



New Hampshire Coverts Project

Volunteers Working for Wildlife

2020 Annual Report



Written by:

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The New Hampshire Coverts Project is sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension and New Hampshire Fish & Game. The program also receives support from the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands.

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Introduction to the NH Coverts Project

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 during the last year (October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020), and summarizes efforts made by Coverts volunteers to bring the message of wildlife conservation and habitat stewardship to a wide range of people across New Hampshire. A brief summary of this report, *NH Coverts Project: Program Highlights 2020*, is included in the Appendix.

The New Hampshire Coverts Project continues to be one of the most effective ways to broaden the outreach efforts of UNH Cooperative Extension, NH Fish and Game, and other partners.

The NH Coverts Project

Project Goals

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 New Hampshire through sound land stewardship.

Funding and Staffing

Funding and sponsorship of the New Hampshire Coverts Project comes from UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, with additional support from the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands.

In the past, the program has attracted additional private funding from the NH Charitable Foundation, the Davis Conservation Foundation, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative's NH Implementation Team, the Anna and Raymond Tuttle Horticultural Fund, and the Quality Deer Management Association. The program regularly receives voluntary donations and contributions.

Haley Andreozzi, the UNHCE Wildlife Outreach Program Manager, coordinates the NH Coverts Project. The Coverts Project receives additional support from UNHCE's network of 9 County Foresters, Extension Wildlife Specialist Matt Tarr, Extension Specialist in Forest Resources Steve Roberge, Extension Land & Water Conservation Field Specialist Emma Tutein, and Extension Community Volunteer Development Specialist Malin Clyde.

Volunteer Recruitment

Each January, the application period opens with prospective participants applying for the spring Coverts training workshop. Potential applicants are recruited by Extension staff including County Foresters, project partners, Coverts alumni, town decision-makers, press releases, and events throughout the calendar year. Selection criteria include the applicant's enthusiasm for wildlife and natural resources, a willingness to commit volunteer time, a recognized leadership role within their

community, and the ability to utilize the information and resources provided at the workshop. A copy of the 2020 application form is included in the Appendix.

Training Workshop, 2020

Each year, a group of up to twenty-five new Coverts Cooperator receives comprehensive training in wildlife conservation, forest stewardship, habitat management, land conservation principles, and effective outreach from a variety of natural resource professionals during a 3 ½-day workshop. Project partners fund the cost of the workshop, including food, lodging, transportation, and reference materials. 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 as stewards of New Hampshire’s wildlife and forest resources during the following year.

In 2020, twenty-five new Coverts Cooperators from twenty-three different communities were accepted to the 2020 training workshop, to be held at the Barbara C. Harris Conference Center in Greenfield, NH on May 15-18. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Coverts Project staff in partnership with UNH Cooperative Extension and NH Fish & Game leadership made the decision to cancel this year’s workshop.

Adapting During the Covid-19 Pandemic

In lieu of holding the annual workshop, NH Coverts Project staff focused on the development of online programming to provide continuing education for existing NH Coverts Project volunteers and others interested in wildlife, habitat management, and forest stewardship.

This included the development and implementation of two online workshops focused on helping landowners learn more about wildlife on their property or community lands: (1) *Learn Your Land: Inventorying & Monitoring Wildlife on Your Property*, held on August 11, 2020 with 68 participants, and (2) *Using Trail Cameras to Study Wildlife*, held on September 9, 2020 with 164 attendees. NH Coverts Project staff also developed and implemented a series of *NH Woods & Wildlife* Facebook Live events focused on Nature & Ecology (May 14, 2020; 1,700 views) and Stewardship & Management (May 21, 2020; 399 views) of New Hampshire’s wildlife and habitats.

Active Coverts Cooperators

Cooperators become part of a volunteer network connected through the internet, field tours, and continuing education workshops. After some attrition (due to dropouts, relocations, deaths, etc.), we have 446 active volunteers today, working in over 165 different communities around the state (see map, page 5). A list of all active volunteers is available from Project staff. A yearly summary is as follows:

Total Coverts Trained: 1995 – 2020

Training Year	# Coverts Trained
1995	23
1996	23
1997	22
1998	26
1999	28
2000	23
2001	23
2002	26
2003	25
2004	23
2005	26
2006	24
2007	23
2008	26
2009	23
2010	24
2011	25
2012	22
2013	21
2014	22
2015	23
2016	22
2017	24
2018	22
2019	24
2020	0
Total Trained Coverts Volunteers	593
Total Active Coverts Volunteers as of 10/20	446
Number of NH Communities with Active Coverts Volunteers as of 10/19	165+

Coverts Outreach and Communication

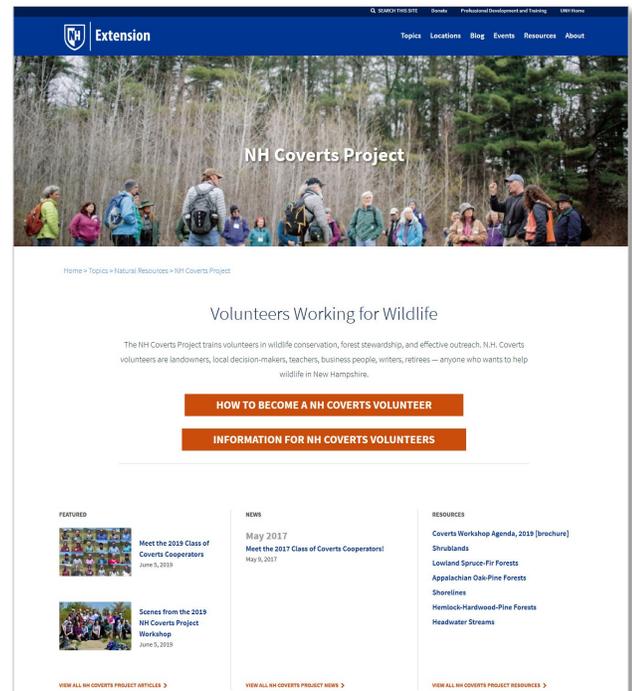
The Coverts Project connects Coverts Cooperators to events, workshops, news, and new volunteer opportunities throughout the year. Through these activities, they build on their knowledge of natural resource topics, often with more in-depth material and presentations than is possible at the Coverts training workshop. Many of these activities are sponsored by UNH Cooperative Extension or are a result of Extension partnering with other natural resources programs and conservation organizations, thereby broadening our training audience, and offering more continuing education opportunities for all natural resources volunteers.

Coverts Updates – These e-mail newsletters are the main communication tool between the project office and Coverts Cooperators. In 2020, 13 Updates were sent to Coverts volunteers, containing information on volunteer opportunities, workshops and trainings, relevant news, resources, and updates related to the NH Coverts Project.

Coverts Library – This web-based library has become integral in providing information and resources for Coverts volunteers. Cooperators can access recommended resources on a variety of related topics, including wildlife habitats and species, habitat management, forest ecology and stewardship, the NH Wildlife Action Plan, land conservation, and effective communication. The Coverts Library can be accessed at extension.unh.edu/resource/coverts-library.

Coverts Project Website – The NH Coverts Project website (*right*) makes it easy for NH Coverts volunteers to identify and access resources, news, and events that might be of interest to them. Blog posts specific to the NH Coverts Project and Cooperators are featured on the page. It also streamlines information for individuals who are interested in learning more about and potentially participating in the Coverts Project. The NH Coverts Project website can be accessed at nhcoverts.org.

NH Coverts Facebook Group –The Coverts Project moderates a Facebook group expressly for NH Coverts volunteers, which currently has 80 members. Many Coverts volunteers are also members of the Forestry and Wildlife Facebook Page (3,035 followers), but the project-specific group allows for Coverts volunteers to post their own pictures, updates, and stories, and allows staff to offer targeted information and resources.



Working for Wildlife: Coverts Volunteer Activities in 2020

Coverts Cooperators are selected to participate in the program based on their commitment and enthusiasm for wildlife conservation and forest stewardship. 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 2020 based on the results from our **annual survey**, which Cooperators are asked to complete each year (a copy is included in the Appendix). We received surveys from 30% of active Coverts volunteers, well within the range of what is considered an acceptable survey response rate and offering a strong picture of active volunteerism on the part of Coverts volunteers.

Coverts Survey Responses in 2020 are summarized as follows:

	Total 2020 Survey
# Cooperators surveyed	435
# Cooperators returning surveys	129 (30%)

Summary of Coverts Cooperators Volunteer Activities

Volunteer Activity	No. of Hours
Helping manage or steward town forest or other conservation land	4329
Working to manage my own land for wildlife habitat	2944
Serving on a select board, planning board or town council	2860
Serving on a conservation commission	2622
Working to conserve my own land	1883
Working to conserve land of another landowner/town/land trust	1345
Talking with other landowners or neighbors about stewardship or conservation	1325
Serving on open space group, land trust board or conservation group board	1089
Volunteering for a citizen science or wildlife monitoring program	889
Serving on a watershed association, river coalition, or other water resources group	767
Distributing written resource materials to others (neighbors, community members, etc.)	671
Staffing natural resource exhibits or working at events	594
Giving presentations to adult groups (such as "Speaking for Wildlife" talks)	545
Writing and providing information to media about natural resources or conservation	403
Attending forestry or wildlife conferences, workshops or seminars	399
Leading or hosting natural resource tours in the field	390
Helping a community with a master plan or natural resource inventory	322
Other	720
TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS 2020	24,097

The total contribution of volunteer time in 2020 was **24,097 hours**. This is a conservative figure, as these are only the recorded hours from the 30% of active volunteers who returned surveys.

Special Opportunities to Volunteer

Speaking for Wildlife

The NH Coverts Project continues to be closely connected to *Speaking for Wildlife*, a program that trains volunteers to deliver wildlife and natural resources-themed presentations to community groups throughout New Hampshire. Previously, the program also trained volunteers to lead field walks. Speaking for Wildlife started in 2010 with support from the NH Charitable Foundation, the Davis Conservation Foundation, the Wellborn Ecology Fund, and the Anna and Raymond Tuttle Environmental Horticultural Fund. Currently, the project is supported by additional funds from the NH Fish and Game Department.

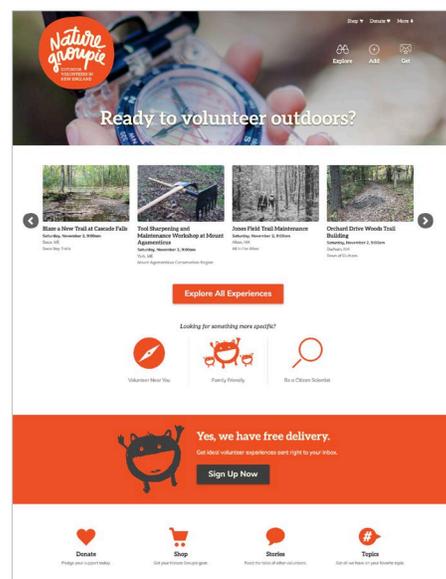
We have a group of 208 volunteers trained to deliver wildlife-focused presentations and lead field walks all over the state. A brochure about the program is provided in the Appendix. Details about the program can be found at speakingforwildlife.org. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Speaking for Wildlife activity has decreased due to the inability to hold in-person presentations. However, several volunteers have taken on the new challenge of delivering talks online, and several continue to lead field walks following best practices for mask-wearing and social distancing. Accomplishments of the program in 2020 include:

- Trained 11 new Speaking for Wildlife volunteers on October 25, 2019 in Holderness
- Held a training workshop for volunteers interested in delivering presentations online during the Covid-19 pandemic - *Zoom Training for Speaking for Wildlife Volunteers: Best Practices for Online Presentations* – which involved 20 existing volunteers
- Volunteers delivered 6 public presentations reaching 154 individuals
- Volunteers led 4 public field walks with 49 participants

Nature Groupie

Nature Groupie, a project of UNH Cooperative Extension, aims to mobilize volunteers to care for and study lands and waters, and to work with a wide range of partners to better match needed stewardship and citizen science work with people who are willing to help. This widens the reach of the NH Coverts Project and expands volunteer and training opportunities for Coverts volunteers. Malin Clyde (former NH Coverts Project coordinator) is the Nature Groupie project manager, and current Coverts coordinator Haley Andreozzi and project staff Emma Tutein both work on the Nature Groupie team.

In 2020, Nature Groupie connected volunteers to science and stewardship projects with over 65 organizations, agencies, and towns in New Hampshire and beyond. The project's weekly e-bulletin and online calendar promoted 148 stewardship projects and trainings and 59 ongoing citizen science opportunities to a growing network of 4,395 interested volunteers and professionals, including all active Coverts Cooperators. Nature Groupie



staff also provide technical assistance to researchers and conservation organizations on how to work with volunteers and implement a web-based registration system that enables partners (including Coverts Cooperators) to easily recruit and communicate with new volunteers. The project’s website can be found at naturegroupie.org.

Land Stewardship

Many Coverts Cooperators own or manage land and incorporate wildlife habitat management and good forest stewardship into their land management. They also share information and resources about land management with others. One Coverts Cooperator reported this year:

“[A highlight of my efforts as a Coverts Cooperator this year was] finding an expanding stand of Japanese Knotwood on a neighbor’s property, talking with them about how to defeat its spread, and then see the neighbor actually tackle it. It had the potential for major spread in the neighborhood and he took it seriously and it is almost eradicated. This is a neighbor who never thought about invasive plants and yet was open to learn, and now is a big advocate and learning about invasive plants himself.”

Land Stewardship Statistics:

Acres owned by survey respondents	9,405 acres
Acres where survey respondents are involved in management decisions	57,424 acres
# Landowners implementing habitat management in the last 12 months	66 (51% of respondents)
All Coverts – Land Owned	51,105 acres
All Coverts – Land Managed	92,057 acres

The chart below shows the acres of habitat actively managed Coverts Cooperators in 2020 (survey respondents only).

Coverts Habitat Management, 2020 (# acres managed, by habitat type)	
Resource Inventory	2,097 acres
Grasslands/Old Fields Management	1,249 acres
Wetland Enhancement	306 acres
Timber Stand Improvement	286 acres
Early Successional Management	251 acres
Hardwood Management	243 acres
Softwood Management	145 acres

Community Conservation

Many Coverts Cooperators serve as local decision-makers and help initiate or implement conservation and stewardship projects in their communities. One volunteer shared:

“As the Brentwood Conservation Commission chair last fall and winter, I was privileged to be instrumental in conserving the former NH Fish and Game farm on South Road in Brentwood. New owners purchased the land from Fish and Game with the intent of conserving it and operating Meadow's Mirth Farm on the property. As part of the effort to conserve the land, the Brentwood Conservation Commission successfully submitted a warrant article which authorized the Town of Brentwood to contribute \$140,000 towards purchase of an easement on the property. With the easement under contract, Meadow's Mirth Farm has begun operations and is experiencing a terrific first year of producing quality local food for the community.”

# of acres of land in New Hampshire that Coverts volunteers helped conserve in 2020	5,226 acres
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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 shared:

“I've started leading walks for [my local land trust] and use much of the knowledge that I've acquired in this program to educate the attendees. My favorite though was the Full Moon snowshoe that I led back in January.”

Coverts volunteer participation in outreach efforts – including through direct contact, leading tours and workshops, media, etc. – plays an important role in raising public awareness about wildlife and habitats statewide.

Estimate of # of people reached by Coverts volunteers in 2020 with stewardship message through outreach efforts	11,876 people
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NH Coverts Project Initiatives for 2021

Coverts Project Communication – Continue use of the new Coverts website and increase the use of blog posts to focus on stories about Coverts volunteer activities and project updates. Continue social media engagement with the UNH Extension Forestry & Wildlife Facebook page and the NH Coverts Facebook Group.

Promotion of Volunteer & Training Opportunities – Project staff will continue to promote volunteer trainings and opportunities to Cooperators, and share information about upcoming events through Coverts Updates. We will continue to expand volunteer access to citizen science and stewardship volunteer opportunities and training from 200+ conservation organizations through the Nature Groupie website, e-newsletter, and social media. We will also provide training opportunities for Speaking for Wildlife in 2021.

Annual Training Workshop – The 2021 NH Coverts Project Annual Training Workshop is scheduled to take place at the Barbara C. Harris Center in Greenfield, NH from May 5-8. However, given the current status of the Covid-19 pandemic and future unknowns, the Coverts Project staff is currently in the initial stages of discussing and planning for a hybrid model Coverts workshop. In this model, some information is provided in advance through readings, resources, recorded presentations, and videos and additional education would be provided in the field (following appropriate Covid-19 safety guidelines).

Continuing Education for Cooperators – Project staff will continue to organize continuing education opportunities tailored to the needs and interests of Coverts Cooperators, including topics like wildlife ecology, forest management, naturalist skills, and more. Project staff will also continue to assist in the planning of field days for Coverts volunteers at Coverts-owned properties or other places of interest, as requested and feasible. Special focus will be given to offering high-quality online trainings this year, as the Covid-19 pandemic continues.

Updates – The Project Coordinator will continue yearly updates to all project partners. The report is promoted and made available to Coverts Cooperators on the Coverts webpage, nhcoverts.org. Also available on the website is a Highlights Report, summarizing the 2020 annual report.



Appendix

NH Coverts Project Annual Report 2020

- [Coverts Project Brochure](#)
- [2020 Program Highlights \(Summary Report\)](#)
- [2020 Coverts Application Form](#)
- [Annual Coverts Activities Survey form – 2020](#)
- [Speaking for Wildlife Program Brochure](#)