



COVERTS PROJECT COOPERATOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 2010 and 2011

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Background:

COVERT: A word that describes a thicket providing sheltering cover for wildlife; also a word that appropriately names a special educational program of the UConn Cooperative Extension System. Since 1983, the **Coverts Project** has been reaching out to enthusiastic and motivated woodland owners in Connecticut and teaching them how sound woodland management practices can make wildlife healthier, more diverse and more abundant.

Each year, a select group of woodland owners and/or environmentally concerned individuals are accepted to participate in a three-day training seminar. There they learn about different types of Connecticut forests and about where, how and why they grow as they do. They learn about different wildlife species, their needs and how to provide for them. They learn about the many natural resource professionals and organizations available to help them, and how to put this knowledge to work on their own woodland.



The seminar (meals, lodging, training and reference materials) and periodic follow-up workshops are free to participants. The Coverts Project seminar continues to be supported primarily by generous private donations and all costs are paid for by the donors.

In exchange, participants agree to volunteer as **Coverts Project Cooperators**, returning to their communities and sharing what they've learned with others. Specifically, cooperators agree:

- To develop a sound forest and wildlife stewardship plan for their own woodland and/or for a woodland which they are involved in managing;
- To maintain, for at least one year, an up-to-date set of reference materials (provided by the **Coverts Project**) and be available to answer questions other landowners have; and
- To make an active effort to reach out to and motivate other woodland owners in their community.

Through this network of informed individuals, thousands of landowners have learned about and are practicing sound forest and wildlife conservation.

Each **Coverts Project Cooperator** is a woodland owner who is experienced in balancing the long term aspects of managing a forest with the short term demands of everyday life. Each has completed at least 25 hours of formal training in forest and wildlife ecology and stewardship. Each has developed a forest stewardship plan of his/her own, working with readily available sources of information and professional assistance. Each has a



comprehensive personal library of forestry and wildlife information. And each is ready, willing and able to help others become knowledgeable forest stewards.

The Connecticut Coverts Project is one of approximately 20 similar programs in various states, some of which go by different names; such as Master Woodland Stewards, or Master Forest Owner, or Keystone Program, to name a few.

However, the CT Coverts Project is one of

the originals and most others have been patterned on its success.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS SUMMARY:

Coverts Project Cooperators are asked each year to report back to us about their activities. The following is a summary of accomplishments taken from the annual surveys for 2010 and 2011 as well as some recent activities for which we have information:

2011 Coverts Project Seminar:



On September 15 – 18, 2011 twenty-five enthusiastic individuals completed the 28th Coverts Project Seminar, held again at Great Mountain Forest. In addition to the great accommodations, food and wonderful cooperation and service provided by the Great Mountain Forest staff, the seminar was supported by the CT-DEEP Divisions of Forestry and Wildlife, who provided important and interesting content, materials and

presentations, personable instructors and valuable personal interaction throughout the weekend. Guest speakers **Jim Little** from CT Forest and Park Association, **Paul Barten** representing Great Mountain Forest and our own **Ruth Cutler**, retired Outreach Coordinator added depth and perspective to the weekend. Our new Cooperators are now actively engaged in woodland management planning, organizing educational programs in their communities, battling invasive species, and enhancing wildlife habitat. The 2012 Coverts Project Seminar is in the planning stages.





Helping out this year is **Sarah Fournier**, a recent graduate from the University of Connecticut who is tasked with helping to coordinate and assist with planning, follow-up and communication with Cooperators. Sarah also functions as an “unofficial liaison” with CT-DEEP Wildlife Division, working half-time in a seasonal position there. Also part of the team this year is **Holly Drinkuth**, with the UCONN Community and Natural Resource Planning Program (CNP) part of the Center

for Land use Education and Research (CLEAR). Holly works on a wide variety of natural resource projects throughout Connecticut, providing education and technical assistance for communities, private landowners, land trusts and conservation partnerships. She has been instrumental in updating the Coverts web site and providing Coverts with a social networking presence. If you haven’t already, check us out and ‘Like’ us on Facebook, [‘Connecticut COVERTS Project’](#) .

Veteran Cooperator Accomplishments:

While the Coverts Project requests a year-long commitment from participants, many of our veteran cooperators remain and have remained active for years and years, continuing to do good work and keeping us informed. Recent accomplishments include management planning, outreach work and habitat enhancements.

Management Planning: During 2010 and 2011 forty-seven cooperators reported progress on developing or updating stewardship plans for a total of 2049 acres of woodland or open space habitat statewide. Some have taken advantage of the CT DEEP Service Forestry program, some have applied for and received cost-share assistance from USDA NRCS, and some have worked independently or with private consultants. Several Cooperators are taking the lead on management planning for land trust parcels.

Stewardship Activities: Thirty-nine cooperators provided information about on-the-ground stewardship activities that improve forest health, enhance wildlife habitat and increase enjoyment and satisfaction from their woodlands:

- One hundred twelve (112) acres of early successional and/or grassland habitat creation or maintenance
- Over 180 acres of invasive species control
- Woodland thinning and/or forest stand improvement on more than 75 acres
- Timber harvesting for regeneration and/or forest products on an estimated 110 acres.
- Habitat enhancements such as blue



- bird boxes, brush piles and apple tree maintenance approximately 25 acres.
- Assisting with New England Cottontail inventory on 395 acres.
 - Recreational trail development, maintenance or improvement on 600 acres.
 - Numerous other habitat and stewardship activities are reported, including deer fencing, conifer seedling planting, wetland and fish habitat, and wildflowers.

Outreach and Educational Activities:

Individual property visits: Cooperators reported a total of 345 individual visits to their properties, or properties they manage, to view and or learn about stewardship and habitat activities. In addition, one public access, nature center-type property had an estimated 4000 individual visits.

Group tours: Cooperators also host group tours, classes, and workshops and reported a total of 338 people attending such group events.

Presentations: Twelve Cooperators reported having arranged or delivered public presentations about their stewardship experiences, to land trust boards, scout groups, local government boards and commissions and high school environmental students. These presentations were attended by approximately 270 members of the general public.



Media: Five Cooperators report having used local newspapers to publicize events or publish an article two others have used web pages and two report using local newsletters.

Youth Education: In addition to the presentations mentioned above, five Cooperators have organized or hosted group tours, events or workshops for youth audiences such as Scout or school groups. A total of 89 youth participants were reported to have attended these events.

Materials: Coverts Project brochures continue to be the favored way of conveying information about the Coverts Project and who Cooperators are. In addition, fact sheets on various topics copied from the manual, downloaded from web pages and obtained from public agencies are used to provide topical information to members of the public. Recent requests for copies of slide presentations indicate that Cooperators would also value the seminar lecture content to share as well. The re-designed Coverts web site and Facebook page will begin to satisfy requests from some cooperators for greater interaction and access to information.

In addition to the activities grouped under general headings above, over two dozen Cooperators reported additional, specific outreach activities ranging from serving at a fair booth to helping with an Eagle Scout project to giving away seedlings, and report

that in total they have reached over 1400 other people with positive information about forestry, wildlife habitat and conservation. They estimate that at least 285 of those people are woodland owners, and that their collective efforts communicating, disseminating information and educating others has stimulated some form of positive woodland or habitat stewardship on over 4500 acres.

In their own words, some of the unique activities in which Coverts Cooperators are engaged are described below:

- Worked with land trust people in Farmington and Burlington helping to develop plans to manage their land. Work with Bristol Fish and Game on invasive removal
- Giving white pine seedlings to several people and assisting them in planting them. Giving black walnut seeds for planting to one person.
- Continue to promote habitat management in any setting when land use is being discussed
- Helped indoctrinate our new property manager
- Helped staff the ECFLA and Coverts booth at the Woodstock Fair in 2010 for the 6th consecutive year
- Worked as a member of the board of directors of Avalonia and as the chairman of the Ledyard Town Committee to educate Avalonia leadership about Coverts project ideals
- Talked about the program casually with people who are interested
- Disseminated information on licensed foresters
- Worked with neighbors to encourage a delay in cutting their hayfields until nesting season is completed
- Created a backyard wildlife habitat pamphlet to provide residential neighborhood members. Explained Coverts and offered services to assist interested landowners by providing on-site visits and advice on how to manage their land for improved habitat. Discussed Coverts with many people and answered questions related to habitat management. Visited fellow Coverts cooperator's land to conduct walk through, witness WHIP progress, and learn more about tree/shrub ID. Currently networking with a fellow neighbor who knows 2 local large landowners (>100 acres each)
- Reviewed 3 land trust management plans. WHIP liaison for land trust. Wrote a "Land Management Practice" guideline for land trust.
- Tried to educate the rest of the Groton Open Space Board as we formulated management plans. Gave numerous fundraising tours to a variety of groups and nature education, our plans for habitat improvement were a central theme.
- I have used this year as an education year, learning and preparing a plan that will package master Gardening and Covert endeavors under property management. I will be putting a program presentation together and will talk to Tom when it is completed. Currently I am also completing Master Gardener program. I will have a written plan for marketing in the future.

Some Highlights: There are many wonderful projects Coverts Cooperators have accomplished and we wish we could tell about them all. Here are highlights from just a few that illustrate the diversity, intensity and creativity with which Coverts Cooperators are engaged with their neighbors, the public and the environment:

- In Northwestern Connecticut a group of knowledgeable landowners is organizing themselves to collaborate on habitat efforts. The impetus behind this group is Coverts Cooperator **Jed Struckus**, who has applied his organizational talents and reached out to all the new and past Coverts folks in his community of Warren. Together they have formed a group loosely known as the Warren Area Coverts Cooperators (or WACCo, for short). They have plans to coordinate efforts for forest health, stewardship planning, habitat work and outreach in their area.
- One of our members has been the director of a nature center in the Danbury area. Using information and knowledge gained during his participation in the Coverts Project, **Gio Ogno** has reached out to other Nature Center Directors in Western Connecticut and organized a discussion and information-sharing group.
- In the town of Marlborough, Coverts Cooperator **Richard Zacher** has been managing his family's working forest lands for many years. Applying what he learned at the Coverts Project Seminar about early successional habitat, and with assistance from a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) grant from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Richard created a spectacular irregularly-shaped 18-acre silvicultural clearcut in the middle of what otherwise is hundreds of acres of even-aged hardwood forest that originated from charcoal cuts in the early 1900s. Age-class diversity, different habitat types, hunting opportunities and some forest products were among Richard's objectives. The clearcut occupies varied terrain and site features from wet areas to rock outcrops. A portion of the area will be maintained long-term as a meadow, and a portion will be permitted to regenerate with woody stems. One public tour, several private tours and a couple of academic classes have visited the site, with Richard as guide.
- Tree Farming: Cooperator **Peter Bergan**, East Hampton, was selected Connecticut's Tree Farmer of the Year in 2009 and was nominated to the national competition in 2010. He hosted a rainy-day tour of his property and several other Coverts Cooperators were in attendance. Another Cooperator, **Jim Poole** of Willington, in addition to the habitat and forest management work he does on his own property, has assumed the chairmanship of the Connecticut Tree Farm Committee.
- Cooperators **Sue Sutherland and Joan Smith** have been instrumental in habitat restoration work on the "Sheep Farm" conservation property in Groton. Among the efforts being made there is creation of rabbit habitat under the New England Cottontail Initiative in cooperation with DEEP Wildlife and NRCS.



Communication: Coverts Cooperators clearly express an interest in staying in touch with the program and with each other, through additional events, email, newsletters and other means. “Keep the program going!” is also a message given loud and clear. Veteran Cooperators consider themselves part of a unique network of people with an important mission and sharing some common bonds. It is hoped that we can reinforce and strengthen this identity as the Coverts Project moves forward.

When asked the question: **“What could we do to make the COVERTS PROJECT work better?”** Veteran Cooperators respond with many positive suggestions.

Again, in their own words, some of their responses are listed below:

- Keep in touch.
- Work more to maintain habitat for native species like Ruffed Grouse.
- Do miss the occasional bulletin we would receive.
- Support Cooperators getting together on a town by town basis, to support each other
- Might want to look into the possibility of having “Coverts Projects” that are ongoing, emphasized by exposing to the interested public work presently taking place... That is where things seem to all take off from. These have taken place but a few more I think would be helpful
- Follow-up meetings, advice, project sharing
- Just keep it going!
- Coverts was excellent training for us. Our goal is to put these tools to use to make the preserve a showcase for what we learned at Coverts as supported by our WHIP grant. There are so many types of habitat and our plan is fairly extensive so that it could be a very interesting habitat improvement experiment. In addition, we are seeking to expand existing native plants in the meadows, wetlands and other areas as well as reintroduce rare native species. The entire project has energized our group and attracted many new people.
- Have a six month get together and keep momentum going. Can give more suggestions in the future.
- Keep the communications coming with teaching seminars.
- Newsletter
- Landowner presentations

During the course of 2012, as we plan the coming year’s seminar, we hope to re-energize and stimulate communication and information-sharing with and among Cooperators. Extra educational events are being planned along with field tours and workshops. Watch for information about a reunion event in the works! Recently an effort has been made to communicate with all past and present Coverts Cooperators, to maintain, and in some cases to re-establish, communications and make sure we remain in contact with all who want to hear from us. Our Coverts Cooperator email list will be the main avenue for direct communication and our web page will provide news updates and hopefully folks will take advantage of communicating by Facebook as well.

The Coverts Project would not be possible without the generous support and enthusiasm of a wide variety of people, agencies and organizations. As stated above, all the costs of the Coverts Project weekend seminar each year are covered by funding that comes from generous private donations, individuals who value, appreciate and believe in the work our Cooperators accomplish. Without the continued support of private donors we would not be able to inspire and educate a new group of enthusiastic Cooperators each year. (*Donations are tax-deductible through the UCONN Foundation. For more information contact Tom Worthley, UCONN Cooperative Extension, 1066 Saybrook Rd., Haddam, CT 06438 860-345-5232 or thomas.worthley@uconn.edu .*)



The participation each year by knowledgeable, dependable and committed individuals from the CT-DEEP Forestry and Wildlife Divisions is another key aspect of the Coverts Project. Whether as expert presenters and field trip leaders or for individual consultation and post-seminar follow-up, members of the Wildlife Division and the Service Forestry Staff commit time and professional expertise that is the foundation for program content

Coverts Project supporters also include several other agencies and private non profit organizations that help in various ways to promote the work of our Cooperators, ensure the quality of our offerings, assist with outreach efforts and tour locations, offer technical assistance, help with communications and otherwise empower Coverts Cooperators to accomplish the many things they do. Over the last few years the following organizations have been key partners or have provided valuable support (listed alphabetically):

- Connecticut Forest and Park Association
- Connecticut Tree Farm Committee
- Great Mountain Forest Corporation
- Highstead, Inc.
- The Ruffed Grouse Society
- USDA Forest Service
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service



Our sincere appreciation goes out to all who continue to make the Coverts Project the successful, high-quality, extremely effective and oh-so-enjoyable program it has become.

Respectfully Submitted,

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