

New Hampshire New England Cottontail Success Stories

The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests-SPNHF

The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests is providing a 6 acre site to expand habitat for the New England Cottontail adjacent to a site that New Hampshire Fish and Game has already been working on. The site is a perfect opportunity and currently, is poor quality pasture pine and invasive species are present on the property. This fall NRCS has provided funding to Arbor Pro, a local small business who controls invasive plants to prepare the site for cutting later in the winter. SPNHF forester, Wendy Weisinger, will help review private sector bids for the forestry work this winter. Once the overstory is removed by a whole tree chipping operation, the site will be planted with live stakes of dogwood by various local volunteers and these will eventually be mowed with a brush cutter to develop dense thickets. In addition, this site is located near a beautiful tidal marsh with a head-of-tide, road, some of the earliest built in the United States. The old farm roads on the property are still enjoyed by several seacoast residents for hiking. The property was originally protected by the Nature Conservancy and given to SPNHF for management.

Brian Stern

Over the past 5 years Brian Stern has battled invasives and transformed 15 acres of abandon farm field into the perfect shrubland habitat. With the help of the WHIP program, Brian has used a cut-stump herbicide treatment on many larger invasive species such as Buckthorn. The area now has several dogwood, meadowsweet, and raspberry thickets, and is a prime candidate for release of captivity bread rabbits. State wildlife agencies are working with the Rodger Williams Zoo in Rhode Island to breed New England Cottontail's and plan to release rabbits in NH first because the states populations are in the greatest peril in the region. It is still unknown where rabbits will eventually be released but developing key habitat within the historical range is an important part of getting these sites in proper condition for eventual release. Also, securing the species with projects on private lands, helps the US Fish and Wildlife Service substantiate the listing decision of a Candidate under the Endangered Species Act. In 2014 the Service needs to revisit the decision and if the New England Cottontail is formally listed as Endangered then regulations will create strict environmental review for business and agricultural operations wishing to expand.

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The University owns several key protected pieces of land within the core of the New England Cottontail focus areas. University Professor John Litvaitis, and expert on NEC has identified several areas on University property which are conducive to management for the species. In addition these areas help educate the students on management strategies and provide recreation areas where other private landowners contemplating NEC management can go to see the habitat being managed. In addition several, vocational high school seniors who are studying forestry and logging are interested in working with Steve Eisenhower, an instructor at the Thompson School of Applied Science. Forest management in general is a focus under NRCS' forestry initiative with a focus on creating jobs. Within the next year several landowners will look to hire loggers and foresters to improve timber quality on their properties.