

dcr

Massachusetts



The newsletter for owners of land protected by a Watershed Preservation Restriction (WPR) held by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Division of Water Supply Protection.

Summer 2014

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Watershed Currents

Helping Nature Help Itself

NRCS cost-sharing assistance for natural resource improvement

By Caroline Raisler and Fletcher Clark

Do you want to improve the quality of natural resources on your property, but don't know where to begin? The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) of the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), part of the United States Department of Agriculture, is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial help for landowners. Fletcher Clark is the NRCS Liaison Service Forester who helps landowners through this process.

Through the EQIP program, you can get cost-share money for up to 75% of the cost of implementing the following practices:

Improve Growth and Vigor of Your Forest

This is generally done by cutting and removing a proportion of low quality trees ("junk wood") to increase light and nutrient availability for the high-quality trees left to grow in your woods. This junk wood has no commercial value and can be expensive to remove. However, if it is left in the woods, it will decrease the resilience and value of your land. Some of the practices that involve the removal of junk wood are: thinning for forest health and wildlife, crop tree release, and pre-commercial thinning. Tree and shrub site preparation (and tree planting) may also be needed, depending on the unique characteristics of your woods.

Early Successional Wildlife Habitat

Young forest habitat benefits species in greatest need of conservation, including rare or endangered species in Massachusetts. New England lacks early successional, or young forest, habitat due to many factors from farm abandonment during the early 20th century to development pressures today. Many species of wildlife depend on this habitat for foraging, nesting, and hiding from predators. To create this habitat requires removing all the trees in an area five acres or larger, then allowing the woods to reestablish itself through succession. The first 5 to 15 years of growth are known to benefit the most species in need. Some of the species helped include the state endangered Eastern Ratsnake

and Golden-Winged Warbler, as well as other species of special concern in the state including the Whip-poor-will, Mourning Warbler, and the Southern Bog Lemming.

Cost sharing, continued on Page 3



These land owners are watching for moose, as well as many other species both big and small, drawn to the habitat created as a result of a forest opening they made on their property that promotes early successional growth.

Photo: Fletcher Clark

Meet the Staff

Nick Rossi:**Learning the ropes in the DCR WPR Program**

Nick Rossi joined DCR in April 2014 as the first Seasonal WPR Stewardship Assistant. In this new position, Nick helps with all things related to WPR stewardship. Many of you have already met him accompanying Caroline on monitoring visits, or perhaps when he has stopped by to post signs on WPR boundaries.

Before joining the DCR this year, Nick helped the Greater Worcester Land Trust (GWLT) with land acquisition projects, and last summer he interned at Mammoth Cave National

Park where he aided in various research projects inside and outside of the cave. Nick recently graduated from Clark University with an M.S. in Environmental Science and a B.A. in Geography.

Off the job, Nick can often be found hiking on local trails with his friends, reading a book on ancient history, or eating free pizza at GWLT volunteer events. He has a particular enthusiasm for caves and is always looking for the next underground adventure.



Nick, dirty but exhilarated, just returning from exploring Roppel Cave at Mammoth Caves in Kentucky.
Photo: Grant Cooper

FYI

**The DCR WPR Program is growing
Many new properties may be 'joining up'!**

When I started as Watershed Preservation Restriction Coordinator in 2009, DCR held 90 WPRs. Since then, the program has been growing at a pace of about five WPRs a year. In 2012, many of you attended the celebration of our 100th WPR, and now the WPR program is already up to 115 properties.

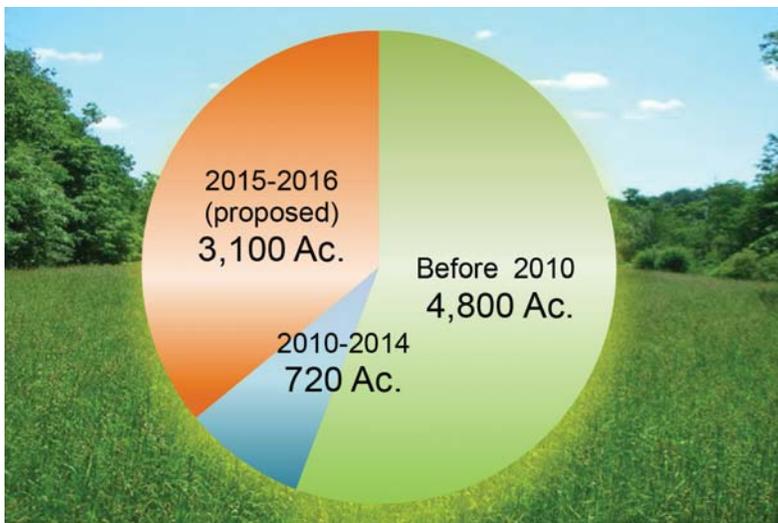
For each WPR that DCR acquires, the WPR Program staff prepare a baseline documentation report—a portrait, including maps, narratives, and photographs, of the conditions of the property at the time of acquisition. After that, we do regular monitoring visits to check that the terms of the

WPRs are being upheld. We also do our best to promptly answer questions from landowners, and communicate with you regularly – for example, via this newsletter.

The WPR program is also anticipating a huge amount of growth. As you read in the summer 2013 edition of Watershed Currents, DCR is part of a group that has received a grant from the federal Forest Legacy Program. This initiative will result in approximately 15 new WPRs, totaling approximately 2,300 acres, coming to DCR in the next 2-3 years. This is in addition to the normal WPR acquisitions, which may slow slightly but not entirely. These Forest

Legacy WPRs are generally much larger parcels than the WPRs that have been acquired over the past few years.

Because of this growth, the WPR program has been able to add a seasonal assistant, Nick Rossi (see above), to help with monitoring and baselines. You may see me accompanied by Nick, or other seasonal staff, when I come to monitor your WPR in the future.



The chart at left shows past and recent progress in WPR acquisition (in green and blue), in proportion to new acquisition activities with proposed acreage (in orange) anticipated to be added to the current total of protected WPR acreage in the next two years. If all of these activities come to fruition, total WPR acreage will be increased more than one third the current total.

Cost Sharing- From Page 1

Invasive Plant Control and Eradication

Invasive plants can inhibit forest regeneration and affect water quality in wetland areas. Control of invasive plants is often a multi-year project; it can involve monitoring, mechanical control such as hand-pulling, cutting, or mowing, and chemical control with herbicides. (Please be aware that some WPRs prohibit the use of chemicals).

General Property Management

This program also covers general property management practices, such as erosion control measures on woods roads and boundary line marking.

Here's how it works:

If you do not yet have a forest management plan or forest stewardship plan for your property, getting one would be the first step. Contact Fletcher Clark or Caroline Raisler for information about how to get a forest stewardship plan, including financial assistance that is available.

If you do have a forest management plan or forest stewardship plan, read it and talk to your forester about which of the EQIP practices you might like to try on your property.

Then, call your county NRCS field office to set up an appointment. The Worcester County office is in Holden, 508-829-4477, and the Franklin County office is in Greenfield, 413-772-0384 x3. Bring along your forest management plan or forest stewardship plan and a copy of the Water-

shed Preservation Restriction on your property (contact Caroline Raisler if you need a copy). You will meet with an NRCS planner, who will talk with you about your goals for the property, what is in your plan, and what is allowed under the terms of your Watershed Preservation Restriction. They will also walk your property with you. Based on that information, they will create a conservation plan for your property, outlining which of the EQIP practices should be used and how and when it will be implemented.

The NRCS planner will also guide you through the NRCS application process, which involves several steps and some effort, since this is a federal government contract.

You can apply to NRCS anytime. Funds are allocated through the Farm Bill and are usually released a few times a year. This is a competitive application, and it can take up to 6 months after submitting the application before contracts are made. In general, management practices are implemented about a year after the application is submitted. You would

receive your cost-share money once the management practices are implemented and NRCS has ensured that their standards have been met.

For more information:

If you are interested in learning more, visit the Massachusetts NRCS website for the EQIP program, www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ma/programs/financial/eqip/, or contact Fletcher Clark, NRCS Liaison Service Forester, at fletcher.clark@state.ma.us or (413) 262-2367.



Candid Camera...a night image captured by a wildlife camera on the Ellinwood-O'Brien Tree Farm after the NRCS-funded work on the property (see article below). Photo: Rich Valcourt, Sr.

The Ellinwood-O'Brien Tree Farm

Richard Valcourt, Sr. is one of the owners of the Ellinwood-O'Brien Tree Farm, a 320 acre property in Phillipston. He and his son, Richard Valcourt, Jr., are consulting foresters doing business as Green Natural Resource Management. Together, they designed the work to be done on the Tree Farm and obtained NRCS funding. Rich Valcourt Sr. said, "Without the incentive we would not have been able to do this work." Between 2011 and 2013, they did three cuts: 10 acres of oak regeneration, in which they cut down undesirable trees to create large openings; 5 acres of high intensity thinning, which also involved removing undesirable trees; and 5 acres of wildlife habitat creation, in which they removed most of the trees, leaving habitat trees, dead snags and other coarse woody debris.

Since the cuts, they have been very happy with the great oak regeneration. They have seen lots of wildlife, including moose, bear, deer, fishers, coyotes, and fox, in the wildlife habitat area. Rich said, "You do need to be patient with the paperwork," but the NRCS Holden office staff was "very helpful" and "great to deal with."

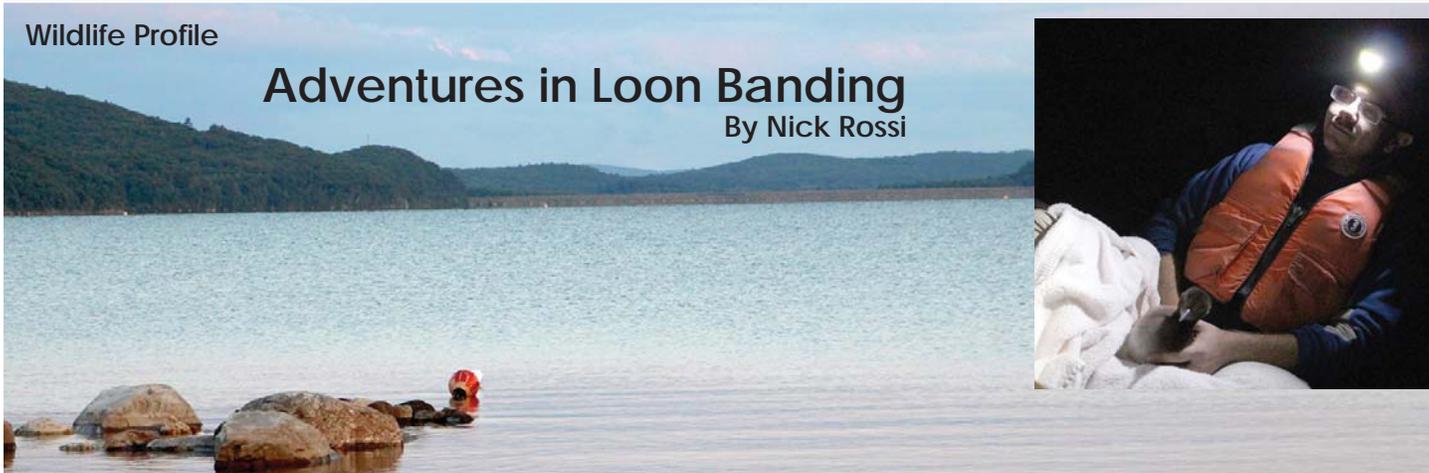
The Massachusetts Forest Alliance is having its Tree Farm Field Day on the Ellinwood-O'Brien Tree Farm on Saturday, September 13 from 9am – 4pm. Among other events, the day will include tours of these NRCS-funded cuts. The event costs \$20 a person, and pre-registration is required before September 10. See http://massforestalliance.org/ai1ec_event/massachusetts-tree-farm-field-day-2/ for more information and how to register.

- Caroline Raisler

Wildlife Profile

Adventures in Loon Banding

By Nick Rossi



On a moonless night, I kneel at the front of our boat, slowly panning the foggy surface of the Quabbin with a spotlight, looking for loons. “There—back to your left,” Rick Gray of Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI) murmurs behind me with his net in hand. I pan back to find two adults and two chicks. We creep up slowly to each loon, and Rick deftly scoops up the bewildered birds with his net before they can dive away. After we catch the family, they get a full physical. The loons endure this with varying degrees of tranquility as they are measured, weighed, and have blood taken. The adults also receive colored bands on their legs to help keep track of who comes back each year. I corral the chicks in my lap while one of the adults gets worked on. One of them pecks aggressively at my jacket sleeve and bites my finger.

This loon banding trip is part of a collaborative effort between DCR and BRI to monitor the growing loon population in the state. Although loons as a species are not threatened or endangered, they are listed as a spe-



Above: The Quabbin Reservoir on a tranquil evening. Inset right: Nick Rossi cradles a loon chick awaiting banding. Below: A loon chick's revenge!

Photos: Dan Warner/Masslive.com

cies of special concern in Massachusetts. Their numbers, however, are growing.

Loons require lakes with clear water free of pollution so that they can spot fish to eat while diving. The pristine waters of the Quabbin, and Wachusett Reservoirs, thanks in part to your WPRs, therefore make excellent habitat for loons. In fact, they have the highest concentration of loons in the state.

If you keep an ear out you may be lucky enough to hear their eerie calls this summer, especially at night when they tend to be the most vocal. By winter, the adults will migrate back to the ocean with the juvenile chicks following a few weeks later. Have no fear though, most adults will be back again next year; although the juveniles will spend the next two years maturing in shallow ocean waters before heading back inland. *For more loon info, see www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/common_loon/lifehistory.*

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