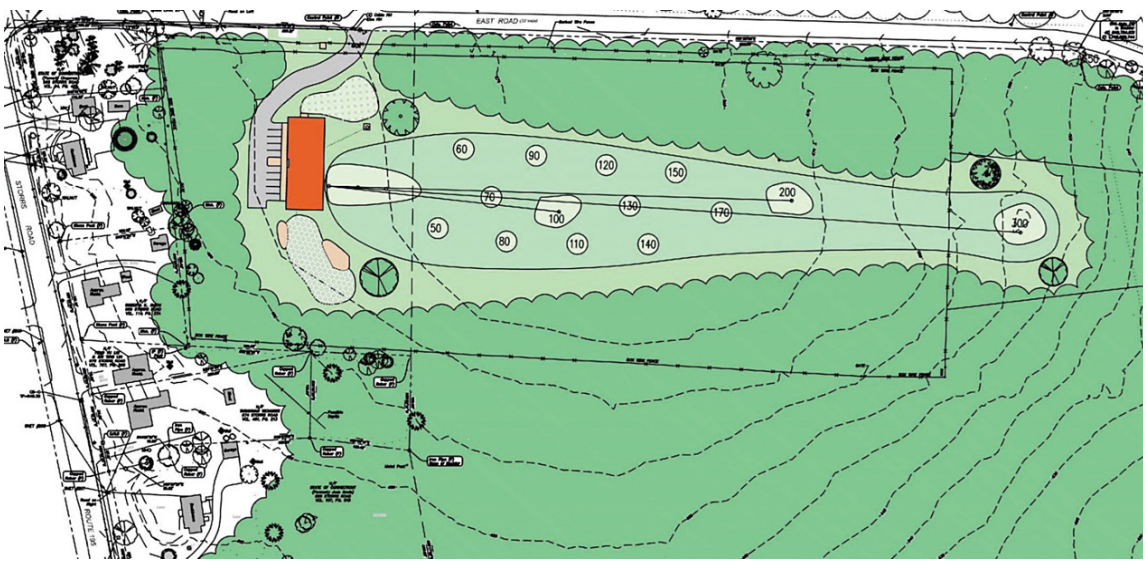
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Golf facility proposed over UConn Conifer Collection



Conceptual site plan of the golf practice facility. UConn is replacing the Conifer Collection with the practice facility. PHOTO COURTESY OF UCONN.EDU

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A golf practice facility proposal for the University of Connecticut men's golf team placed over a historic natural site is facing backlash in the forms of public comments, Facebook groups and yard signs.

A scoping notice for the facility released on Dec. 16, 2025, plotted 986 Storrs Road as the planned address to host the men's team. The location is currently home to the UConn Conifer Collection where Sidney Waxman, a plant science professor at UConn, developed a nursey of pine trees, according to UConn Magazine.

Waxman would search for a genetic mutation called witch's broom in coniferous evergreen trees and then use a .22-caliber rifle to shoot cones out of high branches and plant them in the nursery, according to his New York Times obituary. He died at 81 from transitional cell carcinoma on Feb. 10, 2005.

In a public scoping meeting held on Jan. 7, 10 participants spoke in opposition to the facility. One retired UConn faculty member, Steve Olson, spoke in favor. Olsen had previously worked with Waxman and said the current overgrown conditions of the nursery made the proposal favorable to him.

Opposition to the facility wasn't just oriented around the preservation of Waxman's nursery. Mansfield residents who live close to the proposal were concerned about the environmental impact a golf facility could have on the surrounding area.

GZA GeoEnvironmental is the consulting firm working with UConn to manage the proposal. An environmental consultant at GZA, Stephen Lecco, gave a timeline during the scoping meeting that has yet to come to fruition.

He said a post-scoping notice would be published in the Connecticut Environmental Monitor in February announcing whether an environmental impact evaluation would be needed, with the timeline splitting based on the decision. No update has currently been posted.

University Spokesperson Stephanie Reitz declined to give comment about the facility but provided an updated timeline.

"Given that the project is still in the official CEPA scoping process, we need to limit our comments at this time beyond what's been stated publicly in meetings," Reitz said. "The consultants are actively working on it and we are targeting a post-scoping notice in April."

The post-scoping notice was not included in Tuesday's edition of the Connecticut Environmental Monitor, and the next one is scheduled to be released on April 21. A community information meeting will be held by Mansfield residents on April 20 from 6-7:30 p.m. in the Mansfield Public Library.

> **"There are a lot of valuable specimens that are left there... genetically and horticulturally."**
> **OLIVIA DELELLO**

One Mansfield resident close to the area who requested not to be named raised concern about the timeline of UConn's announcements and the hilly landscape of the area which has already been causing water drainage issues for residents.

"UConn did not inform us, we heard it through the grapevine, and so the Thursday before Christmas... I heard about the golf course," the resident said. "I personally felt like they did it so we wouldn't notice."

The resident added that the Jan. 16 deadline to submit public comment was another instance where it felt as if UConn wanted the facility to go unnoticed. The deadline came a little more than a week after the scoping meeting.

"When they remove the trees and put that driving range in, we're going to have more water flowing down, and it's going to be contaminated water," the resident said about the concerns for fertilizer, weed killer and pesticide contamination from the facility. "We're drinking this water, we're brushing our teeth in this water, we're cooking in this water, and none of us want cancer or Parkinson's disease."

The resident said their wish was for UConn to restore the UConn Conifer Collection instead of removing the remaining specimens.

"It hasn't been cared for in a while," the resident said about the UConn Conifer Collection. "I really would like to see the plant sciences take over that lot and use it for agricultural purposes. Not to clear it... but to grow and experiment with varieties of trees."

Olivia Delello, a UConn Ecology and evolutionary biology student, shared a similar sentiment about Waxman's collection.

"I really hope that UConn would recognize that they have the work of someone who's very famous here in this collection and instead of bulldozing it, they should think about maintaining it and opening it to the public," Delello said. "There are a lot of valuable specimens that are left there... genetically and horticulturally."

Delello added that while she understands the proposal and that specimens would be preserved in the UConn arboretum, risks were still involved.

"I understand the men's golf team wants somewhere to practice," Delello said. "Both the trees and golfers are important, but one should not be sacrificed for the other."

Delello explained why transplanting the current Waxman specimens in the UConn Conifer Collection is a risky solution to finding a place for the UConn men's golf team.

"If something is smaller, generally, it is easier to preserve the root ball and transplant it. Many of the conifers in the collection are very large and would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to transplant," Delello said.

UConn men's golf head coach Dave Pezzino deferred to the university spokesperson on questions regarding the necessity for the facility. The project will be funded by philanthropic donations, with $1 million of a $15 million donation to UConn Athletics from Robert and Stefanie Skinner going towards the facility, according to UConn's website.

NASA'S ARTEMIS II PUSHES HUMAN SPACEFLIGHT FARTHER THAN EVER

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NASA launched four astronauts aboard the Orion spacecraft on April 1 as a part of Artemis II, a mission to orbit the moon and return to Earth.

The mission is the first time humans have traveled this far from Earth since the Apollo era and marks the first participation of a Canadian astronaut in a lunar mission.

The Artemis II crew includes NASA astronauts Victor Glover, Reid Wiseman and Christina Koch and Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen.

"Artemis II is the start of something bigger than any one mission. It marks our return to the moon, not just to visit, but to eventually stay on our moon base, and lays the foundation for the next giant leaps ahead," Jared Isaacman, a NASA administrator, said in a press release.

Artemis II will not land on the surface of the moon, however. Instead, the mission is designed to validate the spacecraft's ability to safely carry humans beyond Earth's orbit and back, securing the success of future lunar landings.

On April 6, during a planned lunar flyby, the crew passed behind the moon. During this time, astronauts captured images and conducted observations of the moon's far side, becoming the first humans in decades to observe regions not visible from Earth.

According to NASA, the crew documented impact craters, ancient lava flows and surface fractures, helping scientists better understand the moon's geologic evolution. They also monitored variations in color, brightness and texture across the terrain. The flyby provided rare visual events, including an "earthset" and "earthrise," as well as views of a solar eclipse from space, allowing astronauts to photograph the sun's corona.

The mission also includes scientific investigations focused on human health in deep space, including the AVATAR study, which examines how astronauts physically and cognitively respond to long-duration spaceflight. Data collected during Artemis II will inform safety protocols and mission planning for future crews traveling deeper into space.

> *"Artemis II is the start of something bigger than any one mission."*
> **JARED ISAACMAN**

During the flight, the crew surpassed the record for the farthest distance traveled by humans from Earth, reaching 248,655 miles, according to NASA. The astronauts also proposed names for two lunar craters: "Integrity," in honor of their spacecraft and "Carroll," commemorating Wiseman's late wife.

The crew is expected to splashdown off the coast of San Diego on April 10 at 8:07 p.m.



The moon crew of Artemis II. The crew are the first humans since the Apollo era to go this close to the moon.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @NASA ON INSTAGRAM.

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