

Scarborough Marsh Wildlife Management Area

Managing Habitat for New England Cottontail

New England cottontail, once common throughout the region, are now an endangered species in the state. The population is so low that it is a candidate species for the Federal Endangered Species List. Loss of habitat is the primary reason for their declining population. These rabbits need thick shrubland or thicket habitat for survival. As stands of trees grow older, they shade-out the understory, thinning the shrubs until it is no longer suitable rabbit habitat.



New England Cottontail by Anne Schnell

The State is working with private, public and non-profit partners to recover the cottontail before it needs to be federally listed. In Maine, we are active members of the state working group - a coalition of over a dozen agencies all working together with this common goal. We are establishing core demonstration sites on public lands to create and showcase these vital habitats. New England cottontail, as well as declining migratory birds will benefit.

We will be expanding the shrubland along the Eastern Trail so that the rabbits, which are already within hopping distance, will increase. It is our hope that proactive management of this rarity will keep New England cottontail in Maine for future generations to enjoy.

Declining Shrubland Dependent Wildlife

- New England Cottontail
- American Woodcock
- Chestnut-sided Warbler
- Prairie Warbler
- Eastern Towhee



American Woodcock by Dave Menke/USFWS

Prairie Warbler by Steve Maslowski/USFWS



Eastern Towhee by Clipart.com

Suitable Habitat



by USFWS staff



by Margaret Arbuthnot

Unsuitable Habitat



by Bruce Hammond



by Margaret Arbuthnot

Changing landscapes

Landscapes are influenced by people, as well as by natural processes (fire, hurricanes, insects, beavers). As fields and pastures were abandoned and reverted to shrublands the cottontail populations thrived. As larger trees grew over the shrublands, the dense understory grew thin and the rabbits declined.

Signs of past ditching provide evidence that this area was once open - most likely agricultural fields and pastures. By clearing patches of trees and allowing natural succession to occur, we can re-establish valuable shrubland. Allowing some grassy areas to fill in with shrubs will also provide food and cover for wildlife. Guided by the species goals and objectives set forth by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we hope to increase our shrubland habitat up to 70 acres in this area.

What to Expect



Ken Canfield/Maine Forest Service

Hardwood forest regeneration

- IFW staff will be on-site monitoring the project
- Forestry operations will take approximately 2 weeks to complete
- The Eastern Trail will remain open at all times
- You will see heavy equipment
- There will be some noise from equipment during work hours

We welcome your comments or questions 207-657-2345

