

Fred Ernst, New Hampshire Coverts Project Volunteer

The NH Coverts Project, coordinated by UNH Cooperative Extension and sponsored by the N.H. Fish and Game Department, trains volunteers to promote wildlife habitat conservation and forest stewardship. These volunteers return to their communities and conserve land, deliver presentations and field walks, join conservation commissions, write articles for newspapers, initiate natural resource inventories, staff exhibits, and more.

One such volunteer is Fred Ernst. In 2000, Ernst purchased 670 acres in Acworth. That same year, he attended the NH Coverts Project training workshop. He was inspired to begin working to improve conditions for wildlife, particularly ruffed grouse, on his property – much of which had been “high-graded” (most commercial-quality trees had been removed) prior to his ownership.

Ernst has integrated wildlife habitat management and sound timber harvesting practices, creating and maintaining early successional habitats for a variety of young forest wildlife species. He has worked with several organizations to complete this work, including UNH Cooperative Extension, N.H. Fish and Game, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Ruffed Grouse Society and Trout Unlimited.

Ernst credits his Coverts Project training with providing him with the information, resources and motivation necessary to actively manage his property for wildlife habitat. Over the past 15 years,

Ernst has created five patch-cuts, ranging in size from 5 to 17 acres, established a 5-acre meadow, restored beaver habitat on the property, and worked to improve brook trout habitat. He allows public access on his land and has established trails through-



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out the property. This past spring, Ernst and his wife, Ellie, hosted a workshop on managing shrubland habitat for birds. More than 40 interested landowners, volunteers and natural resources professionals attended and observed the variety of habitat conditions and abundance of bird species present on the Ernsts' property.

In addition to the work he's done for wildlife on his land, Ernst is Chair of the Cold River Local Advisory Committee, a group that works to protect the health and recreational features of the river and its tributaries. He is also a member of the Leadership

Council of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Since it began in 1995, the NH Coverts Project has trained more than 400 landowners and conservation-minded individuals to become stewards of the state's wildlife and forest resources. Many, like Ernst, manage their property for wildlife habitat and invite others to learn from their experience. New Hampshire's wildlife and habitats have and will continue to greatly benefit from the work that Ernst and his fellow Coverts volunteers do statewide.

– *Haley Andreozzi, UNH Cooperative Extension Wildlife Outreach Coordinator*