

New Hampshire Coverts Project

Volunteers Working for Wildlife



2003 Annual Report

Written by:

Malin Ely Clyde

Coverts Project Coordinator

UNH Cooperative Extension

Durham, NH

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UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



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, the U.S. Forest Service State and Private Forestry, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



2003 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 2003, 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 brings greater opportunities for locally-based programming, as Coverts volunteers represent greater numbers of communities in the state (see map in Appendix).

A summary of accomplishments in 2003 include:

- Organized the 9th Annual Coverts Training Workshop and trained 25 new Coverts Cooperators from 23 different communities, bringing the statewide total of active volunteers to 205.
- Held three continuing education workshops designed specifically for Coverts alumni and guests.
- Continued to manage email discussion forum ("listserv") for 110 participating Coverts Cooperators and natural resource professionals.
- Continued updates to Coverts web page as part of the UNH Cooperative Extension website, adding several new publications.
- Published two editions of *Making Tracks* newsletter – June and October (Appendix)
- Showcased traveling Coverts exhibit at nine different venues in 2003 (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 local land conservation, GIS and GPS mapping technologies, plant and tree identification, municipal forest laws, mapping significant wildlife habitat, woodlot management, and other natural resource topics.



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 New Hampshire Coverts Project comes from UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE), New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, The Ruffed Grouse Society, NH Division of Forests and Lands, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 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 Coverts training 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 2003 application form, a map showing the distribution of Coverts Cooperators, and a list of the 205 active volunteers are included in the Appendix.



Annual Coverts Training Workshop

Boston University's Sargent Center, located in Hancock, NH, continues to provide an ideal setting for the annual Coverts training workshop, held this year September 10-13, 2003. This is our fourth year at this location, and we continue to revise and add to the program, including visiting 3 new field sites this year on public, private, and non-profit owned lands. The Appendix includes a copy of the 2003 workshop agenda and a list of the 23 instructors and field trip hosts who assisted with the 3 ½-day training workshop.

The cost of the workshop, including food, lodging, transportation, 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 volunteering on behalf of the program during the following year. 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 205 active volunteers working in 116 communities across the state.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Number of Coverts Cooperators trained	23	23	22	26	28	23	23	26	25	219



2003 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 reunite with other Coverts Cooperators. They also offer an opportunity for our Extension staff to re-acquaint with Coverts volunteers.

2003 Events and Workshops

Farm and Forest Exposition February 7-8

Ten Coverts volunteers conducted educational activities using the Wildlife Kit materials and staffed the UNH Cooperative Extension booth over the course of two days.

Managing for Biodiversity – February 7

At this computer-based workshop for Coverts Cooperators, participants learned about new tools to better manage the biodiversity of NH, starting with their own properties.

Coverts Advisory Committee Meeting – February 8

The 2002 Coverts Program Evaluation was the main topic of discussion for the Committee. Recommendations from the committee for 2003 included updates for resource materials, promotion of wildlife cost-share and grant programs, emphasis of new Coverts in under-served regions and creating a long-range funding plan for the program.

Coos County Winter Wildlife Workshop – February 15

Hosted and organized by a Coverts Cooperator, this workshop focused on winter wildlife in Coos County. Despite occurring on the coldest day of the year (-37°!), fourteen Coverts participants met for indoor and outdoor presentations in Shelburne, NH.

4-H Spaces Conference – March 22

Several Coverts volunteers and project staff organized and presented hands-on wildlife program for youth and parents

Saving Special Places: Conservation Tools for a Growing State – April 12

Attended by many Coverts volunteers, this annual land conservation conference was put on by the Center for Land Conservation Assistance and UNH Cooperative Extension and included over 40 workshops on land protection and resource conservation in NH.

Sunset Tree Farm Tour – April 19

The 21st annual Tree Farm tour hosted by two Coverts Cooperators and attended by Hillsborough County Coverts Cooperators and UNHCE staff.

Discover Wild New Hampshire Day – April 26

Staffed by Coverts volunteers and staff, the Coverts exhibit and accompanying wildlife activities were on land at this large-scale family event sponsored by NH Fish & Game.

Vernal Pool Workshop – May 3

Organized and hosted by a local Coverts Cooperator, this workshop on identification and assessment of vernal pools was attended by 10 Rockingham County Coverts Cooperators and other guests.

Statewide Extension Conference – May 20

We presented a poster summarizing the Coverts Project mission, goals, and messages of wildlife conservation and stewardship.

Coverts Alumni Workshop: Wildlife Management on a Town Forest – August 2

This event continues to be an important educational and social opportunity for Coverts Cooperators from all previous years (95-2002). The indoor and outdoor workshop showcased the wildlife habitat management projects that have been planned, organized, and carried out on the Franconia Town Forest under the leadership of several Coverts Cooperators.

Conference: Voices of Communities Experiencing Rapid Change – September 6

This symposium for community decision-makers was held at UNH and attended by Coverts Cooperators from around the state.

NH Association of Conservation Commissions – November 1

Coverts volunteers helped staff the NH Coverts Project exhibit at the conference for members of local conservation commissions across the state. This event provides a good venue for both discussing the Coverts Project messages with local decision-makers, as well as recruiting good candidates for the Coverts Project workshop.

Autumn Tree ID Workshop – November 8

A locally-based field workshop organized by a new (class of 2003) Coverts Cooperator with instruction provided by UNH Cooperative Extension staff.

Coverts Listserv Forum – On-going

Initiated in 2001, the listserv is an email-based discussion forum open to all Coverts Cooperators, project partners, and staff (110 Cooperators subscribing). We have worked to refine this venue through a new policy that clarifies the purpose and etiquette of the forum. It remains particularly useful in rapidly announcing events, meeting, workshops, and media programs among volunteers (not just those from the Project office).



2003 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 2003 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 70 Coverts Cooperators also submitted updates and articles for inclusion in our program newsletter, *Making Tracks*, which are then used in this report. This year, eighty Coverts Cooperators responded to the accomplishment survey. This figure represents 45% of our volunteers, in keeping with the average annual response rate of around 47% since 1995.

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. Creating openings within forested areas is labor-intensive but highly valuable to many wildlife species. Reports a Coverts volunteer from southern New Hampshire:

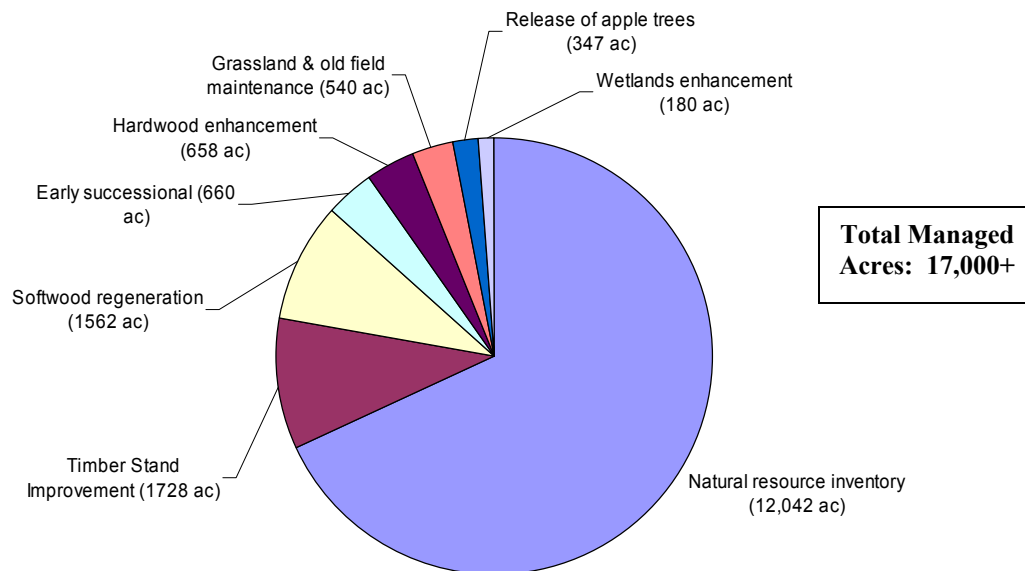
"I am developing a 5-acre meadow and liberating 20 very old apple trees on two acres. This has been done with the help of Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) funds, much input from the USDA in Walpole, the UNH Cooperative Extension county forester, my consulting forester, the Prairie Nursery in Wisconsin, and a number of local people. I have also laid out 25 acres for an improvement cut and another 5 acres of aspen for clear cut to improve grouse habitat."

Land Stewardship Statistics:

- 68 Cooperators (85% of respondents) own land totaling over 17,000 acres
- 33 Cooperators (41% of respondents) help manage over 30,000 additional acres
- Of the lands owned and managed by Coverts Cooperators, 44,000 acres have management plans, and 30,000 acres have conservation easements
- 38 landowners (48% of respondents) implemented some type of habitat management during the past 12 months.

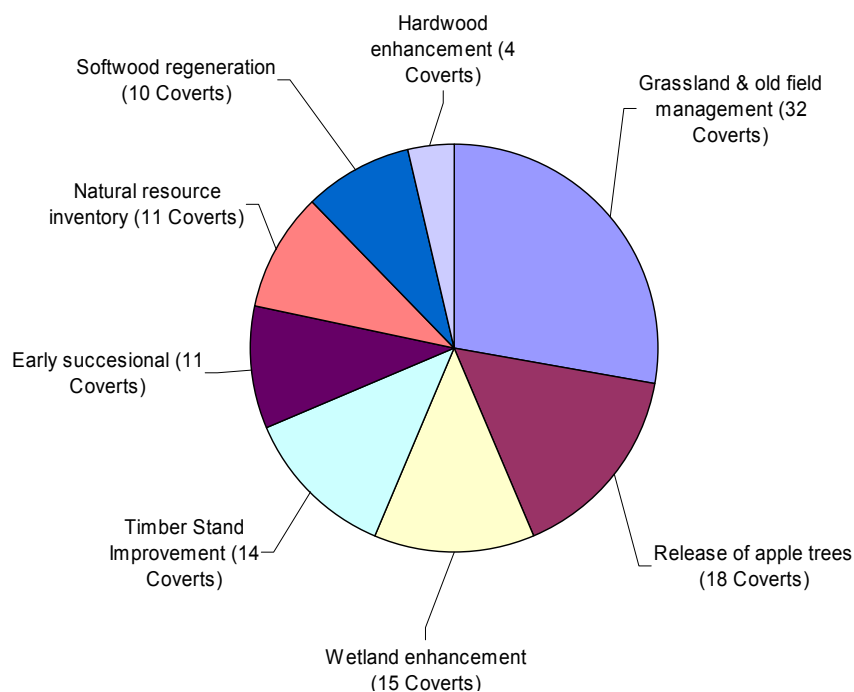
The chart below shows the habitat activities and acres of land managed by the Coverts survey respondents this year. The large inventory acreage was due to a single 10,000 acre parcel inventoried by a team of Coverts Cooperators.

Wildlife Habitat Management by Coverts Cooperators: Acres Managed in 2003



The next chart (below) shows how many Coverts survey respondents participated in each management activity. Managing grasslands and old fields, a labor-intensive practice very beneficial to wildlife, was a particularly popular wildlife management practice in 2003.

Coverts Cooperators Management Activities 2003



In addition, twenty-five Coverts volunteers performed other habitat management activities such as:

- Enhancing turkey habitat
- improving trail signage
- invasive species removal
- forest road improvements
- planting native shrub species
- restoration of damaged stream corridors
- moving trails around ecologically sensitive areas
- seeding openings with wildlife mix
- building bridges
- mowing forest access roads

Coverts Accomplishments: Community Conservation

Many Coverts Cooperators serve as local decision-makers and help initiate or implement conservation actions in their communities. This has become a critical role for Coverts volunteers, as more and more towns in southern and central New Hampshire face issues of urban sprawl, loss of wildlife habitat to development, and rapidly increasing populations. One Coverts volunteers reports on her involvement in a new town group focused on open space, part of a statewide rise in the creation of these kinds of conservation-focused task forces:

“Several citizens in our town organized this summer to increase public awareness about remaining open space, including several of us on the Conservation Commission. A 9th grader at the local school working on her scout award prepared our flyer. So far we have spoken at several local clubs and had a booth at our town fair. To date we have about 400 signatures on a petition for a \$6 million bond. A presentation to the town council is expected this winter. I have spent hours on this, working with other citizens across the town. Our council makes the decision, but the petition is to give them courage. I also had a garden located at one of our conservation areas. It was tremendously successful so I was able to give produce to my neighbors several times this summer! What a great activity. One of our commission members manages the gardens with a group of volunteers.”

Community Conservation Statistics:

- 27 Coverts Cooperators are members of their Town Conservation Commission
- 13 are members of their town planning board, board of selectmen, or are state legislators
- 11 Coverts Cooperators helped initiate or complete a town natural resource or wildlife habitat inventory
- 16 assisted with a town master plan
- 27 helped manage town conservation land or a town forest
- 28 helped protect more than 3,800 acres of conservation land

- More than 50% of respondents are involved in a local conservation group, representing more than 45 different organizations, including:

Ammonoosuc Land Trust
 Audubon Society of New Hampshire
 Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust
 Bear Paw Regional Greenways
 Beaver Lake Association
 Bedford Land Trust
 Brentwood Open Space Committee
 Chester Strategic Land Protection Committee
 Cocheco River Watershed Coalition
 Cold Pond Community Land Trust
 Cold River Watershed
 Connecticut River Conservation District
 Coos County Conservation District
 Exeter River Local Advisory Committee
 Gilmanton Land Trust
 Great Bog Steering Committee
 Green Mountain Conservation Group
 Hancock town easement monitoring
 Harris Center for Conservation Education
 Lamprey River Watershed,
 Mahoosuc Land Trust
 Monadnock Conservancy
 Mont Vernon Open Space Committee
 Nashua Open Space Committee

Natural Resource Outreach Coalition
 NH Antler and Skull Trophy Club
 NH Fish & Game
 Orford Land Protection subcommittee
 Pawtuckaway Lake Improvement Association
 Peabody Mill Environmental Center
 Pelham Open Space Committee
 Pemi River Advisory Committee
 Purgatory Watershed Conservancy
 Rockingham County Woodland Owners Association
 Rockingham Land Trust
 Ruffed Grouse Society
 Rumney Ecological Systems
 Seacoast Land Trust,
 Society for the Protection of NH Forests
 Strafford Rivers Conservancy
 Sullivan County Conservation District,
 Sunapee Ragged Kearsarge Greenway
 Swanzey Open Space Committee
 The Nature Conservancy
 Trout Unlimited
 Upper Valley Land Trust
 Weeks State Park Association

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:

"I chaired a new support group of our town Conservation Commission, focused on land protection. Our main event was a "conservation festival" that was very successful. We held it at a conserved farm. The festival included exhibits and brochures from more than two dozen organizations including Coverts. We also held a guided walk in the forest with forest educators plus speakers on subjects such as invasive species, land protection, and river bank stabilization. About 75 people attended (which is good for a town of 1100!). The festival was supported in part by a grant from the Connecticut River Joint Commission Partnership Program."

Public Awareness Statistics:

- Coverts Cooperators held 24 programs for youth audiences, with more than 3,000 youth participants
- 9 Coverts Cooperators served as volunteers for 4-H programs
- 22 Coverts Cooperators hosted or led field tours with close to 3,000 participants
- 19 public presentations were organized or presented, attended by over 2,000 people
- Coverts Cooperators were involved in 21 media interviews related to stewardship or wildlife, including newspaper articles, local TV broadcasts, editorials, or regular columns
- 17 event exhibits were staffed by Coverts Cooperators reaching thousands of visitors
- 50 Coverts volunteers held personal conversations with more than 1,000 neighbors or friends about stewardship, and 25 Coverts Cooperators distributed written materials to over 4,000 people
- 21 Coverts volunteers participate in the Tree Farm, Community Tree Stewards, Master Gardener, or Backyard Tree Farmer programs
- 23 Coverts Cooperators volunteer for other public or private conservation organizations



Promoting the NH Coverts Project

The focus of the NH Coverts Project is on spreading the message of wildlife habitat conservation and sound forest stewardship to as many listeners as possible. By training volunteers who are already well-connected in their communities, the program capitalizes on the existing enthusiasm, knowledge, and energy of this relatively small group of dedicated citizens. In recent years, we have revamped the promotional materials of the NH Coverts Project to focus less on the recruitment of new volunteers (we always have many more applications than spaces in the program) and more on the messages of habitat conservation and land stewardship. In this way, for Coverts volunteers and program staff, promotion of the program is most important as an avenue into discussion of these key messages. We use several different promotional tools, including:

- Name tags for each Cooperator to use during public presentations, events, and tours
- T-shirts with the NH Coverts Project logo (available for purchase)
- NH Coverts Project promotional brochure (see Appendix)
- A website describing the program in details, including information on the annual training workshop, volunteer opportunities, profiles of Coverts volunteers, copies of the Coverts Project annual report and other reports, and information about the Coverts Advisory Committee.
- Press releases on the fall training, to recruit new volunteers, to recognize Cooperators at continuing education events, and to announce other events
- Cooperators are encouraged to contact the local media when hosting an event (and helped with drafting of press statements)
- The NH Coverts Project display and a variety of Wildlife Activity Kits are available for loan by Coverts volunteers



Coverts Project Initiatives for 2004

Email & Coverts Listserv – As the number of Coverts Cooperators grows each year by roughly 25 people, mailing costs and administrative costs also rise. We have been slowly shifting much of our correspondence with Coverts Cooperators to the internet, using email groups, the Coverts website, and an online discussion forum (listserv) to disseminate news and provide updates. The 40 volunteers without access to email continue to receive updates through the mail.

Webpage – New features are added to the Coverts website continually. The page can be found in the Forestry and Wildlife section of the UNH Cooperative Extension page at: <http://www.ceinfo.unh.edu>

Making Tracks Newsletter – The Coverts Project newsletter 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 as part of the 5-year grant approved in 2000 and extending through June, 2005. Other project partners also receive copies of the yearly update/annual report.

Advisory Committee – The Coverts Advisory Committee meets 1-2 times per year to discuss emerging issues and new ideas for the continued success of the program. Two new members from the Coverts workshop class of 2003 recently joined the committee.

County Liaisons – Based on several successful local initiatives by county liaisons in 2003, we will continue to assist these local leaders in developing regional programming for other Coverts Cooperators and the public.

Continuing Education - In 2004, we will offer a winter workshop at the Farm and Forest Exposition on “Bald Eagles in NH: Protection and Management for an Endangered Species.” We are planning a spring workshop for Coverts alumni on a wildlife habitat management topic, a grassland management workshop during the summer, and at least 2 county-based programs hosted by county liaisons and other Coverts Cooperators.

Annual Training Workshop – We will continue to use Sargent Center in 2004 for the workshop training site, as it offers reliable facilities and is located near excellent field sites.

Appendix

NH Coverts Project Annual Report 2003

Includes:

- Program Brochure
- 2003 Application Form
- Map - distribution of Coverts Volunteers
- List of Active Coverts Cooperators by County
- 2003 Annual Workshop Agenda
- 2003 Annual Workshop Instructors List
- Accomplishments Survey form
- Coverts Cooperators In The News - Example from 2003