Connecticut
Department of Energy &
Environmental Protection

Field Visit to the Keeler Court Property in Ridgefield, CT
Post Visit Report for 37 Acres

Present Parties: Conservation Commission: Tony Markert and David Beers (Western District Service Forester) on 12/18/2025 from 10-12

Stewardship Objectives

1. Maintain properties in an ecologically sound manner
2. Maintain properties for the recreational benefit of the town

PROPERTY OVERVIEW

The property has minimal public road frontage on Keeler Court and at the end of Canterbury Lane. It is surrounded by residential development and blocks of forest. The town-owned golf course abuts the property to the south, and the western boundary is forest in New York State. This is a mainly developed landscape, with a few small blocks of forest and farmland.

This forest is part of a small core forest block having less than 250 acres of contiguous forest. Core forests are large tracts of unbroken forest that provide a much more stable home for plant and animal species, thereby protecting biodiversity. They are forested areas surrounded by more forested areas.

The CT DEEP Natural Diversity Database (NDDB) does **not** record occurrences of threatened or endangered species. Maps showing wetland and farmland soils are attached to this report. The western edge of the property is located within the water-supply watershed for the City of Danbury, and the remainder falls within the NYC water-supply watershed as part of the Croton Reservoir system. Most of this property is in the Mopus Brook and Titicus River watershed. The western edge is in the Still River and Housatonic River watershed.

In the attached 1934 air photo, the property was a mix of forests, fields and brush. Areas that were forested in 1934 were likely pastured over 100 years ago.

There are no official public trails on this property. Some unofficial trails connect to the neighboring golf course, neighboring houses and a horse-riding trail system in New York State.

Please see the attached appendix for more information about your forest's history, future, and general recommendations. It also includes an appendix of Latin names for the tree and shrub species.

Old field in the eastern block

Tree Cover

Most Common	Common	Less Common
Red Maple	Red Oak	Hemlock
	Black Oak	Aspen
	White Oak	Chestnut Oak
	Hickory	Yellow Birch
	Black Birch	White Ash
	Tulip Poplar	Slippery Elm
		Beech
		Red Cedar (field)

This forest features a diverse mix of tree species and sizes, growing in site conditions that vary with slope position and soil type. About a third of this forest is wet, which makes red maple the most common tree.

The eastern block is flat and moist, with an old, abandoned field on the eastern edge that has a few scattered red cedar trees. A wetland drainage flows south to north through the block. Most of the block is comprised of red maple, with a thick understory of thorny, invasive multiflora rose and barberry shrubs.

The central block is dry on the edges and wet in the middle. Here, you'll find more variety than red maple and fewer invasive species.

The western block is mainly composed of dry, hilly terrain, with many oak and hickory trees. There are only scattered invasive shrubs. The western hill had a nice patch of understory hemlock trees that the deer use as nighttime cover on cold winter nights.

Understory
There are a few maple, hickory, beech, ash, hemlock and black birch saplings. There are also some witch hazel and musclewood shrubs, along with areas of alder, winterberry, highbush blueberry, and spicebush shrubs in the wetter lowlands.

Ground Cover
In areas with thick barberry and rose, the leaf litter is degraded and thin. Areas free of barberry appear to have thick, healthy leaf litter. There is a good amount of woody material throughout the forest floor.

Forest Health
Beech leaf disease has infected the beech trees. This microscopic nematode, originating from Asia, has recently begun to spread throughout the state, and the long-term prognosis for infected beech trees remains unclear. The emerald ash borer has killed most of the ash trees within the past decade. The canopy structural diversity and the good tree and shrub species diversity make this forest more resilient to future disturbances (weather, climate, pests).

Patches of exotic invasive vegetation grow in the understory, including barberry shrubs, multiflora rose shrubs, privet shrubs and bittersweet vines. Many areas are thick with barberry and rose shrubs. Please refer to the appendix for additional information on exotic invasive species and their control.

Wildlife Habitat
The mature oak and hickory trees in your forest are an excellent asset for wildlife, especially in terms of the acorns and nuts they produce. Having diverse habitat types (younger, mature, fields, wetlands) intimately mixed, as you have, is always good. Your forest provides adequate food, water, shelter, cover, and space for much of the wildlife in the area.

Please refer to the appendix for additional information on wildlife habitats.

Carbon and Climate Resilience
This mature forest stores a large amount of carbon while sequestering more. Any forest products you produce will help mitigate climate change. The following recommendations are provided to enhance the resilience and adaptability of forests to climate change. More information about forest carbon and the forest's ecological services is in the appendix.

Forest Vegetation - Potential Recommendations
None

White Oak legacy tree in the central block

CONCLUSION

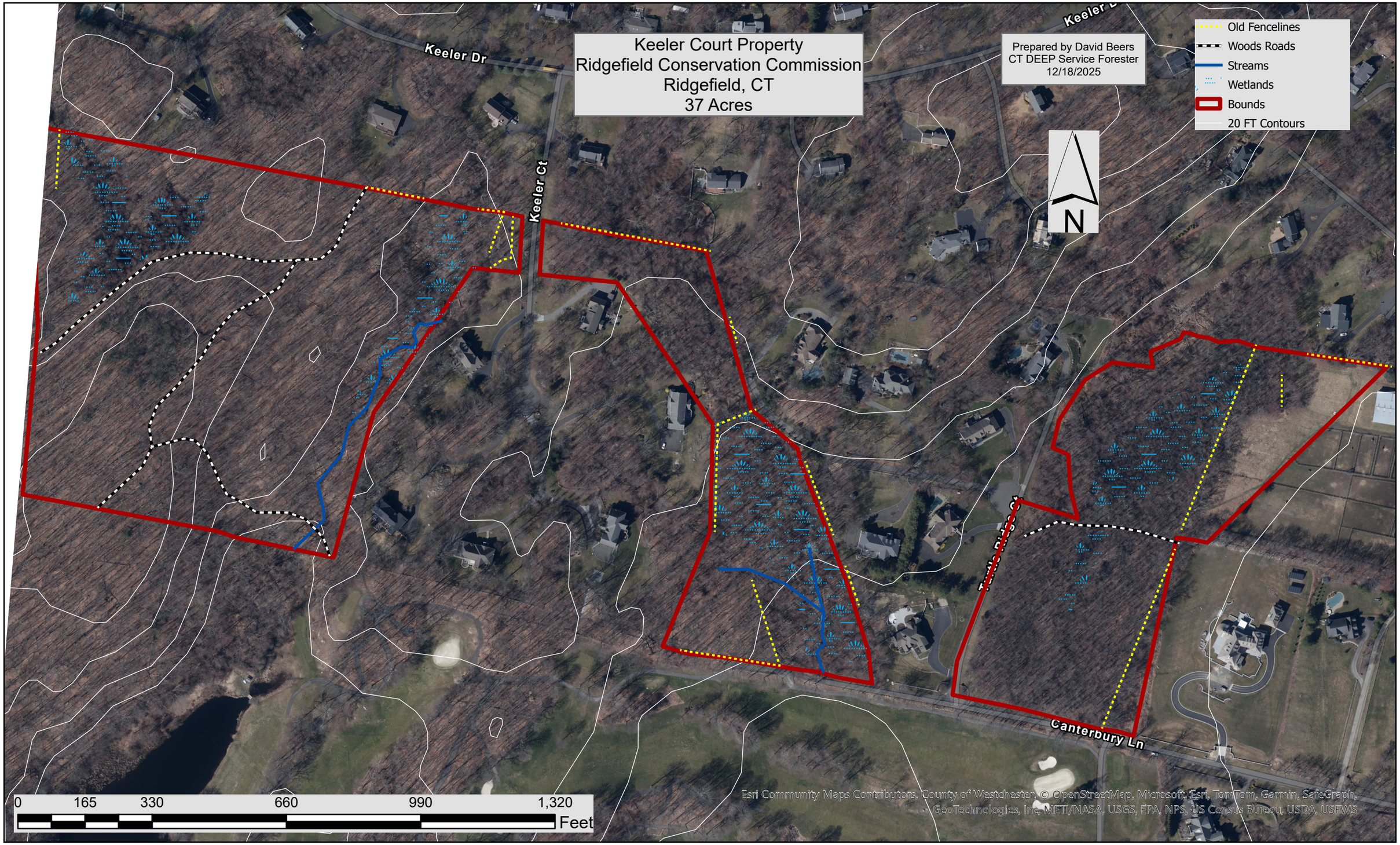
Here are some possibilities for your forest:

- Contact NRCS and a private forester about doing a forest stewardship plan*
- Properly locate and mark your property boundaries (see appendix)
    - An annual property inspection that includes property boundaries
- Discuss with the NY neighbor, maintaining the western trails
    - Create trail access off Keeler Court
- Enjoy your forest!

*Please consider hiring a forester to help you implement any of the recommendations in this report (see appendix). I highly recommend considering a grant to support this work: Urban Forestry Grant Opportunities. Please feel free to share this report.

It is pertinent to note that this is not a stewardship plan and is not intended as a substitute for one. It is a recap report based on a brief tour of the property, without collecting any data as needed for proper planning.

Western trail and hemlock winter deer yard (hemlock provides thermal cover)


Keeler Court Property
Ridgefield Conservation Commission
Ridgefield, CT
37 Acres
Prepared by David Beers
CT DEEP Service Forester
12/18/2025
Old Fencelines
Woods Roads
Streams
Wetlands
Bounds
20 FT Contours
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Keeler Dr
Keeler Ct
Canterbury Ln
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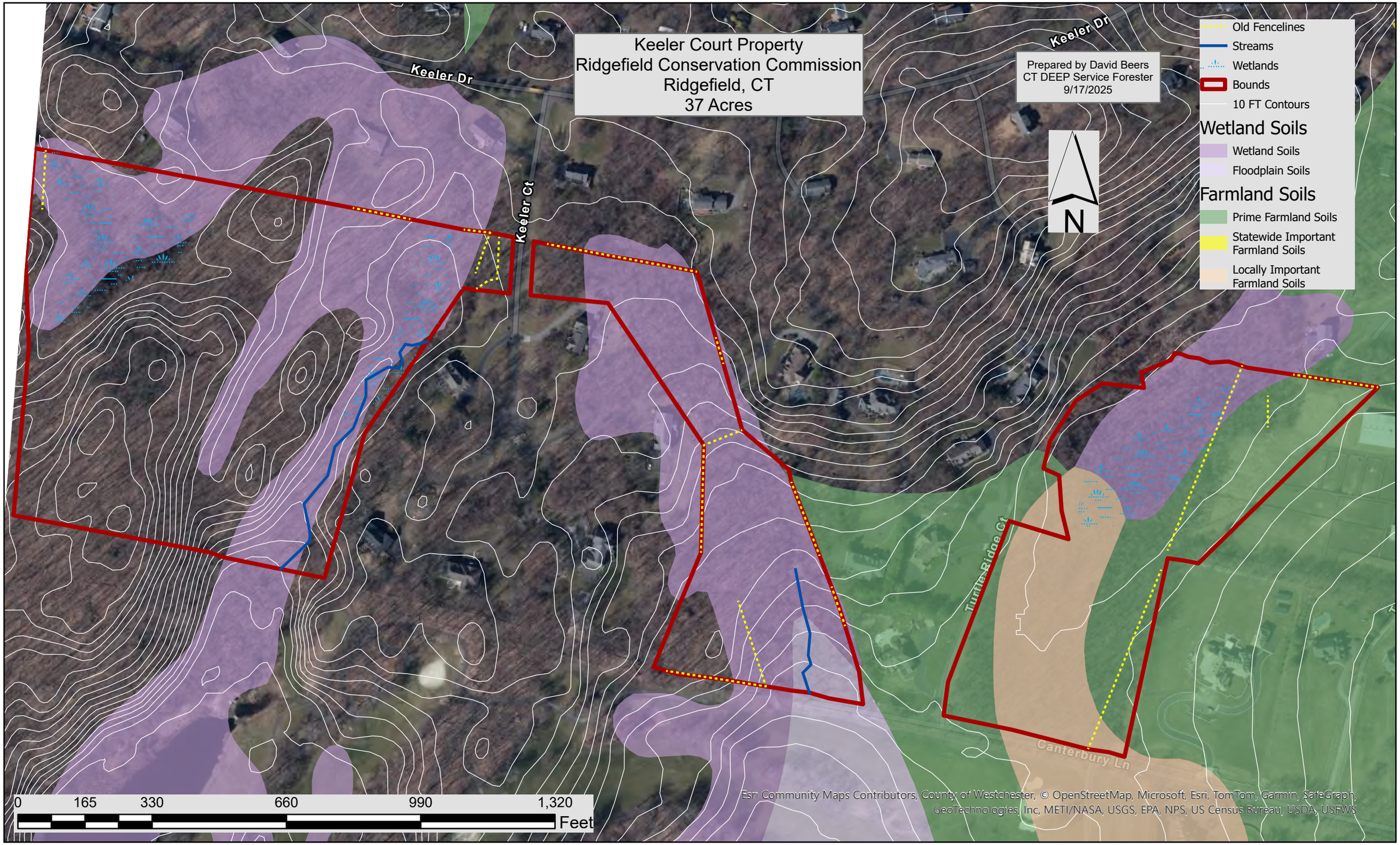
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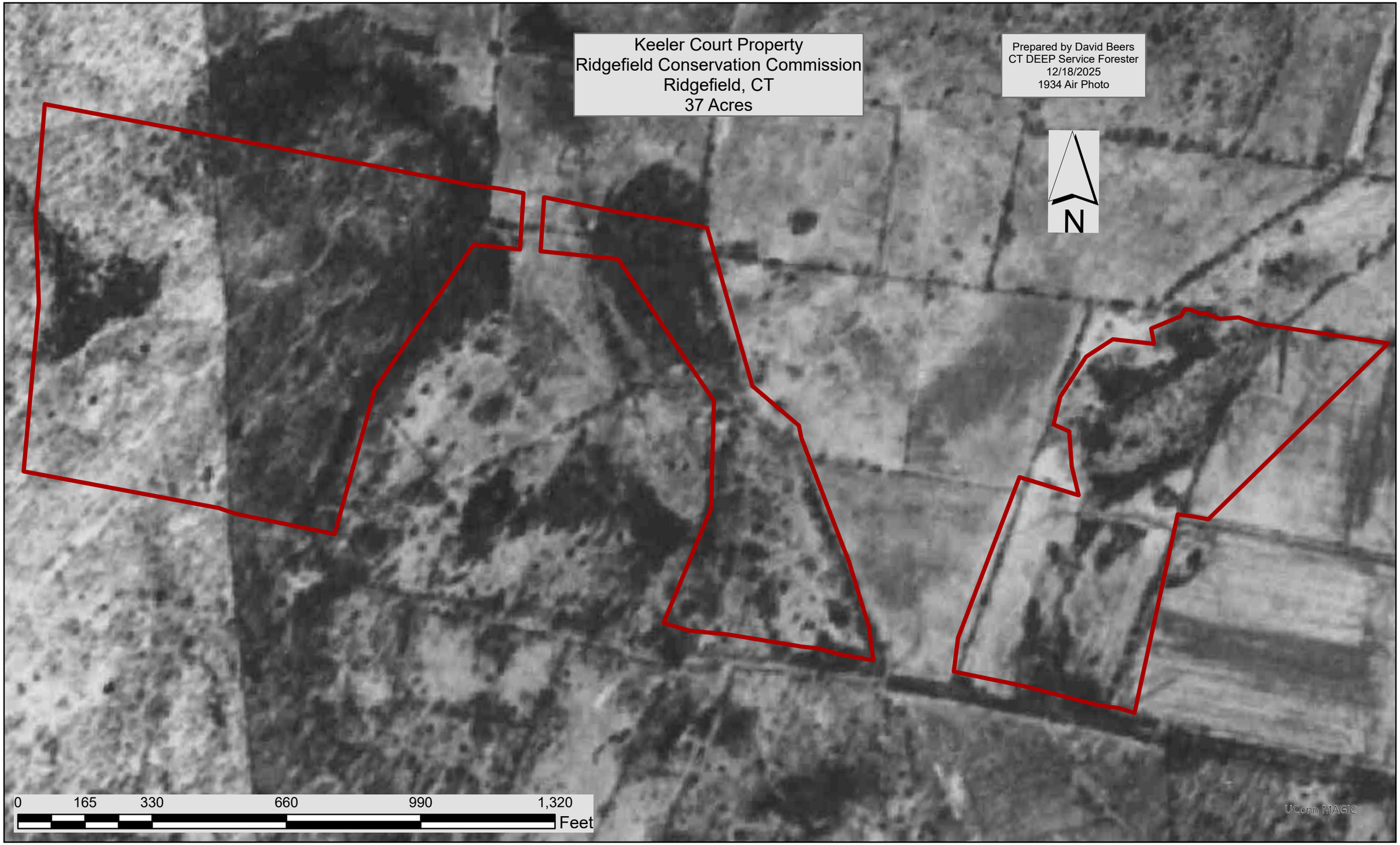
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APPENDIX

FOREST HISTORY

Between the eighteenth-century colonial settlement and the mid-nineteenth century, most of Connecticut was cleared for agriculture, with only a few small patches of forest remaining by the mid-nineteenth century. Only 25% of Connecticut was forested in 1830. Under these conditions, a muskrat was the largest animal in the woods. Turkeys, deer, bobcats, beavers, and bears were either rare or gone. Most of the land was used for livestock pasture, with only the best soils used for hay or tilled crops. Imagine a very open agricultural landscape.

During this farming period, the stonewalls were built to keep livestock out of crops and the neighbor's property. Most of these walls were topped off with piled wood and stumps to increase their height. Stonewalls were also a depository for rocks removed from cultivated land. A stonewall with many fist-sized rocks means that one side of that wall had tilled crops, where the winter freeze of bare ground would push rocks to the surface. After barbed wire became widely available in 1875, many of these walls were supplemented with wire. Barbed wire was used to corral cows and goats, but not sheep (barbs did not hurt the sheep). Sheep pasture used smooth-wire rectangular page fencing.

Most Connecticut hill farms were abandoned between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The farmers either moved west in search of better farming soils or headed to the cities for employment. Immediately after the farm's abandonment, the forest began to reclaim the land again. Much of the young forestlands were then cut down repeatedly to make charcoal, which was used to fuel industrialization. Charcoal was used in metal blast furnaces and by blacksmiths.

Small trees were cut into 4' lengths and carried by hand to make a circular pile about 30' wide and 10' high for charcoal making. A ditch was dug around the circumference of the pile, and the soil from the ditch covered the pile to limit the amount of oxygen in the smoldering pile. Once the low-oxygen burn was completed in two weeks, the almost pure carbon charcoal was removed for transport to market. Charcoal produces the hot fire needed for metalworking.

While this charcoal-making process had been occurring since settlement, it reached its peak between 1880 and 1920. At that time, much of the landscape was cut multiple times, with patches of smoke rising from active charcoal mounds across the hills. By about 1925, less expensive coal had led to the decline of charcoal making, and the forest began to grow back again. The repetitive cutting of young trees for charcoal encouraged the proliferation of oak trees. Of all the tree species, oak responded most favorably to repetitive cutting. This, along with frequent wildfires, contributed to the development of the oak-dominated forest we see today.

The 1934 map is attached. Please note that you need to mentally adjust the map, as the map scale projection does not exactly match what we use today. To see what ancestral homeland existed on your property before settlement, please visit Native-Land.ca, and type in your address.

FOREST FUTURE

Active forest management can nudge a forest in different directions by manipulating which trees continue to grow and how much the forest floor is exposed to sunlight by creating canopy openings of various sizes and shapes. For example, we can nudge the future forest towards oak by leaving oaks to grow and produce acorns, creating canopy openings of sufficient size to bring in the sunlight young oaks need to grow, and hunting the deer that eat young oak trees. Without these manipulations and significant natural disturbances (wind, ice, pests), the forest will gradually transition to shade-tolerant trees not eaten by deer (hemlock, beech, black birch and red maple).

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOREST STEWARDSHIP

Forest Protection

For long-term protection, a conservation easement on part of the property could be donated to a local land trust, preventing development in perpetuity. The easement's value may be income tax-deductible over several years and also provide estate tax benefits.

1. Please contact your local land trusts for more information using this link: Find A Land Trust - Connecticut Land Conservation Council (ctconservation.org).
2. Please contact NRCS about HFRP (Healthy Forest Reserve Program) for conservation easement funding using this link: NRCS Accepting Applications for HFRP Program | Natural Resources Conservation Service (usda.gov).
3. Another good link is Estate Planning Resources and the Forest Legacy Program (ct.gov).

Diversity

A healthy forest has a large diversity of native plant species, particularly trees that support a diverse array of fungi and wildlife (animals, insects, microbes). A healthy forest also features multiple layers of native vegetation, maximizing biodiversity and structural complexity. This means having trees of different ages, diameters, and heights. A healthy forest has standing dead trees (snags) and dead downed wood as essential habitat elements, which help retain moisture during droughts. A healthy forest is resilient because it can recover more effectively from diseases, pests, and extreme weather events. Increasing species and structural diversity of the forest provides multiple recovery pathways from disturbance.

To improve forest landscape diversity, consider establishing some patches of young forest. With over 89 birds, mammals, and reptiles that require young forest habitats, the young forest is nature's pantry for wildlife, thanks to its abundance of insects and berries. It also provides our mature woodland wildlife with important food and cover at critical times of the year. Ideally, 5-10% of our landscape should be young forest. Unfortunately, our landscape rarely has this much young forest because we prevent such forests from forming naturally via beaver activity, fires and floods. We can mimic natural disturbances with well-planned forest stewardship activities to create patches of young forest. Please visit YoungForest.org| a fresh way to create wildlife habitat.

Invasives/vines

Invasive species are typically from another part of the world, and when established here, they have no native predators or competitors to regulate their population. When left uncontrolled, they out-compete what would grow naturally, including tree regeneration and other native understory vegetation. Native understory growth supports a greater diversity of native insects and arthropods that wildlife needs to forage on. It also provides more nutrient-rich berries for birds. Exotic invasive understory growth can provide a better habitat for ticks and associated pathogens while significantly reducing biodiversity. Please see: Home | Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group (uconn.edu) and https://www.conservect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Invasive_guide_2020_web.pdf

Control methods include mechanical and chemical processes. In a shady forest, cutting a vine is enough to kill it. Invasive shrubs are not so easy. Pulling the invasives out by the roots can be effective, but extremely difficult and labor-intensive. Yearly cutting back of the above-ground stems, during the growing season, will keep the invasives under control and may even kill them after a few years. The most effective control method is applying herbicide to the green foliage. You can also cut the invasive shrubs and treat the fresh stumps with herbicides to prevent resprouting.

Buckthorn Blaster herbicide applicator for vine and invasive shrub eradication: Official Buckthorn Blaster® by NAISMA

Lawns and fields

Fields provide an opportunity to help pollinators and native insects. Insects, pollinators (including bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, flies, wasps, and hummingbirds), and the many birds that depend on them, are in severe decline. By delaying annual mowing until after the first hard frost and before the start of plant growth in the spring, you will allow pollinators to utilize your fields as food and habitat during the growing season. Another habitat management strategy is to mow one-third to one-half each year on a rotational schedule, with a 6" or more cutting height. This allows some insects to overwinter in the uncut plant stalks, providing birds with much-needed food during the winter. For this reason, early spring mowing is best, before the green-up and bird nesting season. Please remember that healthy meadows store more than double the carbon of a mowed lawn.

There are also many opportunities to create pollinator-friendly habitats/food sources by adding native plantings, allowing lawn areas to revert to natural areas, and leaving leaves and needles to cover the ground. Insects will overwinter in leaf litter and uncut plant stalks. Birds will pick through the winter leaves for insects. For more information, please visit:
Pollinator Pathway (pollinator-pathway.org). Link for native plantings: https://www.audubon.org/native-plants.

Boundaries

Boundaries must be well-marked to protect the property from trespass and encroachment. Painted blazes are typically used to mark property boundaries. A blaze is a hand-sized shallow scrape in the bark. This scrape will last decades and not harm the tree if done correctly. When painted, this blaze is quite visible and long-lasting. Trees within arm's length of the boundaries are blazed, with the blazes facing the boundary line. Use only paint marks on the neighbor's side of the line, without blazes. The blazes should be given a new coat of paint at least every ten years. Custom signs can also be hung about every 100 feet using galvanized steel or aluminum nails. Keep the nails sticking out an inch from the tree so that the tree has room to grow without pushing the signs out. Understory vegetation and debris can be cleared from boundary lines to facilitate easy inspection of the lines. Please consider hiring a forester to locate and mark property boundaries.

Wildlife

Your forest, and the State of Connecticut in general, is lucky to have a significant and diverse component of mature oak trees (mature trees have reached maximum height). Oak trees are considered a wildlife keystone species due to the large amount and diversity of life they support, surpassing that of any other tree. Acorns, especially white oak acorns, provide the most nutritious plant-based protein for almost 90 wildlife species. Oaks overwhelmingly host the most moth and butterfly caterpillars (over 500), which anchor a biodiverse food web. Oak forests have more bird abundance and diversity compared to other forest types. Oaks produce the thickest, most ecologically beneficial, and longest-lasting leaf litter, accompanied by the most abundant and diverse soil biology. This top-of-the-line leaf litter can keep out invasive exotic stilt grass and jumping worms. It also purifies and holds the most water. For these reasons, preserving and encouraging oak growth and health in your forest is important.

Parts of this forest have legacy trees, also known as old field trees or wolf trees. These trees were growing in open pastures as a source of shade for livestock before the current forest began to grow. They are much older than the surrounding forest. Because they were once open-grown, they have large, spreading crowns and large branches low on the trunk. When the pastures were abandoned, they became a significant seed source for the present forest. These large, old trees are structurally complex, with numerous cavities, hollows, thick branches, and rough, thick bark. They are also prolific seed producers, including acorns and nuts. This structural complexity and prolific seed production attract a vast number and diverse range of insects, birds, and mammals. Underground, the old trees are also the hub and source of the complex fungal soil mycorrhizal growth that all trees depend on for water and nutrients. To make them healthier and more vigorous, such legacy trees could be protected and perhaps even given more sunlight by cutting some surrounding trees. These agrarian vestiges have become the ecological hubs in your forest. They are also a great source of future large snags and large dead, downed wood.

Ecological Services and Climate Change Mitigation

Forests remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere (called sequestration), create oxygen, and remove many pollutants from the air and water. Forests absorb heavy rains and release that water to streams and underground aquifers during droughts. Forests regulate temperature and moisture levels. Your forest contributes to these valuable services by storing carbon in the below-ground roots and soil, as well as in the above-ground vegetation, dead wood, and fallen leaves. These services are enhanced by having a diverse mix of native tree species in various sizes and arrangements. Sustainable, scientifically based forest management to remove forest products and promote young forests or regeneration of desired species has no long-term adverse effect on your forest's ability to provide these vital ecological services. When trees are young and growing fast, they sequester carbon at high rates, and once they are large (over 18" in diameter and often older), they store the most carbon. Whether you choose to manage your forest actively or not, your forest does an excellent service to our planet's health just by being a healthy forest.

Forests store carbon in different pools, and the amount of carbon in these pools changes over time. The pools are comprised of live aboveground elements (trees, shrubs, and other plants), live belowground elements (roots and fungi), deadwood (standing dead trees [snags] and downed logs), litter (leaves, needles, and small branches), and soil organic matter. Sequestration is the process by which forests remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, primarily via tree photosynthesis. A younger forest (10-60 years old) stores relatively little carbon but is likely at or near its peak sequestration rate. An older, more mature forest (60 years or older) stores more carbon, with a gradually slowing sequestration rate. A mix of sequestration and storage in multi-aged forests creates a resilient carbon profile. Please remember that using and harvesting local wood is an integral part of climate mitigation and a vital tool for improving the resilience of our forests to climate change.

Mapping

Attached to this report is a geo-referenced map that the landowner can use with mapping apps. This digital map shows the landowner's location on the property, and the landowner can also record tracks and waypoints.

1. To get map layers and to view maps, please visit CT ECO Home (cteco.uconn.edu).
2. To get soil maps, and associated soil descriptions, please visit Web Soil Survey - Home (usda.gov) and follow the instructions on the first page of this website.
3. For instruction, please see Tutorials | Center for Land Use Education and Research (uconn.edu).

Getting Assistance

Here is a list of every licensed forester in CT:https://www.depdata.ct.gov/forestry/ForestPractitioner/directry.pdf

Additionally, we are seeking applicants for the Master Woodland Manager certification (MWM). Here is a link for MWM: Connecticut Master Woodland Manager Program | Connecticut Forest & Park Association (ctwoodlands.org)

To learn more about the NRCS EQIP funding Program, click NRCS EQIP Program Help

Visit CT DEEP's grants website: Grants and Financial Assistance

Wildlife habitat projects: Partners for Fish and Wildlife | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

To prevent erosion and water quality issues: Best Management Practices Manual

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APPENDIX OF LATIN NAMES

TREES

Red Oak	Quercus rubra	Eastern Hemlock	Tsuga canadensis
Tulip-Poplar	Liriodendron tulipifera	Aspen	Populus sp.
Red Maple	Acer rubrum	Blackgum	Nyssa sylvatica
Black Birch	Betula lenta	Yellow Birch	Betula alleghaniensis
White Oak	Quercus alba	Chestnut Oak	Quercus montana
Hickory	Carya Sp.	Black Cherry	Prunus serotina
Black Oak	Quercus velutina	White Pine	Pinus strobus
Scarlet Oak	Quercus coccinea	Sassafras	Sassafras albidum
American Beech	Fagus grandifolia	Paper Birch	Betula papyrifera
Sugar Maple	Acer saccharum	White Ash	Fraxinus americana
Sycamore	Platanus occidentalis	Eastern Redcedar	Juniperus virginiana
Slippery Elm	Ulmus rubra	Basswood	Tilia americana
Pitch Pine	Pinus rigida	Gray Birch	Betula populifolia

NATIVE UNDERSTORY

Eastern Hophornbeam	Ostrya virginiana	Spicebush	Lindera benzoin
Musclewood	Carpinus caroliniana	Witch Hazel	Hamamelis virginiana
Serviceberry	Amelanchier Sp	Mountain Laurel	Kalmia latifolia
Lowbush blueberry	Vaccinium angustifolium	Huckleberry	Gaylussacia baccata
Highbush Blueberry	Vaccinium corymbosum	Sweet Pepperbush	Clethra alnifolia
Striped Maple	Acer pensylvanicum	Holly	Smilax
Hobblebush	Viburnum lantanoides	Greenbrier	Ilex
Maple-leaf Viburnum	Viburnum acerifolium		

EXOTIC INVASIVES

Barberry	Berberis Sp.	Burning Bush	Euonymus alatus
Multi-flora Rose	Rosa multiflora	Bittersweet	Celastrus orbiculatus
Privet	Ligustrum Sp	Honeysuckle	Lonicera Sp
Russian Olive	Elaeagnus angustifolia	Tree-of-Heaven	Ailanthus altissima