

Issue Brief

State Park and Forest Funding

Connecticut State Parks and Forests

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) manages Connecticut's state [parks and forests](#). There are 110 state parks and 32 state forests operating under DEEP's oversight.

These state parks and forests welcome over 10 million visitors annually, according to DEEP. Attendance increased by approximately 10% compared to prior years after the institution of the Passport to the Parks program in 2018. Additionally, there was a significant increase in attendance in 2020 as people turned to the outdoors as a respite from the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Hammonasset State Park attendance was up by 350,000 in 2020 despite a 50% reduction in parking capacity due to COVID-19 restrictions. According to the [CT Trail census](#), trail use is up from 1.5 million users in all of 2019 to 2.1 million users in the first three quarters of 2020.



Passport to the Parks Program

Beginning January 1, 2018, Connecticut eliminated parking fees at state parks for residents with Connecticut registered vehicles ([PA 17-2, June Special Session](#) §§ 325 - 331, as amended by [PA 18-7](#)). To make this possible, the General Assembly increased vehicle registration fees by \$5 per year (\$10 for the customary two-year registration renewal) for all non-commercial motor vehicles. Vehicles with out-of-state registrations are still charged parking fees at state parks ranging from \$7 to \$22 depending on the park and time of day. Also, fees to reserve overnight campgrounds for both in-state and out-of-state visitors still apply.

The Passport to the Parks vehicle registration fees are deposited in the Passport to the Parks account, which is a separate, nonlapsing General Fund account. The account must be used for (1) the care, maintenance, operation, and improvement of state parks and campgrounds; (2) funding soil and water conservation districts and environmental review teams; and (3) paying the expenses of the Council on Environmental Quality.

State Parks Revenue and Expenditures

	Revenue	Expenditures ²
FY 18¹ (\$)	12,097,813	3,268,059
FY 19 (\$)	23,381,640	13,293,904
FY 20 (\$)	22,234,173	18,569,140

Source: Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA)

¹ Partial fiscal year, beginning January 1, 2018; ² Not including fringe benefits

Staffing costs, including fringe benefits, account for the greatest expenditures related to parks, according to OFA.

Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation Activities

In 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), outdoor recreation activities in Connecticut had a value add to the state's gross domestic product (GDP) of \$3.7 billion. These activities also supported 49,097 jobs. The average compensation per outdoor recreation wage and salary job was \$40,387.

Value Added by Select Outdoor Recreation Activity to Connecticut's GDP (\$ 000's)

Activity	2017	2018	2019
Boating/fishing	247,546	252,131	269,856
Hunting/shooting/trapping	148,378	146,270	168,375
RVing	101,669	104,895	108,873
Motorcycling/ATVing	92,034	89,035	93,706
Equestrian	47,283	50,267	51,050
Climbing/hiking/tent camping	40,050	41,112	41,550
Snow activities	37,578	38,035	39,269
Bicycling	18,508	17,241	18,963

Source: BEA

Recent Development: Self-Serve Parking System for Nonresidents

In 2020, DEEP piloted a self-serve, contactless parking system at non-shoreline parks. This system provided revenue collection from nonresidents who were visiting parks that did not have manual fee collection. Due to a successful pilot, DEEP will roll this out permanently in 2021, adding signage and increasing enforcement.

Learn
More

DEEP's Passport to the Parks [website](#)

Bureau of Economic Analysis's 2019 Connecticut [report](#)

