
New England Cottontail Initiative

An update of activities being conducted to benefit this declining species

NRCS announces funding awards for projects on private lands, Best Management Practices manual published!



*If you build
it, they will
come-*

We continue to bring the latest developments in the ongoing efforts to reverse the population decline of the New England cottontail. While many acres of habitat have already been created on state lands, project implementation on private lands has only recently begun. This issue will highlight one exceptional project that has just been completed, as well as provide updates on other habitat projects, research and outreach.

Private Land Efforts Continue

In 2012, the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program approved funding for eight projects to create 258 acres of habitat. All of these projects are in various stages of implementation, and a significant amount of NEC habitat creation is well underway! The NRCS has just recently announced funding awards for Round 2 WLFW applications and expects that, out of 19 applications, 12 contracts will be finalized. While project details need to be refined, an additional 200 acres of habitat could be created. Although future funding levels have not yet been determined, the

NRCS is still encouraging landowners to submit applications for potential projects. Please let us know if you have a potential project!

State Land Efforts to Begin Again This Fall

Since our last update, one state land project has been completed. A 41-acre cut at Bear Hill WMA will create a significant amount of habitat in the Lower CT River focus Area. In consideration of bird nesting seasons and other wildlife activity, no tree harvesting operations have been implemented during the summer. However, ongoing invasive vegetation management continues at all completed project sites and staff are looking forward to fall, when implementation is expected to begin on a 111-acre project at Pachaug SF, which has the distinction of being the #1 ranked parcel not only in the state, but also in the entire Initiative Region.

Research Continues

While summer is a quiet time of the year for NEC field research, results from the DNA analysis of last winter's pellet collection have started to come in. There are newly documented NEC occurrences at Torrington



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Fish and Game Association in Torrington, White Memorial Conservation Center in Litchfield, Paugussett State Forest in Newtown, and private properties in both Stonington and Lyme. Results are still pending for 253 samples collected in the Lower CT River Focus Area, 80 samples collected from the Scotland-Canterbury Focus Area, and 177 samples collected from various locations around the state.

Workshops and Outreach Events

Nothing is scheduled at this time, stay tuned for future events.

Highlighting a Private Land Project

The CT DEEP, WMI, and NRCS partnered with the Groton Sportsmen's Club to complete a multi-program, multi-stage project. The Club owns a 380-acre parcel in eastern Connecticut, along the Stonington/Voluntown border. This parcel is ranked number 3 in CT and is located less than 1 mile from Pachaug State Forest, which has the top ranked parcel in both CT and the

Ray Thiel and Bill Salisbury oversee the property's management and, in 2011, applied to the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) for funding to complete a small wildlife patch cut. Staff mem-



bers from the LIP program as well as WMI contractors and the NRCS met with Ray and Bill and formulated a plan to create and manage 58 acres of young forest habitat. The LIP project removed large trees, managed invasive vegetation, and created brush piles



over an 8-acre area; while the NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife (WLWF) project included 3 regeneration forest cuts with brush pile construction totaling 22 acres, clearing overgrown trees and invasive vegetation in 3 hedgerows, planting native shrubs in 2 of the hedgerows, and constructing brush piles in an existing 25-acre shelterwood cut. Tree harvest and brush pile



Judy Wilson, Ray Thiel, Bill Salisbury and Roz the chocolate lab

entire NEC Initiative Region. In the past, live trapping efforts documented NEC on the property. Club members

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construction for the LIP and most of the WLFW project areas were completed this past winter and early spring. This spring, the Club had two work parties, planting and mulching over 400 native shrubs including bayberry, raspberry, blueberry and dogwood, and installing fencing to protect the newly planted shrubs from deer browsing. This fall, they plan to re-plant a field once dominated by autumn olive with 300 native shrubs. This extraordinary collaborative effort will benefit not only NEC, but other wildlife species as well, including wild turkey that soon utilized the newly created brush piles as a nest site. For more information about the Groton Sportsmen's Club and this project, please see



<http://www.grotonsportsmen.com/>, and click on 'Habitat Improvement Projects'.

Best Management Practices Manual Published!

This manual offers guidelines on habitat management practices that can benefit NEC in an easy-to-read, convenient booklet format. It is recommended reading for any landowner or land manager who wants to learn more about the nuts and bolts of habitat management and is available for

download at:

www.newenglandcottontail.org/documents or

http://youngforest.org/documents?field_resource_type_value>manual

Other Species - Spotlight on Eastern Towhee

The Eastern Towhee is another example of a species of Greatest Conservation Need that will benefit from early successional habitat creation projects. This boldly marked sparrow has been declining in the Northeast since the 1960s; the estimated population in 1990 was only 13% of the 1966 estimate and Breeding



Bird Survey data (1966-2005) indicated a 7% annual population decline across New England. Towhees require dense shrubs and small trees for cover, as well as a developed litter layer for foraging, and research has shown that they are unlikely to be found in areas with greater than 20% agricultural coverage in a 1 km area. Their decline is due in part to forest maturation and lack of new shrubland habitat creation. Connecticut is home to a significant percentage of the New England population; approximately 20% of all Eastern Towhees in New England are found here, and the work being done to benefit NEC will also provide habitat for this species.

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Contact Information

For more information, or to discuss a potential project, please contact the following:

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Our office location is:
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The following websites offer further information pertaining to New England cottontails:

www.ct.gov/deep/youngforestinitiative
www.newenglandcottontail.org
www.ctnrns.usda.gov/cottontail
www.fws.gov/northeast/indepth/rabbit

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