



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW (Time 5:34)

NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL (HOST SARAH LEON WITH ANTHONY TUR)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S
(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello, there. This is Sarah Leon with the Fish and Wildlife Service and I'm on the phone today with Anthony Tur at the New England Field Office.

Hi, Anthony. How are you?

MR. TUR: I'm doing good. Thank you, Sarah.

MS. LEON: I was wondering if you had some today to discuss the New England cottontail with us?

MR. TUR: Sure do.

MS. LEON: Can you start by just telling us a little about this species?

MR. TUR: The New England cottontail is the only cottontail endemic to areas east of the Hudson River. It's easily confused with the non-native Eastern cottontail which was introduced in New England beginning in the late 1800s. Unlike its competitor, the New England cottontail requires relatively large stands of dense shrubbery and vegetation for its survival.

MS. LEON: And Anthony, how could a rabbit, the epitome of prolific breeding possibly need consideration for protection under the Endangered Species Act?

MR. TUR: One thing about critters that tend to be prolific is that they require ample resources in order to make a living. In this case, the rabbit is stressed by

having inadequate amounts of habitat in which to make a living upon. So the resources are limited, then the rabbit is kind of unable to do what rabbits do best.

MS. LEON: So what actions are currently underway to keep the species from being listed?

MR. TUR: The Service developed kind of two separate goals. One of the short term goals is the Spotlight Species Action Plan. And what we're hoping to do there is to implement conservation efforts on all of our species range by 2012 and hoping to do that to such an extent the reduction in species (Inaudible).

For long-term goals, we've articulated population goals and we're working with our state partners and non-government organizations and other Federal Government agencies to develop a conservation strategy that might allow us to reach those long-term recovery goals for the species.

MS. LEON: And aside from the fact that maybe these bunnies are cute, why should the public care about the recovery of the New England cottontail?

MR. TUR: Well, I think the species is a New England native, so it's kind of one of our own and then also in the New England area we've already lost some species that are typically associated with shrub-land vegetation, one of which was the Heath Hen which went extinct in the early 1900s. This is just another species that requires the same sort of habitat that isn't doing well.

In addition, the New England cottontail serves as a barometer for the health of other early successional shrub-land dependent wildlife species that occurred throughout New England. And these include up to 137 species of great conservation. And examples of those are the American woodcock, Eastern Towhee, brown thrasher, yellow-breasted chat, the golden winged warbler, whippoorwill, black racer Snake, and numerous invertebrates.

MS. LEON: And Anthony, you mentioned some long-term conservation goals. Can you describe who some of the partners are and how these are taking shape?

MR. TUR: Yes. Last fall, actually, the states, together with the Fish and Wildlife Service developed a competitive state wildlife grant proposal for consideration funding and that proposal was favorably reviewed and funding was received.

So currently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with New Hampshire Fish and Game, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife Service, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, New York DEC, and Maine Fish and Wildlife. And we're trying to implement conservation efforts on state-owned land. And then also develop a model to help prioritize landscapes for conservation effort. We're

also developing conservation strategies that will help guide actions that might take place on the ground and this overall conservation strategy, in addition to the state agencies with which we're working are also coordinating with USDA, Department of Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through the development of the New England Cottontail Keystone Initiative to provide funding to projects that may have a conservation benefit to the species.

We're also working with the Massachusetts Military Reservation through their Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan and also numerous local land trusts throughout New England, along with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Massapeguas. So we've got a real cross section of the conservation community working towards planning and implementing conservation efforts for the cottontail.

MS. LEON: Okay, well, great. Thank you, Anthony, for your time today and it's been interesting getting to learn a little bit more about the New England cottontail. So thank you so much for your time.

MR. TUR: Okay, thank you.

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks for listening.

(Music plays, whereupon, the interview was concluded.)