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New Hampshire and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will partner with landowners to restore New England cottontail habitat

An agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of New Hampshire will help restore habitat on private and state-owned lands for the New England cottontail during the next 50 years.

The range of this species, found only in New England and New York, has declined by 86 percent during the past 50 years, primarily through habitat loss. Often confused with the non-native and competing eastern cottontail, the New England cottontail was named a candidate for Endangered Species Act protection in 2006 and is listed as endangered by the states of Maine and New Hampshire.

Under this agreement with the Service, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department will work with private landowners on plans to restore habitat for cottontails in Cheshire, Hillsborough, Merrimack, Rockingham and Strafford counties. The department's goal is to enroll 3,000 to 5,000 acres to be managed as cottontail habitat.

"We recognize this agreement as an important step in the long-term conservation of the New England cottontail," said Steve Weber, chief of N.H. Fish and Game's Wildlife Division. "It allows Fish and Game to provide assurances to landowners that the work they do on their property to benefit the rabbits won't jeopardize the future use or value of the land if the species is eventually federally listed."

Management activities may include cutting vegetation to promote shrub land development, maintaining existing habitat, planting seeds and seedlings, controlling invasive plant species and translocation of rabbits to newly created habitats.

This agreement, called a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, is the first of its kind for New England cottontail and any species in the Northeast. It encourages landowners to voluntarily implement conservation measures for candidate species by assuring they will not be subjected to additional land-use restrictions if the species is protected under the Endangered Species Act in the future.

“This candidate agreement is an important conservation tool,” said Tom Chapman of the Service’s New England Field Office. “The Service is delighted to partner with the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department to pursue New England cottontail conservation on private lands.”

Visit <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/indepth/rabbit> to view the agreement and more information about the cottontail.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department works to conserve, manage and protect the state’s fish, wildlife and marine resources and their habitats. Visit <http://www.wildnh.com>.

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