

# Young Forest Initiative

*An update of activities benefitting young forest wildlife*

## Expanding our Focus



*American woodcock by Paul Fusco*

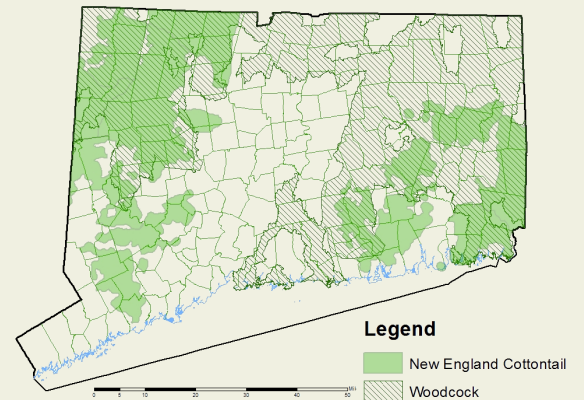
Areas below) by DEEP and Wildlife Management Institute biologists. Working Lands for Wildlife and focus on the NEC will continue, but opportunities to create young forest throughout the state will allow even more private landowners to join us in our efforts to protect these declining species. In order to receive project funding in 2017, you must apply before June 16th. For more information about pursuing a project on your property, please contact Lisa Wahle or Nick Zito. Their contact information is available at the end of this newsletter.

## Wildlife Focus Areas

*If you build  
it, they will  
come-*

Over the years, the New England cottontail has served as a posterchild for creating and preserving young forest habitat in Connecticut. Fifty-five of the state's species of greatest conservation need rely on young forest habitat, including nineteen insects, twenty-one birds, six mammals, and nine reptiles and amphibians. Many other species spend at least part of their lives in young forest, including forest interior birds, who feed on fruit and insects in young forests to store up energy for migration.

New England Cottontail & American Woodcock Focus Areas



As we move forward, we are broadening our scope to include all young forest-dependent wildlife in Connecticut. Due to the scarcity and fragmentation of young forest in this region, these species are especially in need of our help. Many of them have been benefitting from the New England Cottontail Initiative, but our activities were limited to NEC focus areas.

A focus area refers to an area of biological significance to the species we are targeting for management. Focus areas are determined by many factors, including where the species already occurs, and whether or not an area has landscape characteristics that have potential to provide good habitat. For the NEC, we have twelve focus areas across the state. These areas were created around known NEC locations and helped guide us in choosing where to create young forest habitat.

A new focus area for woodcock, encompassing much more of the state, has been designated based on modeling (see Focus



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*Blue-winged warbler by Paul Fusco*

Until now, funding for habitat enhancement projects has been prioritized within the focus areas. The new woodcock focus area will allow us to work more widely throughout Connecticut.

### The Young Forest Team Welcomes RCPP Forester Nicholas Zito

We are excited to announce that we have entered into a regional partnership with the Wildlife Management Institute and NRCS. This partnership funds a forester to create young forest habitat on private lands through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This RCPP grant provides funds for forest planning and project implementation to create or enhance habitat on private lands for NECs, woodcock, and other young forest species.

Nick Zito has joined our team as we expand our focus to include woodcock and other young forest species. His prior forestry experience includes working for the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, CT DEEP, a private forestry industry, and the Regional Water Bureau.

This is the first time Nick has worked specifically to create wildlife habitat. Even before joining us, he has tried to dispel the negative reactions many people have to clear cuts in order to create a greater variety of habitats. He believes that we need to change the paradigm from mature for-

est to a more evenly distributed mosaic of successional stages.

Nick will be reaching out to landowners in our new focus areas and writing management plans to create or maintain young forest habitat. He will be conducting outside assessments and outreach, as well as habitat monitoring.

### Kudos to Rick Jacobson for leadership of the NEC/Young Forest Initiative



*Rick Jacobson and a NEC, by Paul Fusco*

In February 2011, regional state and federal partners convened an Executive Committee (ExCom) with bylaws to govern conservation activities for the New England cottontail (NEC), then a candidate species for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. A Technical Committee was established to develop and implement a Conservation Strategy for the species. The ExCom guided development and implementation of that Strategy. In fall 2015, the USFWS announced that, due to the success of ongoing conservation efforts and the expectation that they would continue, listing NECs under the Endangered Species Act was not warranted. The ExCom expanded its governance responsibilities to address conservation of all young forest-dependent wildlife last year. Rick



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Jacobson has been at the helm of the Ex-Com for most of this, since 2012. In February, he passed the baton and chairmanship responsibilities to Cathy Sparks of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental Management. Bravo Rick for your dedication and leadership!

### A Special Thanks



A special thanks goes out to the Northwest CT Sportsman's Council and Ruffed Grouse Society for their continued support of the Wildlife Division's ongoing Young Forest Initiative. Both organizations have a long record of supporting habitat enhancement projects on public stands throughout Connecticut. Working together the two groups donated a total of \$5,000 towards habitat enhancement projects at the Aldo Leopold WMA, located in Southbury and the Mad River Management Area, located in Winsted. These projects are part of the Division's State Wildlife Grant project, which is seeking to enhance forest age diversity throughout the region. Together, the two Young Forest habitat projects total over 80 acres and will benefit American woodcock, New England cottontail and 55 other young forest dependent wildlife species. Work will be completed in the summer/fall of 2017. Funds will be used to assist in the habitat project costs and also provide monies to provide project signage.

### Contact Information

For more information, or to discuss a potential project, please contact the following:

- Lisa Wahle  
NEC Project Contract Biologist  
[lisa.wahle@ct.gov](mailto:lisa.wahle@ct.gov)
- Nick Zito  
RCCP Forester  
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- Judy Wilson  
DEEP Habitat Program Supervisor  
[judy.wilson@ct.gov](mailto:judy.wilson@ct.gov)

Our office location is:

CT DEEP Eastern District HQ  
209 Hebron Road  
Marlborough, CT 06447  
(860) 295-9523

The following websites offer further information pertaining to young forest species:

[www.ct.gov/deep/youngforestinitiative](http://www.ct.gov/deep/youngforestinitiative)  
[www.newenglandcottontail.org](http://www.newenglandcottontail.org)  
[www.timberdoodle.org](http://www.timberdoodle.org)  
[www.youngforest.org](http://www.youngforest.org)  
[www.ctnrns.usda.gov/cottontail](http://www.ctnrns.usda.gov/cottontail)  
[www.fws.gov/northeast/indepth/rabbit](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/indepth/rabbit)

### What do you think?

We hope you find this newsletter informative and we welcome all comments. To submit recommendations or to unsubscribe, please email:  
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