Agencies, organizations, towns, land trusts, universities, companies, and private citizens are working together to help New England’s native rabbit. These partners create young forest and shrubland where cottontails and other wildlife can live. Conservationists monitor rabbit populations, conduct genetics studies, protect key parcels of land, and maintain a captive breeding program to produce rabbits that can be released into good habitat in carefully delineated focus areas throughout the New England cottontail’s range.

To learn more, visit www.newenglandcottontail.org
Habitat Restoration Success
At all state land NEC management sites and on some key private lands, surveys are conducted to evaluate the response of both vegetation and cottontails. Stem density transects are surveyed prior to management, one year after and then every other year. Fecal pellets are collected on alternate years to document use by NECs and ECs. So far, all sites have exceeded the minimum stem density goal of 20,000 stems per acre, and invasive plant controls have appeared to greatly shift the percentage of invasive plants to native.

Captive Breeding Program
In 2014, 12 NECs from Bethlehem were transported to the Roger Williams Park Zoo, and three rabbits taken to the newly established breeding program at the Queens Zoo. To date, CT has provided more than 25 rabbits to the captive breeding effort.

Eastern Cottontail Removal
Beginning in 2012, ECs were live-trapped and removed from two sites occupied by both cottontail species. In 2013, two more sites were added. Preliminary analysis indicates that >90% of the EC population must be removed to increase the proportion of NECs in the population.

Response to Beagle Chase
At a site occupied by both cottontail species, radio-collared rabbits were observed while being chased by a beagle. After three full circles, if the rabbit did not lose the dog, the dog was called off. To assess vulnerability to hunting, they looked at how often dogs completed three full circles and how often the rabbit crossed an open area (i.e., field or dirt access road). The number of times rabbits were chased for three full circles was similar for both species (~30%), but ECs were more likely to cross or enter open areas. To assess type of escape cover used by cottontails, if the dogs lost the rabbit trail,

While a cadre of biologists and foresters are working to create habitat, another team of scientists, under the direction of DEEP biologist Dr. Howard Kilpatrick, is conducting research and monitoring throughout the state. Some recent and ongoing studies are described below.

Distribution
Ongoing fecal pellet collection and live-trapping as well as collection of hunter and roadkill specimens provide data to continually update the locations of population of New England cottontails. In 2014, eight new locations were documented and two new towns were added to the map for NECs.

Density and Composition
An analysis of occupied patches in CT showed that 8% were occupied by NECs only, 65% by ECs only, and 27% by both NECs and ECs. Kilpatrick’s group also studied size, density and composition (NEC vs. EC) at several sites using three mark-recapture techniques. Densities ranged from 0.6 – 2.4 cottontails per acre of either species.

For More Information
Name, Name, Name, Name,
Address, Address, Address,
Email, Email, Email, Email,
Website, Website, Website

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