

## Carrying Handguns in Connecticut State Parks or Forests

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### Issue

This report answers a series of questions about a person's ability to legally carry a handgun (i.e., pistol or revolver) in a Connecticut state park or forest. It updates OLR Report [2010-R-0472](#).

The Office of Legislative Research is not authorized to provide legal opinions, and this should not be considered one.

### *Can a person legally carry a handgun in a state park or forest?*

Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) regulations prohibit, with exceptions, hunting or carrying firearms or other weapons in a state park or forest ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 23-4-1\(c\)](#)).

According to DEEP, a person may legally possess a handgun in a state park or forest only when carrying the handgun for hunting small game (e.g., rabbits, squirrels) or participating in other authorized activities, such as at a firearms range or during a hunter education class. The person may only do so at predetermined times in areas set aside by DEEP and posted for such purposes ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 26-66-2\(d\)](#)). What is permissible for hunters depends on the location and season. Also, to legally carry a handgun, a person must obtain a permit to do so ([CGS § 29-28](#)).

Under state regulations, a person cannot use a handgun using centerfire ammunition to hunt on state-owned land. A person is also prohibited from using, on state-owned lands, handguns with ammunition larger than .22 caliber rimfire long rifle cartridges ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 26-66-2\(a\)](#)).

For more detailed information about hunting requirements, see DEEP's [2020 Hunting and Trapping Guide](#).

***What are the penalties for illegally carrying weapons in a state park or forest in violation of Section 23-4-1(c) of the regulations?***

Anyone who illegally carries weapons in a state park or forest commits an infraction ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 23-4-5\(b\)\(1\)](#)). Currently, the total amount due for this infraction is \$75, as set by the judges of the [Connecticut Superior Court](#).

Additionally, DEEP may evict the violator from the property for 24 hours ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 23-4-5\(a\)\(1\)](#)). State law also allows DEEP to prohibit a violator from entering any state park for up to one year after their conviction date ([CGS § 23-4\(a\)](#)).

***Does DEEP exercise control over parts of the National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge System within the state (e.g., the Appalachian Trail)?***

According to DEEP, it has authority over the parts of the Appalachian Trail that are on state-owned park and forest property. Other parts of the trail are on federal property and managed collectively under a Memorandum of Understanding between DEEP, the National Park Service, Department of Public Safety, Appalachian Trail Conference, and Appalachian Mountain Club. Trail parts on private property are not under DEEP's control.

***Does federal law allow someone to legally carry a handgun in parts of the National Park Service or National Wildlife Refuge System? Can someone legally carry a handgun while on the part of the Appalachian Trail that passes through a state park or forest?***

Federal law allows anyone who can legally possess firearms under applicable federal, state, and local laws, to legally possess firearms on parts of the Appalachian Trail ([16 U.S.C. § 1a-7b](#)). This applies only to land the U.S. government owns and the National Park Service manages. It does not apply to the Appalachian Trail's parts that are on land owned or managed by other federal, state, or local agencies.

State laws and regulations apply to those parts of the Appalachian Trail that pass through state-owned parks and forests (e.g., a person cannot carry a handgun in these areas except as described above ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 23-4-1\(c\)](#))). According to DEEP, there are property boundary markers

on state park and forest lands, as well as on the Appalachian Trail. A person is responsible for knowing his or her location and which law applies.

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