

Conservation Stewardship Program and Habitat Improvements for the New England Cottontail



The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working with private landowners to conserve habitat for the New England cottontail. Through the Conservation Stewardship Program landowners can receive financial assistance by expanding conservation efforts on working lands. Small improvements to working lands can make a big difference for the New England cottontail. Let us help you develop a conservation plan that meets the goals of your operation and meets the conservation needs of this rare species.



New England cottontail in the wild.

New England Cottontail Habitat

Thickets of shrubby areas and young forests are home to the New England cottontail. These areas may persist for 10-20 years before they convert to a middle-age forest. Older forests do not provide optimal food and cover for New England cottontail. And, unlike eastern cottontails, New England cottontails are not likely to be found on golf courses, lawns, or active agriculture lands with insufficient cover. To maintain and improve habitat for the New England cottontail, existing shrubby areas need to be disturbed every five to 15 years.

How You Can Help

Farmers and forest landowners in New England can help the New England cottontail by creating and maintaining young forests and shrubby areas. Conservation efforts may involve mechanical cutting of trees, controlling invasive plants, and re-establishing travel corridors.



The New England cottontail (below) thrives in thickets of shrubby areas (above) which the rabbit utilizes for food and cover.



Assistance Available - Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP is designed to compensate agricultural and forest producers who agree to increase their level of conservation by adopting additional conservation activities and maintaining their baseline level of conservation. CSP also encourages adoption of new technologies and management techniques. Provided below are CSP opportunities offered by NRCS to improve habitat for New England cottontail.

■ **Brush Management to Improve Wildlife Cover (E314A)**

Brush management is implemented to create a desired plant community that will provide plant structure, density, and the diversity needs for New England cottontail. This can be done through mechanical and/or chemical methods.

■ **Creating Structural Diversity with Patch Openings (E666K)**

Forest stand improvement is used to create patch openings. The patch openings will slowly convert to shrubby areas used by New England cottontail.

■ **Manage Existing Shrub Thickets for Wildlife Cover (E645B)**

Existing shrubs provide important cover and food for New England cottontail. These areas can be managed by a combination of herbicide treatments, cutting and trimming branches, and removal of competing vegetation.

■ **Edge Feathering for Wildlife (E645C)**

The area where two or more habitat types, such as forestland, grassland, or wetland, meet is called edge. By selectively cutting trees and bush along an edge, the resulting cover will result in a gradual transition from one habitat type to the other, thus reducing predation of New England cottontail.



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Contact your local NRCS office in New England to learn more about the conservation practices that may be available to you.

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