U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help the Land

CONNECTICUT

Management of Young Forest and Scrub-Shrub Habitats in Connecticut Through NRCS

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

What are Early Forests and Scrub-Shrub Habitats?

Scrub-shrub habitats are areas where the vegetation is dominated by small woody plants such as shrubs and young trees. Young forests are areas that are dominated by small trees of sapling and pole size. These habitats often take place within the forest environment where removal of mature trees and natural regeneration of adjacent forest species has occurred. These habitats also occur in abandoned fields or disturbed land where pioneer tree species such as aspens, birches, and cottonwood colonize the area and start the process of succession.

Why Should We Manage Early Forests and Scrub-shrub Habitats?

Scrub-shrub areas and young forest habitats often contain a greater diversity of wildlife species than older forests. In the Northeast, these are important habitat types for a large number of birds and other wildlife, but particularly for New England cottontail, woodcock, and ruffed grouse. Many shrub land birds such as golden-winged warbler, prairie warbler, and field sparrow have declining populations.

These habitats are naturally created either through catastrophic events such as storms and wildfires, or through timber management activities. As Connecticut has become more densely populated, forest fires have been significantly reduced in order to protect lives and properties. If gone unmanaged, these habitats would proceed to turn into mature forest – with the exception of areas where natural conditions do not support the growth of tall trees.

Roads and land development have resulted in the fragmentation of large forested areas into smaller areas. Often, these small areas of forest

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are not managed because the amount and quality of harvestable timber is not enough to produce a profitable return. As a result, a large percentage of Connecticut's forests have not been managed in decades. As remaining forests mature or change to non-forest uses such as parking lots, young forests are declining throughout the Northeast.

Who is NRCS?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that promotes conservation of natural resources on private lands.

What is WHIP?

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) offers technical and financial assistance to protect, enhance, restore, and develop fish and wildlife habitat. Contracts are typically 5-10 years, although in some cases 15-year contracts can be developed. WHIP provides property owners and land managers with advice on managing or restoring important types of wildlife habitat, including young forest and shrub-scrub habitat.

Who Can Participate in this Program?

Private landowners, land trusts and other land preservation organizations, fishing and hunting organizations, scout troops and other non-government organizations, and tribal organizations may apply for WHIP.

How Do I Get More Information?

For information about WHIP or other NRCS programs visit our website at www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/programs, or contact your local USDA Service Center (listed below).

NRCS accepts applications for the WHIP Program year round.

Connecticut USDA Service Centers

WINDHAM COUNTY
Brooklyn Service Center
(860) 774-0224

LITCHFIELD & FAIRFIELD COUNTIES
Torrington Service Center
(860) 626-8258

NEW LONDON COUNTY
Norwich Service Center
(860) 887-3604

NEW HAVEN & MIDDLESEX COUNTIES
Wallingford Service Center
(203) 269-7509

HARTFORD & TOLLAND COUNTIES
Windsor Service Center
(860) 688-7725