



Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area Forest Stewardship Plan

The Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area Forest Stewardship plan was developed by New Jersey Audubon in consultation with the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife. New Jersey Audubon has conducted successful forest stewardship projects at Sparta Mountain, both on our own property and also working with the Division of Wildlife on the Wildlife Management Area. These projects have produced healthier forest habitats and are providing resources for species of conservation concern, all while protecting water resources and enhancing passive recreational opportunities for New Jersey residents for years to come.

In 2009 a Forest Stewardship Plan was developed for the Wildlife Management Area. New Jersey Audubon has recently developed a new plan that updates and expands on the priorities in the 2009 plan, reaffirming our commitment to create a healthier forest habit for wildlife while abiding by strict guidelines provided by third party certification as well as agency rules and regulations.

The update project addresses the following:

- Improve the health, structure and diversity of the forests
- Create young forest habitat for birds and other wildlife that are of conservation concern
- Enhance foraging, nesting and roosting habitat for cavity dwelling birds and bats
- Suppress the spread of invasive species
- Create basking habitat for turtles
- Protect and maintain views and vistas
- Improve passive recreational opportunities
- Protect water resources
- Monitor and evaluate stewardship activities



Why is this project so important?

The resident and migratory birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians that rely on this critical stage of forest growth and development are struggling to maintain themselves in places they were once commonly found. Throughout the northeast, young forest habitat has diminished as forest land has been converted to development and abandoned farms and homesteads matured to woodlands. As a consequence, a wide variety of wildlife have experienced the loss of the scrubby, patchy, disturbed portions of the forest that they rely on for food and cover. These are not just the fragmented edges along utility rights-of-way or rural and suburban yard edges, but the needed gaps in forest habitat.

It's not too late if we act now!

We have an opportunity to help restore young forest patches, create new future forest and help numerous birds and other wildlife recover, all while protecting the water and esthetic resources that we all cherish at Sparta Mountain.



Thanks to the support of the National Forest Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service and generous donations by New Jersey Audubon supporters we have been able to chart the course for another decade of wildlife and habitat stewardship. The stewardship of public land is essential to ensure wildlife that have called New Jersey home can continue to do so and to allow current and future residents of the state to enjoy the beauty and diversity of the wildlife that have always been found here.

The Stewardship Plan

The Sparta Mountain Forest Stewardship Plan proposes to create approximately 20 acres of young forest habitat per year for the next ten years. This relatively small area will be created annually out of a wildlife management area that totals more than 3,400 acres. As time goes by each forest patch will grow and mature, attracting a diversity of plants and wildlife.

The plan for the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management was developed under the guidance and review of third party certification standards. Standards that have been endorsed or supported by:

- Sierra Club
- World Wildlife Fund (WWF)
- Greenpeace
- The Nature Conservancy
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- National Wildlife Federation

The plan is subject to annual audits, and review, approval and oversight by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. The implementation of the plan requires adherence to a set of best management practices.

Background

New Jersey Audubon has been actively partnering with the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife since 2011 to manage the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area and New Jersey Audubon's own Sparta Mountain Sanctuary towards a set of shared goals. To date, this has involved the creation of young forest habitat and the stewardship of mature forests. Through this new plan, we look forward to working with the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife and other partners to conserve and restore, the wildlife, habitat and natural resources of the state for the next decade.

More about the project

Sparta WMA Forest Stewardship Plan Overview

In conjunction with the New Jersey Dept. of Environmental Protection, New Jersey Audubon developed a Forest Stewardship Plan for the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area. This new plan slated to be in effect from 2016 to 2026 builds on an existing plan that was developed in 2009 and has been under implementation since then. The new draft Forest Stewardship Plan was prepared using objectives based on regional conservation concerns within a landscape level context. Specifically the plan seeks to address five goals:

- Maintain ecosystem health, diversity and integrity
- Protect and enhance hydrologic resources
- Inventory and monitor priority wildlife populations and habitat
- Provide compatible wildlife related recreational opportunities and facilities
- Continue management in a manner compliant with third party certification

Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area



Plan Financing

NJ Audubon sought-out and received grants from the National Forest Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service, which provided the primary funding necessary to develop the updated plan. Additional financial support was obtained in the form of small grants and in-kind contributions from other environmentally minded organizations. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection invested substantial in-kind staff contributions towards the development of the plan, but provided no direct funding to the cost of developing the plan.

Monitoring - Baseline and Ongoing

Several measures were enacted to establish baseline monitoring for this plan. First, a Forest Health Assessment was initiated by Michael Van Clef, Ph.D. in 2011 to capture general forest conditions (supported by a grant from the NJ Highlands Coalition to the Sparta Mountain Coalition). That data is summarized within the plan appendices. Another method being used to monitor forest conditions is the establishment of fixed radius inventory plots, which have been installed at several locations throughout the wildlife management area. These will allow for long term repeated measurements of plant community development. In addition to the permanent plots, data were collected on another 585 forest inventory plots across the wildlife management area, establishing a significantly more comprehensive baseline for characterizing vegetative age class and species distribution over what is



contained in the 2009 Forest Stewardship Plan.



Spring and fall surveys were also commissioned through an independent group of qualified botanists for rare herbaceous plants and qualified biologists have compiled baseline surveys for various birds and wildlife species. In response to our initial stakeholder input request, a deer exclosure fence was installed protecting several acres at the Ridge Road project site to provide for a long term evaluation of deer impacts to the forest, and all project sites have been re-visited at least four times annually to monitor for invasive plant species emergences.

To date we are realizing positive regrowth of desired vegetation creating suitable wildlife habitat. It will however take several years before we could expect the species we've created the habitat for to find and occupy the sites.

Stewardship Project Financing & Revenue

Habitat improvement demonstration projects have been implemented annually during the course of developing this updated version of the Forest Stewardship Plan. The project locations have been based on specific goals, and all costs associated with contractor implementation and accessing the sites has been paid for using grant funds provided by the National Forest Foundation and U.S. Forest Service funding. Any revenue attained through the stewardship projects undertaken at the wildlife management area has been paid by the contractor directly to the State of New Jersey; NJ Audubon has not received any of this revenue.