

New Hampshire Ecological Reserve System Project News ("The Ecoreserve Project")

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Contents:

- Ecoreserve Project Enters Pilot Phase
- Field-based Workshop Series
- Maine Establishes Ecological Reserves
- Population Viability Analysis on National Forests

NH Ecological Reserve System Project Enters Pilot Phase

For the past one year 4 working groups—criteria, land protection, public lands, and education—have met to work out components of implementing an ecological reserve system on the ground in New Hampshire. The groups have nearly completed all their work. This spring a pilot team will test the scientific criteria for selecting reserves and the reserve designation process on a suite of 6-10 properties that span public and private ownerships. These landowners have volunteered their properties as part of this pilot phase. A review of each site will include a landscape-level GIS analysis and a review of existing information. A field inventory will follow depending on the depth of existing information and GIS analysis. Our goal is to complete the pilot phase by the end of summer. If you'd like more information on the scientific criteria for identifying ecologically significant areas contact Ellen Snyder.

Field-Based Workshop Series

Ecoreserve Project staff are planning a series of field-based workshops on ecologically significant areas for May through September. Each workshop will include a visit to rare or exemplary natural communities, critical wildlife habitats, unique geologic sites, or other ecologically significant areas to discuss the ecology and management and protection options. Natural resource professionals, land trusts, and conservation commissions are primary audiences for these sessions.

Maine Establishes Ecological Reserves

In 1998 the Maine Forest Biodiversity Project (a public-private partnership somewhat similar to the New Hampshire effort) published a report, *An Ecological Reserves System Inventory: Potential Ecological Reserves on Maine's Existing Public and Private Conservation Lands*. In a January 9, 2001 press release, Maine's Department of Conservation Bureau of Parks and Lands announced the designation of 13 tracts totaling 68,974 acres as Maine's first Ecological Reserves. According to the press release, "the ecological reserves will protect one or

more natural ecosystems that are relatively undisturbed, and retain plant and animal communities native to Maine in their natural condition. These ecological reserves will serve as benchmarks for comparison with managed lands, maintain habitats, and provide opportunities for education, monitoring, and research.” Of the four states involved in the Northern Forest Lands Council study, Maine has advanced the farthest in designating sites specifically for biodiversity conservation.

New Hampshire’s approach to identifying and designating ecological reserves is different than Maine’s. We’ve developed scientific criteria to identify ecologically significant areas throughout the state – the criteria can be applied to public lands and private lands alike. The application of the criteria and follow-up site review and designation process is based on the voluntary involvement of landowners, both public and private. Maine has largely focused on already protected public lands. In New Hampshire we hope to also guide future land protection by making our criteria and assistance available to land trusts, communities, landowners, and public agencies. In addition, Maine selected sites where timber management and certain human uses are precluded. In New Hampshire we’ve maintained a principle of flexibility related to management and use on reserves. Appropriate and compatible management and human uses will be decided site by site based on the ecological features present.

Population Viability Analysis on National Forests

The White Mountain and Green Mountain National Forests are entering into Forest Plan Revision, a multi-year process to assess the continued effectiveness of the Forest Plan in meeting resource management objectives and to revise the Plan as needed. As part of plan revision, both Forests must assess the current risk to viability for all native and desired non-native species-at-risk within the plan area and determine what ecological conditions are needed to maintain viability over time. The following Population Viability Assessment (PVA) process was developed to meet this requirement:

1. Develop list of at-risk species

A list of animal and plant species considered at-risk was developed for the two Forests. Biologists are evaluating this list to determine those species for which viability is currently a concern or for which viability may become a substantial concern in the next 10-20 years. Only these species will be brought forward in the PVA process.

2. Conduct literature review on at-risk species

For all species brought forward, a literature search will be completed. Using the literature and known site information, life history, habitat needs, threats and potential management impacts will be developed for each species.

3. Convene expert panels on at-risk species

Species will be divided into small taxonomic and/or habitat groups. People knowledgeable about the species/habitat group will be convened to provide additional information about species’ needs, threats, and potential management impacts that is not readily available in the literature.

4. Use data during development of alternatives

Species information will be used in developing alternatives for the Draft EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) for both Forests.

5. Convene expert panels to evaluate alternatives on species viability

People involved in the initial species group panels will be invited to return and evaluate the likelihood that alternatives developed in the Draft EIS would maintain viability of each species.

This process will take several years. Conservation of biodiversity and ecological sustainability are key components of the Forest Plan. Collaboration with the scientific community and the public are essential to the Plan revision process.

For more information on the Population Viability Analysis contact:

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