder Engagement meetings
May 2023 – December 2023	Conduct initial development of Grant Program
<i>September 2023</i>	<i>Draft Prioritized Recommendations complete</i>
<i>December 2023</i>	<i>Final Prioritized Recommendation complete</i>
February 2024 – July 2024	Identify and implement actionable recommendations
January 2024 – April 2024	Conduct continued development of Grant Program
<i>May 2024</i>	<i>Draft Grant program guidance materials complete</i>

Time Frame	Milestones
<i>August 2024</i>	<i>Final Grant program guidance materials complete</i>
<i>August 2024</i>	<i>Implementation of actionable recommendations complete</i>

4. Project Description

The Coastal Fellow will be spearheading, with support from the Mentorship team and LWRD staff, a multipronged approach for addressing coastal public access needs in Connecticut, primarily through an equity and environmental justice lens. These efforts will be broken down into two key phases, assessment and implementation. The assessment phase of the project is not only intended as an avenue for data reporting, but also an opportunity for learning and gathering meaningful feedback from both internal and external stakeholders, which will include representation from underserved communities and groups. The Fellow will familiarize themselves with the breadth of public access-oriented organizations, projects and resources, aiming to identify the highest priority public access recommendations for the state. In turn, the implementation phase will require the Fellow to present these recommendations to stakeholders and assist in identifying and securing funding opportunities, including developing a state grant program. Throughout the course of these phases, the Mentoring Team and the Fellow will collaborate regularly to ensure that the guidance and resources necessary for success are provided.

Phase 1 (Assessment) Effort: During this phase, the Fellow’s role will primarily revolve around learning about coastal access in Connecticut, gathering feedback from both internal and external stakeholders and groups and synthesizing any findings into actionable public access recommendations. There will be an initial educational period wherein the Fellow will learn about Connecticut’s coastal access resources, including the Connecticut Coastal Public Access Program, the Connecticut CMP, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan (Green Plan), and municipal land use planning and zoning. Subsequently the Fellow will assemble a project Steering Committee to provide guidance and assistance for the Fellowship project.

The Fellow will then lead an analysis of the above programs, in addition to an inventory and assessment of external coastal access programs which will result in a sampling of approaches to help stimulate and explore options with stakeholders. They will then assemble a series of stakeholder engagement meetings, representing LWRD, DEEP, and key external stakeholders with a focus on including representation from underserved groups and communities. The Fellow will be responsible for scheduling and hosting meetings, as well as developing a framework for meeting discussions that will promote productive and insightful conversation regarding the stakeholders’ thoughts and suggestions on public access in Connecticut. Feedback from these meetings will be used by the Fellow, with input from the Steering Committee, to develop recommended implementation actions for Phase 2 of the program, which will be presented to the stakeholders for review before any implementation efforts begin.

Phase 2 (Implementation) Effort: This will focus on implementation of the recommended actions developed by the Fellow during the first phase. The Fellow will determine a timeline for these recommendations, and help with implementation of goals/projects that are achievable within the timespan of the fellowship. They will be responsible for coordinating with towns and community/project liaisons throughout the process and reporting on finished deliverables after specific goals and projects have been completed.

For larger projects, and those that require financial investment, the Fellow will identify potential funding sources and help secure funding where possible by assisting communities in applying for various grants. The Fellow will also work on the development of a framework and scope for a grant program that will be administered through the State, to provide funding for projects such as those that will be recommended at the end of the first phase. This effort will also help to establish another potential revenue source for future projects that have a similar DEIJ focus. The Fellow will collaborate with other State offices as necessary and draft standard operating procedures as guidance for how communities can apply for this grant program, and what information/materials they will need to supply.

Post-Fellowship: The intention of this project is to foster community relationships and encourage project goals that can extend beyond the duration and deliverables of this fellowship. We anticipate that there will be several public access recommendations and projects that come from the conclusion of the first year's efforts. Some of those may be doable within the second year, but for those that have a lengthier timeline, our goal will be to continue to assist communities in their implementation and oversight. The Fellow will also work to establish a solid implementation foundation and funding mechanisms for any recommended actions so that progress can continue even after the fellowship program has ended.

5. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

There are a multitude of environmental benefits and burdens that are disproportionately shared across any given population. Many factors influence this inequality but some of the more readily apparent differences are race, ethnicity, language barriers and gaps in socioeconomic status. The issue of coastal access in Connecticut highlights many of these economic and societal differences, as individuals must face various hurdles such as monetary fees for beach use, lack of personal transportation, limited public transportation avenues to the shoreline and historic siting of industrial facilities that are located along the waterfront of the larger cities in Connecticut.

This project has an intended DEIJ focus and will specifically look to garner input and recommendation suggestions from underserved Connecticut communities. The Fellow will ensure that representation from such communities and liaisons from community-serving groups will be included in the established steering committee. The Fellow will also follow through with offering assistance in securing funding for proposed projects/recommendations. This component of the project will have a special focus on environmental justice communities to ensure that the

implementation of their recommended actions is not restricted by the same economic limitations that contributed to access inequalities in the first place.

Though the overarching scope of the project is aimed at improving general public access to Connecticut's shoreline, there is specific interest in establishing and maintaining an open line of communication with representatives for underserved communities. One of the primary goals of this project is to produce a list of recommendations aimed at addressing concerns raised by environmental justice communities regarding how we can better improve their residents' access to the shoreline and increase their understanding of what rights they have regarding one of their state's greatest natural resources. To support this, the Fellow will cultivate a tailored list of recommendations for the implementation phase of this project based on the feedback and suggestions they receive from the steering committee during the analysis phase.

One of the long-lasting impacts of this project is the cultivation of relationships with representatives of environmental justice communities by seeking their input throughout the various stages of project development and planning. Developing those connections will allow communities to feel like they have a voice in communicating their environmental concerns to the State, and that the State has a way of evaluating and addressing the issues that are most pressing to those communities. This will allow us to cater specific projects, current and future, public access or otherwise, to the specific needs and wants of the communities we are hoping to assist. Through developing a grant program, the Fellow will also be helping to ensure that these communities have the financial opportunity to continue developing and implementing future projects aimed at addressing their specific environmental needs.

6. Fellow Mentoring

As a program with a history of hosting Coastal Fellows, LWRD's mentoring strategy focuses on (1) providing staff resources with necessary expertise to help guide and assist the Fellow, (2) exposing the Fellow to a broad context of coastal management efforts beyond the Fellowship Project tasks, and (3) understanding the Fellow's areas of interest and relating that to (1) and (2). This project will employ a mentorship team approach; team members, all of whom are staff within LWRD, and their coordinating roles are:

Kevin O'Brien (Lead): As the overall lead and former Fellow and mentor, Kevin will be responsible for: general Fellowship coordination and direction including serving as the primary point of contact for Fellow and NOAA; coordinating onboarding, set-up and general administrative needs; providing high-level and hands-on involvement in all phases of project objectives; and coordinating integration with and exposure to various elements of the CMP.

Mary-beth Hart (Co-Lead): Mary-beth, a former Fellow mentor, will assist Kevin in: providing overall mentoring assistance; key guidance to the Fellow with respect to integration of coastal access opportunities within the LWRD coastal program; helping the Fellow guide the stakeholder engagement processes.

Adelaine (Del) McCloe (Technical Lead): As the primary manager for the Coastal Access Program in Connecticut, Del will: mentor the Fellow by providing critical details on the current functions of the program; assist with guiding the day-to-day components of the assessment and grant program development; help the Fellow address the DEIJ components of the project.

The Mentorship team will expose the Fellow to the scope of work conducted by a coastal management program by actively coordinating training, field, and project-related opportunities. This approach, which will be fine-tuned based on existing and emerging opportunities and consideration of the Fellow's interests will include working with LWRD's:

- Planning Section, which deals with legislative and municipal liaison matters, so the Fellow can experience municipal efforts in implementing State coastal policies and gain exposure to issues regarding public access spanning state and local jurisdictions.
- Two regional Regulatory Sections and an Enforcement Section that administer direct regulatory efforts; these programs are often instrumental in securing and helping to maintain coastal access locations.
- The Technical Resources Section that provides technical services, data, and analyses and contains the current Coastal Public Access Program. Several Technical Resources focus areas such as habitat restoration and coastal land acquisition, play vital roles within the context of providing meaningful coastal access opportunities.

Due to the collaborative nature of LWRD's programmatic responsibilities, opportunities to engage other groups and organizations (both within the Agency and with various external partners) are also available and can be fine-tuned based on the Fellow's interests and the project needs. (See Project Partners section for examples). LWRD has long been an advocate of leveraging external opportunities to gain knowledge, and regularly supports staff in participating in a variety of remote and in-person webinars, workshops, and conferences. Travel to such opportunities (in-state and beyond) can be accommodated as necessary pursuant to the travel and funding guidelines established as part of the Fellowship program.

7. Office Environment

LWRD currently employs a hybrid office environment and in general, staff in-office at least once a week, though many opt to come in more often. To support working from both home and office locations, LWRD provides specific equipment and resources (see Cost-Share section for more details). In addition, the Fellow will be able to utilize an Alternative Work Schedule to allow flexibility in scheduling regular off-days during a standard two-week pay period.

As a result of shifting to a hybrid-work environment because of the COVID-19 pandemic, LWRD focuses on fostering an inclusive office culture by emphasizing communication and connections for staff through many different mechanisms. In a remote context, through technologies like Zoom, Teams, and similar platforms, the Division and its sections communicate through regular and informal meetings. Microsoft Teams channels and chats supplement traditional email and phone calls as pathways between colleagues to discuss issues

and to share information. Building connections between and among the various groups within the Division helps educate and remind us that we all are working towards common goals, even when our daily tasks or environments seem independent. Holding regular virtual office-wide meetings for staff to share input or experiences on common topics/projects and holding yearly off-site, in-person retreats themed around subjects that span section projects or responsibilities are important ways LWRD recognizes and implements a collaborative and inclusive culture.

Of special note is that over the last several years LWRD has on-boarded nearly a dozen new staff, and as a result has developed a formal Training Workgroup. This workgroup is tasked with providing training to staff on various topics relevant to the Division's mission. In addition to recommending topics, it also actively seeks input from both new and existing staff so that programming can be developed to reflect specific interests and needs.

The mix of a large cohort of newer staff in addition to seasoned staff will provide the Fellow with ample opportunities for mentoring and developing professional relationships and networks.

Regarding specific scheduling and operational considerations, at the beginning of the Fellowship the Fellow and Mentorship team will collaboratively discuss and determine options based on the needs of the project, the Fellow's input, and LWRD policies and procedures.

Finally, the Fellow will be able to leverage the efforts of LWRD staff being supported through a NOAA CZM Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Capacity Building grant, which will focus on developing strategies to improve coastal habitat restoration, resilience projects, and land acquisition, all of which have components that often overlap with and enhance coastal access.

8. Project Partners

Beyond the CMP, the Fellow will engage internally with several DEEP groups with an interest in recreation, land conservation, coastal access, and DEIJ related issues:

- Environmental Justice Program; Office of Land Management; Division of Fisheries; Division of Wildlife; Bureau of Outdoor Recreation; Office of Climate Planning; Watershed Program.

Additionally, other external partners may likely include:

- Governor's Council on Climate Change; the Connecticut Equity and Environmental Justice Advisory Council; Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office; EPA's Long Island Sound Study National Estuary Program - specifically workgroups on Environmental Justice and Habitat Restoration and Stewardship; Non-governmental organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land; the CT National Estuarine Research Reserve; various regional and municipal boards, commissions, and groups with a focus or interest on land conservation, access and environmentally based recreation.

9. Cost-Share Description

Connecticut will provide \$15,000 (\$7,500/year) in required matching funds from state monies allocated to the DEEP Operations and Expense budget.

In addition to the direct cost-share funds, for the duration of the in-office Fellowship time, DEEP will provide:

- A fully furnished cubicle equipped with: VOIP telephone and voice mail system; a desktop thin-client workstation with dual monitors, mouse/keyboard, video camera and headset/mic; a state issued telephone number and e-mail account.
- Standard office software such as MS Word, Excel, Access, Teams, and PowerPoint; access to specialized software required for work tasks such as: Adobe Acrobat; Google Earth; ESRI ArcGIS; access to DEEP's ArcGIS Online account.

While working from home, DEEP will loan the Fellow:

- A desktop thin-client workstation configured to remotely access the DEEP network environment, standard and specialized software, VOIP telephone/voicemail systems, and state email; dual monitors; mouse/keyboard; video camera; headset/mic; wi-fi extender and cabling.

NOTE: While working from home, DEEP requires staff to provide their own internet access through a local ISP.

Additionally, the Fellow will be able to utilize:

- Laptops, tablets, and related equipment/gear for presentations or related field work.
- State cars for project-related travel.
- All professional training courses available to DEEP staff, including health and safety, software/application use, personal/professional development, health/wellness, etc.

10. Strategic Focus Area

This project most aligns with the objectives described under the focus areas 'Vibrant and Sustainable Coastal Economies' and 'Healthy Coastal Ecosystems'. Increasing the public's access to their coastline is extremely important for many recreational reasons, but also has benefits that expand beyond the casual 'beach day'. Making Connecticut's coast accessible to more of its residents, especially those in underserved communities, is an important step in reconnecting them with an integral part of their state's ecosystem and helps to imbue them with a sense of why we must preserve and protect it. This fellowship will help assist in the conceptualization of coastal access projects that could help to educate people as to their relationship with, and impacts on, our coastal resources.

Through this project, and its resulting deliverables, we hope to strengthen ties between some of our underserved communities and our coastline. We will be creating an opportunity for communities to share their unique perspectives on their coastal access needs, and we will gain better insight into what equity issues are facing these communities and how we may best address them from both a policy and planning perspective.