

Working Lands for Wildlife

New Hampshire Success Stories 2012



Mac apples in Londonderry, NH, shows the apple orchard in full bloom adjacent to a dogwood thicket occupied by New England Cottontail.

“New Hampshire NRCS and conservation partners made tremendous progress with private landowners to increase early successional habitat for the New England Cottontail and other wildlife species over the past year.”

- Rick Ellsmore, NH NRCS State Conservationist

Spring cold nights are a benefit for rabbits. In two of the last three years in New Hampshire, spring came a little too early. Most old-timers are saying spring comes at least two weeks earlier now on average and that isn't a good thing for early pollinated crops such as apples. With temperatures in April ranging up into the 70s and 80s, buds are swelling much earlier with the risk of hard frost until at least the second week in May.

These tender blossoms are done-for and so is the fall harvest if just a few hours of freezing air lingers in the fields. This is where air-drainage comes in.

Apples like dry, rich hillsides and a common fall practice in NH is to open forest edges so that cold air can drain off into the swamps below. This management is perfect for the New England Cottontail whose habitat is exactly in these locations. Over 15 acres of key habitat will be managed by removing aspen trees which are blocking air drainage and beginning to shade out the dogwood thickets beneath. Even better, these thickets are occupied by New England Cottontail, and these practices will not only benefit the orchard crop, but will increase the rabbit population in this key focal area.



Brian Stern and his dog Buddy, stands in front of ideal New England Cottontail habitat which is currently being managed under the Working Lands for Wildlife Program.

If you build it they will come. After a decade of fighting invasives and cutting trees to develop the perfect early successional habitat, this summer, Brian Stern, saw a rabbit while cutting some walking trails through his property! Over the past decade, he has participated in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and now, his 15 acres of habitat is one of the first private properties on the list for the state of NH to release New England Cottontails from the breeding facility. Additional work will be done there this winter to try to identify the number of rabbits which may be occupying the property. In addition, Brian is a key advocate in

the community for much-needed early successional habitat and has helped others understand the importance of managing habitat for declining species.



10,000 of the New England Cottontail's favorite shrubs are delivered and planted in a recent 25-acre clear cut.

From Cow Pasture, to Christmas Trees, to Shrubland. On a 250-acre farm in Madbury, NH, the landowner remembers when this area was summer pasture for cattle. With a bucket of salt you could lead them through the forest out to pasture for much of the summer. Then in the 1960s the area was planted to Christmas trees, but few were ever harvested and the trees were over 40 feet tall when we found them. Several New England farms began to switch to orchard crops and Christmas trees in the 1960s as interest and profitability in farming dwindled. Now, with historic photos, we can easily identify these areas, which are perfect areas for wildlife openings as they are often loaded with invasive plants, old apple trees, and undesirable timber. After this 25-acre area was cut and chipped, a huge number of buckthorn stump sprouts emerged. Typically buckthorn doesn't show such early signs of dieback after a fall spray, but the timing of this operation helped stress the plants making the fall chemical application more effective (see picture on next page). In the third week of September, 10,000 native shrubs were planted and just in time for light fall rains and cool afternoons.



Over 100 acres of buckthorn, killed with funds from working lands for wildlife, including these at the Gangwer property mentioned above.



Master gardener Dianne Mrak, decides to turn her back field into shrubland habitat for New England Cottontail, by mowing, controlling the grass with herbicide, and planting shrubs.

Gardening for Rabbits. Adjacent to the State of New Hampshire's largest wildlife refuge with over 200 acres dedicated for New England Cottontail and near another project at NH Audubon, this small three acres of land creates an important steppingstone between the two properties. With over 3,000 native shrubs planted in the back field, this property shows the importance of small areas in key locations.



A private planting contractor picks teams like back yard football, in the early morning before planting 3,000 bare root shrubs. Jobs like these are bid by the plant so the faster they get them in the ground the more money they make, and jobs like these are important now with a lack of commercial landscape jobs in a slow economy.