



# NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL

Status: Not Listed, September 2015

The New England cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*) is a rabbit that prefers early successional forests, or young forests, in states east of the Hudson River, including Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York. Since the 1960s, development and maturing forests decreased the species' range by 86 percent.

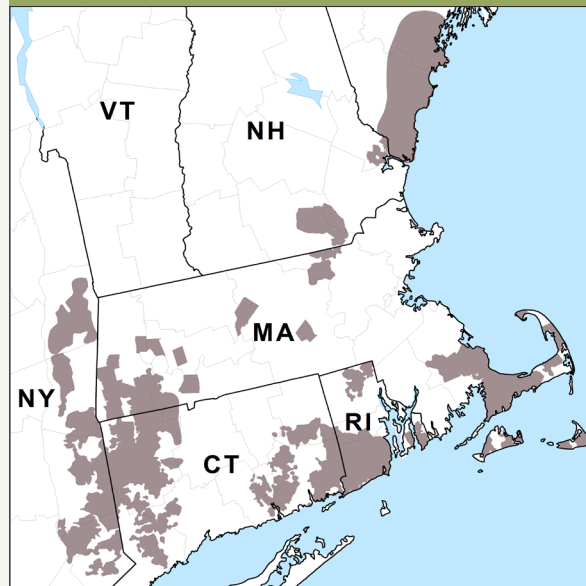
The primary threat to the rabbit is loss of habitat to development and maturation of forests. Fragmentation further degrades habitat by reducing the size of forests and reducing connectivity among habitat. The New England cottontail requires at least 25 acres of continuous young forests. These young forests provide thickets where the cottontail can raise young and escape from predators.

Restoring habitat for the New England cottontail not only benefits the cottontail but 60 other species with similar habitat needs, including whitetail deer and ruffed grouse.

## NRCS and the Cottontail

Through Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help private landowners re-establish young forests and encourage the healthy regeneration of these forests. NRCS works with landowners to make a variety of conservation improvements to their lands to enhance habitat for the rabbit. WLFW also provides landowners with regulatory predictability under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which ensures regulatory compliance for landowners who continue to manage their working farms and ranches using NRCS-prescribed conservation practices for up to 30 years.

## PROJECT BOUNDARY



## Actions

- Control weeds and manage for desired brush species.
- Re-establish native shrubs and trees.
- Remove trees and other vegetation to encourage dense forest regeneration.
- Increase connectivity of habitat.
- Restore wetland areas in priority areas.

## Outcomes and Impacts

Landowners are restoring habitat for the New England cottontail and other species that depend on young forests in the Northeast. The cottontail is on the rebound, demonstrated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2015 determination not to list the species under the ESA.





Leaders from The Trustees of Reservations, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and Orenda Wildlife Land Trust look at habitat restoration that benefits the New England cottontail and other species.

### Fiscal Year 2018 New England Cottontail NRCS Financial Assistance Contract Summary

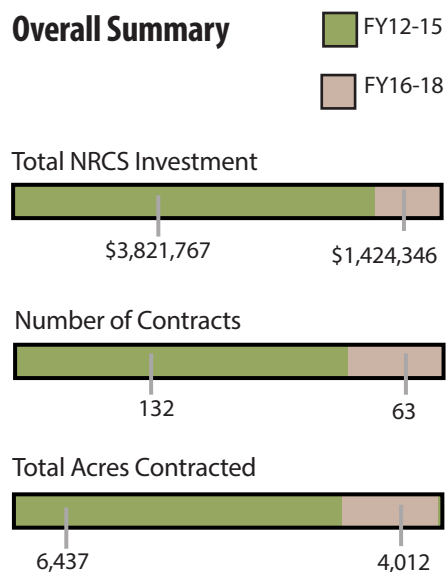
| State         | Acres        | NRCS Investment  | Contracts |
|---------------|--------------|------------------|-----------|
| Connecticut   | 153          | \$297,370        | 10        |
| Maine         | 280          | \$50,611         | 6         |
| Massachusetts | 30           | \$54,054         | 1         |
| New Hampshire | 619          | \$49,962         | 5         |
| New York      | 0            | \$0              | 0         |
| Rhode Island  | 10           | \$11,824         | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>1,092</b> | <b>\$463,821</b> | <b>23</b> |

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, October 2018.

### NRCS Goals

Through WLFW, NRCS works with producers to restore young forests to increase New England cottontail populations, provide habitat for other species and provide ESA predictability to producers, ensuring they can continue managing their working lands. To address these three goals, NRCS met its goal to restore 3,065 acres of young forests and old fields by 2018. These 2018 milestones were part of the agency's WLFW New England Cottontail Conservation Strategy. They also contribute to the 2030 goals of a broader public-private conservation effort outlined by the New England Cottontail Final Conservation Strategy.

### Overall Summary



### 2018 Milestones: Progress on Goals and Priorities by State

