

For immediate release
Oct. 27, 2010

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Comments sought on New England cottontail land conservation proposal in southern New Hampshire

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeks public comment on an agreement to help preserve habitat on private and state-owned lands for the New England cottontail in southern New Hampshire. The Service named the cottontail a candidate for Endangered Species Act protection in 2006.

The cottontail lives in thickets – dense, tangled, low-growing shrubs. The number and size of suitable thickets has declined by 86 percent during the past 50 years and is the primary cause of falling numbers of this rabbit.

The Service, working closely with New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, has crafted a 50-year agreement for New England cottontail habitat conservation in Hillsborough, Rockingham, Merrimack, Cheshire and Strafford counties. Under the proposed agreement, NHF&G would work with private landowners on plans to conserve habitat for the cottontail. NHF&G's goal is to enroll 3,000 to 5,000 acres to be managed as cottontail habitat.

If approved, this agreement would be the first of its kind for any species in the Service's Northeast Region. The Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances encourages property owners to implement conservation measures for candidate or at-risk species by assuring property owners they will not be subjected to increased regulations if the species is protected in the future under the Endangered Species Act.

“Private landowners are important partners in our work to bring back the New England cottontail,” said Tom Chapman of the Service's New England Field Office in Concord, N.H. “This innovative agreement offers an incentive for property owners to voluntarily save this rare rabbit's habitat.”

The draft CCAA is published in today's Federal Register <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/2010-27001.htm> . The draft CCAA and associated documents also may be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/indepth/rabbit/index.html> , along with information about New England cottontails.

The documents are available for public inspection by appointment (call 603-223-2541 for an appointment) during business hours at the Service's New England Field Office, 70 Commercial Street, Suite 300, Concord, NH 03301-5087. For further information, contact Anthony Tur at 603-223-2541. Individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may call the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339.

Written comments are solicited to provide scientific or commercial information to assist the Service and the state in making decisions on this agreement. Comments should be addressed to Anthony Tur at the New England Field Office. They may also be submitted by facsimile at 603-223-0104. Comments must be submitted by Nov. 26, 2010.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and a 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 about our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

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