

Representative Policy Board  
**Land Use Committee**  
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District  
90 Sargent Drive, New Haven, Connecticut

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**AGENDA**

**Regular Meeting of Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.**

1. Safety Moment
2. Approval of Minutes – August 9, 2023 regular meeting
3. RWA Police Update: Sgt. Ruggiero - *Upon 2/3 vote, convene in executive session pursuant to C.G.S. Section 1-200(6)(C) pertaining to security strategy*
4. Updates on land and RWA properties, including invasive species update
5. Other land items
6. Volunteers to attend Regional Water Authority meetings on October 26, 2023, November 16, 2023, December 21, 2023 and January 25, 2024
7. Next meeting regular meeting: Wednesday, October 11, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.
8. Adjourn

# SAFETY MOMENT

## PEDESTRIAN SAFETY MONTH

September is Pedestrian Safety Month. Below are tips for pedestrians and drivers:

### *Pedestrians:*

- Ditch the distractions. Keep your eyes up and phones down, especially when crossing the street
- Always use marked crosswalks
- Make eye contact and nod or wave at drivers
- At night, get in the habit of walking with a flashlight or wearing a reflective vest
- Remember to look both ways before crossing

### *Drivers:*

- Slow down on busy streets and intersections
- Avoid distractions such as cell phones, eating and talking to passengers
- At crosswalks, be prepared to stop for pedestrians
- Avoid blocking the crosswalk when making a right hand turn
- Keep headlights on and slow down at night when pedestrians are harder to see

Service – Teamwork – Accountability – Respect – Safety

Tap Into  
Safety



Regional Water Authority

## PEDESTRIAN SAFETY



Walk on sidewalks whenever they are available.

If there is no sidewalk, walk facing traffic and as far from traffic as possible.



Keep alert at all times, don't be distracted by electronic devices.



Whenever possible, cross streets at crosswalks or intersections, where drivers expect pedestrians.



If a crosswalk or intersection is not available, locate a well-lit area where you have the best view of traffic.

Be visible at all times. Wear bright colored clothing during the day. At night wear reflective materials or use a flashlight.



## DRIVER AWARENESS



Look out for pedestrians at all times. Safety is a shared responsibility.

When backing up be aware of your surroundings. Watch for pedestrians.



Yield to pedestrians in crosswalks as well as stopping far back from the crosswalk.

When opening your vehicle door be alert for bicyclists.



Safety is a core company value at the Regional Water Authority .  
It is our goal to reduce workplace injuries to zero.

Regional Water Authority

**Representative Policy Board  
Land Use Committee  
South Central Connecticut Regional Water District**

**Minutes of August 9, 2023 Meeting**

The regular meeting of the Land Use Committee of the Representative Policy Board (“RPB”) of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water District (“RWA”) took place on Wednesday, August 9, 2023 at the Derby Tank, 73-75 Chatfield Street, Derby, Connecticut. Chair Betkoski presided.

**Committee Members Present:** P. Betkoski, P. DeSantis, B. Eitzer, C. Havrda, M. Horbal, M. Levine, and G. Malloy

**Committee Members Absent:** J. Oslander and J. Mowat Young

**RPB:** R. Harvey, N. Campbell, T. Clifford, and S. Mongillo

**Authority:** Catherine LaMarr

**Management:** J. Hill, S. Lakshminarayanan, C. Savoy, and J. Triana

Chair Betkoski called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He reviewed the Safety Moment distributed to members.

On motion made by Mr. Malloy, and seconded by Mr. Eitzer, the Committee approved the minutes of its July 12, 2023 regular meeting, with Mr. Horbal abstaining.

Mr. Savoy, the RWA’s Project Engineer, provided an update of the Derby Tank project. He reported that the project, approved by the Representative Policy Board in 2019, was necessary for water supply to the existing Ansonia-Derby service area. The existing system had limited capacity during high peak demands. Mr. Savoy stated that the project includes the installation of a new concrete tank with roof access hatches, sidewall access manways, safety rails and stairs. The project also includes an internal mixing system, instrumentations, SCADA communications, electrical equipment, and piping and a pipe vault.

He reported that the project was delayed due to legal challenges but was approved by the town in May 2022. The project contract is nearing completion and the tank is expected to be online in October 2023 and expected to last for approximately 50-75 years.

Update on *The Land We Need for the Water We Use Program* – Mr. Triana, the RWA’s Real Estate Manager, reported:

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
July 31	95%	82%	81%	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
July 2023	7.08	1.11	3.74
Fiscal YTD (6/1/23 – 7/31/23)	9.56	4.18	7.44

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Cheshire – Corresponded with property owner of 50+/- acres.
- North Branford, Beech St. and Poms La. properties (NB 4) – LUC determined that both applications were complete and forwarded them onto the full RPB. Town Hall was reserved as the location for the public hearings.

Rental houses:

- Hamden, 233 Skiff St. (HA 9A) – Asst. Town Attorney wrote asking us to provide a value for the property to be condemned. We provided \$5,000 as the amount we would accept.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 95% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – The harvest was halted in early June, and the logger pulled his equipment off the property on June 13th. It is uncertain at this point whether the buyer will continue with the salvage operation even if a market is found - 15% complete.
- Killingworth - N. Chestnut Hill Patch Cuts, (KI 6) – 100% complete. Equipment removed, but some firewood logs still at the landing.
  - Placed five new woodcutters in woodlots.
  - Surveyed effects of beech leaf disease in areas of Northford.
  - Investigated and responded to complaints from firewood cutter who raised concerns regarding a potentially hazardous tree on his RWA woodlot.
  - Collected and submitted leaf samples to US Forest Service's New England Science Coordinator for a citizen-scientist, American chestnut identification and location project.
  - Supervised an American chestnut flower cross-pollination effort as part of bioregional effort to preserve the species local genetic diversity.
  - Drafted three PA-490 tax abatement applications.
  - Collected inventory data for the 200 Saddle Court PA-490 application.
  - Continued to investigate sugar maple die-off event on Saltonstall Ridge and contacted CAES experts for on-going follow-up toward identifying casual factor(s).

Recreation

- Botany walk at Rt. 42, Bethany had 5 attendees.
- Bass tournament at Lake Saltonstall had 34 participants. We switched to a catch-photo-release format for the tournament and it worked out well and made it easier for the recreation staff.
- Hamden Hall camp brought 50 kids to the Maltby Lakes for a morning of fishing and hiking.
- New Haven Police PAL's camp group also came twice to the Maltby Lakes to fish with about 30 kids each time.
- Issued work orders for trail mowing at various locations.
- Cleared downed tree at Old Mill Rd., Bethany.
- The Water Wagon attended four events in July.
- Discussed option to use PayTrac to collect credit card payments for boat rentals at Lake Saltonstall.

	July		June	
	2023	2022	2023	2022
Permit Holders	4,879	5,218	4,980	5,218

### Special Activity Permits

- Branford Community Television (BCTV) (Ted Ebberts) Rest stop for annual fundraiser “Tour de Branford” - Sugarloaf Parking Lot (9/24/23)
- Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station-(Dr. Elisabeth Ward) conduct research on invasive plants and regenerating ash trees by monitoring plots in areas where ash been affected by Emerald Ash Borer. In ash stand along Farm River at the northern end of Lake Gaillard (7/6/2023-7/6/2024)
- Connecticut Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation-(Mr. Jack Swatt) flowering chestnut trees on RWA property to harvest nuts to plant in their Germplasm Conservation Orchards to preserve genetic diversity of the species (9/1/23-9/30/23)

### Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
  - Hamden, New Haven Country Club (HA 5) – Executed amended agreement for the parking area.
  - Hamden, 33 Rolling Ridge Rd. (HA 12) – Executed license agreement for lawn with adjacent property owners.
  - North Branford, 261 Forest Rd. (NB 17) – Called and left messages for property owner. By end of the month, their VM inbox was full.
  - West Haven, Shingle Hill tanks (WH 7) – Continued to correspond with the contractor for Yale re: using the tanks for a repeater. Sent them plans for the tank that we received from the original manufacturer. Received red-lined version of license agreement from Yale. Corresponded with West Haven staff about amending the license agreement with the City.
  - Trespassing – Recorded instances of trespassing including hikers without permits, dirt bikes, fishermen with alcohol and without permits, ATV’s, and people on horses without permits
- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in North Branford, Branford, East Haven, Prospect, and Hamden. Released bio-control for hemlock woolly adelgid at Lake Glen. Water chestnut harvesting concluded with extra days on the schedule. Conducted drone flights to document the extent of the infestation.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	79.5 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	10.4 acres

- East Haven, Beach Ave. watermain – Corresponded with Tighe and Bond staff regarding the DEEP permit application. Emailed update to one of the residents.
- Regional Conservation Partnership – Corresponded with other members of the RCP steering committee about future plans for the organization.
- Branford, Blackstone Ave. water main – Met with Murtha and RWA staff about the matter. Town staff confirmed it was a private passway. Sent letter to the resident of 1 Blackstone Ave. Authorized title report before our next move.
- Hamden, Waite St. and Mather St. vegetation (HA 6, HA 7, & HA 9) – Corresponded with Operations staff about mowing vegetation growing through the fence.
- Cheshire, Fernwood La. easement – Responded to property owner about our easements in this area.
- East Haven, Pine View Dr. (EH 3) – Replied to letter from owners of 39 Pine View Dr. regarding boundary markings and fence that was destroyed during the August 2020 tornado.

- Deer hunt - Proficiency testing was held on two Saturdays. Twelve hunters passed and one failed.

Committee members discussed the hiring status of RWA Police and possible camera footage at a future committee meeting. Mr. Lakshminarayanan reported that the RWA recently hired one new officer is currently in the hiring process for additional officers.

The next meeting is on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.

At 6:15 p.m., on motion made by Mr. Levine, and seconded by Mr. Eitzer, the committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

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Peter Betkoski, Chairman

**September 13, 2023**  
**Land Use Committee Meeting**

Reservoir Levels (Percent Full)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average	Drought Status
August 31	91%	74%	74%	None

Rainfall (inches)

	Current Year	Previous Year	Historical Average
August 2023	4.90	2.13	3.96
Fiscal YTD (6/1/23 – 8/31/23)	14.46	6.31	11.41

Land We Need for the Water We Use Program (Dispositions/Acquisitions)

- Cheshire – Corresponded with property owner of 50+/- acres.
- Bethany – Corresponded with property owner of 30+/- acres.
- North Haven – Corresponded with property owner of 14+/- acres.
- North Branford, Beech St. and Poms La. properties (NB 4) – Notice of the public hearings was published in the newspapers.
- Cheshire – Reviewed information from Engineering regarding a proposed pump station.
- New Haven, Rt. 80 PRV – Reviewed draft deed for use with the city at the school property.

Rental houses:

- Hamden, 233 Skiff St. (HA 9A) – Asst. Town Attorney replied saying the town was determining how to pay for the condemnation.
- Woodbridge, 1029 Johnson Rd. – Corresponded with property owners about progress at the property.

Forestry Update

- Killingworth - East Hammonasset Leaf Screen Thinning, (KI 4) – 95% complete.
- Hamden - Overstory removal and Tornado Salvage, (HA 36) – The harvest was halted in early June, and the logger pulled his equipment off the property on June 13th. It is uncertain at this point whether the buyer will continue with the salvage operation even if a market is found - 15% complete.
- Killingworth - N. Chestnut Hill Patch Cuts, (KI 6) – 100% complete. Equipment removed, but some firewood logs still at the landing.
  - Worked with Woodbridge DPW to properly align locks at the Sperry Rd. gate.
  - Submitted 490 forestland applications to Prospect (200 Saddle Ct.) and Guilford (off of West St.). QFR also completed for 490 open space application for 1385 West St., Guilford.
  - Surveyed extent of beech leaf disease die-off particularly in Northford along Diversion and Bianchi Roads and in Woodbridge along Sperry Road.
  - Collected and submitted an additional chestnut leaf sample to US Forest Service's New England Science Coordinator for species confirmation.

Recreation

- Corresponded with person who claimed to be owed a complimentary recreation pass.
- Worked with other RWA staff to address issues on the website to buy and renew permits.
- Cleared trails at Chamberlain and Hammonasset.

- The Water Wagon attended six events in August.
- The order for walleye stocking was submitted.

	August		July	
	2023	2022	2023	2022
Permit Holders	4,883	5,102	4,879	5,218

#### Special Activity Permits

- CT Forest & Park Assoc. (CFPA) (Elizabeth Merow) conduct tour of property, Master Woodland Manager Program, forestry ecology, Rt. 79 Madison-Nathan's Pond, (9/16/23)

#### Other items

- Encroachments/agreements –
  - Hamden, 33 Rolling Ridge Rd. (HA 12) – License agreement for lawn with adjacent property owners filed on the land records.
  - North Branford, 261 Forest Rd. (NB 17) – Continued to leave text messages for property owner.
  - West Haven, Shingle Hill tanks (WH 7) – Reviewed draft agreement to be used with Yale. City executed amendment to the license agreement with the them.
  - Trespassing – Recorded instances of trespassing including hikers with dogs, hikers entering the property after dusk, and ATV's.
- Invasive plants – Treated or documented invasive plant populations in North Branford, Guilford, and Madison. Met a UConn grad student to look at sites where Japanese barberry had been mechanically pulled at Lake Gaillard. The information will help with research in determining land use changes and invasive species identification via satellite imagery. Met with a URI grad student to look at areas in Saltonstall and Gaillard where a swallowwort biocontrol had been released. It appears that the release at Gaillard may have been successful, since predation was found on both sides of the lake, when the release only happened on the west side. Completed drone flight at Furnace Pond to document this year's water chestnut harvest.

Invasive Species Documented/ Mapped (ac)	83.5 acres
Invasive Species Treated (ac/MH)	8.5 acres

- Hamden, Sherman Ave. request – Rejected request from abutter to cut trees and brush on our property close to the Mill River and Clark's Pond.
- East Haven, Rock Rd. SNET equipment – Alerted by local resident that old SNET equipment in an area covered by a 1981 easement was being damaged and vandalized. Attempted to contact SNET.
- Contacted by woman who thought there was a submerged vehicle in Saltonstall. Shape that was seen was vegetation on a satellite photo.
- Orange water main easement – Filed easement off of Smith Farm Rd. on the town land records.
- Deer hunt - The check station volunteers have been chosen and the acceptance and rejection letters went. Pre-hunt meetings have been scheduled. Flagging of the areas has started.
- Vault – Filed the documents regarding the Derby tank. Corresponded with GIS staff about a missing easement for a water main off of Lake St. in Hamden. Filed certification of compliance regarding Hamden Middle School remediation in vault.
- Hamden, water main easement at Hamden Plaza – Alerted by GIS staff that there was a patio visible on aerial photos over the water main at Wood-n-Tap. Contacted the owners to meet and discuss the issue.



- Clearing water main easements – Responded to questions from Operations staff about clearing vegetation along water main easements in Prospect/Cheshire (Cornwall Ave.) and Branford (Milo Dr.).
- Drone flights – Conducted drone flights at Derby tank site and the West River DAF project.

#### Attachments

- August 9, 2023 - Expert: All beech trees in Connecticut will die – WTNH
- August 10, 2023 - Hundreds of trees will be cut in CT state forest. But it's not all bad news, wildlife officials say – CT Public Radio
- September 5, 2023 - How Eastern CT researchers could help save an endangered New England wildflower – CT Public Radio
- August 17, 2023 - An invasive plant could choke out aquatic life in CT River. State, feds are fighting back – CT Public Radio
- August 21, 2023 - 4 CT residents test positive for rare Powassan virus, which comes from tick bites – CT Public Radio

#### Upcoming Agenda Items

October 2023 – Lake Saltonstall – drone demonstration

## **Expert: All beech trees in Connecticut will die**

by: Ashley Baylor – WTNH - Aug 9, 2023

HAMDEN, Conn. (WTNH) — Connecticut's state parks are home to groves of beech trees. Typically, they provide a lush, shady canopy but you'll notice a lot of branches and leaves missing from the trees at Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden.

That's because thousands of beech trees across Connecticut are infected with beech tree disease, endangering them all.

Arborists suggest this disease could wipe out not only every beech tree in the state, but every beech tree in the country.

"I have not seen a beech tree uninfected," said licensed arborist Dan Poole.

This disease is caused by microscopic worms that settle into the beech leaves, and there are thousands per tree.

Poole is an arborist for K&J Tree Service, and the resident expert on beech leaf disease. He says the rapid spread of this disease has stunned both arborists and scientists.

"They first suspected that it was carried by birds landing on branches, or chipmunks, or squirrels, but now, they don't know why or how it is spreading so rapidly," Poole said. "There is expected to be a 100 percent mortality rate of every beech tree in Connecticut, every beech tree in the northeast and North America."

Yes, 100% is correct – every single beech tree in Connecticut is likely infected and will succumb to the disease.

"The bigger a tree gets, the more leaves it needs. So, with no photosynthesis taking place on these leaves, the demise of this species is inevitable," Poole said.

It's a relatively new disease, so history won't solve the problem.

"We can't look back 50 years ago, 'oh this happened, let's do this,'" Poole said.

There is a race against time for a cure, but sadly it's already too late.

"Something has to get sucked into the vascular system of these trees to get into the leaves," Poole said. "The problem is, by the time scientists come up with a cure and it's approved by the FDA, all the trees are going to be dead."

Every beech tree is in a different state of decline, so there is a safety concern if you have any beech trees in your yard.

"These leaves are going to fall off, the tree is going to be in a state of decline, limbs are going to start falling off," Poole said. "It's more important to remove these trees while there is strength in the wood."

Check your yard for beech trees – they're easily identified by their smooth trunk. Poole suggests having them removed before any strong wind gusts cause them to fall on your property. If you have any questions, a licensed arborist can help.

## **Hundreds of trees will be cut in CT state forest. But it's not all bad news, wildlife officials say**

Connecticut Public Radio | By Jennifer Ahrens - August 10, 2023

Nearly 250 acres of trees will be cut and harvested from Housatonic State Forest later this year in an effort to revitalize a portion of Connecticut's northwest corner that has been devastated by the invasive spongy moth caterpillar.

That insect defoliated hundreds of oak trees, leaving them dead or dying following outbreaks in 2021 and 2022.

The Sharon Mountain block, a roughly 3,500 acre region of the state forest, was particularly hard hit. Oak trees are a first-choice food for spongy moth caterpillars, and this area is full of them due to Connecticut's historic iron industry, state officials said.

About a century ago, the area was owned by The Salisbury Iron Corporation. To produce charcoal for the iron ore industry, the company repeatedly clear cut and burned thousands of acres of forest.

That clear-cut land was ideal for oak tree saplings, which "thrived in that full sunlight" and the fire regime the land was put through, said State Forester Jeremy Clark.

Fast forward to today, and Clark said Sharon Mountain became a monoculture of mature oak trees – basically an open buffet that was extremely vulnerable to defoliation by the spongy moth caterpillar.

The sick trees will be cut to keep hikers safe and eliminate a potential fuel source for future wildfires. But the forest will also benefit, state officials said.

Removing the dead and dying oak trees will create blocks of young forest, which will increase wildlife diversity.

"We're going to add towhees, whip-poor-wills, chestnut sided warblers, you're going to actually have an increase in populations of those birds here," said Pete Picone, a wildlife biologist.

The oak timber harvest should also increase the number of sugar maples, aspens and tulip poplars on Sharon Mountain, since those trees would no longer be blocked from the sun by towering oaks.

"By having a diversity of age classes, we're going to have forests which are going to be resilient" to a wide variety of environmental conditions and stresses, said Jeff Ward with The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.

The timber harvest is expected to begin in November or December. Any money made from the sale of the timber will be used to pay for trails and roads in Connecticut state forests.

## **How Eastern CT researchers could help save an endangered New England wildflower**

Connecticut Public Radio | By Jennifer Ahrens - September 5, 2023

The northern blazing star flower was never particularly widespread in New England. It likes to grow in specific conditions, such as dry, sandy or rocky open places. Currently, it can be found on Cape Cod and usually in western Connecticut.

But it has been decimated by habitat loss, herbicides and unchecked deer and rabbit populations who love to eat them.

Attempts to repopulate the region with the northern blazing star flower are hampered by its seed's long germination requirements.

"Normally they need to be what's called stratified. They need to be overwintered," Dylan Tillman, a 2023 graduate of Eastern Connecticut State University said.

So Tillman worked with associate professor Dr. Bryan Connolly to find out if a technique used on echinacea, commonly known as the coneflower, would work on the northern blazing star because they are in the same plant family.

Tillman spent his senior year soaking the northern blazing star seed in a plant hormone called ethephon. His results showed the process can cut down the germination time from 60 days to 14.

"Being able to germinate them much faster means that we can grow them faster, and then introduce them more," Tillman said.

Tillman's research results will be published in an upcoming issue of The Native Plants Journal.

## **An invasive plant could choke out aquatic life in CT River. State, feds are fighting back**

Connecticut Public Radio | By Chris Polansky - August 17, 2023

Conservationists at the state and federal levels have teamed up to combat the spread of a “noxious weed” taking root in the Connecticut River and its tributaries.

That weed is hydrilla, “an aggressive plant species that has wreaked havoc from Asia to every continent except Antarctica,” according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The agency is working with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and conservation groups to track and remediate the threat the plant poses to wildlife and recreation on the state’s waterways.

The plant can render bodies of water unnavigable, choke out native flora, and poses a toxic threat to wildlife, including birds of prey.

“Connecticut’s the ground zero” for hydrilla in the Connecticut River system, according to Gregory Bugbee, an invasive aquatic plant expert with the state’s Department of Environmental Science and Forestry.

“There’s about 1,000 acres in the river system right now, in the marinas, in coves, in tributaries, in many cases basically engulfing entire coves and tributaries so it’s basically impassable,” Bugbee said, noting the intruder had also reached parts of the river in southern Massachusetts.

Researchers have begun releasing a red dye in parts of the river system, including Keeney Cove in East Hartford and the Chester Boat Basin in Chester, in an attempt to track the spread of the weed and devise a plan for eradicating it which may involve introducing an herbicide into the river.

State Rep. Christine Palm, a Chester Democrat who serves as vice chair of the General Assembly’s Environment Committee, said that states with hydrilla problems, like Florida, can spend millions of dollars a year fighting it. Its impact on waterways can wreak havoc on recreation and tourism, she added.

“Even if there were no economic impact, we are charged with protecting the earth that we share, and this is something that is starting to creep ever inward to rivers, to lakes, to ponds,” Palm said.

Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut’s senior U.S. senator, pledged to pursue significant federal funding for hydrilla remediation. He said he’s seeking upwards of \$25 million annually, an increase from \$6 million already appropriated for the work.

“This stuff is a clear and present danger,” Blumenthal said. “More than just a science fiction fantasy, it poses real-life dangers to Connecticut ecology, economics, and environmental quality.”

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, invasive hydrilla was first imported to the United States in the 1950s for use in aquariums, and was subsequently discarded into waterways in Florida. The USGS says the plant is established in 28 states, as well as Guam, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

#### **4 CT residents test positive for rare Powassan virus, which comes from tick bites**

Connecticut Public Radio | By Matthew Long-Middleton - August 21, 2023

Four Connecticut residents have tested positive for the rare Powassan virus, marking the first cases of the year, state officials said.

All four residents were hospitalized and treated; they have been released from the hospital and are recovering, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) said. Each person had reported being bitten by a tick.

Powassan virus can cause severe disease, including encephalitis, or brain infection, and meningitis, or infection of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord, federal health officials said.

Last year, officials reported six cases of the virus in Connecticut; two of the infections were fatal.

Between 2016 and 2022, officials reported 19 cases of the virus in the state.

This year's cases include two men, both at least 60 years old who live in Middlesex County and Litchfield County, who became ill in early July. Two women, both at least 50 years old who live in Windham County and Litchfield County, fell ill in late July.

All four residents were hospitalized with a central nervous system disease, officials said.

Laboratory tests performed at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Laboratory in Fort Collins, Colorado, confirmed the presence of antibodies to the virus in all patients.

"The identification of four Connecticut residents with Powassan virus-associated illness emphasizes the importance of taking actions to protect yourself from tick bites from now through the late fall," DPH Commissioner Dr. Manisha Juthani said in a statement.

Officials have been getting more reports and samples of ticks for testing this year compared to last year, according to Dr. Goudarz Molaei, the director of the Connecticut Tick and Tick-borne Pathogen Surveillance Program at the Agricultural Experiment Station,

Molaei said there's a "persistent and expanding threat posed" by the various ticks and that these developments highlight the "increasing public health challenges associated with ticks and tick-borne diseases."

According to DPH, Powassan virus is spread to people through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick or deer tick. It takes between one week and one month after the bite of an infected tick to develop symptoms of the virus. The virus can be transmitted in as little as 15 minutes after the tick first attaches. Powassan virus-associated illness is typically reported from early spring until late fall when ticks have been most active.

While most people infected likely experience no symptoms or a mild flu-like illness, some people will develop severe illness affecting the central nervous system, according to state public health officials. About one out of 10 cases of severe illness are fatal and approximately half of people infected experience long-term health problems.

Severe cases may begin with fever, vomiting, headache, or weakness and rapidly progress to confusion, loss of coordination, difficulty speaking, or seizures, officials said.

There is no vaccine nor a specific treatment for POWV associated illness. Severe illness is treated by supportive therapy which may include hospitalization, respiratory support, and hydration.

Tips to avoid tick bites - The Connecticut Department of Public Health provides these tips:

- Avoid areas where ticks are likely to be, such as in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas. Ticks are active from spring to fall and may also be active on warmer days during winter.
- Consider the use of CDC-recommended mosquito/tick repellents, containing DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, IR3535, or 2-undecanone, and apply according to directions, when outdoors. However, repellents containing >30% DEET have been reported to be the most effective.
- Check yourself, your children, and your pets for ticks immediately after coming indoors. Showering within two hours of coming indoors may be effective in reducing the risk of tick-borne disease.
- Examine clothing and gear carefully after coming indoors. Tumble-dry clothing in a dryer on high heat for at least 10 minutes to kill ticks that were carried inside.
- Talk to your veterinarian about the best tick prevention products for your dog.
- Consider treating items such as boots, clothing, and hiking or camping gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin.