

NH Fish and Game Department

SMALL GRANTS for PRIVATE & MUNICIPAL LANDS HABITAT CONSERVATION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

A Small Grants Program was established in 2001 to fund all or part of the cost of small-scale habitat restoration and enhancement projects on privately owned lands. The program is restricted to properties or aggregates of adjacent properties, 25 acres or larger, that are open to hunting and other non-motorized public recreation, and applies to lands owned by individuals, organizations, and communities. Funding is limited to no more than \$4,000 per property per year and no more than \$10,000 will be granted to a single landowner over a ten-year period. Funding for habitat enhancements comes from the wildlife habitat account, funded by a fee required of all who purchase a NH hunting license. As general policy, funds will only be granted for projects on land that is and will continue to be open to public hunting and other non-motorized public activities. Exceptions to this policy may be made at the discretion of the Executive Director.

The program works as follows. Landowners request grants alone or in partnership with the wildlife biologist listed at the bottom of page 2 by selecting appropriate projects from the attached list of practices. They then complete the standardized application form and send it to the wildlife biologist. Applications are considered as they are received and as long as uncommitted funds remain during any particular fiscal year. Wildlife biologists review the application and, if acceptable, sign off and send it to headquarters for commitment of funds. Once approved, a signed copy of the grant application is returned to the landowner. This signed form authorizes the landowner to complete the project and commits the Department to reimburse them for costs up to the identified limit. Upon completing the project, the landowner submits a signed standardized voucher to the wildlife biologist who verifies satisfactory completion of the project and forwards the voucher to headquarters for payment.

Applications for small grants will be handled quickly. Wildlife biologists may speak with the landowner or their agent for additional information. They will visit the site if they feel it is necessary. Applications that include partial project funding from other sources (such as landowner contribution, Farm Bill Programs, etc.) may receive priority consideration. The Department reserves the right to decline to fund projects determined to have limited value to wildlife or that can be more appropriately funded some other way. The Department also reserves the right to change program policies and procedures to adjust to changing funding levels, habitat priorities or other unforeseen circumstances. For example, as regional habitat composition goals are established and refined, the list of projects may be prioritized to reflect regional needs. This prioritization may then be factored into the decision making on grant applications.

In exchange for project funding, the landowner agrees to allow non-motorized public recreation, including hunting, on their property for at least five years. However, livestock areas and safety zones of 300 feet around permanently occupied dwellings can be posted against hunting.

Further, the landowner agrees to maintain the project in accordance with our standards and guidelines.

Sequence of Steps

1. Landowner submits a completed grant application to a wildlife biologist listed below.
2. Wildlife biologist reviews, consults with landowners, and if approved sends to Headquarters.
3. Program Administrator commits funds.
4. A signed copy of the approved application form is returned to the landowner along with a blank invoice. A copy is also sent to the regional biologist; the original is retained at Headquarters.
5. The project is completed by the landowner. Projects must be completed within two years of the funding being committed.
6. Landowner submits invoice form, certifying project is completed as approved, to the wildlife biologist.
7. Wildlife biologist reviews work, signs off on invoice, and sends it to Headquarters.
8. Payment is processed and the landowner is reimbursed.

Questions regarding the Small Grants Program and requests for application forms and associated information can be referred to the contacts listed below. Visit the [Small Grants Program webpage](#) to determine which region your property is located in.

Region 1, Lancaster	788-3164	Jake DeBow and Henry Jones
Region 2, New Hampton	744-5470	Becky Fuda and Brett Ferry
Region 3, Durham	868-1095	Patrick Tate and Jessica Carloni
Region 4, Keene	953-4423	Matt Tarr, UNH Coop Extension

PRIVATE LANDS HABITAT IMPROVEMENT – SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

LIST OF PRACTICES, FUNDING RATES AND MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

The habitat restoration and enhancement practices listed below are eligible for reimbursement through the Private Lands Small Grants Program. The rates listed indicate the maximum reimbursement for each practice by an appropriate unit of measure (per acre, per tree, etc).

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Applications have a maximum of two years from the time their grant is approved to complete the project and submit for reimbursement.

By applying for reimbursement, landowners agree to implement and maintain practices in accordance with acceptable standards and procedures, as identified by the Department. Once the original project has been completed, periodic maintenance to sustain the practice must be scheduled.

No reimbursement will be provided for work within 300 feet of a residential building.

Small Grants funding is not available to landowners who feed deer.

Reimbursement will not be made for cutting trees and other plants that have commercial value.

These funds can be used as the landowner match for other federal or state cost-share programs, however, duplication of payment is not allowed.

The Department may, without notice, add or remove practices from this list, and change the reimbursement rates if necessary to reflect changes in the cost of implementing specific practices.

The Department may, on a case-by-case basis, authorize reimbursement for projects not on the list that are determined to be of value to wildlife.

The Department may decline to fund projects that are judged to provide little value for wildlife or that are not implemented in accordance with identified and acceptable standards and procedures.

ACCEPTABLE PRACTICES AND REIMBURSEMENT RATES

Release of Wild Apple Trees	\$ 12.00 per tree
Release of Fruiting Shrubs	\$400.00 per acre
Mast Tree Release	\$ 12.00 per tree
Softwood Release in Historic Deer Yards	\$250.00 per acre

Soil Scarification to Enhance Oak and Softwood Regeneration	\$400.00 per acre
Regeneration or Restoration of Alder or Aspen/Birch	
1. Hand Tools or Brontosaurus/Chipper	\$900.00 per acre
Brush Clearing/Sapling Removal to Maintain Old Fields and Shrublands	
1. If Brush Hog	\$ 60.00 per acre
2. If Hand Tools or "Brontosaurus"/Chipper	\$900.00 per acre
Mowing to Maintain Grasslands & Shrublands	\$ 60.00 per acre
Creation of Permanent Woodland Openings	
Stumped and leveled in condition to maintain by mowing	
1. Seed, lime & fertilizer	up to \$250.00 per acre
2. Site prep – stump, level, spread	up to \$1,500.00 per acre
Maintenance of Woodland Openings, Log Landings, Wood Roads & Edges	
Not to include initial clean-up and closing after a timber harvest	
1. Seeding, liming & fertilizing	up to \$250.00 per acre
2. Brush Hog	\$ 60.00 per acre or 1/2 mile of road
Grassland Restoration: Establishing Cool Season Grasses and Clovers	
1. Initial seeding and site preparation	\$100.00 per acre
2. Soil Amendments (lime & fertilizer)	actual cost up to \$150.00 per acre
Grassland Restoration: Establishing Warm Season Grasses	
1. Initial seeding and site preparation	\$600.00 per acre
2. Soil Amendments (lime & fertilizer)	actual cost up to \$150.00 per acre
Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation	
1. Burn Plan Development	\$500 for plan development \$500 after burn is completed
2. Fireline Preparation	\$60 per mile – brush hog \$750 per mile - Hand Tools or "Brontosaurus"/Chipper
3. Burn Implementation	\$1,000
Management Plans	
1. < 100 acres	\$1,000.00 per plan
2. 100-500 acres	\$1,500.00 per plan
3. > 500 acres	\$2,500.00 per plan

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICES

Release of Wild Apple Trees

- I. To qualify for the program, you must have a minimum of ten apple trees at a density of at least five trees per acre.
- II. Trees credited for reimbursement must be of fruit bearing size. If trees are smaller than this, use the Release of Fruiting Shrubs practice.
- III. The number of trees released for reimbursement will be by agreement with the regional wildlife biologist.
- IV. Release standards
 - A. Severely suppressed trees must be slowly released to full sunlight over several growing seasons. Rapid exposure to full sun can kill these trees.
 - B. Apple tree crowns will be exposed to sunlight on a minimum of two sides, four sides is preferable. At least one side must have a southerly or westerly exposure. Dense softwoods can be retained on the north side if not shading other trees being released.
 - C. Competing trees can be eliminated by either felling or girdling. Competing trees are those that interfere with sunlight reaching the crown of the tree being released. In general, competing trees less than eight inches in diameter should be felled, lopped and piled. Trees over eight inches in diameter can be cut if no damage to the apple tree will be caused, or girdled if damage might occur. Girdling consists of two cuts ringing the tree completely that penetrate through the cambium layer of the tree.
 - D. A commercial timber harvest should be used whenever possible to remove large trees that are shading apple trees.
 - E. Remove all brush from under the drip line by at least six feet. Pile, windrow or lop brush so that it does not block access to released trees.
 - F. Cut stumps as low as possible to facilitate future maintenance.
- V. Pruning standards (Note: pruning is not required for reimbursement.)
 - A. Intensive pruning should only occur after all the fruit trees on the property are released, and only during the dormant season.
 - B. Do not remove dead or damaged limbs that contain, or have the potential to contain, nest cavities.
 - C. Pruning is aimed at opening up the crown to increase fruiting or to remove damaged or diseased limbs that are a threat to tree survival.
- VI. Reference: Care of Wild Apple Trees, D. Olson & C. Langer, UNH Ext. Coverstone, et al. 2004. [Wild apple trees for wildlife](#). University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Release of Fruiting Shrubs and Vines

- I. To qualify for the program, you need a minimum of ¼ acre, which can be an aggregate of smaller units, of native or non-invasive fruiting shrubs.
- II. Species qualifying for this practice include hazelnuts, hawthorns, winterberry, blueberry, dogwoods, etc.
- III. Reimbursement will be pro-rated to the total area released.
- IV. Release standards

- A. Competing vegetation must be removed from at least three sides of the shrubs so they receive full sunlight for most of the day. The clearing distance from the shrubs is related to the height of the competing vegetation. The taller the competitors the more distance will be needed.
- B. Emphasize and encourage the conservation of native species first, then non-invasive introduced shrubs. Reimbursement will not be provided for release of invasive non-native species.

Mast Tree Release

- I. To qualify for the program, you must release a minimum of five trees per acre, up to a maximum of fifteen trees per acre.
- II. Species qualifying for release are oaks, beech, black cherry, hickory, butternut, white ash, and mountain ash.
- III. The number of trees released for reimbursement will be by agreement with the regional wildlife biologist.
- IV. Release standards
 - A. This practice is only for mast tree release that cannot be accomplished through a commercial timber harvest.
 - B. Competing vegetation must be removed from a minimum of two sides, all four sides is preferable.
 - C. Competing trees may be removed by cutting or girdling.
 - D. Windrow, pile or lop the slash away from the bases of the released trees.

Softwood Release in Historic Deeryards

- I. To qualify for this practice, you must have a minimum of 5 acres of historic deeryard that would benefit from softwood release or acreage deemed of significant importance according to the regional wildlife biologist.
- II. The purpose is pre-commercial thinning to release hemlock, spruce and fir from competition with hardwoods and to control softwood spacing for optimum growth. Hardwood browse regeneration is also a benefit.
- III. Stands managed for Christmas trees, either planted or naturally seeded, are not eligible for this practice.
- IV. Management standards
 - A. Target primary softwood sites with trees 8 to 15 feet in height.
 - B. The hierarchy of species to retain is based on presence and dominance. Favor spruce, hemlock, and fir.
 - C. Choose trees to retain that have good form, are free from rot, and have a large live crown to bole ratio. The trees left standing should not be nicked with the brush saw.
 - D. Softwood spacing after release should be 7ft X 7ft (900 trees/acre).
 - E. Trees being removed should be cut low on the stump, below the lowest live limb, and laid down on the ground.
 - F. Leaving occasional hardwoods is acceptable if they are mast producers (mountain ash, oak, beech, etc) or have cavities.

- G. Consider a commercial harvest to remove overtopping hardwoods where hardwood competition is heavy and when hardwoods are more than 5 feet taller than the softwood being released.

Soil Scarification to Enhance Oak and Softwood Regeneration

- I. This is a pilot practice as of 2015. Work with your regional biologist and a consulting forester to develop a treatment plan most suitable to your site and based on available equipment.
- II. To qualify for this practice, you must have a minimum of 5 acres of oak-pine or softwood that would benefit from soil scarification to enhance seed germination.
- II. The purpose is to enhance regeneration of oak and softwoods such as spruce or hemlock.
- III. Managed plantations are not eligible for this practice.
- IV. Management standards
 - A. Forest soils must be able to support the target species.
 - B. Site is historically difficult to regenerate oak or spruce using typical commercial harvesting prescriptions.
 - C. Site has less than 35 percent surface rock larger than 6 inches.
 - D. Slopes should be less than 25 percent for reasons of safety, job performance, and erosion hazard.
 - E. Site was harvested during a bad seed year or during the winter and understory is currently dominated by herbaceous vegetation and/or leaf litter that would significantly hinder good seed to soil contact.
 - F. Options for scarifying soil include disks, rock rakes, and anchor chains, among others.
 - G. Must include a plan for monitoring regeneration success following scarification, which should be submitted to the regional biologist when completed.
- V. Reference: [Field Practices: Site Preparation, MN Department of Natural Resources](#).

Regeneration or Restoration of Alder

- I. A minimum of one acre designated for alder management is required to qualify for this practice. Smaller units can be used in aggregate.
- II. Management standards
 - A. Alder should be regenerated when a majority of the stems appear to be more horizontal to the ground than perpendicular. Initial cuttings should target areas with the greatest numbers of horizontal stems.
 - B. The alder management area should be set up on a 10 to 20-year rotation, depending on the area's size and initial alder condition. Regenerate an equal amount of the total area every 3 to 5 years so that the entire area has been regenerated by the end of the 10-20 year rotation period. The area to be regenerated in any given year can be divided and cut in strips 50 -70 feet wide that are separated by strips that will be cut in the future.
 - C. Cutting should occur in winter or during the driest part of the summer.
 - D. Alder can be regenerated using a brush hog or brontosaurus in areas where the ground conditions will accommodate machinery without causing ruts or wetland damage.
 - E. If hand tools are used the brush should be piled or removed.

- III. Reference: [A Landowner Guide to Woodcock Management in the Northeast](#), by G.F. Sepik, R.B. Owen, Jr., and M.W. Coulter, Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge and University of Maine Agricult. Exp. Station.

Regeneration or Restoration of Aspen and Birch (Non-commercial)

- I. To qualify for this practice a minimum of four acres should be in aspen or birch, or have the ability to be restored to these types. Units smaller than one acre, down to 1/2 acre, can be used in aggregate.
- II. The purpose of this practice is to retain clones of aspen or groups of paper or gray birch that might be lost through successional progression but cannot be managed commercially.
- III. Management standards
 - A. Set up a rotation that every ten years regenerates 1/4 of the total area to be managed for this condition. Alternative approaches may be suggested to maintain aspen and birch in relatively small areas.
 - B. This practice can be accomplished with machinery (such as a brontosaurus) or with hand tools. If hand tools are used the brush should be piled or lopped so that it lies close to the ground.
- IV. Reference: Managing Northern Forests for Wildlife, Gordon W. Gullion, The Ruffed Grouse Society.

Brush Clearing/Sapling Removal to Maintain Old Fields & Shrublands

- I. A minimum of three acres is required to qualify for this practice. The total area can be an aggregate of smaller units of no less than 1/2 acre.
- II. Management standards
 - A. At least 80% of all invading saplings should be removed from abandoned fields, pastures or other similar openings. This allows the retention of sapling clumps if so desired.
 - B. Hand tools, brush hog or brontosaurus can be used providing that the desired fruiting shrubs and trees are maintained. If hand tools are used, the cut material must be piled or lopped so it lies flat on the ground.
 - C. No more than one third of the total area in this vegetative condition should be treated in any one year.

Mowing to Maintain Grasslands and Shrublands

- I. To qualify for this practice, you must mow a minimum of one acre, which can be an aggregate of smaller units of no less than 1/4 acre.
- II. Mowing standards
 - A. This is a maintenance operation to be implemented on existing fields or shrublands, such as low bush blueberry or other low shrubs.
 - B. Mowing should not be conducted until after the nesting season is over, usually from mid-July on. If also managing for pollinators, mowing should be delayed until after Sept 1st at the earliest.

- C. Fields in this category can be mowed annually. Mowing every two years is preferable for shrublands. Other mowing schedules are acceptable if more appropriate to maintain the desired vegetative condition.

Creation of Permanent Woodland Openings

- I. Creation of at least $\frac{3}{4}$ acre of permanent opening is required to qualify for this practice. While bigger is better, the minimum area can be achieved with three $\frac{1}{4}$ acre units. Units smaller than $\frac{1}{4}$ acre do not qualify.
- II. The creation of a log landing for the purpose of timber harvesting does not qualify for this practice.
- III. Deer food plots do not qualify. Plant a typical conservation seed mix or work with the regional biologist to develop a seed mix that will provide long-term benefit to a variety of wildlife.
- IV. Management standards
 - A. A minimum of 3% of the total property acreage should be targeted for establishing permanent woodland openings.
 - B. In targeted areas, the existing forested condition should be converted to a grass/shrub/ forb complex and maintained as such for ten years. After ten years, new openings can replace existing ones, or existing openings can continue to be maintained.
 - C. Whenever possible, forest cover should be removed through a commercial cutting operation that produces income for the landowner. If the existing vegetation has no commercial value, the trees must be felled and piled or removed along with their tops so that brush hogging or mowing can be used to maintain the opening once every three to five years.
 - D. Stump removal may be necessary, unless cut flush with the ground, to allow for mechanical maintenance with a brush hog or mower.

Maintenance of Woodland Openings, Log Landings, Wood Roads & Edges

- I. To qualify for the practice, a total area of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ acre should be in woodland openings, log landings, or wood roads and edges.
- II. The initial cleanup, stabilizing and seeding of log landings, roads and skid trails after a forestry operation does not qualify for this practice.
- III. Management standards
 - A. Refer to the publication "[Best Management Practices for Erosion Control](#)" for complete details on proper management of roads and skid trails.
 - B. The soil types and amount of sunlight are major factors in determining the best seed mixtures and the amounts of lime and fertilizer needed. This information is generally available from County Extension or NRCS offices.
 - C. Established openings should be maintained by mowing or brush hogging once every three to five years. Additional seed and soil amendments should be applied as needed to maintain the desired condition.
 - D. Water bars and other erosion controls should be in place prior to seeding.
 - E. Large debris should be removed from the landing or piled along the edge prior to seeding to facilitate future mowing.
 - F. Landings should not be reused for timber harvesting for at least five years.

Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation

- I. Can be used to maintain or restore woodland openings, grasslands, old fields, shrublands, and barrens, and to regenerate oak.
- II. Wildlife and habitat enhancement must be the primary objective of the prescribed burn.
- III. Can be used for burn plan development, fireline preparation (brush hogging, brontosaurus mowing, hand clearing, etc.), or contracting with a burn boss.
- IV. Burn plans need to meet NH Prescribed Fire Council or National Wildfire Coordinating Group specifications and be developed by an individual meeting the qualifications set forth by one of these organizations. A burn plan with relevant approval signatures, including but not limited to the landowner, burn boss, and burn planner needs to be submitted with the Small Grants Program invoice. NH Fish and Game needs to be satisfied that the plan meets NH Rx Fire Council or NWCG standards before payment will be rendered. Burn plan specifications and templates can be found at the following links:
 - A. NH Prescribed Fire Council
Template: https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource002195_Rep3241.pdf
Specifications: https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001886_Rep2781.pdf
 - B. National Wildfire Coordinating Group -
Template: <https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms484-1.docx>
Specifications: <https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms484.pdf>
- V. Prescribed burns must be executed to meet minimum standards as set forth in "Planning for Prescribed Burning in New Hampshire"
(https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001886_Rep2781.pdf).

Management Plans

- I. Landowner is committed to the long-term stewardship of his/her property and the implementation of the management plan once completed.
- II. Wildlife and habitat enhancement must be the primary objective of landowner.
- III. Plan must be developed by a licensed forester, certified wildlife biologist, or other qualified natural resource professional that is approved by the Regional Biologist.
- IV. If the management plan is being written by a natural resource professional other than a licensed forester, review, input, and approval of forest management recommendations should be sought from a licensed forester to meet the requirements of RSA 310-A:98.
- V. Given that the primary objective of the plan is wildlife and habitat enhancement, recommendations for both forested and non-forested habitats should be made in collaboration with a certified wildlife biologist.
- VI. Drafted plans will be reviewed by the Regional Biologist before final approval.
- VII. Refer to Appendix A for plan specifications.

Appendix A: Wildlife Management Plan Specifications

Plan Components

The plan shall address the following:

- For ownerships with permanent land protection (e.g. conservation easements), include a description of the easement, purposes, and restrictions and how those will be met.
- Discussion of landowner objectives, size of ownership, property location, and pertinent historical information.
- Fish and wildlife habitat descriptions. A habitat inventory is required to ensure that habitats can be clearly mapped and described so that specific management recommendations can be developed. Descriptions should include the following for each habitat area:
 - For forested habitats describe species composition, density, quality, accessibility, and age class. Make note of understory vegetation, invasive exotic plants, and insect and disease problems. Also include a description of within-stand features such as snags, downed woody material, canopy closure, understory and midstory cover, vegetative diversity.
 - For non-forested habitats describe primary vegetative cover, land uses, and current management (if applicable). Non-forested habitats include, but are not limited to, herbaceous and shrub occupied openings, active hayfields, marshes, bogs, swamps, gravel or sand pits, etc. Make note of presence and density of invasive exotic plants.
- Species of greatest conservation need as addressed in the NH Wildlife Action Plan, rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species and exemplary natural communities and opportunities to maintain or enhance habitat for same.
- Soils
- Forest health (including insect, disease, invasives species, erosion)
- Forest recreation including assessment of potential wildlife impacts of current or proposed future recreation infrastructure (e.g., trails, roads, and bridges).
- Other considerations the plan may address:
 - Aesthetic quality
 - Historic, cultural and archeological sites
 - Estate planning including land protection
 - Finances including timber, income, and property taxes
 - Landscape considerations especially as related to wildlife and water resources
- Management recommendations to achieve fish and wildlife habitat goals. Specify the likely results and consequences of suggested management recommendations. Prioritize and detail these according to the landowner objectives including suggestions for timing. Recommendations should include the following for each mapped habitat area:
 - Options for forest management to accomplish wildlife habitat improvement goals. Include recommendations for improving within-stand habitat features if needed, and/or protection or management of sensitive habitats (e.g., buffer zones for riparian areas and vernal pools, deer yard management considerations, etc.).
 - Options for managing non-forested habitats, such as mowing (including timing and rotations), plantings, prescribed burning, etc.
 - Include status and related recommendations for forest protection regarding insects, diseases, invasive species, and wildfire and catastrophic risk reduction and rehabilitation.

- Incorporate specific recommendations such as trail and access road construction and address the impacts of recreation on wildlife and other resource values.
- If the management plan is being written by a natural resource professional other than a licensed forester, review, input, and approval of forest management recommendations should be sought from a licensed forester to meet the requirements of RSA 310-A:98.
- Given that the primary objective of the plan is wildlife and habitat enhancement, recommendations for both forested and non-forested habitats should be made in collaboration with a certified wildlife biologist.
- All prescriptions should meet or exceed recommendations in "Good Forestry in the Granite State: Recommended Voluntary Best Management Practices" available at <http://goodforestry.org>.

Map Requirements

Composite or separate maps to include the following:

- Locus Map- Showing the location of the property on a USGS topo, or some equivalent map.
- Property - perimeter sketch or survey map with known boundary information (stone walls, monuments, etc.), significant land features, access points, roads, landings, trails, surface water, and historic resources.
- Habitat Types – Delineate location and extent of tree species and species groups, size classes, etc. for forested habitat. Also delineate location and extent of non-forested wildlife habitats and land features such as deer yards, heron rookeries, wetlands (such as marshes, floodplains, bogs and ponds); rare, threatened or endangered species, critical habitat such as beech stands showing heavy bear use, deer wintering areas, natural heritage elements, etc.
- Soils - based on the latest USDA-NRCS Soil Survey information.
- Management Recommendations – Delineate forest habitat, non-forest habitat, and recreation management recommendations by habitat area or location.

Copies of final, approved plans are to be provided to the landowner and the Regional Biologist.