



DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

Stafford Hill Wildlife Management Area Habitat Management Summary

Location: Cheshire

Overall Size of WMA: 860 acres

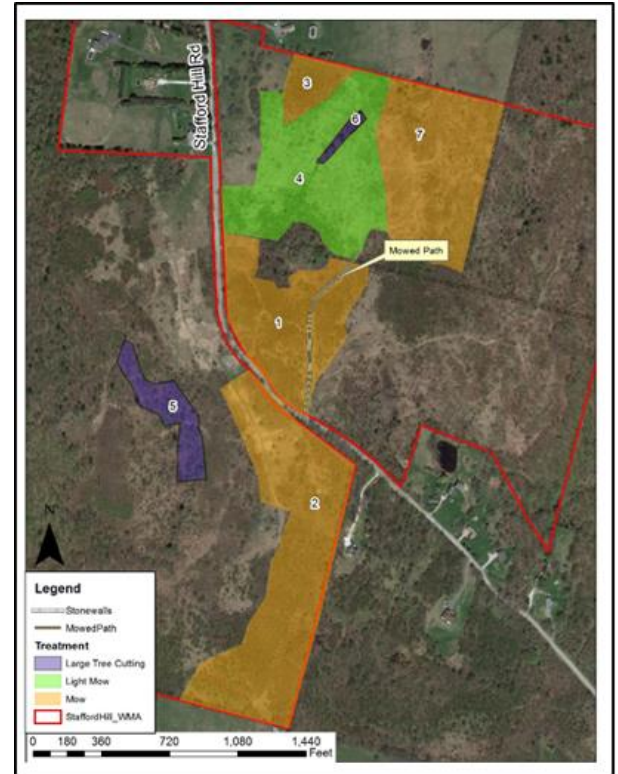
Potential size of restoration area: Approximately 150 acres

Size of area currently under active restoration: Approximately 55 acres

The current mix of habitat at Stafford Hill WMA is the result of 15 years of assessment, planning, and active habitat management. MassWildlife continues to focus attention on this area to create and maintain quality habitat for wildlife and exceptional recreation opportunities for people.

Habitat management activities at Stafford Hill WMA include:

1. Tree clearing and mowing to diversify and maintain old field and young forest habitat.
2. Tree clearing, mowing, invasive plant treatment, and prescribed fire to restore a calcareous fen—a priority natural community in Massachusetts.
3. Evaluating and planning future young forest management projects.



- MassWildlife's landscape [habitat goals](#) call for an abundance of full-canopy forest at any given point in time, but also highlight the need for a portion of state wildlife lands (20-25%) to occur as open grassland, shrubland, and young forest habitat. Young forest is typically younger than 30 years old and provides dense cover and abundant fruit and insect food for wildlife. Young forest habitat also provides quality outdoor recreational opportunities for sportsmen and women of the Commonwealth. Go to youngforest.org to learn more about the why young, regenerating forests are important for wildlife.
- Several phases of successful habitat management at Stafford Hill WMA have produced over 250 acres of young forest habitat that includes aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) as a significant component of its composition. Large contiguous stands of aspen at this high elevation are not common within the state. Aspen is an important food and cover source for ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and migratory songbirds like the mourning warbler. This type of habitat enhancement and creation helps support wildlife populations that are declining in many areas of the region. Current activities will maintain and add to these successfully managed areas.
- Abandoned field reclamation began in 2005. Invading woody vegetation and large diameter trees were removed to maintain open habitat. Many apple trees were retained. After treatment, naturally regenerating aspens began to grow. Twenty-five acres of pole sized hardwood trees will be mowed in the area originally treated in 2005. Different sections of the original treatment area will be cleared every 10 years. This rotational schedule of mowing will produce four age classes of young forest (0-10, 10-20, 20-30, or 30-40 years old). This variety of age classes will benefit a variety of wildlife.
- Work is underway to restore a [calcareous sloping fen](#), a priority natural community. These are open wetlands dominated by sedges on slopes that are fed by seeps of calcareous groundwater. These habitats are home to a suite of uncommon species—the fen at Stafford Hill contains two state-listed plants. Planned habitat management activities will remove invasive shrubs and also mimic natural disturbance to prevent woody plants from taking over. Thirty acres will be mowed and mulched and herbicides will be carefully applied. Eventually, prescribed fire will be used to maintain the openness of

this natural community.

- Work is being done to identify future areas for young forest habitat creation at Stafford Hill. The mature forests of the WMA contain an abundance of mature Aspen, much of which is starting to die. When mature aspen is cut and can receive full sun, aspen roots send up thousands of shoots resulting in dense thickets of saplings. Harvesting aspen and other hardwood species will increase healthy, regenerating young forest habitat that is so important for many species of wildlife.
- All required permits and project reviews were obtained prior to work beginning at Stafford Hill WMA. These include DEP Wetlands permits, MESA permit, MA Forest Cutting Practices Act permit, MA Historic Commission review, and federal tribal review.



Young Forest Habitat created in 2005, photo taken April 2020.