



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Erie National Wildlife Refuge

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# INSIDE Erie



www.123r-f.com

*The American Woodcock is a ground-dwelling bird that needs shrubland or young forest habitat for nesting and raising their young.*

## Tomorrow's Forests are Today's Wildlife Haven

Step into a young forest, and you might not recognize it as a forest. For most people, the word evokes images of towering trees—the older, the more majestic.

Jeff Herrick, a biologist for the non-profit Wildlife Management Institute, is on a mission to educate people about the importance of a very different looking forest: forests so young they might not even be called forests.

For its first five years, a fledgling Pennsylvania forest might be a fallow field or a clear-cut forest area, regenerating with tiny saplings. Within five years, it will fill with saplings and brushy vegetation—pioneering species like aspen, silky and gray dogwood, viburnums, hawthorn and hardwoods. “Ideally it will have a high stem density, so you can barely see through or walk through it,” Herrick says.

This dense, low vegetation provides wildlife food, nesting areas and shelter. It is a haven for numerous species, including a number that are federally threatened and endangered, or candidates for listing, as well as many common species. As a forest nears its 20th birthday, hardwoods that will make up the mature forest canopy start to suppress the smaller trees and shrubs, thinning the understory.

*(story continued on page 3)*



## ...Tomorrow's Forests (cont.)

Northeastern and Midwestern states have seen a gradual maturing of their forests, creating an imbalance of forest age class and diminishing biodiversity. Pennsylvania has lost nearly 30 percent of its seedling- and sapling-sized young forest acres since 1985.

The decline in young forests concerns wildlife biologists like Herrick because it is critical habitat for a number of species. One of them is the American woodcock, a species of concern on Erie National Wildlife Refuge. Monitoring in the eastern United States and southeast Canada shows the woodcock population has declined annually since 1968, reflecting the bird's shrinking habitat. There are multiple reasons for this. While wildfires once burned clearings, which grew into young forests, most wildfires now are quickly suppressed. Agriculture and land development have reduced the base of existing forests, and those that remain have gradually matured over the years.

In 2008, the Wildlife Management Institute developed an American Woodcock and Young Forest Conservation Plan, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state wildlife agencies and other nonprofit organizations. The plan focuses on restoring young forest habitat, and it is really about much more than just woodcock. The woodcock is an umbrella species - when it has adequate habitat to thrive, scientists have found that other species benefit as well. (These include cottontail rabbit, bobcat, white-tailed

deer, ruffed grouse, whip-poor-will, golden-winged warbler and bog turtle, to name a few.)

To bring back young forests, forested lands must be managed to maintain age and habitat diversity. The Wildlife Management Institute is working with a number of partners, such as M.K. Goddard State Park, to establish demonstration areas that maintain portions of young forest.

In the past, Erie National Wildlife Refuge has hydro-axed areas to create openings of several acres to maintain early successional habitat, and it will continue this effort in the future. As alternatives for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan are developed, managing young forest to continually provide for the refuge's priority species will be one of the implementation strategies presented.



Forest wildlife (pictured L-R): Bobcat, Meadowlark, Cottontail Rabbit and Bobolink.

### The Rule of Fives for Young Forest:

For forest landowners who want to maintain diverse habitat and age classes that benefit wildlife, Herrick recommends "the Rule of Fives": Manage at least five percent of your land for seedling, sapling and shrub type habitat, cut at least five acres of forest to start the new growth, then five years later cut another five acres or more nearby. For more information, go to [www.timberdoodle.org](http://www.timberdoodle.org).

## Forest Succession and Wildlife



### Some of the species which can be found at each stage:

#### Grasses

American toad  
Red-back salamander  
Eastern meadowlark  
Grasshopper sparrow  
Red fox  
Ragweed

#### Shrubs and Saplings

Wood frog  
Eastern garter snake  
American woodcock  
Ruffed grouse  
Cottontail rabbit  
Goldenrod

#### Pole Stage

Red-spotted newt  
Gray tree frog  
Black-capped chickadee  
Red-eyed vireo  
Eastern box turtle  
Sumac

#### Mature Forest

Slimy salamander  
Great-horned owl  
Pileated woodpecker  
Turkey  
Black bear  
Oak



Refuge  
**Summer  
Fest** June 30

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Rain or Shine

Free activities for everyone