

# Maine New England Cottontail Working Group Tracking and Pellet Surveys

## Talking Points

### FOR ALL AUDIENCES

*The New England cottontail, the region's only native rabbit, is disappearing, and it needs habitat management to ensure its survival.*

- The New England cottontail cannot survive without thick, dense habitat. They need management of young forests and shrublands for their continued existence.
- Extinction is forever.

*In many areas, non-native Eastern cottontail has thrived, while the native New England cottontail has declined.*

- The other rabbit in the northeast region, the non-native eastern cottontail, is abundant in many places in New England. Unlike New England cottontails, eastern cottontails are commonly seen on roadsides and in gardens.
- Eastern cottontails can live in many different types of landscapes, while New England cottontail need managed shrublands and thickets.
- Recent survey data suggests that the New England cottontail may not thrive in landscapes dominated by Eastern cottontails.

*The Northeast is rapidly losing young forests and shrublands and associated wildlife, including the New England cottontail. We can take action to reverse the decline.*

- Work to benefit the New England cottontail will also benefit other species including game species.
- In many areas of the Northeast, young forests and shrublands are rare on the landscape, yet they provide native wildlife with essential food, shelter and places to raise young.
- Helping the New England cottontail will make a big difference for the many different types of animals that need healthy young forests and shrublands.
- A diversity of wildlife needs a diversity of habitats.
- Wildlife needs young forests and shrublands.
- Young forests and shrublands provide areas attractive to deer, moose, ruffed grouse and many other game species.
- Many birds that breed in forests need to feed in shrublands rich with berries and insects.

*Active management of forests is needed, as we no longer allow natural disturbances like fire and flood that historically governed the outdoors and maintained young forests. Now, wildlife needs us to bring shrubland back by cutting trees, restoring wetlands and controlled burning.*

- When forests were disappearing from the Northeast, we restored them. Now we have a highly forested landscape, and we need to restore landscape diversity. We can do this by creating a mosaic of mature and young landscapes.
- Managing young forests and shrublands creates open scenery, economic opportunities and new recreational activities (e.g. bird watching, hiking, berry picking and hunting) for people now and in the future.

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- Permanent conservation of young forests and shrublands provides long-term protection of these important habitats and the wildlife that rely on them. Conservation easements, sale or donation of land, or deed restrictions can provide this protection.
- Prescribed burning can reduce the risk of wildfire in your community, while improving habitat for wildlife.
- Increasing shrubby areas on your land can provide food and cover for wildlife.
- Restoring and conserving wetlands and streams provides high quality habitat for wildlife and improves water quality for all.

*Managing for New England cottontail supports the local economy.*

- Habitat management supports local jobs in the community.
- New England's working forests annually contribute to local and regional economies, sustaining jobs in the woods, mills and in supporting industries.
- Habitat creation provides wood, a renewable resource, which can be used in place of foreign oil for heating homes or generating electricity.
- Young forests and shrublands can promote ecotourism by offering excellent wildlife watching opportunities along with many other recreational uses.

*Landowners can help wildlife while maintaining rights to their land.*

- If we work together, we may be able to restore the New England cottontail, so federal protection may not be required.
- In many situations, there are methods in place or under development to reduce any possible regulatory risks to the landowner.
- One tool, a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), can help landowners maintain and restore habitat. Landowners are encouraged to proactively implement conservation, and these agreements protect the landowner from additional land-use restrictions if the rabbit becomes federally protected.

*Proactively managing a species' threats is more cost and time efficient than to let the species become so imperiled that it requires listing, recovery and delisting.*

- By working to reduce threats and conserve wildlife before needing to list under the Endangered Species Act, we have more management flexibility, fewer conservation action implementation costs, and a reduced likelihood for potential hunting and land-use restrictions.
- Saving the New England cottontail is the partnership's highest priority, and we can take pride in those efforts. However, without improvement, we can't guarantee that it won't require future protection under the Endangered Species Act.
- If the New England cottontail is federally listed, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will help landowners identify whether "take" is an issue and will work with landowners to address permitting if necessary.

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## **FOR LANDOWNERS**

### **Private Landowners**

*Private lands are essential for conservation and can make a positive difference for New England cottontail.*

- Be a part of a wildlife legacy.
- Good land stewardship now improves your land for future generations.
- Together, we can make sure that New England's native rabbits survive for future generations to enjoy.
- Most of the Northeast is privately owned. Private landowners are key to the restoration of the New England cottontail.
- Neither the partners, nor one landowner can do it alone.

*There are people, tools and incentives available to help landowners manage their land for New England cottontail.*

- No experience is required. Wildlife and forestry professionals will help you.
- We know it requires money to manage your land, and there are programs available to help fund your management efforts for the New England cottontail.
- Information about managing your land and where to get help is available at [www.newenglandcottontail.org](http://www.newenglandcottontail.org) or at the offices of your state wildlife agency, University Cooperative Extension, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service.

*Making small changes on your land can help many types of wildlife, in addition to ensuring a healthy environment for now and for future generations.*

- Healthy woods provide clean air and clean water. Those mean good health for our families now and in the future.
- We have changed the landscape of our state, and this hasn't necessarily been good for wildlife. Today, we can do the right thing for our woods and wildlife by making some changes to our land.
- Keep your woods healthy and beautiful by taking some simple steps to create openings for wildlife.
- On [www.newenglandcottontail.org](http://www.newenglandcottontail.org), you can read and learn from the experiences of people managing their land.
- Healthy woods are good for wildlife. They bring many people peace and relaxation.
- Your woodlands are valuable to you and can provide many benefits. Well-planned harvests will help you reach your goals now and in the future.
- Enjoy the results of your work. Young forests and shrublands invite song birds and other wildlife, berry bushes, and flowering shrubs.
- You can feel good knowing you helped a rare species get back on the road to a healthy population, while taking care of your land.

*Wildlife and habitat specialists will work with you to select the appropriate management tools to create young forests and shrubland on your property.*

- Prescribed fire can enhance wildlife habitat while reducing the risk of wildfires.
- Forestry operations can benefit wildlife while creating open spaces and sometimes generating revenues.
- Herbicide use plays a significant role in the control of non-native, invasive plants associated with management activities. If desired, non-herbicide control methods are available.

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- Best management practices to create young forests and shrublands are available and can inform good habitat management decisions.
- Properly designed and implemented forest harvests can increase wildlife diversity and benefit many animals without harming the environment.

### **Private Agricultural Landowners**

*Farmers can also manage lands for wildlife.*

- Farmland can be managed for wildlife without compromising operations. Small changes to your current management practices can reap large benefits for New England cottontail and other wildlife including game species.
- Shrubby edges, wet areas and other marginal lands that are difficult to access or unsuitable for agriculture can be set aside as wildlife habitat.
- Adding well-managed shrubby edges between a hayfield and a forest can benefit wildlife while keeping shade off your hayfield.
- Managing for New England cottontail can be good for your business. Community work enhances public image and reveals alternative lines of business, such as agritourism or ecotourism. Information and assistance may be available.
- A variety of habitats on your farm can increase the beauty and recreational value of your farm, as well as provide habitat for important crop pollinators.

### **Private Small Woodlot/Forest Landowners**

*Forest land stewards can also manage lands for declining wildlife.*

- Small changes to your forest management can reap large benefits for not only the New England cottontail, but as many as 50 other types of wildlife.
- Adding habitat diversity to your woodlot will attract wildlife that can improve the overall health of your forest.
- Creating young forest habitat could lead to timber harvest and income, and can offset costs of wildlife management.
- Areas that are not suitable for producing prime timber can produce high quality young forest and shrubland habitat for wildlife.
- Private consultants, such as foresters or wildlife biologists, can help explore different ways of managing your forest.
- Financial support may be available to benefit wildlife on your land while also supporting other land management goals (e.g. developing forest management plans, etc.).

### **Commercial, Energy, and Industrial Landowners**

*Businesses can benefit when they manage lands for New England cottontail; it can increase profits and improve community support.*

- Management of young forest can generate revenue from selling wood and provide jobs.
- Customers may select a company based on its environmental stewardship.
- Supporting New England cottontail habitat restoration supports an important community wildlife value.
- Industrial landowners can serve as leaders and provide good examples of young forest stewardship.

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- Some commercial landowners are already managing young forest and shrubland. Their support of the New England cottontail will help build public support for this initiative.
- Managing for young forest and shrubland can be considered donations of time, expertise and land. These may be tax deductible and may be used as in-kind contributions by groups to leverage additional conservation dollars.
- Managing lands for New England cottontail provides opportunities to inform the public about their corporate environmental awareness or stewardship philosophy.

### **Municipal Landowners**

*[Town Name] is special; it is home to the New England cottontail.*

- We can manage lands for this animal while meeting town goals and services, such as recreation, transfer stations and schools.
- Conservation of the New England cottontail provides communities with opportunities to continue good stewardship of the environment.
- Native plants and animals create a healthy environment, and people need healthy environments.
- Partners can help provide funding, educational and technical support for this work.
- Wildlife management adds value to lands by enhancing recreational and education opportunities. Conservation doesn't have to change the way land is used.

### **Land Trusts and other Nonprofit Local Conservation Entities**

*Creating and conserving habitats for declining wildlife is an example of good land stewardship.*

- Your lands can make the difference for a rare animal.
- Managing your lands for wildlife creates an opportunity to educate your communities and enhances recreation.
- New England cottontail conservation gives land trusts a reason to engage landowners.
- New England cottontails are charismatic animals, and can provide a reason for people to engage with nature and land conservation.

*Our supporters value a diversity of habitats to support a diversity of wildlife.*

- We need to create young forests and shrublands to help restore declining wildlife populations.
- Managing for the New England cottontail could help expand your conservation ownership by offering additional funding sources.
- Young forests and shrublands are vital to land birds during breeding and migration.
- Young forests offer prime bird watching opportunities.

**FOR COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORS**

*Your neighbors are working with partners to restore a rare rabbit and its habitat.*

- Creating a variety of habitats in your landscape brings new wildlife to watch and learn from.
- See a different side of wildlife. Young forest gives people more opportunities to hear and see their treasured outdoors.
- This is an opportunity to see the before and after of forest management, and to see how it benefits wildlife and ultimately people.