

Maine New England Cottontail Working Group Tracking and Pellet Surveys

Finding and Approaching Landowners

Where do I start?

If you specified a site to survey at the training, we will send you a detailed map of your site(s) by email. If you did not specify a site, you can either contact us to be provided with a site that we have identified, or you can look for other thick, shrubby areas to survey. If available, you can use the map-lot numbers on your map to identify the landowner. Your local land trust may be able to assist you, but you may need to visit your town office (or their website) for more information to identify whom the landowner of your site is.

Contacting the landowner

Once you identify the landowner, ask the landowner for permission to survey the site. Oftentimes, the best thing to do is to go out to the site and knock on the landowner's door. We have found that a face to face introduction is the most effective method for obtaining a landowner's consent to survey. A phone call also works, but email is less effective.

Please note that in some cases one site may overlap with land belonging to several different landowners. It is necessary to obtain permission from each landowner, otherwise, otherwise you may only survey the portions of the site you have been given permission to survey.

If the landowner isn't home

Try again later. We have developed some [cards](#) and fact sheets that you can leave in the landowner's mailbox or door with your contact information. Leaving a temporary tattoo wouldn't hurt either. If you leave your contact information, make sure you follow up with another visit if you do not hear back.

If the landowner says no

Don't do the survey! Without the landowner's permission, you cannot conduct the survey or go on their land.

If the landowner says yes

Record the landowner's name, mailing address, and phone number. Make note of the date and time that the landowner gave you permission to survey the site. You can write this information on your [survey form](#) in the landowner information section and in your own personal field notes.

If the landowner wants more information

You can give the landowner the brochure and fact sheets that were provided to you at the training. If the landowner still wants more information, please refer them to one of the agency contacts listed below:

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Cory Stearns
ME Dept. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
657-2345 Ext 108
cory.r.stearns@maine.gov

Mao Lin
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Gulf of Maine Coastal Program
781-8364 Ext 15
mao_lin@fws.gov

Lynn Wolfe
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge
646-9226 Ext 35
lynn_wolfe@fws.gov

Lindsey Fenderson
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Rachel Carson NWR
646-9226 Ext 34
lindsey_fenderson@fws.gov

Is there any information that I can read about NEC to help me prepare for my interactions with landowners?

Recently, the Rangewide New England Cottontail Initiative developed an Outreach Work Group who put together an [Outreach Strategy](#). We used that Outreach Strategy to develop a list of talking points. We encourage you to download and use these [talking points](#).

What if I think I found a New England cottontail?

Take pictures and write as detailed notes as possible about your survey and observations, and collect at least one vial of pellets following the instructions from the [protocol](#) and the tips at the training. If the landowner asks, inform them that you cannot conclude that you have a New England cottontail without a DNA analysis. Deliver your datasheets and pellets to one of the three appointed offices. At the end of the tracking season we will release the results of the DNA analysis to all NEC survey volunteers.

If the DNA analysis concludes that New England cottontails do occupy the site, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife will contact the landowner to inform them that NEC's were detected on their property.

What happens if New England cottontails are found during these surveys?

Firstly, if cottontails are found north of Portland, it will increase their known range and will therefore greatly change our conservation strategy, which is currently focused in a few towns south of Portland. As for the landowner, there are three possible scenarios:

1. If the landowner makes no alterations to the habitat, then nothing will really happen. Because New England cottontails occur in early successional habitats, the vegetation will eventually succeed into older stages, and when it does NEC habitat (and NEC) will disappear from the site.

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2. If the landowner is conservation oriented, and wants to manage for NEC and other early successional species, we can assist them with managing the habitat to benefit NEC. Depending on the conditions of the habitat at the beginning of management, the initial treatment may be profitable (if there are abundant mature trees on site), or may cost money to do the management. There are funding sources available to landowners to conduct habitat management for New England cottontail, particularly through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
3. If the landowner wants to develop the property, we will work together with the landowner to safeguard the cottontails on site.

In the future, we may be able to enter CCAA's (Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances) with landowners that are willing to manage part of the property for cottontails. In exchange for managing for NEC, landowners with a CCAA are provided protection from incidental take penalties in the event that the species is listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Always remember...

To be courteous, respect the land, and respect the landowner!