

SPNHF Creates Endangered Rabbit Habitat in Durham

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<http://landstewards.blogspot.com/2012/03/spnhf-creates-endangered-rabbit-habitat.html>

Have you seen this bunny? If so, you have seen a species listed as endangered by the State of New Hampshire. This is a New England cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*), a native rabbit that once ranged from southern New York to southern Maine. It looks very similar to the Eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), which was introduced to New England in the early 1900s, but is actually a distinct species that does not interbreed with Eastern cottontails. The Eastern cottontails do, however, compete rather better for food and resources than the New England cottontails, and the latter has now been reduced to five small subpopulations in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Efforts to save the New England cottontail from extinction have involved creation of the early successional shrubland habitats that they require to thrive. In the five core population areas, projects are underway to convert and maintain land in a suitable successional stage for the endangered bunnies. The Forest Society has recently partnered with the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department (NHFG), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and others in the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership (GBRPP) to work on one such project on the Hills Reservation in Durham. Six acres of low-quality forest was converted to open habitat that will hopefully grow into shrubland to support a sizeable New England cottontail population. To help that process on its way, volunteers will help by planting bare-root native shrubs at the Hills Reservation and abutting Bunker Creek Tract (NHFG) this spring. This is a great example of how forest management can be used to create specific wildlife habitat conditions. Check out this great article at newenglandcottontail.org to learn more about the specifics of the Hills Forest/Bunker Creek Tract bunny project!

