

Downward Trend

But young forest habitat is declining throughout the Northeast. Human land use practices have affected the regeneration of young forest and the quality of that habitat. Many acres have been lost to roads, buildings, and parking lots. As a result, many wildlife species that depend on young forest habitat are declining too.

In the Northeast, the populations of 22 of 40 shrubland birds have significantly declined in recent years. Since 1980, American woodcock populations have declined by 40%. Many other species—from butterflies to New England cottontails—have suffered similar declines. How can we reverse this trend?



Clockwise from upper left: Golden-winged warbler, American woodcock, ruffed grouse, moose, bobcat, snowshoe hare.

You Can Help

Today, forests cover roughly 80% of Vermont. Most of that forestland is owned in small parcels by people like you. Because of that, private forestland owners can have a big impact on the state's native wildlife.

Learn how to steward your forestland in ways that keep the whole forest community healthy. Download a free copy of *Managing Grasslands, Shrublands, and Young Forest Habitats for Wildlife: A Guide for the Northeast* (published by the Northeast Upland Habitat Technical Committee and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife) from the web.

Run by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) offers both technical and financial assistance to establish and improve wildlife habitat. Ask your county forester how you can take part.

For More Information

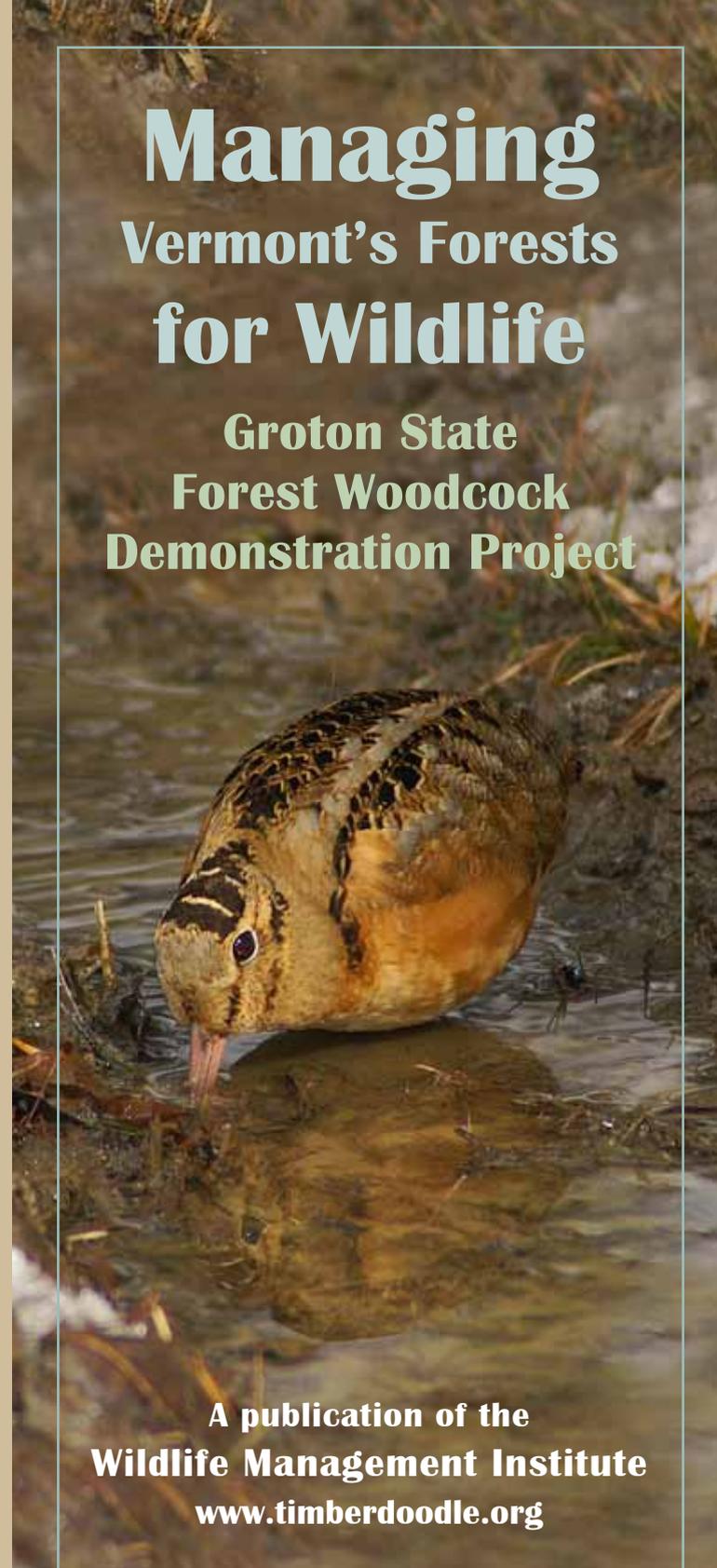
Find up-to-date contact information and learn about demonstration areas in your region at www.timberdoodle.org. For more information about Groton State Forest Woodcock Demonstration Project visit: www.timberdoodle.org/demo/groton-state-forest-caledonia-and-washington-counties-vermont

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Managing Vermont's Forests for Wildlife

Groton State Forest Woodcock Demonstration Project



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Reversing a

In a healthy forest, variety is not just the *spice* of life, it's the *foundation*. Vermont's forests contain a rich and dynamic mosaic of habitats—from open wetlands to shrubby thickets to mature forest stands. That's good news for native forest plants and animals, since each species relies on a particular habitat or habitats for its survival.

One key habitat type, in terms of species diversity, is young forest—the dense growth of saplings and shrubs that grows up in a forest clearing. Generally speaking, young forest supports more wildlife species than any other forest age class. In a healthy forest system, young forest continually grows into mature forest and is regenerated by disturbances, like floods and windstorms.



Just a few of the many wildlife species that depend on young forest habitat.

Under the Woodcock's Umbrella

Wildlife biologists consider the American woodcock an “umbrella” species, meaning that protecting this species helps protect the many other wildlife species that depend on scrubby, young-forest habitat.

Though woodcocks migrate to the southeastern U.S. in winter, they return to the Northeast each spring and rely on young forest habitats for courting, nesting, brood rearing, and roosting. Male woodcocks perform elaborate courtship displays along logging roads and log landings. Hens nest and rear their young on the ground beneath shrubby new growth, protected by dense leaf cover. At dusk in summer and early fall, woodcocks fly to weedy fields and newly logged woods where they roost for the night beneath patchy plant growth that protects them from both land and aerial predators.

By maintaining the mix of open, weedy, and shrubby habitats needed by woodcocks, forest managers also create habitat for alder and willow flycatchers, whip-poor-wills, snowshoe hares, cottontail rabbits, and many other wildlife species.



Indigo bunting chick.



Managing Forests for Biodiversity

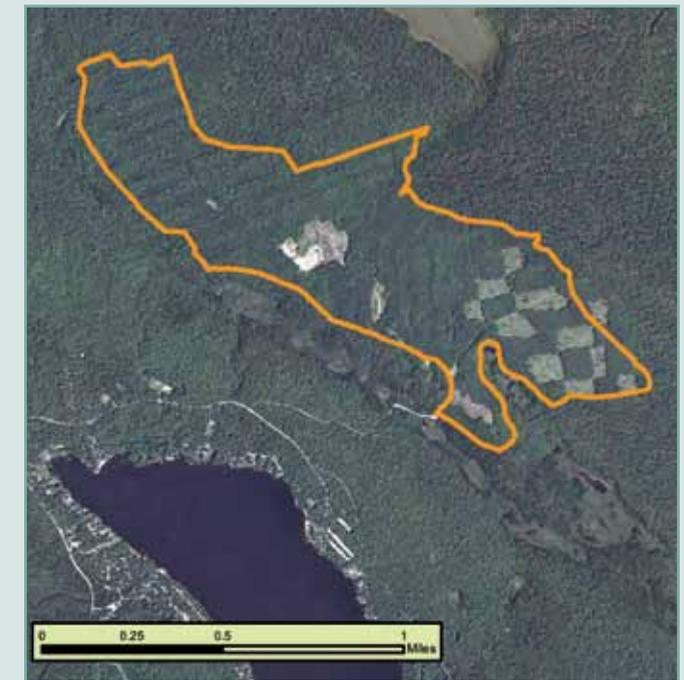
Some wildlife species, like the American woodcock and eastern cottontail, need the dense shrubs and saplings of young forests for shelter, food, and courtship and nesting sites. Other species, like the wood thrush and pileated woodpecker, need the big trees, snags, and downed logs of mature forests. Still others, like the wild turkey, depend on a mix of habitats. Here at Groton State Forest, one of our primary management goals is to protect native biodiversity. At the same time, we aim to provide great recreational opportunities and contribute to local and regional economies.

Careful planning, based on the latest understanding of wildlife ecology and sustainable forestry, helps Groton State Forest's resource managers merge these three goals. When new logging roads or recreation trails are needed, they are placed where they will least impact wildlife habitat. Foresters identify and manage particular stands to encourage habitat that meets specific wildlife needs, like deer wintering grounds and mast (fruit and nut) production. As you explore the forest, watch for changes in forest habitat—from brushy new growth to mature forest—and for the animals that live in these habitats.

Groton State Forest Woodcock Demonstration Project

To halt and reverse the decline of wildlife that need brushy woods, Groton State Forest managers create and maintain young forest by cutting trees in carefully selected areas. Because young forest is a short-lived phase in a forest's growth cycle, such harvests need to be fairly frequent and ongoing.

In Groton State Forest's 382-acre Woodcock Management Area, managers began creating a series of strip- and patch-cuts in 1984. These cuts are growing back as dense stands of paper and yellow birch, sugar and red maple, aspen, and black cherry. Managers are also restoring the 4-acre gravel pit near the center of this management area, creating further shrubland habitat and ground-roosting areas for woodcock.



One of the two woodcock demonstration areas in Groton State Forest.