



Connecticut
**Department of Energy &
Environmental Protection**

**Field Visit to the New Canaan Bristow Park at 47 Old Stamford Rd in Sharon, CT
Helen and Alice Bristow Bird Sanctuary and Wildwood Preserve
New Canaan Conservation Commission
Post Visit Report**

Present Parties: Chris Schipper (Chair of the New Canaan Conservation Commission) and David Beers (Western District Service Forester) on 5/10/2023

Stewardship Objectives

1. Improve wildlife habitat
2. Improve the recreational experience
3. Highlight and showcase the park's resources



FOREST HISTORY

Between eighteenth century colonial settlement and the mid-nineteenth century, most of western Connecticut was cleared for farming, with only a few small patches of forest remaining by the mid-nineteenth century. Only 25% of Connecticut was forested then. Under these conditions, the biggest animal left in the woods was a muskrat. Turkeys, deer, bobcat, beaver, and bear were either rare or entirely 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 agrarian landscape.

It was during this farming period that 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 make them taller. 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-wired rectangular page fencing.

Most of the western CT hill farms were abandoned between the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The farmers either moved west for better farming soils or headed to the cities for industrial work. Immediately after this farm abandonment, the forest began to take over again. Much of the young forestlands were then cut down to make charcoal that was used in metal blast furnaces and by blacksmiths.

In the 1934 air photo, the entire property shows as forested. The 1934 map is attached. Please keep in mind that you need to mentally adjust the map because the map scale projection does not exactly match what we use today. According to [Native-Land.ca](#), your property exists on the ancestral homeland of the Munsee Lenape, Wappinger & Schaghticoke people.

In 1924, the Bird Protection Society of New Canaan purchased the property. It is the third oldest private bird sanctuary in the nation, with 110 documented bird species. The property was transferred to town ownership in 1934. The property was well kept by a warden through the 1960s and then gradually fell into disrepair and disuse. In 2018, the town Conservation Commission took over management of the park and began fundraising for improvements. In 2019, those improvements occurred as described in the forest description below. The Friends of Bristow Park has also recently formed to oversee management and improvement of the park. [[BristowPark.com](#)]

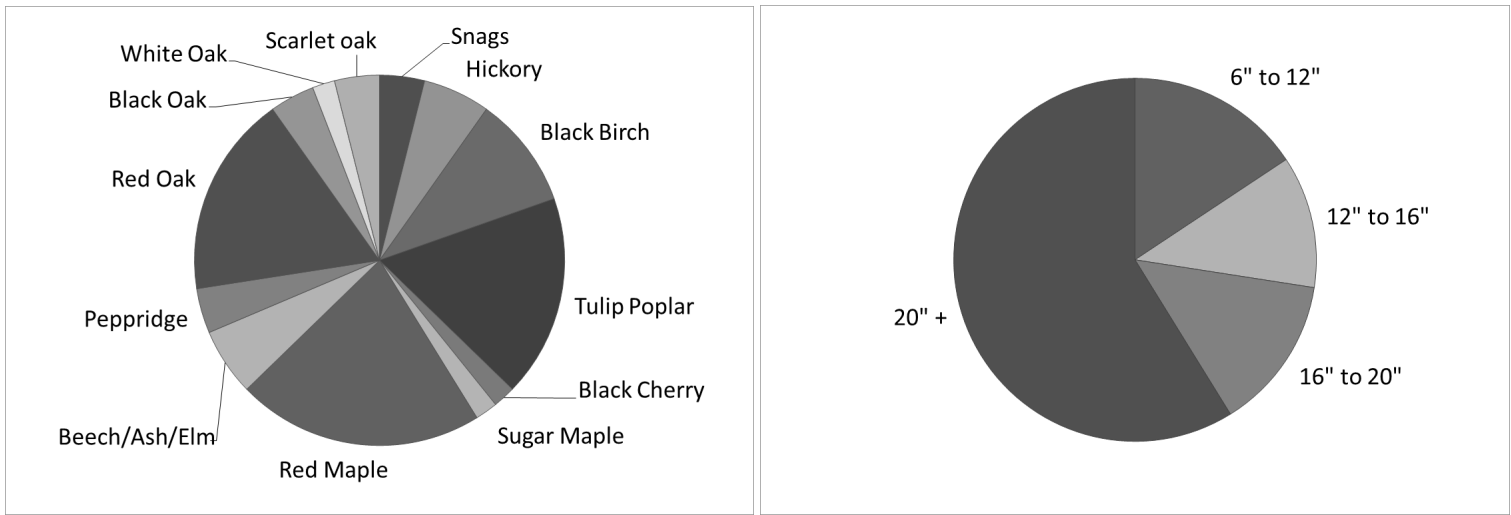
INTRODUCTION

The description of your forest on the next page begins with two graphs. The first shows the relative abundance of each species by percent. Not all species found will be included in this graph because some of the less common species did not fall within a measurement point. The second graph shows the relative abundance of different tree sizes based on the diameter of the tree measured at 4.5 feet off the ground. Please keep in mind that this report is based on a very **brief** sampling of your forest. **Please contact a private forester for a much more detailed and accurate forest stewardship plan that would include timber information, forest type delineation, and detailed individual forest type descriptions based on many more inventory points.**

The CT DEEP Natural Diversity Database (NDDB) does **not** have occurrences of threatened or endangered species on or near this property. Maps showing wetland and farmland soils is attached to this report.

This property has four unique features. **First** is its rich history that is touched upon above. **Second** is its location within the downtown area. **Third** is its tremendous diversity of flora and fauna. **Fourth** is its water features. It has a diversity of wetlands and streams that originate as downtown stormwater. This forest helps clean that stormwater runoff. **The park could encourage and highlight these four strengths.**

FOREST (17 ACRES)



Other Species (not measured)	Hemlock, white pine, beech, pin oak, sassafras, cottonwood, Norway spruce, Norway maple
Understory	A few red maple, tulip poplar, hickory and black cherry saplings Shrubs: holly, spicebush, maple-leaf viburnum, high-bush blueberry, dogwood, musclemwood, sweet pepperbush, witch hazel, azalea
Insect/Disease/Disturbance	A few dead ash from the emerald ash borer Beech leaf disease
Exotic Invasives	Shrubs: burning bush, honeysuckle, barberry, multi-flora rose Burning bush is particularly common in large thickets Trees: Norway maple, tree-of-heaven Vines: bittersweet Succulents: garlic mustard, phragmites reed Others are discussed in the 2016 Audubon report -Wineberry, devil's walking stick, mugwort, knotweed, stilt grass, Russian olive
Canopy Closure History	90% Likely livestock pasture 150+ years ago Entirely forested in the 1934 air photo 2019 Park Improvements Trails, boardwalks, benches and bridges (senior and stroller friendly) Pond Revitalization Fencing on boundaries (exclude deer) Pavilion and wildlife blind 24 bird houses and 9 bird feeders Wildflower meadow in former gravel pit 100' north of pond Ongoing native plantings, including a fern and pollinator plantings

This forest has a diverse mix of trees growing on a moist rich soils. There are patches of tulip poplar and hickory trees. There are patches of red maple trees in wetlands. There are patches of large oak trees. There are patches of sugar maple saplings and poles. It is a diverse patchwork forest quilt.

There are many large specimen trees throughout the forest. There is also a diversity of understory growth that would not exist without the fencing that is keeping the deer out. Without fencing, the deer would browse away much of the native understory growth.

Recommendations

Highlight the specimen trees with informational QR-code posts at each tree.

Create a plan to eradicate many of the invasive exotic flora. I suggest starting with the low-hanging fruit. This would be cutting and painting with herbicide the freshly cut stumps of some of the woody invasives; specifically burning bush, honeysuckle, tree-of-heaven, Norway maple and tree-hanging bittersweet vines.

It would be interesting to work with the CT Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) on a study of the floral diversity of this deer-excluded forest in comparison to a similar forest at Waveny Park that has free ranging deer (aka white-tail goats).

There might be cost-share monies through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) available. Please contact Todd Bobowick at 475-355-3864.



Burning bush thicket

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

FOREST PROTECTION

This property is right in the heart of downtown New Canaan. Mead Park is to the north and the Metro North Rail is to the west. 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. **This forest is a gem of greenspace in the downtown.**

DIVERSITY

A healthy forest has a large diversity of native plant species, particularly trees, that supports a diverse array of fungi and wildlife (animals, insects, microbes). A healthy forest also has multiple layers of native vegetation to maximize biodiversity and structural complexity. This means having trees of different ages, diameters, and heights. A healthy forest has both standing dead trees (snags) and dead downed wood as important habitat elements and to hold moisture during droughts. A healthy forest is resilient because it is better able to handle diseases, pests, and extreme weather events. Increasing species and structural diversity of this forest provides multiple pathways of recovery from disturbance. **This forest has all these elements in spades!**

INVASIVES/VINES

There are some exotic invasive shrubs on the property – see forest description. Invasive species are typically from another part of the world and when established here they have no native enemies to hold their population in check. When left uncontrolled, they spread into natural landscapes and replace what would grow there naturally, including tree regeneration and other native understory vegetation. Native understory growth has many more native insects and arthropods that wildlife needs to forage on. Exotic invasive understory growth can provide better habitat for ticks and associated pathogens while greatly reducing biodiversity.

Control methods include mechanical and chemical methods. 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 aboveground stems, during the growing season, will keep the invasives under control, and perhaps kill them after a few years. The most effective control method is to apply an herbicide to the green foliage, and to cut the larger invasive shrubs and treat stumps with a herbicide to prevent resprouting.

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 because of the large amount and diversity of life they support – more than any other tree. Acorns, especially white oak acorns, provide the most nutritious plant-based protein for almost 90 species of wildlife. Oaks overwhelmingly host the most species of moth and butterfly caterpillars (over 500), which in turn anchor a biodiverse food web. Oak forests have more bird abundance and diversity compared to other forest types. Oaks also produce the thickest, most ecologically beneficial, and longest lasting leaf litter; that has 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, it is important to preserve and encourage oak growth and health in your forest.

Parts of this forest have legacy trees, also known as old field trees or wolf trees. These trees were growing in open pasture, as a source of shade for livestock before the current forest started growing. They are much older than the surrounding forest. Because they used to be 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 many cavities, hollows, fat branches, and thick, rough bark. They are also prolific seed producers, including acorns and nuts. This structural complexity and prolific seed production attracts an enormous number and diversity 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 of the surrounding trees. These agrarian vestiges have become the ecological hubs in your forest. They are also great source of future large snags and large dead downed wood.

ECOLOGICAL SERVICES

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. Your forest contributes to these valuable services with carbon stored in the below-ground roots/soil and in the above ground vegetation, dead wood, and fallen leaves. These services are enhanced by having a diverse mix of native tree species of different sizes and varied arrangements. Sustainable, scientifically based forest management to remove forest products and promote young forests or regeneration of desired species has no long-term negative 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" diameter, and often older) they store the most carbon. Whether you choose to actively manage your forest or not, your forest does a great service to our planet's health just by being a healthy forest.

MAPPING

Attached to this report is a geo-referenced map that the landowner can use with the free smartphone app 'Avenza Maps'. This map shows the landowner where they are on the property. The landowner can also record tracks and waypoints on the property. These phone mapping features allows the landowner to locate/map property boundaries and trails. To get map layers and to view maps, please visit [CT ECO Home \(cteco.uconn.edu\)](http://cteco.uconn.edu).



CONCLUSION

Here are some possibilities for your forest:

- Contact NRCS and/or a private forester about doing a forest stewardship plan
- Highlight the specimen trees with informational QR-code posts at each tree.
- Create a plan to eradicate many of the invasive exotic flora.
- Work with CAES on a study of the floral diversity of this deer-excluded forest in comparison to a similar forest at Waveny Park that has free ranging deer.

Please consider hiring a forester to help you implement any of the recommendations in this report.

There might be cost-share monies through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Please contact Todd Bobowick at **475-355-3864**.

Please feel free to share this report.





View from hilltop down to wildflower meadow







Red oak specimen tree



Roseshell azalea





View from hilltop down to the pavilion



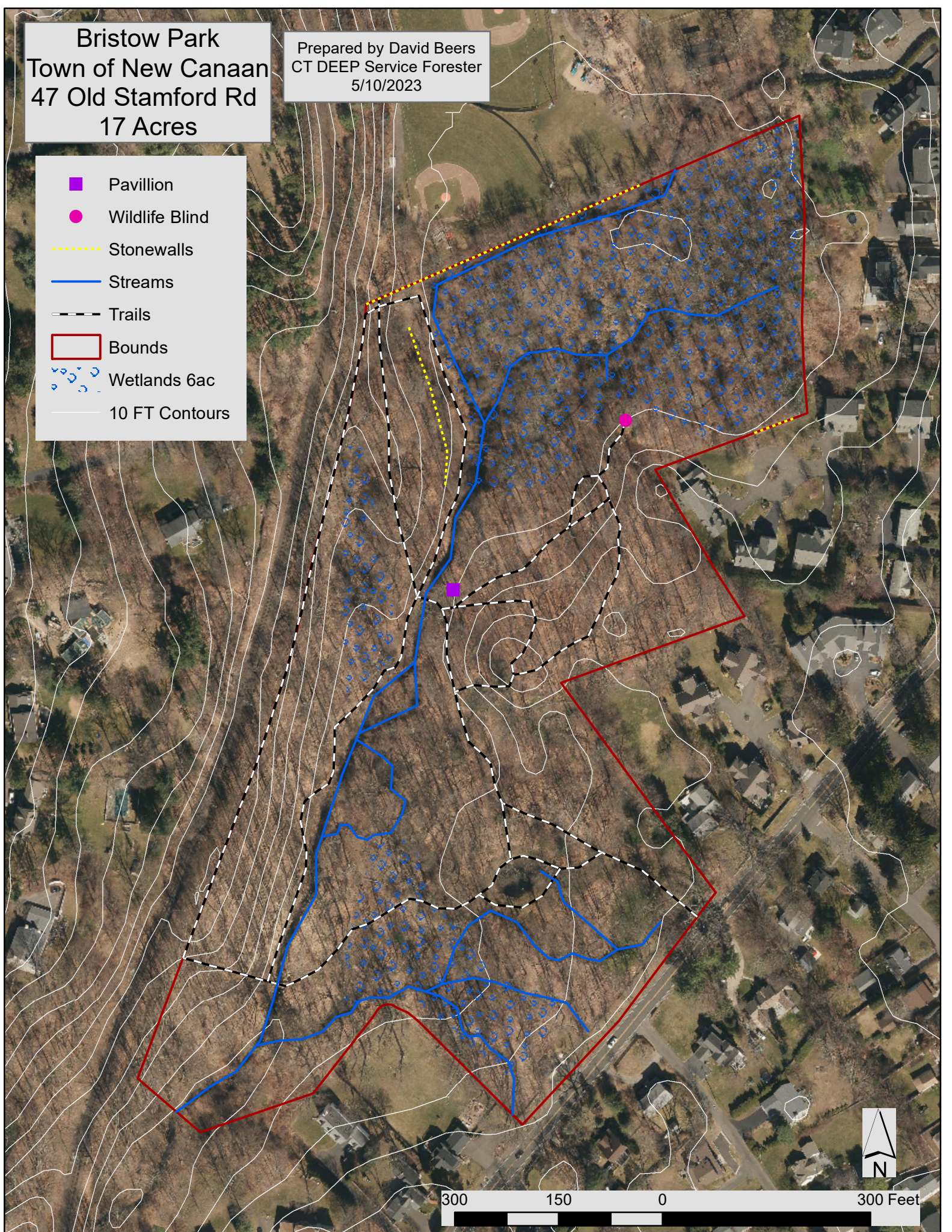


Specimen tulip poplar tree

Bristow Park
Town of New Canaan
47 Old Stamford Rd
17 Acres

Prepared by David Beers
CT DEEP Service Forester
5/10/2023

- Pavillion
- Wildlife Blind
- Stonewalls
- Streams
- - - Trails
- ▭ Bounds
- Wetlands 6ac
- 10 FT Contours

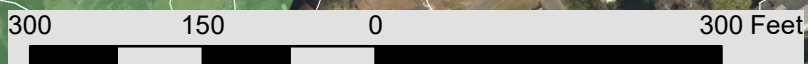
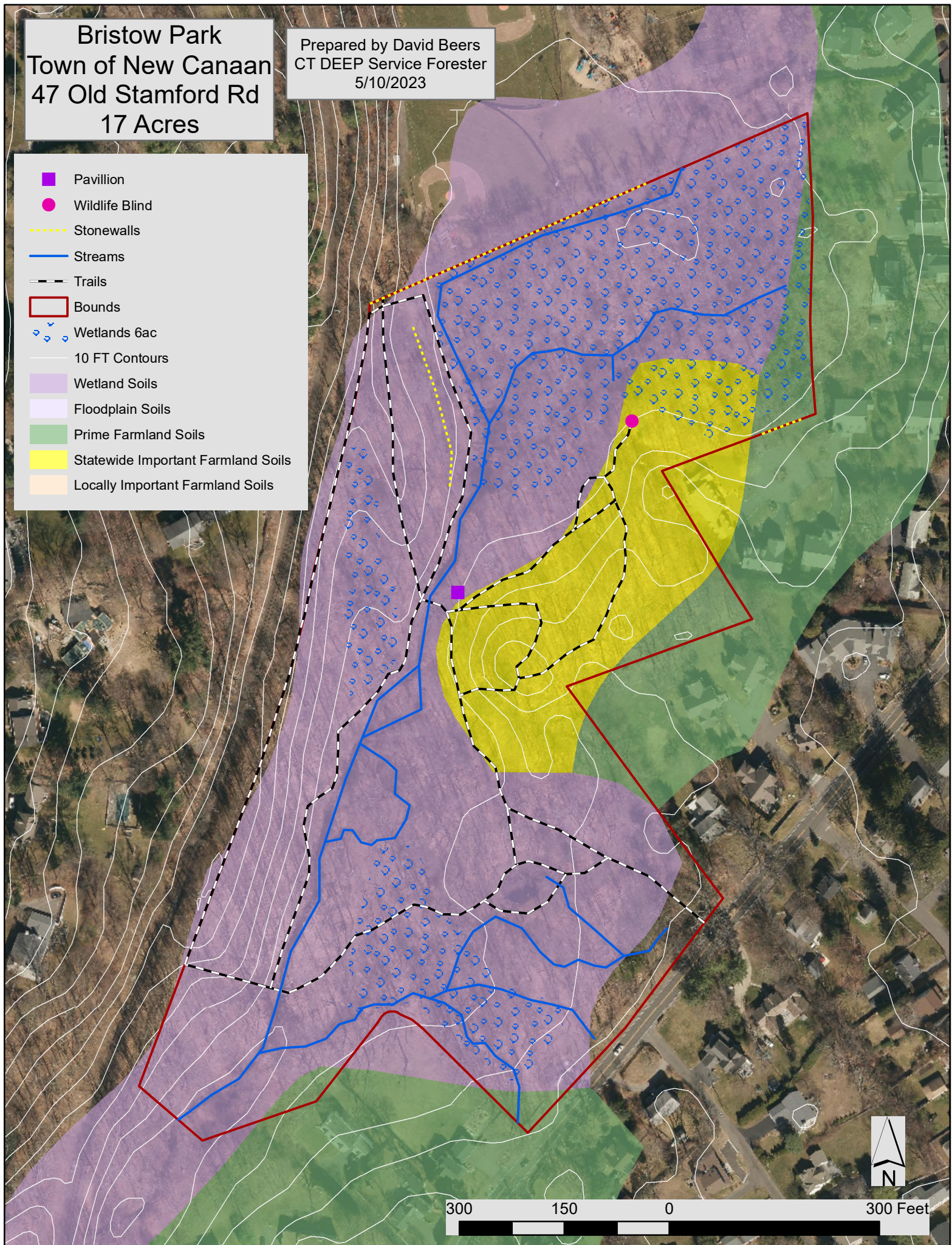


300 150 0 300 Feet

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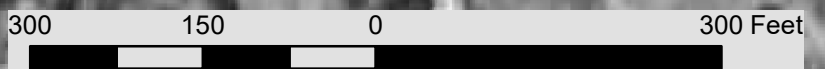
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- ⊙ Wetlands 6ac
- 10 FT Contours
- Wetland Soils
- Floodplain Soils
- Prime Farmland Soils
- Statewide Important Farmland Soils
- Locally Important Farmland Soils



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47 Old Stamford Rd
17 Acres

Prepared by David Beers
CT DEEP Service Forester
5/10/2023
1934 Air photo



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300 150 0

200 ft