

## A Day in the Field with the DCs

By Matthew Larkin, technical assistance provided by Don Keirstead

On August 9, 2011, Don Keirstead, NRCS-Ecologist, led a field day for New Hampshire NRCS field staff. The group traveled to three sites close to the NRCS State Office.



### Wiswall Dam Fish Ladder – Durham, NH

Since the 1980's, there have been talks of creating a fish passage at the Wiswall Dam – located on Wiswall Road in Durham, NH. The Lamprey River is the most significant river in NH for migratory fish such as alewife, herring, and American shad, which spend most of their life in salt water and spawn in fresh water. Wiswall Dam is a barrier to these fishes' ability

to access 45 miles of river habitat and Pawtuckaway Lake, both of which are important spawning ground. NH-NRCS funded a fish ladder at the site through the [Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program \(WHIP\)](#). The ladder will be in operation for fish migration Spring 2012, and New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) will help teach the Town of Durham how to operate the structure during various flows.

NH-NRCS has funded two other important projects for migratory fish including the recently-removed Woolen Mills Dam in West Swanzey, NH and the Winnicutt Dam in Greenland, NH. As populations of river herring and other migratory fish continue to decline, NH-NRCS continues to look for opportunities to work with partners to fund fish passage projects.

### Old Mill Gravel Pit Restoration – Lee, NH

The Old Mill Gravel Pit Restoration project was funded through the [Wetlands Reserve Program \(WRP\)](#) in 2007. The location was a high priority for NH-NRCS because four private landowners worked together in order to preserve 156 acres along the Oyster River. The site itself is an aquifer which provides drinking water to several towns and the University of New



Hampshire. The site is also a historic site for the [New England Cottontail](#) rabbit as well as the Atlantic White Cedar. To accomplish its goal, NRCS used ground penetrating radar to find buried organic materials and to determine the volume of materials to use when revegetating the

pits with various natural communities. Data loggers were used to measure and monitor water table levels, which helped to determine the depth to excavate when creating two shallow wetlands on-site. The site serves the Town of Lee as a recreational area and helps inform land managers of the potential in restoring gravel pits.

Since the restoration was completed in 2009, several declining species of birds such as Sora, Tohees, and American Kestrels have been seen at the project site. In addition, the presence of Carolina Saddlebags, a rare dragonfly, has been documented. The site continually shows up on Audubon's "[e-Bird](#)" as a fantastic place to watch birds such as yellow legs, hooded mergansers, red tailed hawks, and brown thrashers.



### **Bunker Lane New England Cottontail Restoration Site – Durham, NH**

Currently, the New England Cottontail is a candidate for Federal Listing under the Endangered Species Act. In order to prevent this listing, the NRCS has become part of a wide-ranging, special initiative. Funding from NRCS has gone into the restoration of thickets within newly-created focus areas. Adjacent to a parcel of land that is owned and managed for the [New England Cottontail](#) rabbit by New

Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) is a 15-acre property owned by The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF). In the 10 acres immediately bordering the NHFG property, an old orchard and pasture with poor quality timber sits on rich soils. From an ecologist's perspective, this is perfect for developing dense thickets and early-successional habitat for the rabbit.

On August 31<sup>st</sup>, NRCS and partners will meet at the site to kick off a new collaboration for the New England Cottontail.