

Preserving and Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

Coveting NH Coverts

The Challenge

With rapid residential and commercial development in New Hampshire, the State is seeing increased forest fragmentation and sprawl. This development of open space and farmland is having widespread effects on natural areas and remaining wildlife habitat.

While the public needs to be aware of the consequences of consuming so many acres, there are not enough natural resource professionals to reach every citizen in the State.

The Solution

The Forest Service, along with other cooperating organizations, provides financial support to the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension's Forestry and Wildlife Program. This funding staffs public education training programs, such as the NH Coverts Project. Since 1995, Cooperative Extension has provided natural resource protection training with a focus on wildlife habitat and community efforts for land protection across the State.

The NH Coverts Project trains volunteers to promote forest stewardship and wildlife habitat conservation in order to:

- enhance, restore, and conserve habitat for the rich diversity of native wildlife in the State, and
- increase the amount of New Hampshire's public and private land managed with a stewardship ethic.

The training emphasizes habitat conservation as the best way to ensure viable wildlife populations.

Resulting Benefits

The NH Coverts Project is a community education effort that focuses on the message that ordinary people can manage local land using forestry practices that benefit wildlife.

According to Cooperative Extension Specialist Karen Bennett, landowners who receive the training commit to pay back 40 hours of volunteer work related to the mission of coverts. "These individuals become volunteers for life with

A "covert" (pronounced "cover" with a "t") is a thicket that provides shelter for wild animals. NH Coverts are neighbors helping neighbors understand the importance of wildlife habitat.



Wildlife Specialist Darrell Covell demonstrates to Coverts volunteers how bears claw beech trees, leaving telltale marks as they search for beechnuts. (UNH Coop Ext photo)

a lifelong commitment to the environment," says Bennett. "They work towards making a difference for wildlife."

By integrating the management of forests and open lands to benefit wildlife, watershed areas and natural resources are protected as well. "It's about getting people to understand where water comes from," says Dave Welsch, USDA Forest Service Forester, "where it goes and how we interact with the environment to either protect or damage it. When you understand this, it makes all the difference in the world."

Sharing Success

The NH Coverts Project encourages participants to integrate their new knowledge and skills into what they're already doing to protect wildlife habitat. Since many of them volunteer with various local conservation organizations, they are able to carry their training to the larger community, which further maximizes the benefits.

The Forest Service sees the success of the NH Coverts Project as people "understanding and then applying this knowledge on a local basis," says Welsch. The project speaks to the need for landowners to be stewards of the land, for when a community makes informed decisions and considers the effects of its actions on the environment, natural resources and wildlife benefit.



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