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SpecialReport

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2026 Acts Affecting Environment

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Notice to Readers

This report provides summaries of new laws (public acts and special acts) significantly affecting the environment enacted during the 2026 regular legislative session. OLR's other Acts Affecting reports, including Acts Affecting Animals and Agriculture and Acts Affecting Energy and Utilities, are, or will soon be, available on OLR's website.

Each summary indicates the public act (PA) or special act (SA) number. Not all provisions of the acts are included. The report does not include vetoed acts unless the veto was overridden. Complete summaries of public acts are, or will soon be, available on OLR's website.

Readers are encouraged to obtain the full text of acts that interest them from the General Assembly's website or the Connecticut State Library.

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Boating

Abandoned Vessels

The legislature passed a law this year that expands the state's oversight of abandoned vessels, including by (1) requiring owners of unregistered boats (generally smaller boats, such as kayaks) to attach their contact information to the boat before entering Connecticut waters; (2) increasing the minimum and maximum fines that generally may be imposed for abandoning a boat; and (3) allowing state and municipal law enforcement agencies to recover a broader range of costs for removing abandoned boats (PA 26-60, §§ 3 & 5-7).

Boating Regulations

This session, the legislature passed a new law that makes several changes to Connecticut's boating regulations, including:

1. generally prohibiting people from sitting or standing on, or hanging their legs over, a boat's gunwale (top edge or rim) while it is underway;

2. prohibiting personal watercraft (such as jet skis) and jetted articulated vessel owners from knowingly allowing anyone to operate their boat without the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP)-issued certificate required to do so; and

3. amending waterskiing restrictions on North Stonington's Wyassup Lake (PA 26-60, §§ 1, 2 & 4, effective upon passage).

Lake Authority Boating Fines

A provision in the annual court operations act details the steps needed to fulfill an existing requirement that lake authorities receive revenue from the fines they issue for boating violations. Specifically, it requires the state to remit all the fines collected from these violations to the lake authority that issued the fine (PA 26-92, § 28, effective October 1, 2026).

Vessel Record Privacy

A new law generally subjects vessel-related records to the privacy protections that apply to most other records related to documents issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) (such as driver's licenses and registrations). In doing so, it prohibits DMV from disclosing personal information contained in the records unless the disclosure is for a purpose specifically authorized in law. The new law specifically allows DMV and DEEP to disclose the name and address of the person who last registered a vessel to anyone who proves they currently own it (PA 26-24, §§ 7-11, effective October 1, 2026).

Climate Resilience and Mitigation

CHEAPR Rebate

This year, the legislature passed a law that changes the requirements for prioritizing rebates and vouchers issued under the Connecticut hydrogen and electric automobile purchase rebate (CHEAPR) program by (1) eliminating the requirement that the rebates and vouchers be prioritized for residents of environmental justice communities (EJCs) and (2) requiring the rebate or voucher amounts for income-qualified residents be at least double the standard amount. The act allows, in consultation with the CHEAPR advisory board, the DEEP commissioner to prioritize granting rebates or vouchers to non-income qualified residents of EJC communities over other non-income-qualified residents (PA 26-124 § 3, effective upon passage).

Diesel-Fueled Transit Buses

The legislature allowed the state to procure, purchase, or lease diesel-fueled transit buses by eliminating a prohibition against it doing so that began January 1, 2024. Existing law still generally requires at least 30% of state-purchased or -leased buses to be zero-emission buses on and after January 1, 2030 (PA 26-63, § 1, effective upon passage).

EV Charging Stations at Certain New State Facilities

This year, the legislature passed a law that changes the electric vehicle (EV) charging station requirement for new state facilities projected to cost over $100,000 by generally requiring that 8% of these facilities' designated car parking spaces be installed with equipment capable of supporting future charging stations, rather than requiring that 20% of parking spaces designated for cars or light-duty trucks be installed with level two EV charging stations. Additionally, starting by January 1, 2029, and then every three years, it requires the transportation, administrative services, and DEEP commissioners to jointly submit recommendations to the legislature proposing an appropriate requirement for future EV charging infrastructure at new state facilities based on certain considerations (PA 26-63, § 3, effective upon passage).

State Agency EV Charging Station Parking Spots

A new law allows plug-in hybrid and battery EVs to be parked in spots with state agency EV charging stations while not actively charging at the discretion of the state agency that designated the charging station as available for public use. Prior law prohibited parking in these spots unless the vehicle was charging (PA 26-63, § 2, effective upon passage).

UConn Study and DOT Vegetation Management Guidelines

A new law (1) delays the due date for the UConn Department of Natural Resources and the Environment's final report on its study of carbon sequestration by trees and other vegetation along highways and other areas in Connecticut and (2) requires the UConn department to additionally submit its study results and recommendations to the Department of Transportation (DOT). Relatedly, it requires the DOT commissioner to consider the results of UConn's study and determine whether DOT's vegetation management guidelines need to be accordingly revised (PA 26-63, §§ 15 & 36, effective October 1, 2026, except the provisions related to UConn's study are effective July 1, 2026).

Wildfire Protection

This year, the legislature passed a law to modify wildfire management practices in the state. Principally, the act (1) bans open brush burning within 100 feet of a woodland or grass land area when the commissioner identifies the forest fire risk as high or very high (previous law only said extreme risk); (2) allows the state forest fire warden to ban open flames on all or any part of land the commissioner controls (for example, state parks), if the DEEP commissioner finds it necessary; and (3) increases the range of the fines for violating woodland and brushland closure and open-air fire restrictions, from between $5 and $100 to between $500 and $1,000 (PA 26-124, §§ 11-14, effective October 1, 2026).

Zero-Emission School Buses and DEEP Working Group

Existing law requires school districts to gradually transition to zero-emission school buses and sets deadlines for doing so. A new law generally (1) requires 90%, rather than 100%, of school buses to be zero-emission by 2040 and sets an interim deadline for distressed municipalities; (2) eliminates the requirement that EJCs fully transition to zero-emission school buses by 2030; (3) requires municipalities to submit plans outlining how they will meet the zero-emission requirements to DEEP; and (4) requires schools to implement safety plans before using a zero-emission school bus. It also modifies the zero-emission school bus grant program requirements, including broadening its purposes beyond providing matching funds for federal grant applications (PA 26-63, §§ 24 & 37, effective July 1, 2026, except the safety plan requirement is effective upon passage; and PA 26-124, § 4, effective upon passage).

The new law additionally requires the DEEP commissioner, in support of the law on zero-emission school bus requirements and the grant program, to create a working group to evaluate and make recommendations on Connecticut school bus fleets' increased use of alternative fuels and technologies, including biodiesel, propane, and electric school buses. It requires the working group, by February 1, 2027, to submit a report to the Environment, Energy and Technology, and

Transportation committees with the group's findings and recommendations, including any potential legislative action (PA 26-63, § 36, effective upon passage).

DEEP Program Administration

Beneficially Reclaimed Materials

Existing law allows the DEEP commissioner to create a pilot program to allow beneficially reclaimed materials (for example, asphalt, brick, crushed recycled glass, or street sweepings) to be used as fill materials and facilitate the reclamation or redevelopment of environmentally impaired or underutilized land. Prior law required someone seeking authorization to, before submitting their application, have zoning approval or other necessary permits from each municipality in which beneficially reclaimed material will be used. A new law passed this session instead allows applicants to either (1) submit these documents with their application or (2) indicate in their application when they reasonably estimate to have them (PA 26-129, § 2, effective upon passage).

DEEP General Permit Expansion

This year, the legislature generally expanded DEEP's ability to issue general permits instead of individual permits to certain entities. Under the new act, to grant a permit DEEP must (1) determine that the activity both separately and cumulatively causes minimal environmental effects and (2) specify the determination in the general permit's public notice (PA 26-124, § 9, effective July 1, 2026).

Resource Recovery Study

This session, the legislature required the DEEP commissioner to convene a working group to examine the need for, and viability and impact of, suspending the resource recovery fee of one or more resource recovery facilities in the state for up to five years (the examination may consider other means to meet identified needs, such as the availability of state grants, tax abatement, or financing programs). By January 1, 2027, the commissioner must submit a report on the result of the examination, identified need, availability of other state resources or programs, and any legislative recommendations to the Environment Committee (SA 26-25, effective upon passage).

Riparian Area Training

This year, the legislature passed a law to require the DEEP commissioner to hire an employee to train inland wetland commissions. The training must be on the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act, including on preserving riparian areas (PA 26-61, effective July 1, 2026).

Sewage Disposal and Nitrogen Removal

A new law requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) and DEEP commissioners, by July 1, 2028, to consult with nitrogen removal experts to establish procedures and standards for reviewing and approving new nitrogen removal technologies for DPH-regulated on-site subsurface sewage disposal systems (PA 26-13, § 8, effective upon passage).

State Comprehensive Energy Strategy

By law, the DEEP commissioner must prepare the state's comprehensive energy strategy every four years. Among other things, the strategy must consider how Connecticut's energy policies affect greenhouse gas emissions and the state's economy. A new law passed this session requires the DEEP commissioner when doing so to consult with the following individuals: (1) agriculture, economic and community development, housing, and DOT commissioners; (2) Office of Policy and Management secretary; (3) Consumer Counsel; (4) Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) chairperson; and (5) Connecticut Green Bank chief executive officer. The DEEP commissioner must also submit the final report to the Commerce Committee, in addition to the Energy and Technology and Environment committees as already required under law (PA 26-121, effective October 1, 2026).

Traditionally Non-Harvested Species Conservation Program

A law passed this session changes DEEP's traditionally non-harvested species conservation program by:

1. expanding it to (a) implement the state's most recent federally approved wildlife action plan and (b) include provisions on wildlife health, monitoring climate change, and biodiversity conservation;

2. eliminating a requirement for the DEEP commissioner to annually report to the legislature on the program and instead creating a working group to determine how the program should be funded and implemented with a deadline of January 15, 2027, to report to the Environment Committee; and

3. requiring any money donated to the state for the program be deposited into the General Fund and allocated to the program, as existing law required for any revenue from DEEP's program to sell wildlife stamps and other artwork or publications (PA 26-101, §§ 3-5, effective October 1, 2026, except the provision on the working group is effective July 1, 2026).

Land Use

OSWA and Charter Oak Grants

This session, the legislature passed a law that expands the eligibility for Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program (OSWA) and Charter Oak open space grants. OSWA and the Charter Oak program generally give state grants to municipalities, land trusts, and water companies to buy land to be preserved as open space or water supplies in perpetuity, as applicable.

The law, among other things, (1) permits municipalities and nonprofit land conservation organizations to target open spaces that are immediately adjacent to EJCs for OSWA grants, and (2) for OSWA and Charter Oak grants, expands certain eligibility authorization to all conservation easements or restrictions, rather than those that resulted from federal, municipal, or private programs and removing matching funds requirements (PA 26-124, §§ 1 & 2, effective upon passage).

Release-Based Cleanup and Remediations

Adriaen's Landing

This year, a new law specifies conditions under which soil and groundwater pollution can be managed in place to satisfy environmental remediation requirements in Adriaen's Landing, a 33-acre area in Hartford. The new law also requires the Capital Region Development Authority to (1) create a protocol when disturbing polluted soil or groundwater managed under these conditions and (2) annually inspect the portions of Adriaen's Landing managed under this provision (PA 26-68, § 164, effective July 1, 2026).

Brownfields Working Group Study

A new law requires the existing brownfields working group to study brownfield development and remediation issues, including any caused by the implementation of the release-based cleanup program. The working group must report their findings by January 1, 2027, to the Commerce and Environment committees. The law allows the working group to collect any necessary data or information from the DEEP and Department of Economic and Community Development commissioners (SA 26-7, effective from passage).

Renewable Energy

Agrivoltaics Projects Study

A new law requires DEEP, in consultation with the agriculture commissioner, to study the feasibility of implementing an incentive program for agrivoltaics projects (generally, solar facilities on agricultural land) in the state. The study must consider potential project benefits and consequences and make recommendations on various things, including project size restrictions, permitting processes, and preserving core forest. DEEP must report its study to the Energy and Technology and Environment committees by January 1, 2027 (PA 26-127, § 11, effective October 1, 2026).

Solid Waste Management

Balloon Releases

This session, the legislature banned knowingly releasing, organizing the release of, or intentionally causing the release of, any amount of lighter-than-air gas-filled balloons by individuals, nonprofit organizations, firms, and corporations. Prior law allowed release of up to nine of these balloons within a 24-hour period.

In addition, the law, beginning January 1, 2027, requires all retailers that sell those balloons, or offer them for sale, to attach weights to them so they cannot rise into the atmosphere before giving the balloons to a customer. Failure to do so subjects the retailer to a Department of Consumer Protection civil penalty of $20 per violation (PA 26-90, effective October 1, 2026).

Bottle Bill Changes

Two acts from this session make several changes to the state's beverage container redemption law ("bottle bill"). The new laws, among other things, replace the prior redemption center registration with a licensure requirement and require license applicants to pay a $2,500 application fee, and increase the fines for violating the bottle bill's requirements and give municipal police enforcement authority over those violations.

Starting April 1, 2026, the new laws also reduce the handling fee distributors pay to certain redemption centers by up to one cent if the redemption center does not use certain scanning technology to redeem beverage containers. This reduction ends July 1, 2027, or when the redemption center uses the specified scanning technology to redeem beverage containers at its facility, whichever comes first. Additionally, the new laws prohibit willfully collecting or charging a refund value on beverage containers not purchased in Connecticut and make violations a class A or B misdemeanor or class D felony depending on the volume of containers (PA 26-2, effective upon

passage, and PA 26-148, effective October 1, 2026, except the provision modifying redemption center handling fees is effective upon passage).

Environmental Laboratories

This session, the legislature passed a new law that makes various changes to laws on environmental laboratories that test drinking water, sewage, soil, and other environmental samples for contaminants. For example, it (1) requires certain out-of-state laboratories to get DPH's approval before operating collection sites in the state and (2) expands the range of disciplinary actions that DPH may take against in-state laboratories (PA 26-142, §§ 7 & 20, effective October 1, 2026).

Paint EPR Program Expansion

This year, the legislature expanded the existing architectural paint extended producer responsibility (EPR) program and plan to include aerosol coating products and requires producers of those products to either participate in an approved paint stewardship plan that includes aerosol coatings by that plan's implementation date or be banned from selling those products in Connecticut. Among other things, the act (1) requires by July 1, 2028, all producers of aerosol coating products to join a representative organization, and that organization to submit to the DEEP commissioner for approval an EPR plan (or updated plan) that includes all paint products and (2) authorizes DEEP, beginning July 1, 2027, to charge a new yearly fee of up to $50,000 to the representative organization that implements an approved paint EPR plan for administering and enforcing the paint EPR program (PA 26-107, effective date October 1, 2026).

Subsurface Sewage Enforcement Officer Certification

The legislature this year passed a new law that creates a three-phase certification program for subsurface sewage enforcement officers who perform inspections and similar work related to subsurface sewage disposal systems (septic systems). Starting on October 1, 2026, it generally requires anyone performing the duties of these officers to (1) become certified by DPH and (2) be appointed by a local health director as the local department's or district's employee or contractor. It provides a grace period for people approved before October 1, 2026, under existing regulations to serve in a similar role (PA 26-142, §§ 21-25, effective upon passage, except certain conforming changes are effective July 1, 2026).

Vegetation Management

Aquatic Invasive Plant Species

This session, the legislature passed a law outlining certain rapid response actions and associated timeframes to eradicate, contain, or control hydrilla or other aquatic invasive plant species

introduced into an ecosystem or waterbody while the infestation remains localized. The new law required the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station's Office of Aquatic Invasive Species (OAIS) to set rapid response qualification criteria for (1) newly discovered aquatic invasive species and (2) hydrilla discovered within the last three years. OAIS must also consult with DEEP to develop a (1) state rapid response plan for hydrilla and (2) publicly accessible statewide aquatic invasive species management plan (PA 26-65, effective October 1, 2026).

Cranes and Hoisting Equipment

New legislation makes several changes to the state's laws on cranes and hoisting equipment, including how they are regulated by the Department of Administrative Services and the Examining Board for Crane Operators. Among other things, it expands the size of the board by two members, from five to seven, and eliminates licensure and registration exemptions for people engaged in arboriculture (cultivating trees and shrubs). The act also changes the department's and board's investigative and enforcement authority, such as by allowing stop work orders to be issued, increasing the maximum civil penalty for violations, and expanding who can be penalized to include equipment owners' lessees and contractors (PA 26-12, §§ 18-24, effective October 1, 2026).

Sterile Cultivars

New legislation this session directs the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station to, by January 15, 2027, report to the legislature on the use, planting, import, transport, sale, and purchase of sterile cultivars and the distribution of Japanese barberry in the state. The experiment station must provide for a public comment period when preparing the report and any legislative recommendations (PA 26-129, § 1, effective upon passage).

Water Resources

Apprentice Water System Operators

A new law allows DPH to certify individuals as water treatment plant, water distribution system, or small water system operators after the applicant completes an applicable apprenticeship. To qualify, an applicant must (1) be a state Department of Labor (DOL)-registered apprentice who completed a DOL-approved apprenticeship for the applicable system type and (2) have passed a written exam after completing the apprenticeship. An apprentice must be directly supervised by a certified water operator of the appropriate system type (PA 26-142, § 26, effective July 1, 2026).

Bottled Water and Water Sources

Legislation passed this session makes changes to DPH's oversight of bottled water and water sources, such as specifically (1) requiring the commissioner to issue a schedule of perfluoroalkyl

substances (PFAS) and other unregulated contaminants and acceptable levels for each, based on federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations, and requiring that bottlers' testing of water sources test for compliance with this schedule and standards in DPH regulations and (2) allowing DPH to set conditions on its approval of bottled water sources (PA 26-142, §§ 1-6, effective October 1, 2026).

Water Company Service Cessation Report

Under existing law, certain small water companies and suppliers must apply for both PURA's and DPH's consent before ceasing operations. This session, the legislature passed new legislation requiring PURA and DPH to report on these water company cessation requests to the legislature. The report must include, for the past two calendar years, a listing of each instance in which a water company applied for PURA's or DPH's consent to cease operations and details on the application's processing generally. The law also requires PURA to initiate a docket to adopt regulations requiring the authority to provide written instructions informing a water company of the process to request an expedited review of its request to cease operations or discontinue providing water services (PA 26-123, effective upon passage).

Well Water Testing Results

A new law allows health authorities to disclose private residential or semipublic well testing results to eligible parties without getting the DPH commissioner's approval, and expands the allowable recipients to include certain nearby property owners (PA 26-13, § 31, effective October 1, 2026).

Miscellaneous

Asbestos Professionals

A new law makes various changes to laws on asbestos professional credentialing, including certain changes to conform to existing practice or regulation. For example, it (1) prohibits anyone who provides services as an asbestos contractor from performing any duties associated with those of asbestos abatement site supervisors unless the person is certified as a site supervisor and (2) requires asbestos training programs to comply with EPA's model accreditation plan, as well as DPH regulations as under existing law (PA 26-142, §§ 8-16, 19 & 27, effective October 1, 2026).

Crematory Permits Working Group

This session, the legislature passed a law requiring the DEEP commissioner to establish a working group to evaluate mercury vapor emissions and fine particulate matter emissions factors associated with crematories used for human remains. The working group must also develop

recommendations for using emission factors in the review of certain permit applications, registrations, and other approvals (SA 26-33, effective upon passage).

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