

# Destigmatizing Nature

## *& The Role of Watershed Stewardship*

A 101 Introduction



# What We'll Cover Today

**01** What does it mean to stigmatize nature?

**04** Environmental inequity today

**02** History of exclusion from green & water spaces

**05** Watershed stewardship as belonging

**03** Connecticut's watersheds & who they affect

**06** How you can get involved

*Think about the last time you were in nature.*

# Who was there with you?

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- Who feels welcome in nature and who doesn't?
- What stories shaped that divide?
- How do our watersheds connect us or exclude us?



# What Does It Mean to "Stigmatize Nature"?

## Environmental Racism

Directing pollution, waste sites & industrial hazards toward communities of color making nature a threat, not a refuge.

## Cultural Erasure

Dismissing Indigenous & Black ecological knowledge as "primitive" or irrelevant to modern conservation.

## Green Space Inequality

Wealthier, whiter neighborhoods get parks & clean waterways. Urban communities of color face contaminated sites.

## Fear & Exclusion

Historic violence in outdoor spaces (Sundown Towns, racial terror) taught communities that nature was unsafe (a legacy that persists).

# History of Exclusion

Understanding how communities of color were systematically separated from natural spaces and why that legacy still matters.

# A Legacy of Exclusion from Natural Spaces

1800s–1960s

## Segregation in Parks

Black Americans systematically excluded from public parks and recreation areas across the U.S.

1930s–1960s

## Redlining & Environmental Neglect

CT cities Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport redlined. Those neighborhoods still lack green infrastructure today.

Ongoing

## Indigenous Land Dispossession

Pequot, Quinnipiac, Paugussett tribes removed from CT watersheds they stewarded for millennia. 100M+ acres taken nationally.

Present

## Policing of Public Space

Differential enforcement creates persistent barriers to outdoor recreation for BIPOC communities.

# "The Water Wasn't Meant for Us"

Municipal pools in Hartford, New Haven & Bridgeport were segregated through the 1960s.

In 1964, Civil Rights protesters were arrested at Waterbury's Municipal Pool demanding equal access.

Long Island Sound beach access in wealthy CT towns required resident stickers effectively excluding urban communities. Approximately 80% of the Connecticut shoreline is privately owned, making it one of the most exclusive coasts in the U.S.



Sources: CDC, USA Swimming Foundation, National Park Service

## 64%

of Black children have low or no swimming ability  
(USA Swimming)

## 1 in 3

Black Americans feel unwelcome in outdoor spaces

## 5.5×

more likely to drown — Black vs. white Americans; a direct legacy of exclusion

# Redlining: A Policy That Shaped Today's Environment

## What was redlining?

Starting in the 1930s, banks and the federal government marked mostly Black and immigrant neighborhoods as "risky" refusing home loans, insurance, and investment regardless of income or credit.

## The lasting environmental impact

- Less tree canopy coverage
- More impervious surfaces → more flooding
- Higher proximity to industrial sites
- Fewer parks & green spaces

## Persistent Effects of Redlining

**74%**

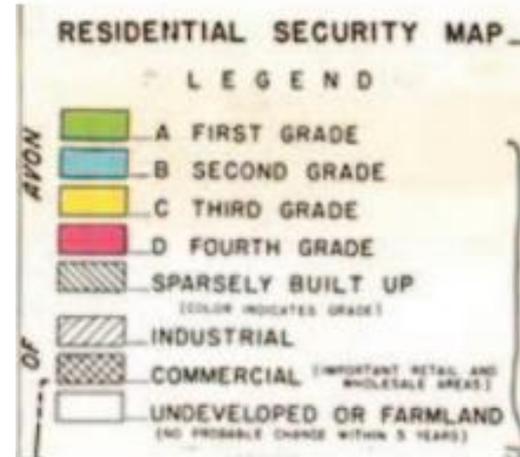
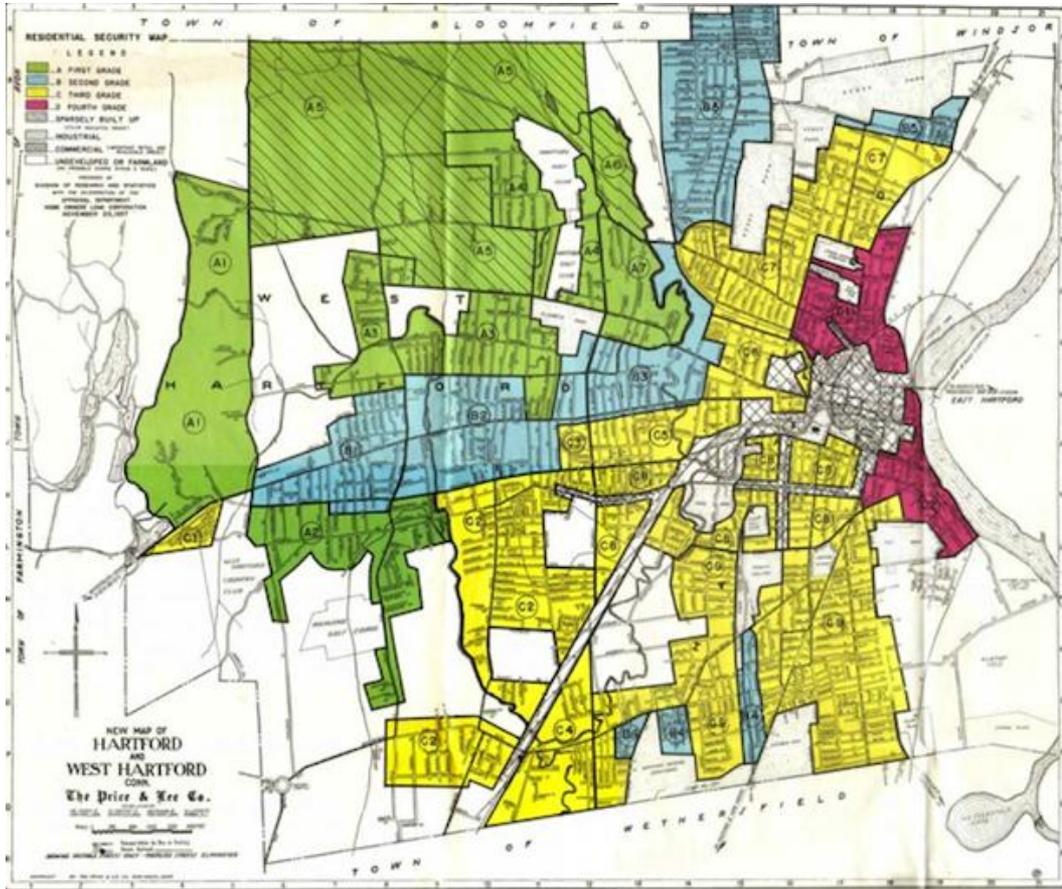
of neighborhoods graded 'hazardous' in the 1930s are low-to-moderate income today

**64%**

are still predominantly neighborhoods of color

**7°F**

warmer — Hartford's urban core vs. surrounding suburbs due to lost tree canopy



Redlining map of the Hartford area, Homeowner's Loan Corporation, 1937. Red shaded areas assessed as less desirable, in part based on the race or ethnicity of residents.

**This Manchester homeowner was shocked to learn his house contained a 'whites only' restriction on its deed. A new law allows homeowners to formally void those unlawful clauses.**



1909 ad

### Sea Side Plots.

**A GREAT INVESTMENT.**  
**Saybrook Manor, Saybrook, Conn.**

The most beautiful spot in Connecticut. Is highly restricted as to nationality. Street cars, water, trees, large plots. \$135 upwards. On 2 per cent, monthly payments. Tents allowed.

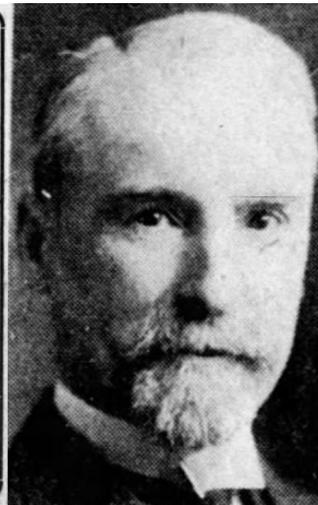
**SOMETHING NEW.**  
**SOMETHING DIFFERENT.**  
**NOT FOR RICH PEOPLE.**  
**NOT FOR POOR PEOPLE.**  
**JUST FOR GOOD PEOPLE.**

Desirable All water property has become very scarce and increasing more rapidly in value than any other kind of real estate.

Come Down and Own a Piece of the Ocean and make the best investment of your life. For further information call or address

**JAS. JAY SMITH CO., Saybrook, Conn.**

Railroad fares refunded to purchasers if not found as represented. Everything guaranteed. Property shown Sundays also.



1913 ad for Groton Long Point, CT

James Jay Smith

Who will your neighbors be? The best, because it is restricted as to nationality. There is a Club House and Pier, free to owners, where you can become acquainted.

1930 ad

### Join the Lake Hayward Club!

It is not necessary to build to enjoy the privileges of the Club House. Bathing houses and a long dock to which club members can tie their boats have been provided, so that boating, bathing and fishing are immediately available. Annual club dues are only \$5.00. Proper restrictions to membership, assure a happy, congenial family of vacationists.

1936 racial covenant, Lake Hayward Club, East Haddam, CT

As the Lake Hayward Club property is strictly a club proposition, it is hereby covenanted and agreed that the property herein conveyed shall be sold, released, or rented in any form or manner directly or indirectly to any person or persons: (1) who are not of the Caucasian Race; (2) who are not acceptable to the Grantor or to the Jas. Jay Smith Co. This covenant shall be a real covenant and run with the land until the year 1960.

sely restricted"

Add

Children's Community pla

All improvements—gas, ele  
 ter, sidewalks, sewers.

**Wisely restricted**

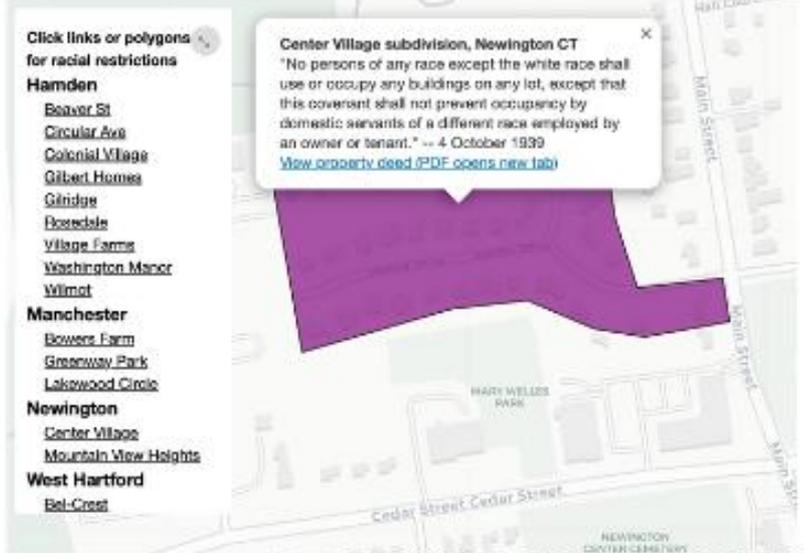
BUY—BUILD AT  
 QUARTER MAN  
 THE FUTUR

Crystal Lake. Good locati  
 overlooking miles of countr  
 five minutes to food and dai  
 arms, 10 minutes to center  
 Middletown. **Wisely** **restrict**  
 reasonable terms. Follow Sou  
 Farms trolley line to end a  
 continue straight ahead to si  
 entrance on right.

### Explore the Map: Neighborhood Change in Connecticut, 1934



### Explore the Map: Race Restrictive Covenants in Connecticut, 1930s-40s



ALFRED E. HANBURY

(e) No persons of any race except the white race shall use or occupy any buildings on any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race employed by an owner or tenant.

Does my Connecticut property deed  
contain a racist covenant?  
Find it and Reject it at  
myCTdeed.com

Click links or polygons  
for racial restrictions

**Hamden**

[Beaver St](#)

[Circular Ave](#)

[Colonial Village](#)

[Gilbert Homes](#)

[Gilridge](#)

[Rosedale](#)

[Village Farms](#)

[Washington Manor](#)

[Willowdale](#)

[Wilmot](#)

**Manchester**

[Bowers Farm](#)

[Greenway Park](#)

[Lakewood Circle](#)

**Newington**

[Center Village](#)

**Gilbert Homes subdivision, Hamden CT**

"No persons of any race other than the white race shall use or occupy any building or any lot except that this covenant shall not prevent the occupant by domestic servants of a different race domiciled with an owner or tenant." -- 16 Sept 1941

[View property deed \(PDF opens new tab\)](#)



Free info by attorneys June Gold & David  
Ware, and professor Jack Dougherty

# THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

## FIRST CHRISTIAN "DISCOVERY"

European powers claimed automatic sovereignty over Indigenous lands through first Christian contact—reducing living nations to mere occupants without legal title.

## U.S. LEGAL FOUNDATION

### **Johnson v. M'Intosh (1823)**

Tribes granted occupancy only, not ownership. Federal government claimed ultimate title.

### **Indian Removal Act (1830)**

Used doctrine to justify forced displacement of entire nations.

## DEVASTATING IMPACT

**Pre-contact: ~5-15 million**  
Indigenous population in what is now the U.S.

**By 1900: ~237,000**  
95%+ population decline

Doctrine enabled: land theft, forced removal, cultural genocide, treaty violations

The Doctrine of Discovery transformed Indigenous peoples from sovereign nations into legal non-entities turning them into "trespassers on their own land." This legal fiction provided the framework for **systematic displacement, cultural destruction, and genocide.**

# Indigenous Land Dispossession

**100+ MILLION**  
ACRES REMOVED

*Federal policies removed more than 100 million acres from Indigenous nations*

The Doctrine of Discovery remains embedded in U.S. legal precedent.

Land loss undermines cultural continuity, governance, and ecological stewardship.

Indigenous land management consistently demonstrates positive environmental outcomes.

# INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME  
OF  
YOUR OWN  
\*  
EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE  
\*  
POSSESSION  
WITHIN  
THIRTY DAYS

wikipedia • www.CALIE.ORG

**FINE LANDS IN THE WEST**  
IRRIGATED AGRICULTURAL  
IRRIGABLE GRAZING DRY FARMING

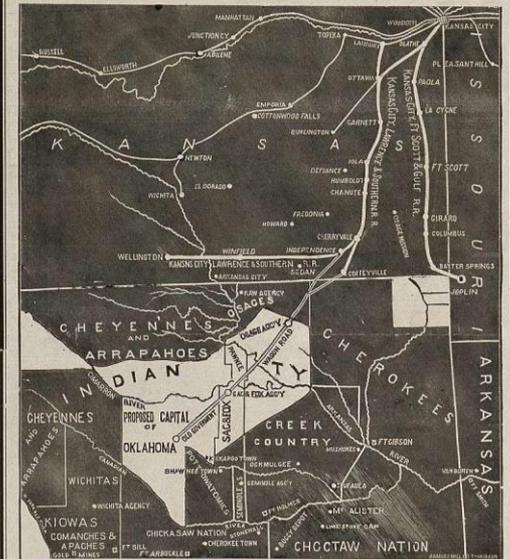
IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.	Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.
Colorado	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma	34,664.00	\$19.14

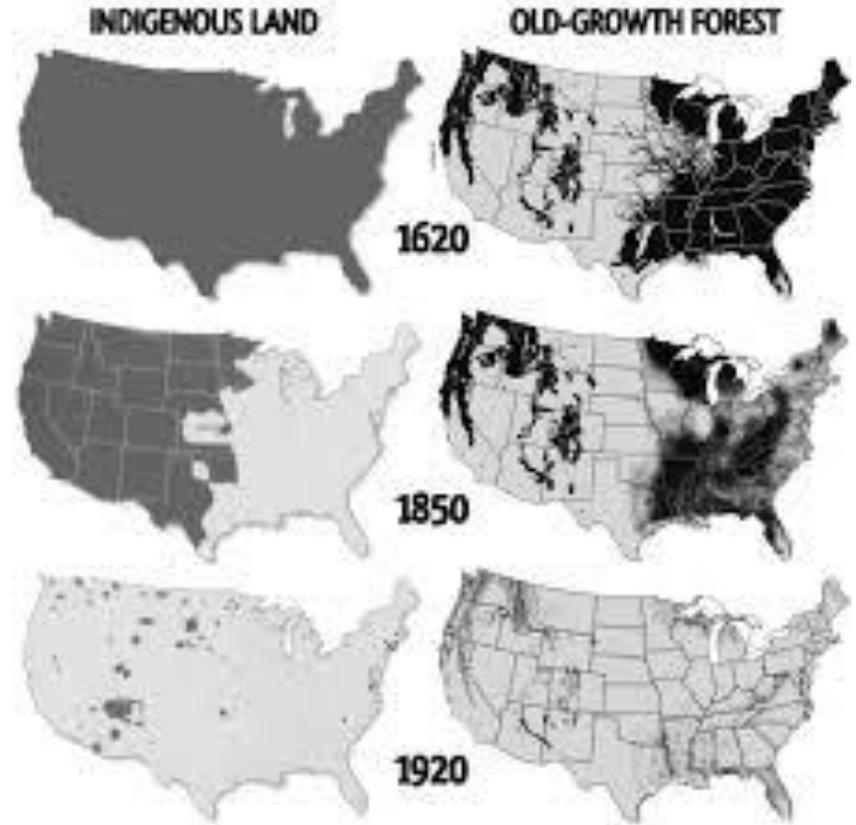
# THE PRESIDENT

In his last message to Congress, strongly recommends that the Indian Territory be opened for settlement, and there is no doubt but that Congress at its present session will pass the necessary act declaring the unoccupied lands in

**INDIAN TERRITORY**  
THAT  
GARDEN OF THE WORLD,  
OPEN FOR  
HOMESTEAD AND PRE-EMPTION

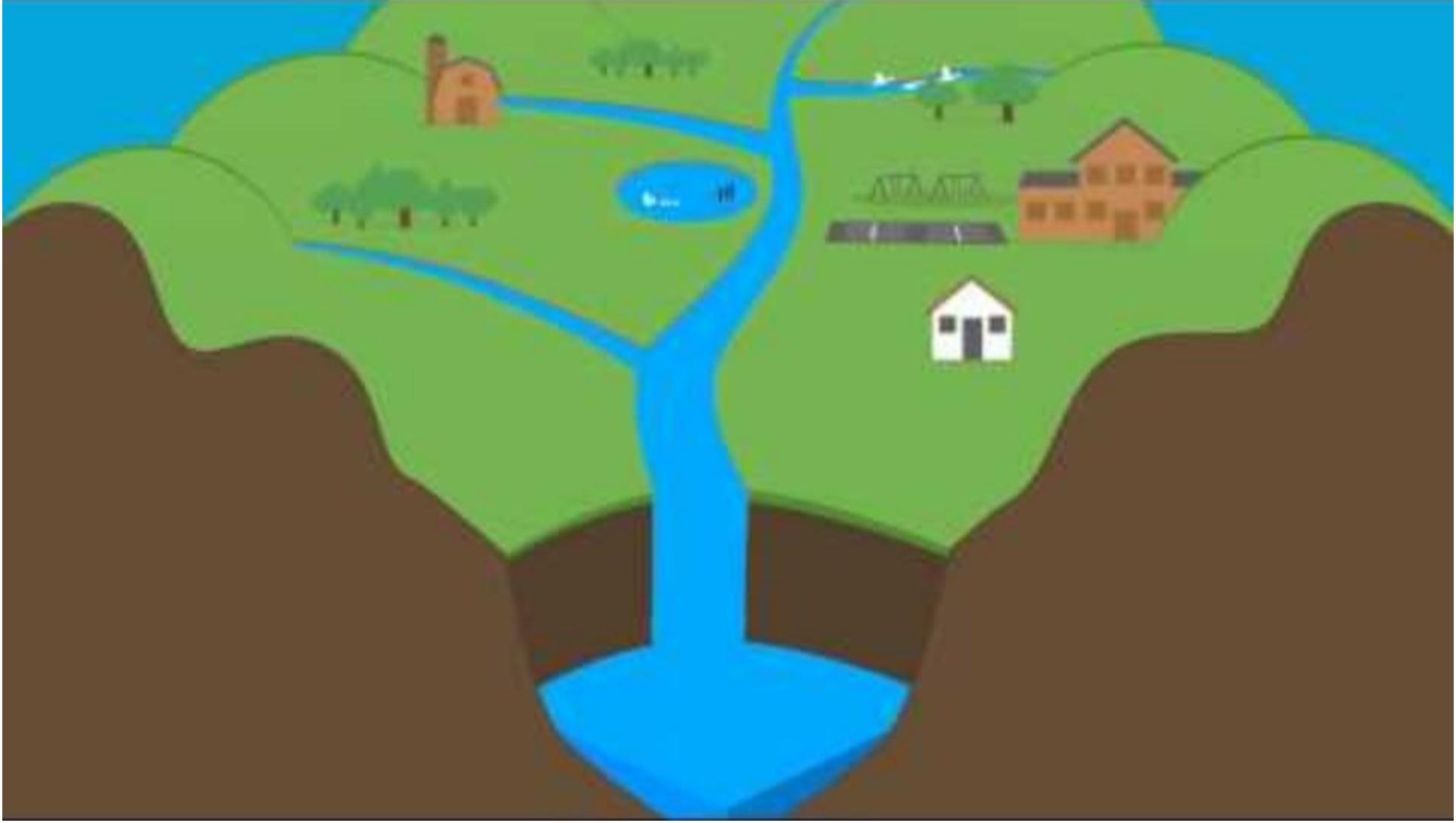


MAP OF INDIAN TERRITORY,  
Showing the Lands that will be subject to Homestead Entry and How to Reach Them.  
White indicates Homestead Lands, of which there will be over 10,000,000 Acres.



# Connecticut's Watersheds

A living system and why who has access to it matters.



# What Is a Watershed?

*A watershed is all the land that drains to a common waterway from the ridge top to the river, from the city block to the ocean.*

## **Drinking Water**

Source protection directly affects public health

## **Recreation & Mental Health**

Access to nature improves wellbeing

## **Flood Protection**

Natural systems reduce flood risk in our communities

## **Climate Resilience**

Healthy watersheds buffer climate impacts

## **Food Systems**

Water quality supports local agriculture

# Connecticut's Major Watersheds & Their Communities

Longest in New England

## Connecticut River

410 miles. Once called "the best-landscaped sewer in America." Partially restored through the Clean Water Act. 2.4 million CT residents connected.

Indigenous Homeland

## Pequot (Thames) River

Home to Mohegan & Mashantucket Pequot nations for millennia.

Environmental Justice

## Housatonic River

Catastrophic PCB contamination by General Electric. Superfund cleanup ongoing. Disproportionate impact on lower-income CT communities.

Urban Watershed

## Quinnipiac River

Flows through New Haven County. Named by the Quinnipiac people. Legacy industrial contamination affecting predominantly Latino/Black neighborhoods.

# Environmental Inequity Today — Connecticut

## Tree Canopy Gaps

CT's BIPOC communities have significantly less green space and urban tree cover.

## Flooding Patterns

Redlined neighborhoods in Hartford, New Haven & Bridgeport face the highest flood risk in the state.

## Water Quality Disparities

CT Latino communities face PFAS exposure in the Farmington River watershed & higher contaminant risks.

## Park Access Differences

Two-thirds of CT's Black and Latinx residents live in just 15 towns with limited accessible park space.

## Coastal Risk

Bridgeport, New Haven & New London face 2–4 ft of sea level rise by 2100. Coastal communities of color have fewest resources to adapt.

## Combined Sewer Overflows

Heavy rain causes untreated sewage to discharge into New Haven's Mill River & Hartford's Connecticut River affecting BIPOC neighborhoods most.

# In Connecticut 92% of communities of color live in nature-deprived areas: study

By **Austin Mirmina**, *Staff Writer*

March 1, 2026



## Nature Gap in Connecticut

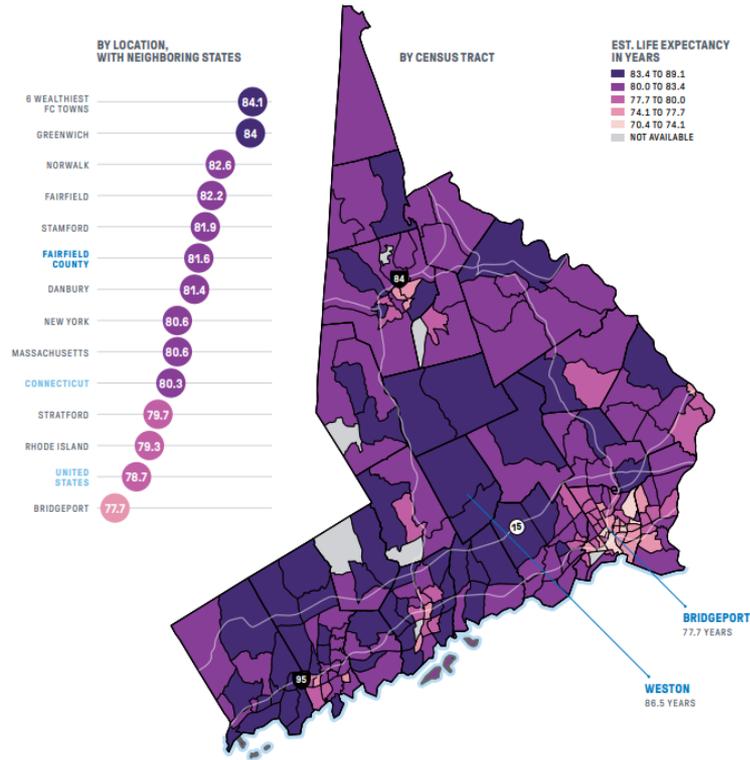
The nature gap describes the unequal access to safe, healthy green space based on race and income. In Connecticut, the divide is stark. Ninety two percent of communities of color and 94 percent of low income households live in areas considered nature deprived, among the highest rates in the country. Access to parks, trees, and open space is not evenly distributed, and the disparities are concentrated in urban neighborhoods.

The gap is compounded by environmental exposure. In Connecticut, 60 percent of communities of color live near a brownfield site, compared to just 3 percent of white communities. Nationally, communities of color are far more likely to live near pollution sources, and similar patterns hold across the state. Neighborhoods with limited green space often face the highest environmental risks.

In Connecticut, the nature gap reflects decades of land use decisions and disinvestment. Communities with the least access to nature are often the same communities facing higher housing burdens, lower median incomes, and greater pollution exposure. The issue is not only about parks. It is about health, equity, and who benefits from environmental protection.

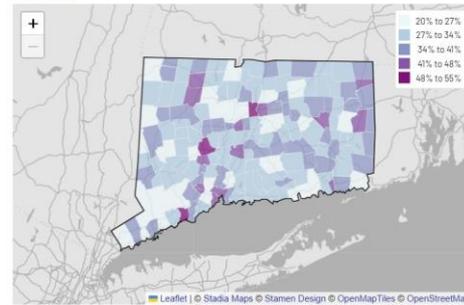
## Life expectancy in Fairfield County is high, but often differs by several years between adjacent neighborhoods

ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY IN YEARS, 2010-2015



### Just getting by or struggling financially

MAP CHART



### Financial security at a glance: Connecticut

Just getting by or struggling financially	36%
Food insecure in past year	16%
Housing insecure in past year	10%
Transportation insecure in past year	14%
Access to a car	89%

# Stewardship as Belonging

How watershed care becomes an act of community,  
culture, and justice.

# What Is Watershed Stewardship?

*Caring for land + water together from the ridge to the river, from the city block to the ocean.*

## **Stormwater Management**

Green infrastructure, rain gardens & permeable pavement reduce runoff carrying pollutants into waterways.

## **Riparian Buffers**

Planting native vegetation along streambanks reduces erosion, filters pollution & provides wildlife habitat.

## **Citizen Science Monitoring**

Communities testing water quality & conducting surveys — putting data collection in the hands of those most affected.

## **Wetland Restoration**

Restoring coastal & inland wetlands rebuilds natural filtration systems and climate resilience.

## **Dam Removal**

100+ CT dams removed or candidates for removal ; restoring fish passage and natural river function.

## **Community Education**

Reaching urban residents to change everyday behaviors: car washing, lawn care, and stormwater awareness.



*Nature is not 'out there' it's the sidewalk crack, the river under the bridge, the vacant lot. It's ancestral, cultural, everyday.*



# Reframing Nature: Shifting the Story

**From**

Conservation as exclusion

Scarcity mindset

Expert-only spaces

Nature as "out there"



**To**

Stewardship as belonging

Care-based approach

Community knowledge valued

Nature is everywhere around us



# Removing Barriers to Participation

## Barriers

Transportation — limits access to natural areas

Lack of representation in outdoor leadership

Technical jargon excludes community members

"You need a degree" gatekeeping mentality

## Solutions

Bird walks in city parks; programming near transit

BIPOC-led organizations & paid stewardship roles

Plain language, multilingual, culturally relevant outreach

Citizen science — real data collected by the community



# From Participant to Steward: A Simple Pathway

1

## Learn

- Attend a workshop
- Take a nature walk in your neighborhood
- Explore EPA's EJScreen to map your community

2

## Engage

- Join a cleanup event
- Test water quality with a youth program
- Connect with a local watershed group

3

## Lead

- Organize events in your community
- Teach others what you've learned
- Advocate for policy change

*"The river taught me to notice. Now I teach others to notice too." — Community Member*

# What can you do?

## Individual

- Walk your local watershed name your nearest waterway
- Install a rain barrel or rain garden
- Attend a Source to Sea Cleanup (October, CT River)
- Take a child to a river, pond, or beach

## Community

- Partner with tribal nations on watershed projects
- Push for EJ inclusion in local watershed planning
- Create multilingual, multicultural outreach
- Hire and train BIPOC watershed stewards

## Policy & Funding

- Apply for EPA Section 319 grants
- Use EPA's EJSCREEN to document community burdens
- Advocate for CT tribal federal recognition
- Comment on state water quality permit proceedings



**AFFIDAVIT OF FACTS AFFECTING TITLE TO REAL PROPERTY  
(Connecticut Standards of Title, Standard 18.7 subsection A)  
UNDER CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES SECTION 47-12a,  
TO IDENTIFY A**

**A VOID RACIALLY RESTRICTIVE COVENANT**

State of Connecticut     )  
  ) ss: Manchester, August 3, 2021  
County of Hartford        )

Subject Property: 285 Green Road, Manchester, CT

Record Owner of Subject Property: Frederick D. Ware

I, Frederick D. Ware, (the "Affiant") being duly sworn, depose and say:

1. This Affidavit is made with respect to real property known as and situated at 285 Green Road, Manchester, CT, which is more particularly described in Schedule A attached hereto and made a part hereof (the "Property"). As of this date, Affiant is the record owner of the Property.
2. This Affidavit is made to carry out the provisions of Connecticut Public Acts 2021, No. 21-173, Section 1.
3. This Affidavit is made on the basis of facts that are personally known to Affiant.
4. An Unlawful Restrictive Covenant (as defined in Connecticut Public Acts 2021, No. 21-173) pertaining to the Property is contained in a document recorded at Volume 147, Page 463 of the Manchester Land Records, to the extent that it restricts the use and occupancy of the Property on the basis of race.
5. Connecticut Public Acts 2021, No. 21-173 provides that Unlawful Restrictive Covenants shall be VOID.

*Frederick D. Ware*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Affiant's Signature)

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 3rd day of August, 2021, by Frederick D. Ware.

*D. Kula*  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Western Rivers Conservancy Conveys Final Acreage to Yurok Tribe in a 47,000-Acre Effort Critical to the Salmon, Wildlife and Forests of the Klamath River

Totaling 73 square miles, Blue Creek project marks milestone for Klamath River and Tribal sovereignty, more than doubling Tribe's land holdings



Over the last 15 years, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation has spent \$10 million to purchase parts of their original reservation — including 130 acres near Shabbona Lake State Park in what is now DeKalb County, Illinois. This March, the state transferred the 1,500 acre park back to the tribe, some of which is now covered by water. *Peter Medlin/Harvest Public Media*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Media Advisory**  
**October 10, 2025**

**Media contact:**  
Aria Bredtveit  
On behalf of the Lac du Flambeau Tribe  
715-588-4324  
abredtveit@lftribe.com

**Historic Land Return: Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center Transferred to Lac du Flambeau**  
**Arbor Vitae, Wisconsin** — On October 31, 2025, at noon, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) will formally transfer the Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center property in Arbor Vitae, Wisconsin, to the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, the original caretakers of the land.

This moment marks the first known transfer of land from a Catholic institution to a Tribal Nation as an act of reparations for colonialism and the legacy of residential boarding schools.

Tribal leaders and representatives from the Franciscan Sisters will gather at Marywood for a ceremonial signing and blessing to honor this return and acknowledge the shared commitment to healing, relationship, and stewardship of the land.



## Stockbridge-Munsee Band reclaims 372 acres of ancestral lands



372 acres at the foot of Monument Mountain have been transferred back to the Stockbridge-Munsee thanks to a state grant and support from conservation nonprofits. (Photo by Stockbridge-Munsee)

# Raised H.B. No. 5523

## Session Year 2026



### AN ACT CONCERNING TRIBAL COMANAGEMENT OF WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES.

To establish a cooperative framework between the state and Native American tribes for the shared stewardship of wildlife and fisheries resources and expand conservation participation for tribal members, while supporting tribal food sovereignty and resource management infrastructure.

#### Introduced by:

Environment Committee

 New today     2-4 days old     5 days & older

**Text of Bill**

 Raised Bill [doc]

[+ Add to My Bills](#)

[+ View or Add Notes to HB-5523](#)

[Bills Similar to HB-5523 >](#)

[Public Hearing Testimony >](#)

# *What would it look like if everyone felt they belonged in nature?*

## Key Resources

- EPA EJScreen: [epa.gov/ejscreen](https://epa.gov/ejscreen)
- CT DEEP: [ct.gov/deep](https://ct.gov/deep)
- Groundwork Bridgeport: [groundworkbridgeport.org](https://groundworkbridgeport.org)
- CT River Conservancy: [ctriver.org](https://ctriver.org)
- Outdoor Afro CT: [outdoorafro.org](https://outdoorafro.org)

## Further Reading

- Braiding Sweetgrass — Robin Wall Kimmerer
- An Indigenous People's History of the US — Dunbar-Ortiz
- All We Can Save — Ayana Elizabeth Johnson
- The Color of Law — Richard Rothstein

# BIPOC-Led Watershed & Environmental Justice Organizations

## Hartford Environmental Justice Network

Local conservation leadership centered in Hartford's communities of color.

## Groundwork Bridgeport

EPA partner. Trains youth of color in stewardship along the Yellow Mill Channel watershed.

## Mohegan Environmental Team

Tribally operated monitoring of the Thames watershed. Model of Indigenous-led stewardship.

## Park River Collaborative

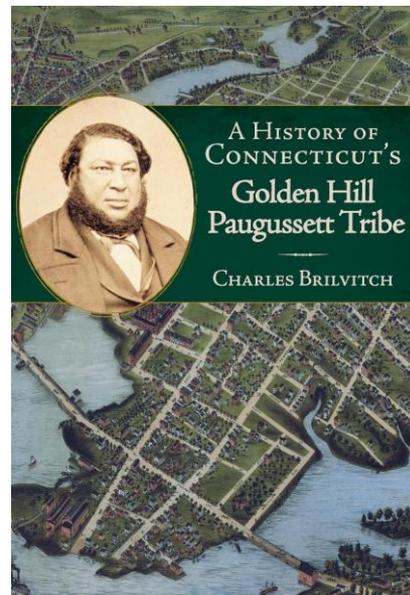
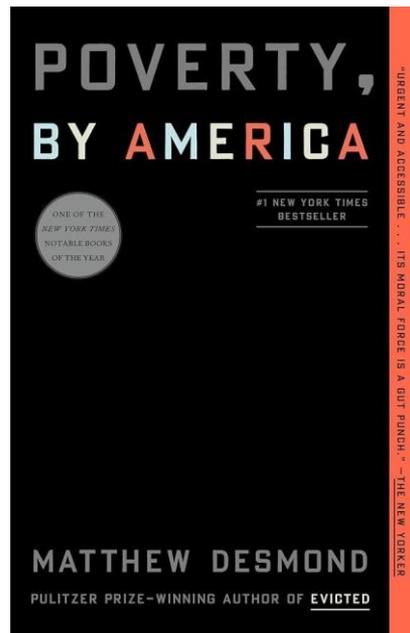
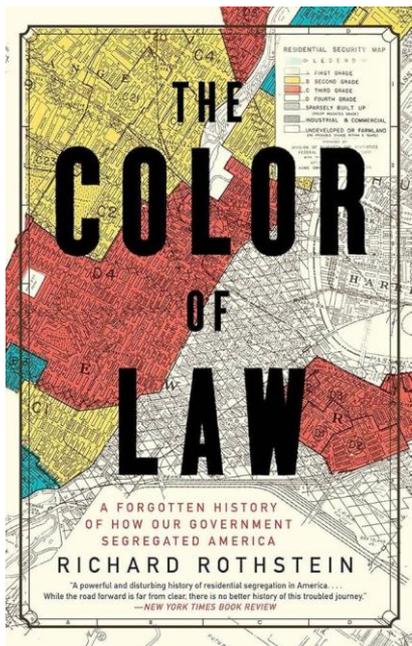
Advocates for daylighting Hartford's buried Park River — reconnecting BIPOC communities with their waterway.

## CT River Conservancy EJ Program

Centers BIPOC voices in CT River management. Partners with frontline communities for Source to Sea cleanup.

## Outdoor Afro CT Chapter

Reconnects Black communities with nature through group outdoor experiences and stewardship.



# On The Line



How Schooling, Housing,  
and Civil Rights Shaped  
Hartford and its Suburbs

