

# New Hampshire Coverts Project

*Volunteers Working for Wildlife*



## 2002 Annual Report

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UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE  
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The New Hampshire Coverts Project is sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension, New Hampshire Fish & Game, New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands, The Ruffed Grouse Society, and U.S. Forest Service State and Private Forestry.



## 2002 Summary of Accomplishments

The New Hampshire Coverts Project is a program that trains volunteers to promote wildlife and habitat conservation and forest stewardship. This report details Coverts Project programs in 2002, along with the substantial efforts made by our dedicated and accomplished group of Coverts volunteers, bringing the wildlife stewardship message to a wide range of people across the state of New Hampshire.

The New Hampshire Coverts Project continues to be one of the most effective ways to broaden the outreach efforts of UNH Cooperative Extension and its partners. The NH Coverts Project is a flagship program for Extension that expands with each year's trained class of Cooperators. This yearly growth continues to require more efficient communication, but it also means greater opportunities for locally-based programming, as Coverts volunteers represent greater and greater numbers of communities around the state. This year marked the completion of the Coverts Project evaluation, and the dissemination of the results to Coverts volunteers, Cooperative Extension staff, project partners, and the greater scientific community through a variety of media and events.

A summary of accomplishments in 2002 includes:

- Organized the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Coverts Training Workshop and trained 26 new Coverts Cooperators, bringing the statewide total of active volunteers to 187
- Completed Coverts Project Evaluation survey, analyzed data, and shared results at 8 forums (project funded by USDA Forest Service Focusing of Federal Assistance FY2000 grant)
- Held three continuing education workshops designed specifically for Coverts alumni and guests
- Continued managing email discussion forum ("listserv") for 115 participating Coverts Cooperators and natural resource professionals
- Continued updates to Coverts web page as part of the UNH Cooperative Extension website, adding several new features and publications
- Published three editions of *Making Tracks* newsletter - February, June, and November
- Showcased traveling Coverts exhibit at 8 different venues in 2002 (using both staff and volunteer exhibitors)
- Encouraged and promoted participation by Coverts Cooperators in numerous educational workshops organized by UNH Cooperative Extension and project partners, including workshops on landscape-scale conservation, current use taxation, invasive species, GIS and GPS mapping technology, inventorying and monitoring wildlife, and estate planning and land protection.



## Coverts Project Background

Since 1995, the New Hampshire Coverts Project has promoted wildlife habitat conservation and forest stewardship through volunteer education and outreach. The goal of the NH Coverts Project is to enhance, maintain, and conserve habitat for the rich diversity of native wildlife in the Granite State through sound land stewardship.

Funding support and sponsorship of the NH Coverts Project comes from UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE), NH Fish and Game Department, the Ruffed Grouse Society, NH Division of Forests and Lands, and the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry. A half-time staff person coordinates the program, while the UNHCE wildlife specialist oversees the project. The project also receives assistance from a network of 10 county foresters and the Extension specialists in forest resources and biodiversity.

Each spring, applications are sent to prospective participants for the fall workshop. Potential applicants are recruited by Extension staff, project partner staff, existing Coverts Cooperators, letters to Conservation Commissions, press releases, and through Coverts-related events. The major selection criteria are the applicant's enthusiasm, willingness to commit to outreach, and a recognized leadership role within their community. A copy of the 2002 application form, a map showing the distribution of Coverts Cooperators, and a list of the 187 active volunteers are included in the Appendix.



## Annual Coverts Training Workshop - September 4-7, 2002

Boston University's Sargent Camp, located in Hancock, NH, continues to provide an ideal location for the annual Coverts training workshop, held this year September 4-7, 2002. With this the third year of the workshop at this site, we have been able to refine both the logistics of the workshop and the location of field sites in this ecologically diverse part of the state. We incorporated three new field locations, including private, public, and non-profit-owned land management sites. The Appendix includes a copy of the 2002 workshop agenda and a list of the 22 workshop instructors and field trip hosts who assisted with the 3 ½ day training workshop.

The cost of the workshop, including food, lodging, and reference materials, is entirely funded by grants from our partners. In exchange for the opportunity to attend the workshop, participants agree to become Coverts volunteers and spend at least 40 hours of volunteer time during their first year in the program. Each Cooperator develops an outreach plan on how they will return to their community to share their experiences and motivate others. Cooperators become part of a volunteer network connected through newsletters, the internet, field tours, and continuing education workshops. Today we have 187 active volunteers out of 194 trained since 1995.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	<b>Total</b>
Number of Coverts Cooperators trained	23	23	22	26	28	23	23	26	<b>194</b>



## **2002 Coverts Events and Continuing Education Programs**

Coverts Cooperators are invited to events and workshops throughout the year which help them build on their knowledge of natural resource topics, often with more in-depth material and presentations than is possible at the Coverts training workshop. The programs and events provide an opportunity for Coverts volunteers to meet with program partners, natural resource professionals, and to re-unite with other Coverts Cooperators. They also offer an opportunity for our Extension staff to re-acquaint with Coverts volunteers from their counties.

Regionally-focused Coverts programming progressed this year, led by Coverts "liaisons" located in 7 of the 10 counties in New Hampshire. As envisioned by the Advisory Committee in 2001, the county liaison takes on the role (with assistance by the Coverts Coordinator) of hosting and stimulating local programming, by and for Coverts Cooperators, and to inspire collective volunteer projects by Coverts Cooperators in their county.

### **2002 Events and Workshops**

**Landscape-Scale Conservation in NH: Scientific Underpinnings, Planning and Practice - Jan. 9**  
Academic conference attended by 23 Coverts Cooperators

#### **Farm and Forest Exposition – February 1-2**

Twelve Coverts Cooperators conducted educational activities using Wildlife Kit materials and staffed the UNH Cooperative Extension-sponsored booth over the course of two days.

#### **Coverts Advisory Committee Meeting – February 2**

A total of 19 Coverts Cooperators and staff participated in the Advisory Committee meeting on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, including three staff from our project partners - RGS, NHF&G, and USFS. Members discussed new ideas for county events, suggested ways to improve county-based communication and networking, gave ideas for how to simplify the annual survey and reporting, and gave ideas for sharing the results from the Program Evaluation.

#### **Wildlife Kit Workshop – February 2**

Twenty-three Coverts Cooperators attended this workshop for volunteers interested in using the wildlife kits housed at various natural resource offices around the state. The kits, which can greatly enhance presentations to both adult and youth audiences, include curriculum materials, ideas for games and activities, physical props and tapes and videos.

#### **NE Society of American Foresters Conference – March 26-27**

Presented a poster detailing outreach efforts of NH Coverts Project; 5 Coverts Cooperators also attended conference

#### **4-H Spaces Conference – April 13**

Hands-on wildlife program for youth and parents presented by Coverts Cooperators & project staff

#### **Discover Wild New Hampshire Day – April 27**

The Coverts exhibit and accompanying wildlife activities were on hand at this large-scale, family-oriented event sponsored by NH Fish & Game. Conversations with potential cooperators,

landowners interested in wildlife, and many young people brought the Coverts message of wildlife habitat and sound stewardship to many hundreds of visitors.

### **Regionally-Based Coverts Workshops**

#### **Sunset Tree Farm Tour - April 27**

20<sup>th</sup> Annual Tree Farm tour by Coverts Cooperators, attended by 8 Hillsborough County Coverts Cooperators and project staff

#### **Managing Grasslands - May 18**

Using the new model of regionally-based continuing education programs, Coverts Cooperator Denis Huber of Exeter, NH hosted a grassland management field tour aimed at Coverts Cooperators and other local landowners from Rockingham County

#### **Early Successional Habitat Conference - May 4**

Presented a poster detailing habitat management efforts of Coverts Cooperators in NH, with focus on early-successional habitats; several Coverts volunteers also attended conference

#### **UNH Cooperative Extension Statewide Conference - June 6**

Presented a poster summarizing the results of the 2001-2 Coverts Program Evaluation

#### **Watershed Weekend - July 13**

Sponsored by Green Mountain Conservation Group; Coverts booth and display staffed by 4 Coverts volunteers and program staff, attended by 50+ residents from the Ossipee region of NH

#### **Coverts Alumni Workshop: Focus on Wetlands - August 3**

This event continues to be an important educational and social opportunity for Coverts Cooperators from all previous years (1995-2001). The all-day workshop, attended by over 40 Coverts Cooperators, focused on the natural resource features of the Ossipee region of NH, specifically wetlands and pitch pine barrens.

#### **The Ruffed Grouse Society, NH Chapter Banquet - September 20**

A new Coverts Cooperator (who is also a member of RGS) staffed the NH Coverts Project booth at the annual banquet of the local RGS chapter

#### **Coverts Listserv Forum - On-going**

Initiated in January of 2001, the Coverts listserv is an email-based discussion forum open to all Coverts Cooperators, project partners, and staff (currently 115 Cooperators subscribing). The listserv has proved particularly useful in rapidly announcing events, meetings, workshops, and media programs.



## 2002 Accomplishments by NH Coverts Cooperators

Coverts Cooperators are selected into the program based on their commitment and enthusiasm for wildlife conservation and forest stewardship. It is therefore no surprise that Coverts volunteers are involved in an extensive and broad variety of natural resource-related activities, putting the knowledge and skills gained or refined at the annual training workshop to work in their communities.

We present the following summary of Coverts volunteer accomplishments for 2002 as a compilation developed from annual accomplishment surveys that Cooperators are asked to complete each year (a copy is included in the Appendix). In response to suggestions from the Advisory Committee, this form has been shortened and simplified. Over 100 Cooperators also submitted updates and articles for inclusion in our program newsletter, *Making Tracks*, which are then also used in this report. This year, eighty-nine Coverts Cooperators responded to the accomplishment survey. This figure represents 48% of our volunteers - a decrease over the excellent response from last year, but in keeping with the average response rate of around 47%.

We opted not to experiment further with using a web-based survey this year after experiencing many technical difficulties last year. We found that many Coverts Cooperators do not have advanced internet connections, and were therefore frustrated by delays and lost surveys.

### Coverts Accomplishments: Land Stewardship

Many Coverts Cooperators own or manage land and incorporate wildlife habitat management and good forest stewardship into their land management activities. As one new Coverts Cooperator reported this year:

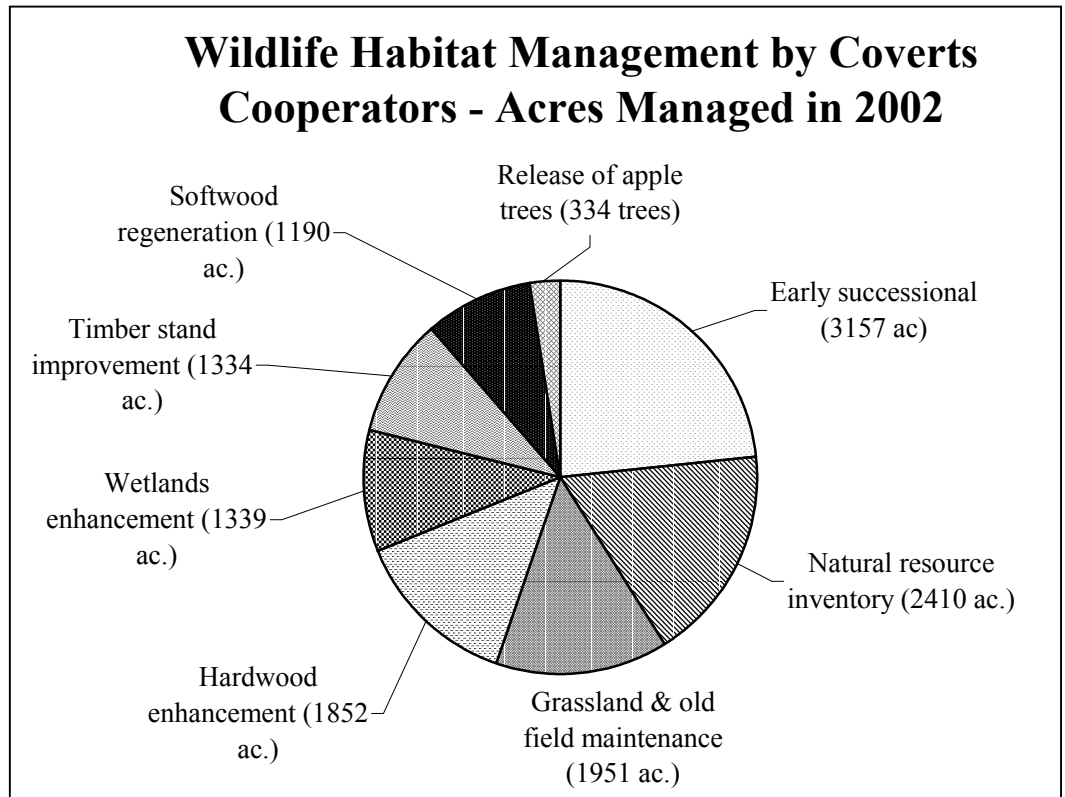
*"Motivated by our workshop in September and inspired by the professionalism of the Extension and private foresters on our field trips, I decided to finally do something with my 100-acre woodlot [in the southwest part of NH]. As a first step, I met with a forester in October and walked the property with the idea of drawing up a Forest Stewardship Plan and to include some plantings to enhance wildlife habitat. I expect to proceed with the plan this winter. In the meantime, I am participating in the small game hunter survey sponsored by NH Fish and Game, and I continue to volunteer with student and Scout troops."*

#### Land Stewardship Statistics:

- 74 cooperators (83% of respondents) own land totaling over 30,000 acres
- 39 cooperators (45% of respondents) assist in managing approx. 29,000 additional acres
- Of the lands owned or managed by Coverts Cooperators, 55 parcels (74%) have management plans, and 29 parcels (33%) have conservation easements
- 54 landowners (73% of landowner respondents) implemented some type of habitat management during the past 12 months.

The chart at right shows the habitat activities and acres affected by survey respondents this year.

In addition, twenty-six landowners performed other habitat management activities such as invasive species removal, maintaining woods roads, planting fruiting trees and shrubs for wildlife, developing new trails, doing water quality testing, and restoring wild trout habitat along river corridors.



### Coverts Accomplishments: Community Conservation

Many Coverts Cooperators serve as local decision-makers and help initiate or implement conservation actions in their communities. One long-time Coverts Cooperator was recently named the NH Municipal Association's Volunteer of the Year for her ground-breaking work helping to put a conservation easement on a county-owned farm in her town:

*"It came to our attention that the 288 acres of county farm land designated on all our town maps as "open space" in fact really wasn't...there was nothing on the books to insure that it would be permanently protected. We have worked for two years to try and preserve what is left of this county farmland for future generations. Our success this year sets an historic precedent for other counties to follow when trying to protect their dwindling natural resources"*

### Community Conservation Statistics:

- 35 Coverts Cooperators (39% of respondents) are Town Conservation Commissioners
- 5 are Town Planning Board members
- 3 are Town Council/Selectmen
- 1 is a NH State Legislator
- 48 Cooperators (55% of respondents) got involved in local conservation groups including:

Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust	Harris Center in Hancock
Antrim Wood Project	Keeping the Green in Greenfield
Appalachian Mt. Club	Mink Hills Conservation Planning Group
Ashuelot River Water Quality Watch	Monadnock Conservancy
Audubon Society of NH	Moose Mt. Regional Greenways
Bear Paw Regional Greenways	NH State Conservation Committee
Bedford Land Trust	NH Timberland Owners Association
Brentwood Open Space Task Force	NH Tree Farm Program
Chester Strategic Land Protection Committee	Nichols-Smith Conservation Trust
Cocheco River Watershed Coalition	Peabody Mill Environmental Center
Cold Pond Community Land Trust	Pemi River Local Advisory Committee
Cold River Watershed Association	Piscataqua Watershed Association
Coldwater Fisheries Coalition	Rockingham Co. Woodland Owners Assoc.
County Conservation District	Rockingham Land Trust
County Cooperative Extension Council	Sanbornton Agriculture and Land Trust (SALT)
Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust	Sierra Club
Dover Open Lands Committee	Society for the Protection of NH Forests
Durham Land Protection Working Group	The Nature Conservancy
Friends of National Wildlife Refuge	Three Rivers Land Coalition
Friends of Suncook	Tin Mt. Conservation Center
Gilmanton Land Trust	Town Forestry Committee
Green Mountain Conservation Group	Trout Unlimited
	Upper Valley Land Trust

- 21 Coverts Cooperators helped initiate or complete a community-wide natural resource or wildlife habitat inventory
- 22 assisted with a town Master Plan
- 30 helped protect land in town covering a total of 9,880 acres
- 29 helped manage town conservation land or town forest

## Coverts Accomplishments: Raising Public Awareness

Coverts Cooperators engage in many activities that promote forest stewardship and wildlife conservation to their families, friends, peers, and community members. One Coverts Cooperator reports this year:

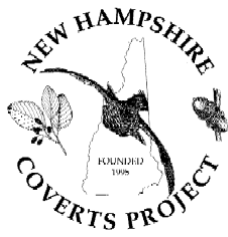
*"A neighbor of mine who attended our tree farm tour last year has decided to contract for long-term forest management as a result of what he saw and heard. Another 200-plus acres are coming under planned management!"*

A new Coverts Cooperator also wrote in:

*"I have been putting on some talks to historical societies based on what I learned at the Coverts workshop. I have entitled these talks, "Historical Changes in Landscape and Wildlife." So far, I have given one to the local historical society and another to a neighboring town's historical association."*

### Public Awareness Statistics:

- Coverts Cooperators held 16 programs for youth audiences, with 1,500+ youth participants
- 8 Coverts Cooperators served as volunteers for 4-H programs
- 22 Coverts Cooperators hosted or led 45 field tours with 1,000+ participants
- 14 public presentations were organized or presented, attended by over 1,000 people
- Coverts Cooperators were involved in 19 media interviews related to stewardship or wildlife, including newspaper articles, local TV broadcasts, editorials, or regular news columns
- 12 event exhibits were staffed by Coverts Cooperators reaching many thousands of visitors
- 53 Coverts Cooperators held conversations with 850+ neighbors about stewardship, and 25 Cooperators distributed written materials to over 5,000 people
- 4 Cooperators are volunteers in the NH Community Tree Stewards Program
- 3 Cooperators are Master Gardeners
- 20 Cooperators are Tree Farmers
- 29 Cooperators volunteer for other public or private conservation organizations



### Special Project: Coverts Program Evaluation

A grant from the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry was extended through 2002 to allow for completion of the Coverts Program Evaluation project, including compiling, analyzing, and presenting the data gathered from a survey mailed to all Coverts alumni in January 2002. A copy of the survey is included in the Appendix. The full report is online at:

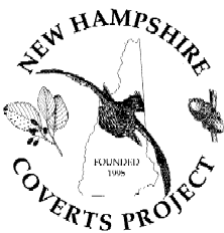
<http://www.ceinfo.unh.edu/forestry/documents/COVR2002.pdf>

A summary of the survey results includes the following:

- Wildlife Habitat (specifics) and Forest Management are topics of primary interest to Coverts Cooperators
- Coverts volunteers are interested in wetlands issues, though the current Coverts program does not currently place emphasis on this ecological component
- The labor and expense of providing extensive resource materials to Coverts Cooperators through a resource notebook is a worthwhile practice, as most use the materials at least once a year, many as often as once a month
- Coverts volunteers want to hear more from each other, so anything we can do to promote or enhance communication among Coverts Cooperators will be appreciated - the listserv, county-based Coverts groups/meetings, local field tours, etc.
- Coverts volunteers are interested in a variety of types of workshops, but programs in their local area, on other Coverts Cooperators' lands, are most appealing
- The networking function of the Coverts workshop is one of the most valued aspects of the program; this function is enhanced by the intense nature of a 3 1/2 day workshop format, by the newsletter, and by the other venues that encourage communication among Coverts volunteers
- Making connections to resource professionals is important to many Coverts volunteers, so exposing them to as many different speakers and presenters as possible during the training helps "put names with faces" and helps make those connections
- The Coverts Project is motivating volunteers to manage their own land with a stewardship ethic, one of the primary goals of the program, and an important benefit of the project
- The training provided by the Coverts Project is helping Conservation Commissioners and others communicate more effectively in their communities on behalf of wildlife and land stewardship.

Results from the Program Evaluation were shared at eight venues in 2002, including:

- Publication on Coverts Website for access to all Coverts volunteers, project partners, and other states' Coverts programs
- Results summarized for lead article in *Making Tracks* (June 2002)
- Presentations made to: UNHCE Forestry & Wildlife Staff; UNHCE "Leadership Team"
- Posters presented at three conferences: Early Successional Habitat Conference; New England Society of American Foresters Conference; UNHCE Statewide Staff Conference



## Promoting the Coverts Project

The NH Coverts Project uses several different tools to promote the program, including:

- Name tags for each Cooperator to use during public presentations, events, and tours
- T-shirts with NH Coverts Project logo (available for purchase)
- NH Coverts Project promotional brochure (see Appendix)
- A website describing the program in detail including information on the annual training workshop, volunteer opportunities, and upcoming events. Additions to the website this year

include Coverts Advisory Committee meeting minutes, the full version of the Coverts Program Evaluation report, and several personal profiles of Coverts Cooperators which tell the stewardship stories of each landowner.

- Press releases to announce the completion of the fall training, to recruit new volunteers, to recognize Cooperators at continuing education workshops, and to announce other events
- Cooperators are urged to contact the local media when hosting an event (see Appendix for several news stories from the past year)
- The NH Coverts Project display is updated to reflect program activities and accomplishments



## Coverts Project Initiatives for 2003

**Email & Coverts Listserv** – As the number of Coverts Cooperators grows each year, mailing costs and administrative costs also rise. In an effort to reduce costs, we are using email and the listserv as much as possible to disseminate news and provide updates. The 30+ volunteers without access to email continue to receive updates through the mail.

**Web Page** – New features are added to the Coverts website continuously. It can be found in the Forestry & Wildlife section of the UNH Cooperative Extension web page at: <http://ceinfo.unh.edu>

**Making Tracks** - The Coverts Project newsletter, "Making Tracks," will continue to be issued 2-3 times a year. The newsletter is an effective method of keeping our statewide volunteers, including those without access to the internet, connected to each other. Back issues of the newsletter are also available on the Coverts web site.

**Updates** - The Project Coordinator will continue yearly updates to the Ruffed Grouse Society and as part of the 5-year grant approved in 2000 and extending through June, 2005. A final report to the USFS on the 2001 Focusing Federal Assistance grant will also be completed this year.

**Advisory Committee** – the Coverts Advisory Committee will continue to provide ideas to the program. Five new members (four 2002 Cooperators and one new Extension forester) have been added to the committee.

**County Liaisons** - We will continue to work with county liaisons, having added one new liaison in 2002. The liaisons will help promote collaborative volunteer projects and organize local events for Coverts Cooperators in their counties.

**Continuing Education** – In 2003, we will offer a winter workshop at the Farm & Forest Expo on "Managing for Biodiversity," a summer alumni education workshop, and at least 2 county-based programs hosted by county liaisons and other Coverts Cooperators.

**Annual Training Workshop** - We will continue to use Sargent Camp in 2003 for the workshop training site as it offers reliable facilities and it is located near excellent field sites.