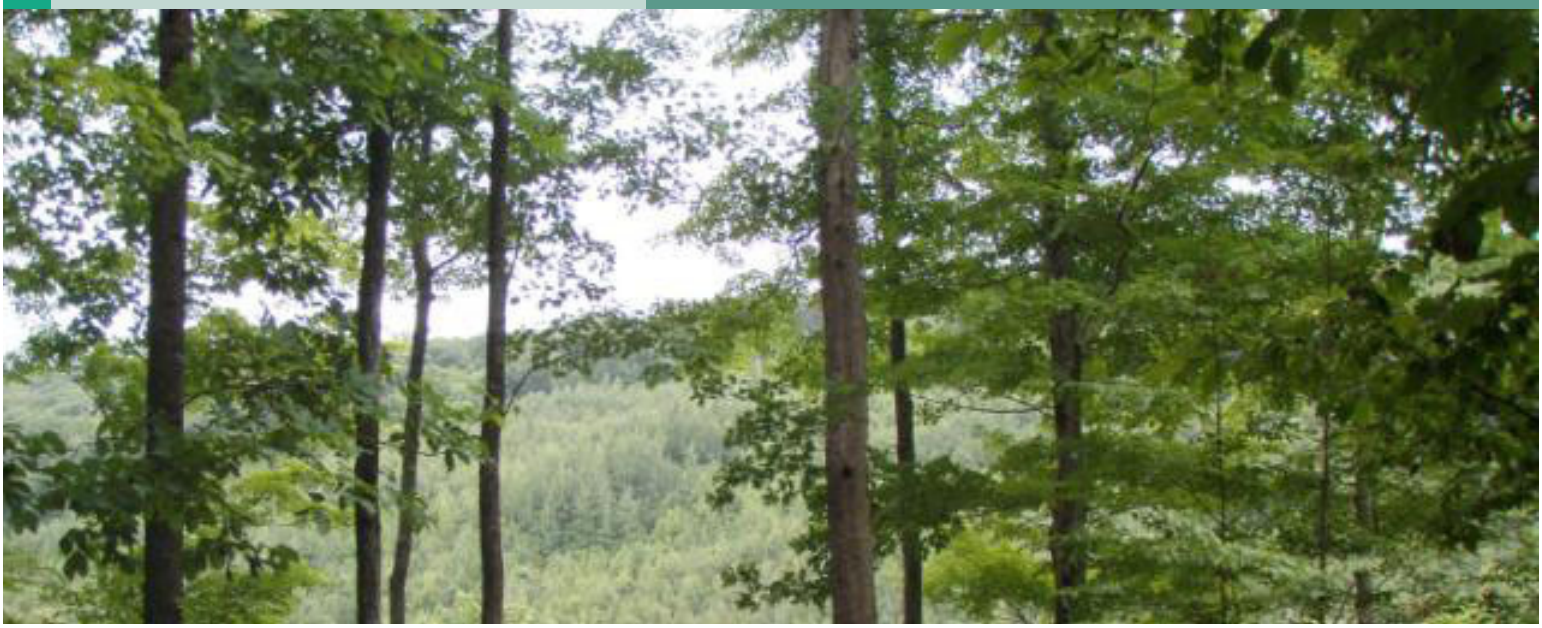
USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Beyond Boundaries

New England/New York Forestry Initiative

2011 Report



Background/Purpose

The New England/New York region contains over 52 million acres of forest land, including the largest intact block of temperate broadleaf forest in the Nation. The forests are diverse, ranging from the extensive broadleaf deciduous and mixed forests to montane and lowland spruce-fir and low elevation forests of oak, pine, and hickory. They stretch from the Atlantic coast to the highest mountain peaks in the region. The forests also provide habitat for a variety of wildlife such as moose, black bear, lynx, and several migratory bird species. New England and New York forests help define the character of the region and are an integral part of its economy.

In 2008-2009, the New England Governors' Conference commissioned a Blue Ribbon Task Force to identify the most urgent land conservation issues facing New England. The committee identified five principles to build a lasting conservation legacy for future generations of New Englanders, including "Keeping Forests as Forests." In the last 20 years, two-thirds of the area's forests have changed ownership, and tens of thousands of acres have been developed. A 2006 Forest Service study reported that the 43,000 identified owners of over 1.75 million forested acres plan to sell some or all of their acreage in the next five years. As the average parcel size decreases and development accelerates, this important landscape is increasingly threatened.

The USDA All Lands Policy recognizes the critical role that forests play in providing clean drinking water, supporting rural economies, and protecting wildlife habitat. NRCS is committed to improving forest stewardship

Did You Know?

Agriculture in the New England/ New York area...

- Is restricted by rocky soil and a cooler climate.
- Maine ranks 9th in the U.S. for aquaculture.
- Vermont ranks 15th in dairy products.

and wildlife habitat, and conserving the value of the region's forest landscape through the New England/New York Forestry Initiative (NE/NYFI). NRCS is working with forest landowners and land managers to Keep Forests as Forests and maintain and enhance the public benefits they provide. The Initiative offers a combination of technical and financial assistance to landowners and land managers in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Goals/Objectives Achieved

NRCS is working with forest landowners through the NE/NY Forestry Initiative to support and promote a strong forestry interest and stewardship ethic. NRCS is helping landowners plan and install conservation practices that will improve forest health, reduce erosion, and improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. Those efforts will assist NRCS in meeting the USDA strategic goal of "ensuring that private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water and wildlife resources." It will also assist in meeting the Governors' Conference goal to conserve at least one-half of the region's forests.

Conservation Funding/ Practices Applied

NRCS is working with landowners and land managers to improve the health and value of forest lands through the development of management plans and the implementation of conservation practices. Typical practices include: forest stand improvement, the restoration of rare and declining habitats, early successional habitat management, riparian forest buffers, erosion control on forest trails and landings, stream habitat improvement, and fish passages. These conservation practices promote healthy, sustainable forests throughout the New England/New York region.

Benefits

In the New England/New York area, sustainably managed forests serve as the backbone for rural economies by providing renewable energy, forest products, outdoor recreation, and tourism. The forests also provide clean water for the public, improved habitat for fish and wildlife, and contribute to the region's scenic beauty. Because of the efforts for forest land restoration, forest landowners can look forward to an improvement in their land as well as a productive future for themselves and future generations.

Fiscal Year 2011 NRCS -- New England/New York Forestry Initiative Funding

NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) and Active and Completed Contracts/Agreements

All Completed Through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

State Name	Number of Contracts	FA Contract Obligations
Connecticut	28	$912,934
Maine	84	$2,222,614
Massachusetts	33	$903,586
New Hampshire	39	$759,144
New York	53	$504,027
Rhode Island	18	$243,666
Vermont	127	$973,818
Totals	**382**	**$6,519,789**

Source: WHIP data was queried from NRCS ProTracts 10/1/11 with an update 12/24/11.

NE/NYFI In the States

Connecticut

Restoring Pasture to Woodland Provides Habitat for Wildlife

Landowner Brian Dirlam takes pride in combining his passion for wildlife into managing his land. After observing a decline in the woodcock and ruffed grouse populations on his property, Dirlam contacted NRCS. He received technical support and financial assistance to restore five acres of abandoned pasture to mixed hardwood forest, improving habitat for wildlife species, and laying the groundwork for sustainable forest harvest management in the future.

During the conservation planning process, he identified that he wanted to eradicate the Asiatic bittersweet and other invasive weeds and their seed sources before they spread to the rest of his land.

The area was cleared with the exception of select crop trees which were retained to provide a seed source for natural regeneration and food for wildlife. Dirlam also planted 65 native shrubs and seeded portions of the pasture to a native plant mix. He applied a thick mulch of woodchips and opted to use a propane torch to make spot treatments to control invasive weeds, reducing potential threats to water quality.

As the plant materials mature, the crop trees and native plants will replace the non-native species and the need for additional management will decrease. Dirlam has already noticed a variety of wildlife enjoying the area again.

Above: Pasture before conservation work. Second photo shows healthy wildlife habitat and forestland.

Maine

Replacing a Crushed Culvert Improves Water Quality and Fish Habitat

Imagine a collapsed road with a crushed, rusted-out culvert. Gravel from the road has fallen into the stream and debris has collected inside of the culvert, slowing water flow and preventing fish passage of brook trout and the American eel.

Through the NE/NYFI, NRCS staff in Edmunds (Washington County), Maine partnered with a private landowner to replace the culvert with a more fish-friendly alternative and rebuild the road.

NRCS provided engineering support and cost-share assistance for the materials and labor. The original 12-foot wide x 7-foot tall culvert was replaced with a 20-foot wide x 8-foot, 3-inch tall bottomless culvert, which allows increased runoff while reducing the risk

Maine Continued on page 4

Above: A rusted, collapsed culvert and sediment-filled waters restrict the movement of fish up or downstream. See next page for after.

Maine continued

of erosion. Road gravel that had flowed downstream was removed and footers were placed for the culvert. The project was delayed by the arrival of tropical storm Irene, which covered the site with five feet of water. The culvert is now open for fish passage, and vehicles are able to cross the stream on the improved road.

With the sediment removed and an improved culvert in place, fish will soon be moving throughout the stream again with planted trees and grasses holding the soil in place.

Massachusetts

Restoring Forestland Reveals Rare American Chestnut

When Jack Lochhead looked into a federal government program to help him manage his 250 acres of forest land in rural Conway, MA, he had no idea what surprises were waiting for him deep in the forest. During the conservation planning process, Lochhead worked with NRCS staff to develop an oak regeneration project to restore the forest and provide habitat for wildlife. The project called for selective thinning of the area around existing oak trees to allow new oak seedlings to take hold.

Historically, oak trees dominated forest ecosystems in Massachusetts. However, other species frequently took over after the land was cleared for farming and timber harvesting. While searching for the best location for the project, Lochhead and NRCS staff made a startling discovery—a lone American chestnut tree.

The American chestnut is a large, deciduous tree that populated eastern forests until it was devastated by the chestnut blight. Less than a century ago, chestnuts covered 200 million acres of eastern woodlands from Louisiana to Maine—making up about a quarter of the hardwood trees in these forests and providing habitat for countless creatures. Today, healthy adult American chestnut trees are rarely found in their native range.

Lochhead called a local representative for The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) and verified that the tree was indeed a healthy American chestnut. The tree is now part of TACF's breeding program where trees are crossbred to produce a blight-resistant strain of chestnut. Trees like Lochhead's provide valuable genetic material for the project and will help reintroduce the chestnut to eastern forests.

Jack Lockhead cleared some of the trees from the 250 acres of forest land he manages to allow new oak seedlings room to grow.

New Hampshire

Harvesting Lesser-desired Species Improves Forest Quality

Western New Hampshire and Central Massachusetts contain several continuous blocks of private forest land—one of the largest contiguous deciduous forests in the U.S. The area is characterized by excellent water quality, few invasive plants, productive soils, and high quality timber which are a result of several conservation easements and the conservation efforts of many forest landowners. NRCS has prioritized the area for conservation practices such as timber stand improvement, which designates lower-graded trees for cropping and allows the regeneration of more desired species.

One property in NH is an excellent example of forest regeneration and crop tree release in an area that was historically full of high-graded species. With NRCS assistance, poor quality beech, hemlock, and red maple have been harvested to promote the growth of high quality hardwoods like white pine, sugar maple, yellow birch, and ash that once filled the area in the 1970s. The project has provided timber and processing jobs for an otherwise stagnant forest economy in the region and will provide a return on the public investment in the future as the demand for North American hardwoods increases.

In addition, NRCS has worked with The Nature Conservancy and The Society for The Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF) to restore the Pine Barrens along several outwash areas of the Ossippee River. Together, they have reduced fuel loads, installed fire breaks, and conducted controlled burns to promote fire-tolerant vegetation in this fire dependent ecosystem. The restoration will also provide mating and nesting habitat to several declining bird species such as brown thrashers and whip-poor-wills.

Top Photo: Forest land is harvested to prepare the area for a controlled burn then re-planted with higher quality species to complete the reforestation process. Lower photo: Harvested forest lands provide open space for high quality trees to take root and grow.

New York

Restoring Forest Lands Creates Habitat for At-Risk Birds

In New York, the NE/NY Forestry Initiative is focused on creating and enhancing habitat for declining shrubland birds, such as the golden-winged warbler, ruffed grouse, and eastern towhee. Conservation efforts also improve habitat for pollinators and other grassland wildlife species.

Forest owner and wildlife enthusiast Alvin Rabideau, of Schuyler Falls in the Lake Champlain Basin of northeastern New York, is working with NRCS to open up the tree canopy and encourage shrub growth below by selectively cutting low-value trees. The Lake Champlain basin is an NRCS-defined priority habitat area located in the Atlantic flyway, a migratory corridor for waterfowl and other birds that provides critical resting and feeding sites during fall and spring migration periods. It also provides prime nesting habitat during the breeding season.

Rabideau also planted several acres of trees to control hillside erosion and provide food and nesting habitat for wildlife. "It's a real good program," said Rabideau. "We are surrounded by state land and we are looking forward to attracting even more wildlife by diversifying the habitat."

The eastern towhee is one of the shrubland birds that will benefit from the management of forest lands in the New England/New York Forestry Initiative.

Rhode Island

Selective Harvesting Improves Forest Quality

On April 30, 1942, a fire burned 24,510 acres of Rhode Island forestland. Seventy years later, the impact of that fire is still apparent. The intensity of the fire eliminated much of the eastern white pine and today the forest consists of smaller diameter sprout-origin oak. A few clusters of larger trees can still be found but show scarring.

In an effort to improve forest health, support regeneration, promote upland wildlife habitat, and control invasive species, the Greene Company has been working with NRCS through the New England / New York Forestry Initiative. By selective harvesting the poor quality oak and red maple, they are promoting the growth of better quality hardwoods and eastern white pine on 45 acres of their property.

In addition, the Greene Company has also improved the overall management of the land by adopting additional conservation activities such as installing wood duck boxes in ponds and improving management activities on an additional 429 acres of forest land.

The Greene Company of Rhode Island owns and manages 2,140 acres with 1,718 acres of forest land, five ponds, two cedar swamps, and 103 acres in cranberry cultivation.

Vermont

Selective Harvesting Improves Understory Growth for Wildlife Habitat and Food Sources

Richard Carr of Enosburg, Vermont, knows his forest land and fields are valuable resources that need to be improved and protected from development. Forests are important to Vermont's culture and improve the lives of its residents by providing environmental and economic benefits. The NRCS New England/New York Forestry Initiative has provided the financial assistance to help Carr improve forest health and enhance wildlife habitat on his land. NRCS has provided the conservation professionals to work with Carr and help formulate a strategy for achieving his forest management goals.

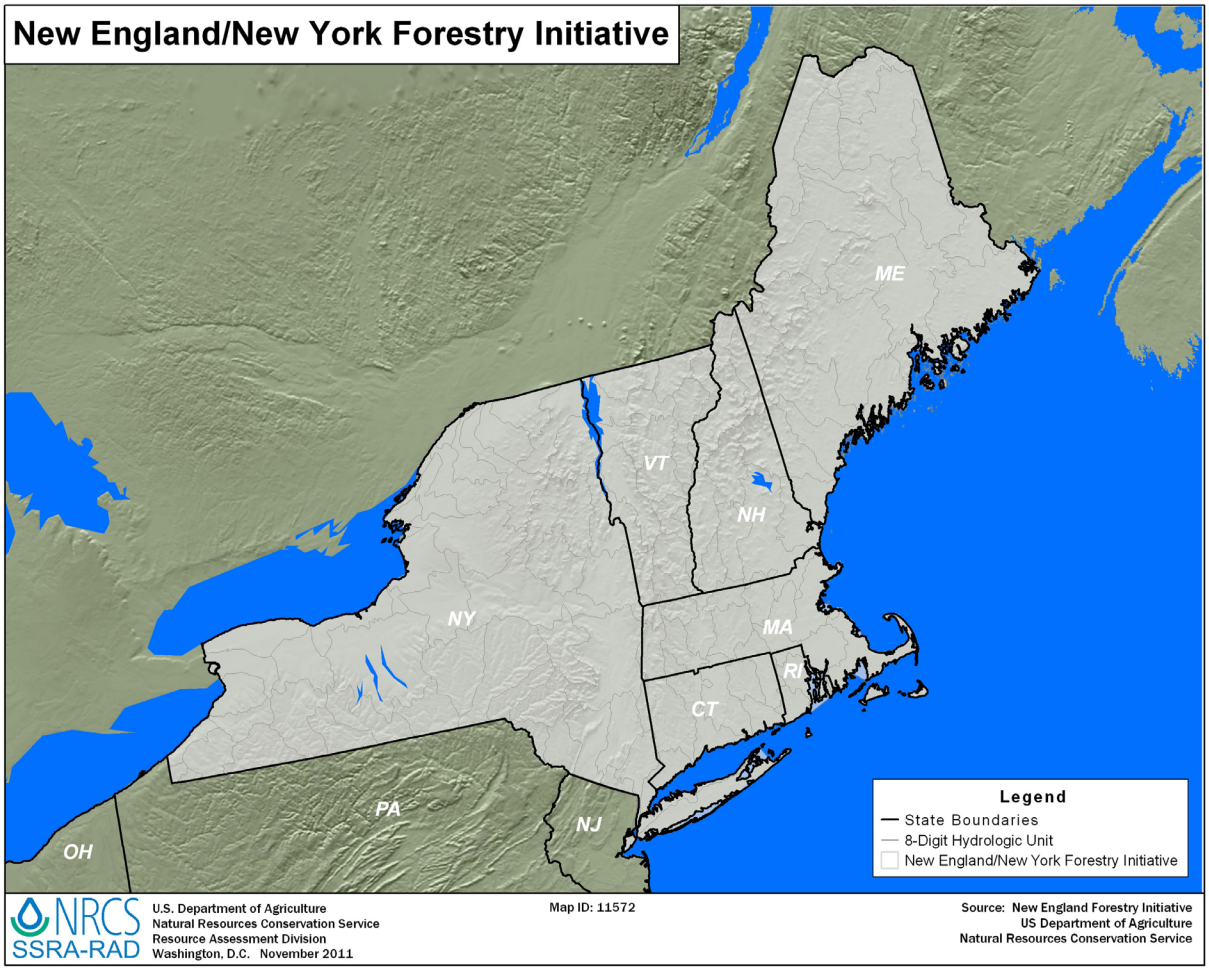
In 2010, Carr applied 12 acres of forest stand improvement practices that allowed the thinning of overcrowded forest stands to favor healthy, well-formed trees. The growth rate of the trees left behind after thinning will result in a higher value investment for Carr, who can sell those trees for timber in the future or use them to produce maple syrup.

The thinning practices are improving forest wildlife habitat by increasing the fruit and/or seed production of the remaining trees and promoting regeneration and cover in the understory. An existing early successional area of young woody growth was expanded with habitat management practices to provide better quality habitat for both declining non-game and game species of wildlife. Carr is now working collaboratively with his neighbors to insure their sections of the forest also remain healthy and protected.

Thinning lesser quality forest trees promotes the growth of higher quality woods and improves wildlife habitat.

"NRCS conservation practices to improve and protect our northeastern forests also help to enhance water quality and provide habitat for many of our endangered species. We thank the forest managers and landowners for their work to improve and protect those forests."

--NRCS Conservation Forestery Specialist



For more information on how you can participate in the NE/NY Forestry Initiative, contact your local NRCS office within the states shown on the map above.

Improving and Protecting the Forests of the New England and New York Region

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