

New Hampshire Coverts Project

Volunteers Working for Wildlife



2004 Annual Report

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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, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



Summary of 2004 Projects

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 2004, 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.

A summary of accomplishments in 2004 include:

- Organized the 10th Annual Coverts Training Workshop and trained 23 new Coverts Cooperators from 21 different communities, bringing the statewide total to 224 active volunteers working in 118 different communities. [Click here](#) for a map showing Coverts Cooperators' statewide distribution and land stewardship impacts to date.
- Held five (5) continuing education workshops designed specifically for Coverts alumni and guests.
- Promoted participation by Coverts Cooperators in dozens of educational workshops organized by UNH Cooperative Extension and project partners, including workshops on species identification (ferns, butterflies, dragonflies), land conservation, local tree farm tours, early successional habitats, and wildlife inventorying and monitoring.
- Continued to manage email discussion forum ("listserv") for 127 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 three editions of *Making Tracks* newsletter – February, July and December.
- Showcased traveling Coverts exhibit at ten (10) different venues in 2004, using both staff and volunteer exhibitors
- Outstanding NH Tree Farm of 2004 awarded to long-time NH Coverts Cooperator Sam Doyle of Hanover (see news clipping and *Making Tracks* newsletter cover story (8/04) included in the Appendix)



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 NH through sound land stewardship.

Funding support and sponsorship of the New Hampshire Coverts Project comes from UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE), The Ruffed Grouse Society, NH Division of Forests and Lands, and New Hampshire Fish and Game Department including funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service Landowner Incentive Program. 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 specialist in forest resources.

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 town decision-makers, press releases, and through Coverts-related events. The major selection criteria are the applicant's enthusiasm for wildlife and natural resources, a willingness to commit to outreach, and a recognized leadership role within their community. A copy of the 2004 application form and a list of the 226 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 8-11, 2004. This site has become a tradition for the Coverts workshop, as it offers both reliable facilities and excellent and diverse field sites to public, private, and non-profit owned lands. The Appendix includes a copy of the 2004 workshop agenda, which includes a list 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. This "debt" encourages strong allegiance and commitment by the volunteers: in exchange for the workshop opportunity, participants agree to become Coverts volunteers and spend 40+ hours volunteering on behalf of the program during the following year. Each Cooperator develops an outreach plan on how they will share their experiences and motivate others in their community. Cooperators become part of a volunteer network connected through newsletters, the internet, field tours, and continuing education workshops. Today we have 226 active volunteers working in 118 communities around the state.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Number of Coverts Cooperators trained	23	23	22	26	28	23	23	26	25	23	242



2004 Coverts Events and Continuing Education Programs

Coverts Cooperators are encouraged and 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.

2004 Events and Workshops

Winter Wildlife Tracking – January 31

A locally-based field workshop (Dover) organized by Coverts Cooperators, with instruction provided by UNH Cooperative Extension staff.

Farm and Forest Exposition – February 6-7

Ten (10) Coverts volunteers conducted educational activities using the Wildlife Kit materials and staffed the UNH Cooperative Extension booth over the course of two days.

Wintering Bald Eagle Workshop – February 7

Coverts Cooperators learned about the natural history, habits, and habitat needs of bald eagles in NH, then visited Manchester-area sites to (successfully!) view bald eagles.

Coverts Advisory Committee Meeting – February 7

Twelve members of the Advisory Committee met to review projects associated with the Coverts Program including geographical distribution of trainees, continuing education programs, and outreach methods including the newsletter format.

School to Career Event: Newmarket – March 10

Coverts volunteers staffed a booth to discuss natural resources and land conservation with middle and high school students.

Bird ID and Habitat Management Tour: New Boston – April 17

A local Coverts volunteer hosted his 22nd annual Tree Farm tour, working with UNHCE staff and the Coverts Project, which was attended by Hillsborough County Coverts Cooperators and member of the public.

Saving Special Places: Conservation Tools for a Growing State – April 17

Attended by a large number of Coverts volunteers, this annual land conservation conference sponsored by the Center for Land Conservation Assistance and UNHCE included 38 different workshops on land protection and resource conservation in NH.

Discover Wild New Hampshire – April 24

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

4-H Spaces Workshop – April 24

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

Local Forest Management Workshops: Hillsborough County – May 10 & May 15

Coordinated by a Coverts Cooperator and hosted by UNH Cooperative Extension and the town of Merrimack's conservation commission, covering forest management topics.

Coverts Alumni Workshop: Early Successional Habitats in the Seacoast – May 22

This event continues to be an important educational and social opportunity for Coverts Cooperators from all previous years (1995-2003). The all-day workshop showcased the early successional and grassland habitat management projects on Phillips Exeter Academy lands which are under the supervision of a Coverts volunteer. These lands were recently awarded the "Outstanding Tree Farm of the Year" designation for 2005. Also toured NH Fish & Game sites to discuss unique shrubland and coastal habitats.

Exeter Alewife Festival – June 5

Eight Rockingham County Coverts volunteers organized and participated in this event. The Coverts display and wildlife kits were on hand, staffed by Coverts volunteers.

Bio-thon Events: Rockingham County – June 5

Organized by several Coverts volunteers to benefit a local land trust, several of these all-biota identification events took place on Coverts Cooperators lands.

Identification of Dragonflies and Damselflies – June 11

Sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension, this workshop covered basic identification of dragonflies and damselflies. Located in Concord, NH.

Coverts Cooperator Tree Farm Tour: Hillsborough County – June 26

Tree farm tour on award-winning Coverts Cooperator's property showcased forest management and land protection. Located in Bedford, NH.

Identification of Butterflies – July 16

Sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension, this workshop covered basic identification of dragonflies and damselflies. Located in Concord, NH.

Working Your Woodlot: Strafford County– July 17

Over 400 members of the public, including Coverts Cooperators, attended this all-day field workshop sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension. Programs included chainsaw maintenance, tree felling, marking for a selective cut, firewood marking, and planning & building forest access roads. Located in Dover, NH.

Fern Identification – July 22

Sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension, this indoor and outdoor workshop was held at Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in Thornton, NH and covered basic fern structure and terminology, morphology, reproduction, ecology, and field ID.

10th Annual Coverts Training Workshop: Hancock – September 8-11

(see previous section for full description)

Coverts Tree Farm Tour: Hanover – September 25

A 10-year veteran of the NH Coverts Project was awarded Outstanding Tree Farm of the year for 2004. This tour, co-sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension, included field tours of wildlife habitat management, Coverts historical materials, the Coverts display, and other forestry and habitat exhibitions. More than 20 Coverts Cooperator attended.

Coverts Conservation Tour: Randolph – October 6

An event and tour celebrating a Coverts Cooperator's conservation efforts in the Moose River Valley to protect over 200 acres of important habitat to benefit wildlife.

NH Naturally Writers Workshop – October 12

A training workshop for Coverts Cooperators interested in writing as part of a writer's collaborative. Writers will submit articles on natural resource topics for statewide media distribution of "NH Naturally" weekly column, coordinated by UNHCE.

New Hampshire Assoc. of Conservation Commissions Conference – Nov. 6

Coverts volunteers helped staff the NH Coverts Project exhibit at this conference for members of local conservation commissions across the state.

Wildlife Inventorying and Monitoring Workshop: Hillsborough – Nov. 19

Indoor and outdoor workshop showcasing wildlife inventorying and monitoring techniques for a variety of species, attended by over 30 Coverts volunteers.

Wildlife Inventorying and Monitoring Workshop: Lancaster – Nov. 20

Indoor and outdoor workshop showcasing wildlife inventorying and monitoring techniques for a variety of species, attended by 8 Coverts volunteers.

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 (127 Cooperators subscribing). It is particularly useful in rapidly announcing events, meeting, workshops, and media programs among volunteers (not just those from the Coverts Project office).



2004 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 a wide range 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 2004 as a compilation developed from annual accomplishment surveys that Cooperators are asked to complete each year (a copy is included in the Appendix). Coverts Cooperators also sent in over 130 written updates and articles for inclusion in our program newsletter, *Making Tracks* (information that is also included in this report – see copies included in the Appendix).

This year, ninety-four (94) Coverts Cooperators responded to the accomplishment survey, including 96% of the most recent trainees (class of 2003) to fulfill their 1-year volunteer commitment. This figure represents 46% 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. One recent Coverts Cooperator writes of his newly-acquired land in northern NH:

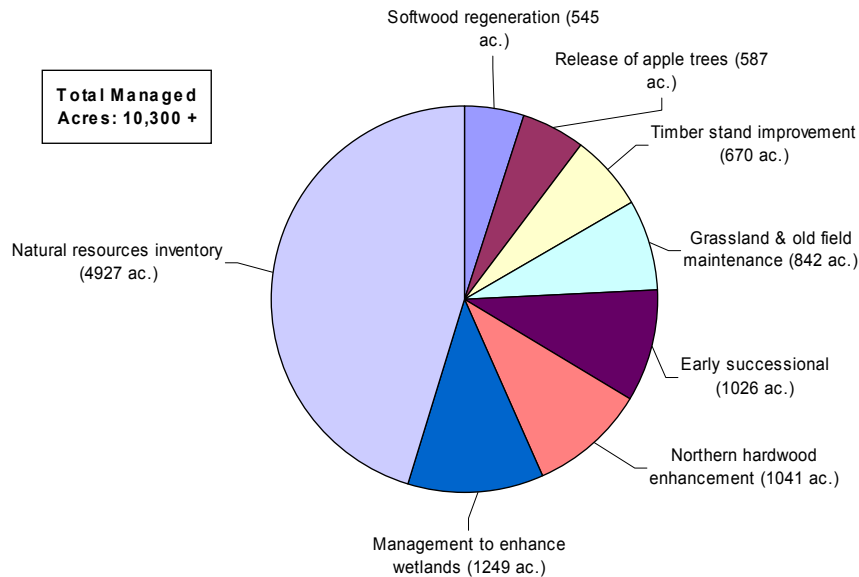
“...I just finished phase one of an old-field restoration project. I had the Brontosaurus in for a couple of days - what an amazing machine. This was funded through the NH Fish and Game Small Grants Program. Also, there have been over 50 apple trees that have been released on the property. Releasing trees is a whole lot more time-consuming than it would appear! Going through the Coverts Program has made working with the state Fish and Game biologist so much easier as I had more than a basic understanding of what ought to be done and how to prioritize the different projects on my land...One week after the brontosaurus work was done, I have robins in the field, deer are grazing, and I have seen moose and bear tracks.”

Land Stewardship Statistics:

- 78 Cooperators (88% of respondents) own land totaling over 15,000 acres
- 30 Cooperators (34% of respondents) help manage over 24,000 additional acres
- 62 landowners (70% of respondents) implemented some type of habitat management during the past 12 months.
- Total land owned by Coverts has reached over 40,000 acres (see map on p. 2)
- Total land managed by Coverts has reached over 50,000 acres (see map on p. 2)

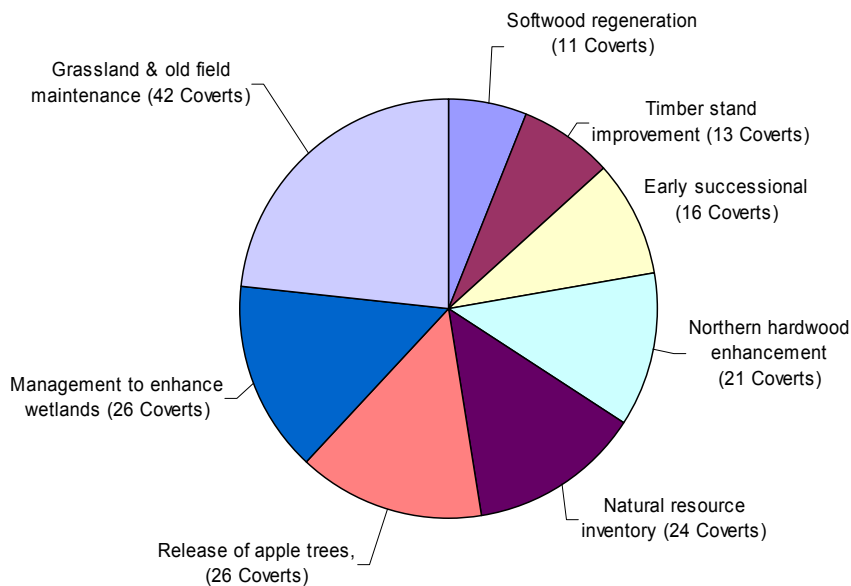
The chart below shows the habitat activities and acres of land managed by the Coverts survey respondents this year.

Wildlife Habitat Management by Coverts Cooperators: Acres Managed in 2004



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, continues to be the most common wildlife management practice.

Coverts Cooperators' Management Activities, 2004



In addition, fifty-six (56) Coverts volunteers described performing other habitat management activities such as:

- updating a land management plan
- enhancing turkey habitat
- improving trails
- invasive species removal
- forest road improvements
- planting native shrub species
- moving trails around ecologically sensitive areas
- seeding openings with wildlife mix
- Enrolling land in NH Tree Farm Program

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. A recent Coverts volunteer writes about her town located near the Massachusetts border:

“It has also been a good year for land protection. Our conservation commission has acquired almost 200 acres of conservation land in the past year. In most cases, I hand-held the process, including identifying the parcel, negotiating with the landowners, and spearheading our communications – or advocacy – with the Selectmen. More importantly [the new conservation land] abuts another 180 acres of town conservation land in town. The wildlife studies all indicate the area is a high-functioning corridor.”

Community Conservation Statistics:

- 43 Coverts Cooperators are members of their town’s Conservation Commission (48% of respondents)
- 70 Coverts are members of their town planning board, board of selectmen, a town open space group, or watershed association (79% of respondents)
- 39 Coverts Cooperators helped initiate or complete a town natural resource or wildlife habitat inventory (44% of respondents)
- 30 helped manage town conservation land or a town forest (34% of respondents)
- 38 helped protect more than 12,000 acres of conservation land
- Towns with active Coverts volunteers are twice as likely to have passed conservation measures in recent years as towns without Coverts volunteers. [Click here](#) for a map showing this relationship.

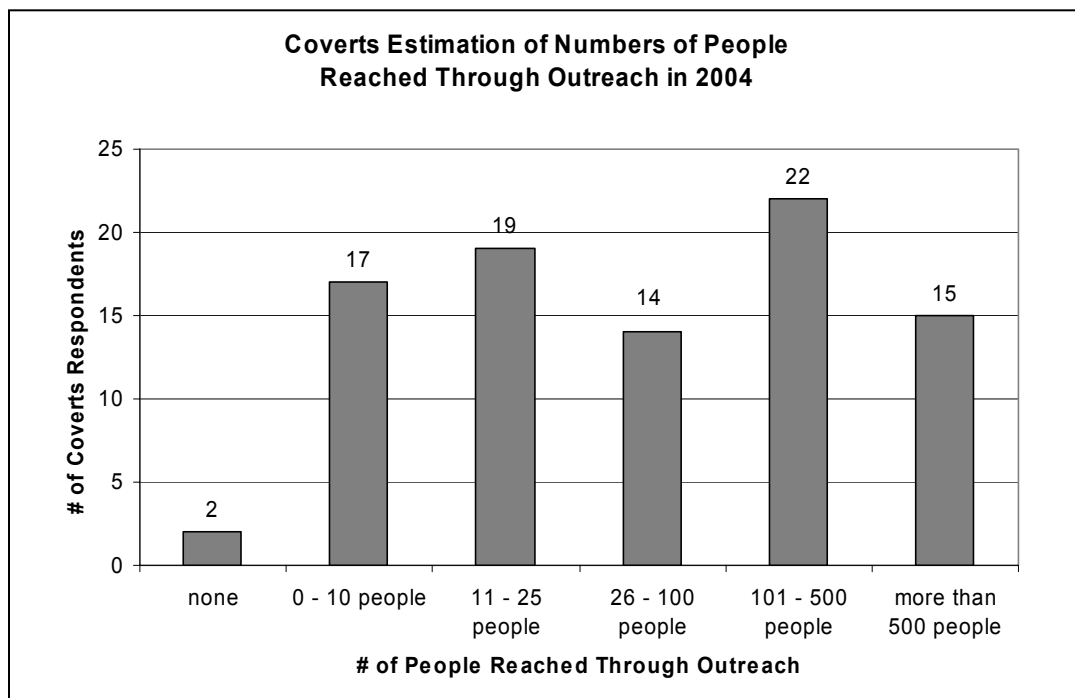
Coverts Accomplishments: Raising Public Awareness

Coverts Cooperators engage in many activities that promote forest stewardship and wildlife conservation to their families, friends, peers, and community members. A long-time Coverts volunteer writes of a workshop series he created in his town, located in southwestern NH:

“Our Open Space Committee is about to complete our second annual Open Space and Nature Series, a lecture series that invites speakers to discuss issues regarding growth in New Hampshire, benefits of open space to wildlife, and how we can promote land conservation. We have had a good response from the public so far. I highly recommend this type of series to other communities. The cost has been minimal so far as most of our speakers have not charged a fee.”

Public Awareness Statistics:

- 16 Coverts Cooperators hosted or led field tours on their own land
- 27 Coverts hosted or presented public programs in their communities
- 28 Coverts Cooperators were involved in media interviews related to stewardship or wildlife, including newspaper articles, local TV broadcasts, or regular columns
- 20 Coverts volunteers staffed natural resources exhibits
- 79 Coverts volunteers (88% of respondents) held personal conversations with neighbors or friends about stewardship, and 32 Coverts Cooperators distributed written materials to others on wildlife or stewardship topics
- 40 Coverts volunteers participate in the Tree Farm, Community Tree Stewards, Master Gardener, or Backyard Tree Farmer programs
- 50 Coverts Cooperators volunteer for other conservation organizations
- Coverts volunteers reached a great many people through their outreach in 2004:





How the Coverts Project Assists in Stewardship & Wildlife Outreach

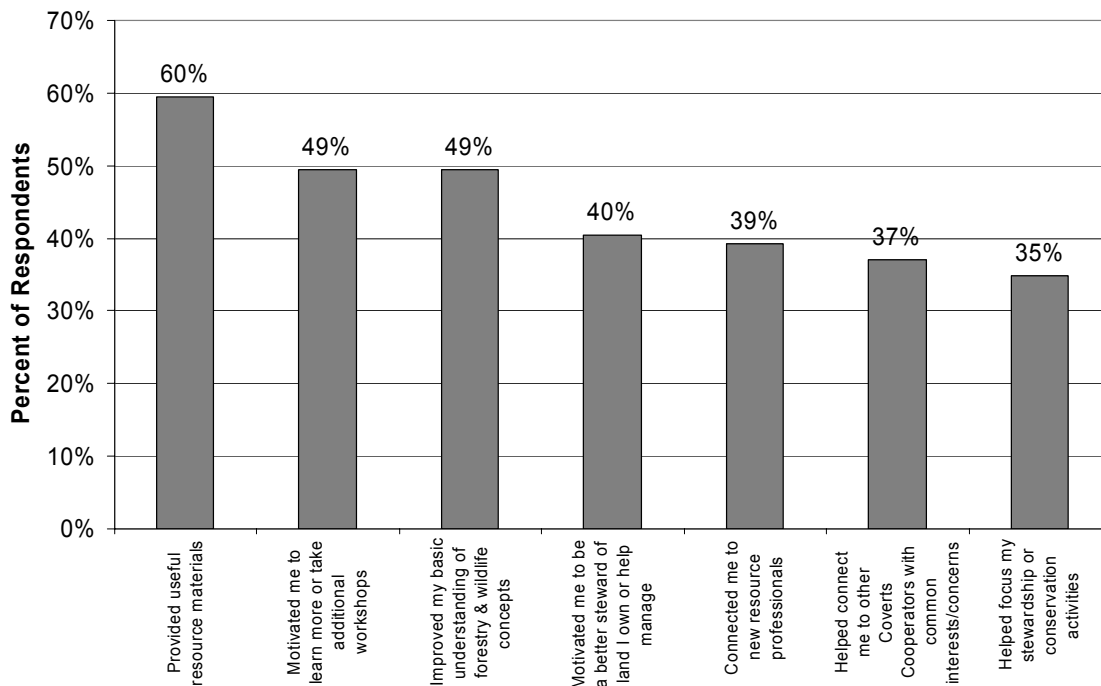
For the first time, the annual survey of Coverts Cooperators included a question asking Coverts volunteers to reflect on the Coverts Project itself. We asked volunteers how the program helped them during the past year, listing as choices the “program benefits” that derived from the results of our 2001 Coverts Program Evaluation. The question asked in this year’s survey read:

In the past year, has the NH Coverts Project helped your stewardship or outreach activities in any of these ways? (Check all that apply).

- ☐ *Provided useful resource materials*
- ☐ *Motivated me to learn more or take additional workshops*
- ☐ *Helped connect me to other Coverts Cooperators with common interests/concerns*
- ☐ *Improved my basic understanding of forestry & wildlife concepts*
- ☐ *Connected me to new resource professionals*
- ☐ *Motivated me to be a better steward of land I own or help manage*
- ☐ *Helped focus my stewardship or conservation activities*
- ☐ *Other (please describe):*

Results show that Coverts volunteers value different aspects of the program. All categories received significant responses, with provision of reference materials rating highest.

How has the NH Coverts Project Helped Your Stewardship or Outreach Activities in 2004?





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
- NH Coverts Project promotional brochure (see Appendix)
- A website describing the program in detail, 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 2005

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: 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, which is also available on the Coverts webpage.

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. One new member from the Coverts workshop class of 2004 recently joined the committee. Committee meeting notes are available on the Coverts webpage.

Continuing Education - In 2005, we will be offering a variety of new workshops, including a program on invasive plant species, and several landowner-focused workshops on inventorying and monitoring wildlife based on a new publication produced at UNH Cooperative Extension, “A Landowner’s Guide to Inventorying and Monitoring Wildlife on Your Land.” We are planning a spring workshop for Coverts alumni on a wildlife habitat management topic, and at least 2 county-based programs hosted by local Coverts Cooperators.

Annual Training Workshop – We will continue to use Sargent Center in 2005 for the workshop training site, as it offers reliable facilities and is located near excellent field sites.

Appendix

NH Coverts Project Annual Report 2004

Includes:

- Program Brochure
- 2004 Application Form
- List of Active Coverts Cooperators by County
- 2004 Annual Workshop Agenda
- Annual Coverts Survey form
- Coverts Cooperators In The News – Example from 2004