

PARTNERSHIP REPORT: Audubon Vermont

PARTNERSHIP NAME: MA/VT Woodland Partnership

LANDSCAPE: Deerfield River Watershed in MA and VT & West River Watershed in VT

The forest threats and opportunities that our group focused on included family forest intergenerational transfer, lack of appropriate management and forest fragmentation. We focused our work in a 12-town block along the Massachusetts and Vermont state border. Towns in VT included: Guilford, Halifax, Marlboro, Wilmington, Whitingham & Readsboro. In Massachusetts, the towns included: Bernardston, Leyden, Colrain, Heath, Rowe & Monroe.

STRATEGY: Promoting Silviculture with Birds in Mind

Audubon Vermont's contract for implementation services was designed to help improve land stewardship by testing how most effectively to engage family forest landowners in contributing to three main goals 1) strengthen markets for forest products, 2) strengthen forest stewardship, and 3) conserve the many values of New England's forest landscape for future generations. Our primary strategy was to use forest breeding birds to educate landowners about the importance of forests for bird populations and how management can be used to improve breeding habitat. Our implementation steps included:

1. Training Mass Audubon staff in habitat assessment methods
2. Plan and deliver forester workshops in partnership with Mass Audubon
3. Plan and deliver landowner workshops
4. Provide habitat assessments on ten woodlots

LANDOWNER GROUP TARGETED: Woodland Retreat Owners

DESIRED OUTCOMES FROM STRATEGY:

- Attendance by family forest owners at a community values forum (same one as in Project 1).
- Attendance by family forest owners at Woods Forums (same ones as in Project 1).
- Increase in awareness of conservation and management options.
- Attendance by foresters in Foresters for the Birds Training.
- Engagement of forests by family forest owners.
- Engagement of management and or conservation practices by family forest owners.
- Acres of bird assessments on family forests.
- Acres of NRCS cost-share for bird habitat improvements.

MESSAGES USED (AND HOW THIS TIES TO YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE)

Managing forests to maintain or improve forest breeding bird habitat especially for species of regional priority. We highlighted the importance of Vermont and Massachusetts forest due to the fact that we have the some of the highest diversity of bird species breeding in the country and most of those are breeding in family-owned woodlots. This message connected with our primary landowner target: Woodland Retreat Owners because they place a high value on forests as wildlife habitat. Foresters were given information on Silviculture with

Birds in Mind. This was done to provide foresters with the background and tools for talking to landowners about managing woodlots with an eye to maintaining or improving bird habitat.

MATERIALS AND CHANNELS USED (DISCUSS WHICH CHANNELS AND MATERIALS WERE USED AND WHY, REFERRING TO THE TELE WORKSHOP)

To recruit landowners to workshops we used postcards, ads in local papers. Most of the habitat assessments were recruited using existing networks such as the Windham Woodland Owners Association, County foresters and the Vermont Land Trust. We also provided information at the Strolling of the Heifers. The most effective channel of communication was using peer-to-peer networks, foresters and partner networks. Individual contacts by an Audubon staff person, land trust staff or forester led to almost all of our individual habitat assessments.

TIMELINE AND BUDGET

Deliverable #1 Staff trainings.

Audubon Vermont will train Mass Audubon staff and other partners in forest bird habitat assessment techniques. August 2012 – May 2013.

Deliverable #2: Forester Trainings

Audubon Vermont will work with Mass Audubon to plan and deliver 2 forester trainings for Mass foresters. Fall 2012 and Spring 2013

Deliverable #3 Woodlot habitat assessments and related materials.

Audubon Vermont biologists will provide at least 10 habitat assessments on larger woodlots and provide landowners with assessment reports and management options. Spring/Summer 2013 and Spring 2014

Deliverable #4 Habitat walkovers and related materials

Audubon Vermont biologists will offer bird habitat walkover in the 2 Vermont focus areas for landowners who participate in the Woods Forums to be coordinated with MA and VT state forestry staff and consultant foresters. Walkovers will take place on properties that have had habitat assessments completed. Participants will receive landowners guide to managing woods with birds in mind. Spring 2013 and Spring 2014.

Deliverable #5 Evaluation

Audubon Vermont will conduct surveys of participating landowners and foresters to determine effectiveness of outreach activities. Surveys will assess changes in awareness, and behavior and whether or not woodlot management changes as a result of outreach activities. Summer 2014.

Budget

	2012	2013	2014	Totals	Actuals
Staff time total cost (\$24/hr)	\$ 768	\$ 4572	\$ 385	\$ 5,736	\$6,961
Direct Expenses Workshop expenses (rental, refreshments (\$500) Forester Toolkit (\$1000) Landowner Guide (\$1,000) Assessment Reports (\$100)	\$ 125	\$ 2475	\$	\$ 2,600	\$1,518
Travel miles 3845(@ .55/mile)	\$ 293	\$ 1815	\$	\$ 2,108	\$1,975
Total Costs	\$ 1,186	\$ 8,874	\$ 385	\$ 10,444	\$10,454

SUMMARY OF WHAT HAPPENED

Audubon Vermont engaged landowners and foresters to promote the management of family-held woodlots for forest breeding birds. The activities built off of the work of Audubon Vermont's Forest Bird Initiative which for several years has been providing landowners with individual habitat assessments and management recommendations and we developed a toolkit for foresters to implement silviculture with birds in mind. Prior to the grant Audubon Vermont had done very little outreach in southern Vermont. Audubon Vermont worked with partners in the MA/VT Woodland landscape to promote forest management with birds in mind. Audubon Vermont trained staff at Mass Audubon in using a qualitative habitat assessment process and how to develop management recommendations. Mass Audubon used these skills to conduct habitat assessments on private woodlots in Massachusetts. Audubon Vermont conducted 19 habitat assessments on woodlots totaling 4,408 acres. Woodland Retreat Landowners were recruited for the assessments using a targeted mailing developed by the regional conservation partnership. However this mailing resulted in only one landowner contacting the group for a habitat assessment. We also provided information at the annual Strolling of the Heiffers event in Brattleboro. We worked with our partners in the landscape to provide habitat assessments on two properties (Marlboro Town Forest and Riverledge in Grafton) and these properties then hosted tours for landowners to learn more about the forest birds and management. Since the mailing to new landowners did not generate much of a response, we reached out to existing networks to find names of potential landowners. On a parallel track Audubon Vermont worked with Mass Audubon to deliver a forester workshop in the spring of 2013 which was attended by over 40 foresters. The Vermont Forest toolkit was presented at the workshop and foresters gave input into how it could be adapted for Massachusetts.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS/ ADAPTATIONS

We encountered several challenges during the project which required adjusting our plans. Distance to Southern Vermont from Audubon Vermont's headquarters in Huntington meant that a lot of time was spent traveling to woodlots. To adjust to this we developed a quicker habitat assessment process for the field which allows us to do more than one property in a day. This model is now being used throughout Vermont and is

being copied by Mass Audubon, Audubon Connecticut and Maine Audubon as they implement forest bird habitat assessment outreach in their respective states. As mentioned above, the mailings to Woodland Retreat Owners did not generate the interest we planned on. Consequently, we relied on existing landowner networks and neighbors talking to neighbors to get our information out. We saw the results of this at our last woodlot tour on the Marlboro Town Forest where the majority of attendees were either adjoining property owners or from the nearby vicinity.

ACTUAL OUTCOMES:

Audubon Vermont agreed to provide training the Mass Audubon staff and assist in delivering a Forester workshop in Massachusetts. We also agreed to participate in two landowner field tours on properties where we had done a habitat assessment. Lastly we agreed to do 10 habitat assessments in the MA/VT woodland regional conservation landscape. We trained three Mass Audubon staff in our habitat assessment method which directly lead to habitat assessments being done for Massachusetts woodlot owners. Our Forest workshop in Shelburne Massachusetts in May 2013 was attended by 40 foresters and land managers. Participants learned how to assess bird habitat in the forest and what type of silvicultural practices can be used to improve interior forest bird habitat. Participants also provided input on how what practices could be used to improve habitat conditions in Oak-Pine forests. We completed 19 habitat assessments in the target towns along the Mass/Vermont border covering 4,408 acres. Although outside the target towns, three additional assessments were completed in the northern part of the regional landscape covering 649 acres. Landowners who had an assessment done also received a habitat assessment report and management recommendations and a copy of Audubon Vermont's "Managing Your Woods with Birds in Mind: A Landowners Guide." The majority of these landowners were recommended to us by consulting foresters though the county foresters. The first landowner tour was done in partnership with the Vermont Land Trust and the Windham Woodland Owners Association in October 2013, it was attended by 40 people. The second forest tour was offered on May 3, 2014 at the Hog Back Marlboro Town Forest and was attended by 15 people. These tours were publicized using local media and partner networks and mailing lists created by the project.

LESSONS

We learned three important lessons when working in the MA/VT Woodlands landscape. In the first, we confirmed that once contacted Woodland Retreat Owners are very interested in managing their woodlots for birds. Our post habitat assessment surveys showed that landowners were more inclined to take a management action to improve habitat after a visit from an Audubon conservation biologist. This suggests that these one-on-one contacts are very beneficial and motivating for the landowner. For example one landowner described the experience as, *"This is such a helpful and important opportunity that is going to lead to a much clearer and deeper understanding of what needs to happen in my woods to improve habitat."* And overall most participants in the habitat assessments said they were more likely to conduct a timber harvest designed to improve habitat for birds.

Second, we learned that the best way to contact landowners was by using peer-to-peer networks or other existing networks. The targeted mailings at least in Vermont did not yield very many responses from

landowners. Most of the habitat assessments we conducted were initiated by contacts that the Vermont Land Trust or the county foresters had.

The third lesson was that the border is still a barrier. Our observation was that at events like the forest tour at the Marlboro Town Forest despite advertising on both sides of the border only Vermonters showed up. While this may be a single data point, we believe it is indicative of a general preference of people to attend events in their own state despite sharing a larger multi-state landscape. However while the program participants may have been reluctant to cross-borders, we found working with our colleagues from Massachusetts to be very educational and productive.

BENEFITS

We received very positive feedback from the landowners who had habitat assessments done for their properties. We implemented post visit evaluations and a majority of the landowners who filled out the on-line evaluation indicated that they were more likely to talk to their neighbors about managing woodlots for forest birds and conduct a timber harvest with the aim to improve bird habitat. Another benefit of this project is that it led to the State of Massachusetts investing state funds into implementing more forester trainings. There funds gave us the capability to create a forester toolkit for Massachusetts Northern Hardwoods and provided additional trainings and habitat assessments. I believe this valuable effort would not have happened without the connections

RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that all in all this project was a valuable effort which helped us expand our forest bird outreach into Southern Vermont, and promote our foresters for the Birds project in Massachusetts. Our main recommendation would be to build more time into the front end of the project to accommodate the partnership building and work planning that needs to happen when you are establishing a new Regional Conservation Partnership. While we found the landowner groupings very helpful in thinking about how to communicate with a target audience, at times we felt too much time was going into crafting targeted messages for informational materials. This was probably due to group wordsmithing. While this may have been a good way to educate the group in how to communicate with a target audience, it led to delays in getting information out.

**FOCUS AREA #1: “12-Town VT-MA Forest Block Greenway”
OUTCOMES BY THE NUMBERS (MA-VT Woodlands Partnership)**

FORM B

Strategy 2: Promoting Silviculture with Birds in Mind	Numbers of Landowners
In Focus Area	500
Attended Woods Forum (WF)	30
Attended Bird Workshop	55
% Attendees in Target Attitudinal Group	90%
Foresters who were trained in Silviculture for the Birds	40
Foresters who helped their landowners get assessments	20
Early Adopter Assessments	4
Total Bird Habitat Assessments (BHA) n VT	22
Number of Acres with BHAs	5057
% owners of BHAs from private foresters	90%
% owners of BHAs that first attended a Woods Forum	10%
Attendees who were called and encouraged to move forward (Outcome Indicator calls/How many did move forward)	NA
Number of owners/acres who met with foresters to discuss options	unknown
Number of owners/acres with new management plans	unknown
Number of owners/acres who met with land trusts to discuss options	5/250 ac
\$ per acres/in process for stewardship/protection	unknown