

# Northeast Conservation Plan Exec Summary

## Who We Are:

Established in 1961, the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society (RGS) is dedicated to healthy forest habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and all forest wildlife. RGS works with landowners and government agencies to facilitate forest management for wildlife utilizing scientific management practices.

## Our Mission:

RGS & AWS unite conservationists to improve wildlife habitat and forest health. Since 1961, RGS has promoted stewardship for our forests, our wildlife, and our future. Our vision is to create landscapes of diverse, functioning forest ecosystems that provide homes for wildlife and opportunities for people to experience them.

**RGS Northeast Region:** Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New York.

**Northeast US Conservation Need:** Ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) are now listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in 19 states across their native range, including 6 of the 7 Northeastern states. American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) is listed as an SGCN in all seven Northeastern states' Wildlife Action Plans and in 29 states nationally.



Experts attribute this issue mostly to habitat decline and a lack of forest habitat diversity. (Eastern Working Forest Group, 2020). Since these upland birds are bellwethers of forest health and diversity, dozens of other species are in decline as well.

The decline of young forest and early successional habitats throughout the Northeast US has been identified as a dire issue for decades. Wildlife that are highly dependent on diverse forest habitats in New York and New England have suffered severe population declines.

Golden-winged warblers, ruffed grouse, American woodcock, snowshoe hare, whip-poor-will, and even moose are bellwethers of a much broader decline in forest habitat diversity.

## Strategic Public Engagement – Balanced Forests to Bring Back Birds

To address the science-based forest habitat problems that we're facing in the Northeast US, we must also engage the more nuanced and complicated social problems around conflicting public perceptions and the role that sustainable forest management should play in forest conservation. Public concerns about active forest management will be addressed through engagement, education, and leadership. Public engagement, communication, and outreach are critical to our

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conservation delivery success in the Northeast and will be integrated into every aspect of our conservation delivery programs. From building chapter support for landscape level projects to supporting agency partners to weighing in on key legislation and messaging, engagement will be paramount to our conservation delivery.

## Northeast Forest Ownership:

Forest ownership throughout the region is a mosaic of public and private land and both ownership categories are critical to RGS & AWS's grouse and woodcock conservation efforts. It's an all hands-on-deck scenario. Family forest landowners are stewards of 25.5 million acres, about half of all forest land in the Northeast. Corporate and institutional ownership account for 29% of the forest ownership across the region, including timberland investment management organizations (TIMO), real estate investment trusts (REIT) and institutional ownerships. Collectively, private, and corporate ownership account for over 40 million acres across the Northeast.

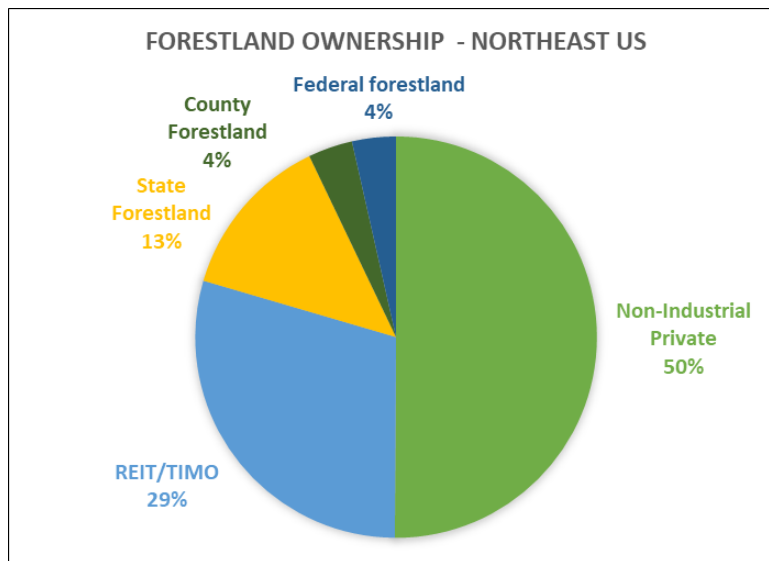


Figure 4 – Forestland Ownership Graph in the Northeast US

Twenty one percent of forestland in the Northeast is overseen by public agencies including state forest (13%, mostly in NY), county forest (4%) and federal public lands (4%).

## Desired Conditions:

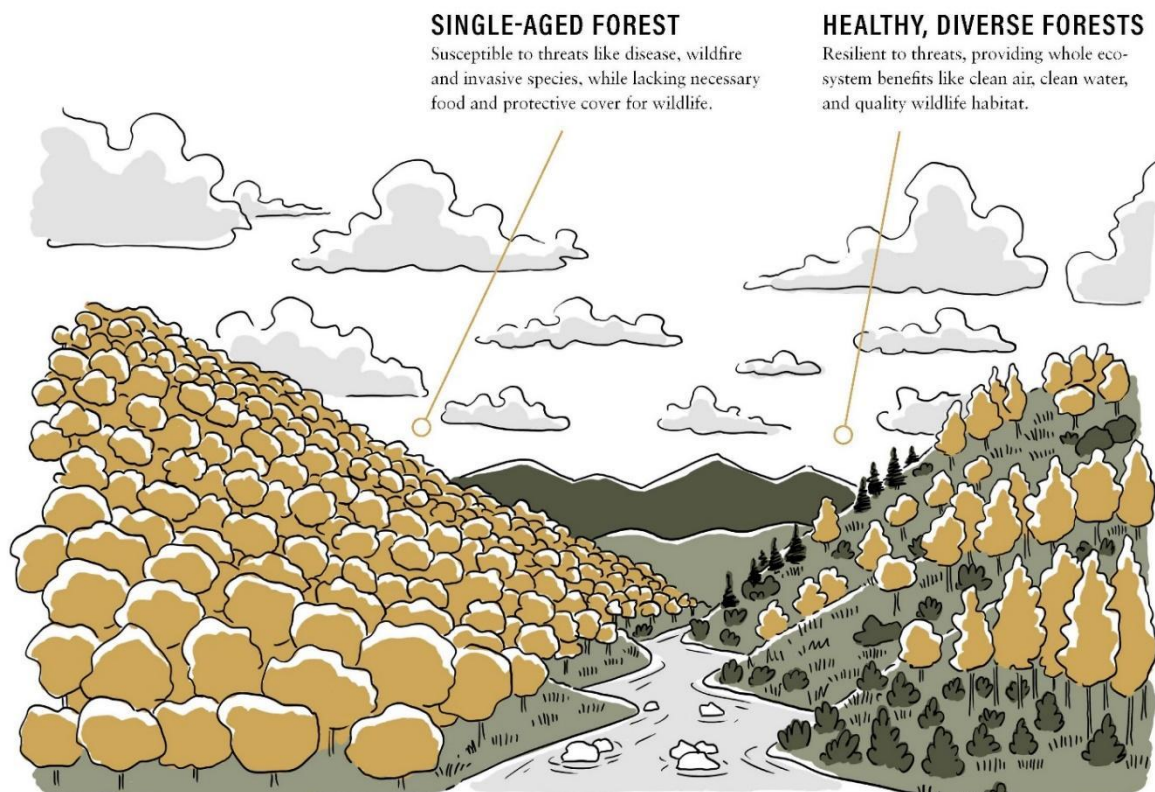
To bring grouse, woodcock, and dozens of other species back from the brink, we need to increase forest habitat diversity through forest management. The RGS/AWS model is founded on a “shifting mosaic” approach to restore forest health and improve habitat. Functionally, our priority is to implement wildlife-friendly, sustainable forestry across large compartments known

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as Dynamic Forest Restoration Blocks (DFRBs) that range from a few thousand acres up to large landscape level blocks. We will also work to support these conditions broadly across the Northeast region with our public and private land partners and supporters. Public wildlife management areas, state & federal forests, community forests, family ownerships, municipal watersheds, large scale timberland properties and land trust holdings can all play a pivotal role in this approach.

## RGS & AWS Forest Conservation Approach:

Our forests are not meeting wildlife habitat needs, and in large part, the problem is unnatural dominance of 80- to 120-year-old forests (a legacy of the pre-conservation era). Healthy, natural forests are age-diverse, like a community or family with multiple generations, young and old. A movement toward healthy forests means more old and young forest on our public and private lands. This will benefit all forest-dwelling wildlife, not just grouse and woodcock. A concerted effort is needed to ensure resilient, climate-adapted, diverse landscapes. We know how to fix the problem based on sound science and we have support from a broad coalition of forest wildlife conservationists.



The goal is to create a shifting mosaic and to diversify forest ages with a goal of ensuring 20 – 30% older forest (>125 years), up to 10-12% young forest (0 – 15 years), and 50 – 65% in middle-aged generations over time. Nurturing old forests takes time, cultivating young forests takes disturbance, specifically active forest management and timber harvest. The old forest goal is to ensure that 20-30% of each forest block is prioritized to succeed naturally toward old forest

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conditions. The young forest goal is to restore up to 10% in the 0 – 15-year generation by 2025, and up to 12% by 2030, maintaining up to 10-12% over the long term. Our goal is to create 10-12 landscape level dynamic forest restoration blocks throughout the Northeast over the coming 5 years. These projects will span public and private boundaries and will leverage the following broad objectives:

1. increased quantity and quality of habitat for at-risk species
2. Better protection of water quality and aquatic habitats through strategic watershed restoration
3. Increasing the role of working forests in climate mitigation
4. Jobs for rural communities and landowner income
5. Strong partnerships unified around sustainable forest management and wildlife
6. Improved public recreation access to quality habitat and open space, including hunting, angling, birding, and a diverse suite of opportunities.
7. Increased public awareness around forest sustainability.

## **RGS/AWS Contact Information:**

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