

Urban and Community Forestry and Wildlife Conservation

Situation:

New Hampshire is one of the most densely forested states in the country. Growing forests cover 84 percent of the Granite State, and as a renewable resource, supply many values to the state and regional economy, including tourism.

Increasing development has led to smaller parcels of forested land and open space. Communities and small parcel landowners want to be further educated in the best practices for managing urban shade trees and wildlife habitat, while making sound policy decisions regarding land use.

UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:

Andy Fast, Belknap County Extension Educator, Forest Resources, helped residents of Alton and Barnstead respond to the 2008 tornado damage. This included hosting an informational session in North Barnstead with 60 individuals attending, and providing assistance to 24 residents through email and phone calls, and 11 residents through site visits that covered 202 acres. State-wide, the storm uprooted or damaged trees across a 49.5-mile stretch of the state from Northwood to Effingham, resulting in millions of dollars in damage to homes and property. In addition to site visits from county Extension Educators, a comprehensive web site was developed to provide information about storm damage, safety tips for clean up, and to provide access to other state agency resources pertaining to disaster assistance and clean up.

Andy provided the Belmont Conservation Commission with funding options for universal access trails on the Belmont Town Forest and continues to meet with them and conduct site visits to the town forest.

A workshop, "Planning a Timber Sale on Your Town Forest and Signs of Spring Walk" took place with Extension Wildlife Specialist Matt Tarr, Ron Klemarczyk, and the Gilmanton Conservation Commission on the Gilmanton Town Forest.

The Gilford Elementary School was assisted with their Community-Based School Environmental Education (CO-SEED).

The Community Tree Steward Program educates volunteers in community and urban forestry. Tree Stewards participate in a course that meets once a week for 11 weeks with optional Friday field trips. The goals are to strengthen communities, promote social change, and enhance urban ecosystems. In return, they spend 40 hours volunteering in their communities, although most volunteer additional hours beyond the required 40.

- Andy Fast worked with the Laconia Shade Tree Group with support from Mary Tebo, UNH Extension Educator in Community Forestry and John Parry, Urban Forester, USDA Forest Service, to provide a two-workshop training on inventorying shade trees, followed with several days of inventory.

The NH Coverts Project trains volunteers to promote wildlife habitat conservation and forest stewardship. The Coverts Project goals are to enhance, restore and conserve habitat for its rich diversity, and to increase the amount of New Hampshire's public and private land managed with a stewardship ethic. Almost half of all Coverts volunteers serve on their town's Conservation Commission, bringing knowledge of wildlife and habitat to these local decision-making bodies. Coverts volunteers are asked to spread what they've learned at the Coverts training workshop to other landowners, community members, and the public.

- Matt Tarr completed seven site/field visits with landowners to identify and make recommendations around improving wildlife habitat.

How We Made a Difference:

- The Community Tree Steward and Coverts Projects ask volunteers to serve 40 hours doing outreach on wildlife and forestry topics each year. In 2008, Coverts and Community Tree Steward volunteers volunteered 535 hours in Belknap County on behalf of forest stewardship or wildlife habitat issues. These hours reflect the volunteers' involvement in many different wildlife and conservation groups, and reflect the intense dedication of Coverts volunteers. It represents a cost benefit to the county of \$10,245, when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.15/hour for volunteer time (independentsector.org).
- The NH Coverts Project trains volunteers to promote wildlife habitat conservation and forest stewardship. It works to bring a message of wildlife conservation and habitat stewardship to New Hampshire's private landowners, who combined, own more than 80 percent of New Hampshire's forestland. The Coverts Program has trained over 250 volunteers statewide (12 in Belknap County, managing 2,370 acres) in wildlife ecology, habitat management, and sound land stewardship. Recently Covert cooperator, Nanci Mitchell and her husband Charlie, of Gilmanton, hosted a Coverts workshop highlighting early-successional habitat management, vernal pool ecology and management, cost-share programs for landowners, and the conservation work they've done on their farm. Their conservation enthusiasm, hard work, and personal generosity have helped shape a new coalition that formed around the 32,000-acre Belknap Mountain Range. (Making Tracks Newsletter, June, 2008)