

# A DEC Strategic Plan for Implementing the Young Forest Initiative on

## Wildlife Management Areas 2015-2020



In recent years, conservation partners throughout the Northeast have launched efforts to restore young forests to address concerns about declines in this type of habitat and the corresponding impacts to populations of important associated wildlife. These efforts are occurring on public lands, such as on Wildlife Management Areas and State Forests; on private lands, such as commercial forest lands and Non-governmental Organization (NGO) conservation lands; and on private lands in conjunction with an array of conservation partners, including federal agencies (Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service) and NGO organizations. In New York, key partners have included Audubon New York, Ruffed Grouse Society, National Wild Turkey Federation, Quality Deer Management Association, Wildlife Management Institute, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Department of Environmental Conservation's Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources (Division) supports a broad goal to protect, manage, and restore habitat for fish and wildlife. In 2014, the Division embarked on a specific habitat management initiative to significantly increase the amount of young forest being restored on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), beyond that which was already being accomplished, and the Division has allocated additional resources to increase capacity to deliver specific targeted goals.

The Division will continue to use other resources to continue management of other important habitats such as grasslands, wetlands, shrublands, and other forest types on WMAs, and in conjunction with various conservation partners on other lands. The Division also will continue to work more broadly with our conservation partners to foster and promote young forest conservation in New York. When, in the future, the Division's young forest goals are met on WMAs and are sustainable in the long-term, we will reevaluate the Division's YFI and decide how to address habitat goals salient at that time.

This document provides structure and context for implementing the YFI on DEC's Wildlife Management Areas over the next five years (2015-2020).

### 1. Purposes of this document:

- a. To provide direction and guidance on the Young Forest Initiative (YFI);
- b. To memorialize the goals and intent of the YFI;
- c. To create a framework for and establish the bounds of the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources leadership's expectations of what the YFI is and is not; and
- d. To recognize and validate the collaborative approach between DFWMR, Division of Lands and Forests (DLF), and our conservation partners in delivering habitat management through the YFI.

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### 2. Purposes of the YFI:

- a. To restore and maintain young forest habitat on DEC's WMAs in order to address the declining amount of young forest habitat in the state and provide habitat for key species of conservation interest, including both at-risk and important game species;
- b. To build on the success of past habitat management efforts so as to achieve additional acres of young forest, recognizing that staff have already been managing for young forests on WMAs;
- c. To uphold our stewardship responsibilities for wildlife that are dependent upon young forests for some or all of their life cycle;
- d. To provide opportunity for wildlife-related recreation (e.g., hunting, wildlife observation): we need to have the habitat to support the species of interest;
- e. To satisfy the articulated wants and needs of the public we serve; and
- f. To contribute to the region-wide Young Forest Project, including states across the Northeast and Midwest, to support landscape-level species and habitat conservation.

### 3. Goals and YFI context:

- a. The collective conservation partnership promoting young forest habitat has agreed to a goal of 10% of the forested landscape as young forest (approximately 0-10 years old).
- b. To help accomplish that goal, the Division will establish *a minimum* of 10% of the forested habitat on each WMA as young forest, in perpetuity. The 10% goal is on *each* WMA, recognizing that restoring young forests is not feasible on some WMAs for limited reasons provided below.
- c. Provide habitat for those species that depend on young forest habitat.
- d. Maintaining existing shrublands and allowing fields to succeed to new shrub/woodlands are important components of managing the habitat complex on WMAs and work will continue on those efforts outside of the YFI using other Division resources.
- e. It is important to consider the YFI in context and under current conditions: about 3% of the WMA forests are currently in young forest condition.
- f. The YFI provides a foundation for the eventual expansion of the Division's young forest related efforts to other State-owned and private lands, once the minimum 10% goal is attained and maintained in perpetuity.

### 4. Definitions:

- a. Forested Area: includes all those areas that support trees, including forested wetlands, recognizing that forested wetlands present additional ecological and logistical challenges.
- b. Regeneration cut: includes three silvicultural treatments: clear cuts, seed tree cuts, and shelterwood cuts. Salvage operations (following a natural disturbance) will be considered based on the size and scope of the disturbance.

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- c. Stand Prescription: a planned series of treatments of a forest site designed to change current stand structure to one that meets management goals. The prescription normally considers ecological, economic, and societal constraints. (from *The Dictionary of Forestry*, Society of American Foresters, John A. Helms, Editor)
  - d. Target species: the suite of high priority wildlife species of conservation interest:
    - i. American woodcock
    - ii. Golden-winged warbler
    - iii. New England cottontail
    - iv. Ruffed grouse
    - v. Varying hare
    - vi. White-tailed deer
    - vii. Whip-poor-will
    - viii. Wild turkey
    - ix. It is recognized that many other species will benefit from the creation, restoration, and maintenance of young forests, and these will be acknowledged in WMA-specific habitat management plans, but the YFI focus will be on the target species listed above.
  - e. Wildlife Management Area (WMA): includes lands administered and managed by the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources' Bureau of Wildlife. A list (Table 1) and a map are attached.
  - f. Young Forest: forests that result from a regeneration cut, typically having a dense understory where tree seedlings, saplings, woody vines, shrubs, and herbaceous vegetation grow together. Young forests are typically 0-10 years old (adapted from [www.youngforest.org](http://www.youngforest.org)). It is acknowledged that "young forests" will differ in their character in different ecological areas of the state and that "0-10" is a continuum into more mature forest types.
5. Overarching principles:
- a. Keep things simple. Everywhere. At all times. Administratively and programmatically.
  - b. YFI will be focused on turning areas with mature trees into areas with young trees.
  - c. This is an enduring commitment of the DFWMR. It is the intent to have at least 10% of the WMAs in young forest *in perpetuity*. This will require continual management over time.
  - d. Cutting trees on WMAs is about creating habitat for wildlife. Although the sale of timber and wood products may generate revenue to the Conservation Fund, the YFI effort is not about generating revenue. If we can't sell it, we'll still cut it.
  - e. YFI is wildlife species driven. Actions will be taken according to forest habitat management plans focused on specific target wildlife species. Adverse impacts on other species will be assessed and addressed in the planning process.

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- f. Providing habitat for target species, and all those other species that benefit from young forests, is a form of “access.” We want people to have access to the target wildlife species and that entails having the right kind of habitat to support that wildlife.
  - g. Stewardship of the wildlife resource is the preeminent goal; recreational opportunity is secondary. People benefit for recreational purposes from the habitat generated by meeting our stewardship responsibilities.
  - h. We will track and be accountable for what we accomplish.
  - i. Metrics will measure what we accomplish, not what we plan. Accomplishments are measured when the entire prescription is completed (e.g., in a shelterwood cut, after the second round of cutting occurs).
  - j. The YFI will serve as a model and demonstration area(s) for encouraging and facilitating creation and restoration of young forest on others state and public lands and on private lands in the surrounding areas, working with our conservation partners, recognizing that we will build on past accomplishments to show the full spectrum of forest that result from young forest prescriptions. For example, Upper and Lower Lakes WMA already serves as a demonstration area for golden-winged warblers.
6. Where do we want to do it?
- a. The YFI will apply to WMAs.
  - b. Table 1 lists those WMAs that are included in the YFI, along with the acreage of the WMA and the amount of forest lands currently existing on the site.
  - c. Following are the acceptable “exemptions” for WMAs not included in the YFI:
    - i. There are no forested areas on the WMA;
    - ii. There are legal limitations or restrictions on cutting trees in the deed, or in the case of those within the forest preserve, in the state Constitution;
    - iii. There are overarching ecological considerations that predominate at the site (e.g., rare natural communities or habitat for endangered or threatened species). The simple presence of a rare community or species will not, in and of itself, preclude portions of the WMA from being part of the YFI;
    - iv. There are physical limitations (e.g., water features or steep slopes) that predominate a WMA; or
    - v. There is no legal access for conducting prescriptions.
7. Who are the key players?
- a. DFWMR staff, both in the regions and in central office, including the Division leaders;
  - b. DLF staff, both in the region and central office and at the DEC Tree Nursery;
  - c. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and
  - d. Conservation partners will be engaged as implementation progresses.

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8. What is the timeline?
  - a. This strategic plan will be for five years, at which time we will reassess what is working, where the obstacles are, and how close we are to meeting our goal of 10%. We will, at that time, adaptively manage the YFI and adjust as appropriate.
  - b. The targeted age structure for young forests is 0-10 years, commensurate with the habitat needs of the target species and the ecological constraints of the site.
  - c. The intent is to commit to the YFI for the long-term: species will need this habitat type in perpetuity.
  - d. A schedule of implementation and an annual workplan will be developed.
9. How do we get there? What is our approach?
  - a. Conduct, dust off, or update as appropriate, a forest inventory for those WMAs that are included in the YFI. Inventories that are 10 years old or less are acceptable.
  - b. Develop a YFI implementation schedule for each region.
  - c. Develop a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for each WMA:
    - i. The HMP will cover all habitat types on the WMA (including wetlands, grasslands, and shrublands), including rare or sensitive natural communities.
    - ii. HMPs will be simple, clear, and succinct and follow a standard template.
    - iii. The HMP will contain a forest habitat management plan that lays out management of the forest to meet the minimum 10% goal in perpetuity, although it may be desirable and appropriate in some landscape settings to set a goal greater than 10% to meet species needs.
    - iv. The prescriptions will focus on habitat needs for WMA-specific targeted species, contemplating juxtaposition to other habitat types and conservation of sensitive or ecologically unique forest habitats (e.g. forested wetlands, forested stream buffers).
    - v. The HMP will consider other site limitations, such as access challenges (e.g. river islands) and potential impacts prescriptions might trigger (e.g. water quality impacts).
    - vi. The HMP will eventually be incorporated into a broader WMA Management Plan that will include compatible wildlife-related recreational use, access, and facility development and maintenance.
    - vii. HMPs will address compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act and the State Historic Preservation Act.
    - viii. HMPs will incorporate information on sensitive species from multiple sources, including NY Natural Heritage Program reports, the Environmental Resource Mapper, and the Threatened and Endangered Species GIS Screening Layer.
    - ix. HMPs will be subject to public outreach to provide information and gain informed consent regarding habitat management goals for those WMAs and to promote the

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benefits of what we are doing. The appropriate level of outreach will be determined in the Communication Plan to be developed.

- d. Implement cutting prescriptions, with all necessary associated tasks such as invasive species control, seeding, etc.
  - i. Implementation will follow existing Best Management Practices (BMPs) for the targeted species
  - ii. Administrative aspects of revenue contracts will be supported by the DLF in Central Office.
- e. Monitor and evaluate outcomes at an appropriate level as determined in the WMA-specific HMP and based on monitoring guidance to be developed.
- f. Adaptively manage for best management practices and approaches.

#### 10. When do we know we're there?

- a. Post-treatment evaluation will document both wildlife and vegetation responses to determine whether we are meeting our goals.
- b. All monitoring will be kept simple and, to the degree possible, use our conservation partners, citizen science, and existing monitoring programs and protocols. Evaluation and assessment will be at the level appropriate to determine response of the target species.
- c. Monitoring may occur at different levels for different areas or target species (e.g. New England cottontail and golden winged warbler responses vs. ruffed grouse and American woodcock responses).
- d. The baseline for measuring change in forest cover is provided in the attached list of WMAs and their associated habitat acreage.
- e. Additional guidance will be developed to guide the scope and magnitude of monitoring, including when and where pre-prescription assessments may be desirable or necessary. Monitoring will be addressed in each HMP to correspond to the prescriptions, and will follow a template to be provided.
- f. There is plentiful research already published on the benefits and outcomes of habitat management. Targeted species-specific research needs will be addressed on an as-needed basis.
- g. We will use a data management system to account for progress, and to the degree possible, it will be consistent with existing data management systems, particularly those in DLF, where they are already tracking forestry cuts, or through a data-sharing agreement with the Wildlife Management Institute for the Young Forest Project.

#### 11. Building Expertise

- a. This is an enduring program. Hence, we will provide all necessary training and tools to develop expertise in our staff, including biologists, foresters, and technicians, in the

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management of young forests, species habitat needs, appropriate forestry practices, and communication of young forest needs and practices.

- b. To the extent practicable, we will seek training expertise from our conservation partners, and where appropriate, the forest industry.

#### 12. Communicating our messages:

- a. Communication is absolutely critical and is recognized as a central element of the YFI. A communication plan and strategy will be developed to guide communication about the YFI.
- b. The communication plan will focus on purpose, audience, and plan.
- c. The communication plan will include both internal and external partners.
- d. A central message will be that we are restoring habitat.

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*Table 1. Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and Multiple Use Areas (MUA) that are administered by the Bureau of Wildlife that will be included in the Young Forest Initiative (n=92).*

<b>Location</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>Forested Acres <sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Map Number</b>
Bashakill WMA	3	3,107	909	1
Baxtertown Woods WMA	3	250	141	2
Bog Brook Unique Area	3	131	66	3
Cranberry Mountain WMA	3	1,085	962	4
Great Swamp WMA	3	478	34	5
Mongaup Valley WMA	3	6,315	6,255	6
Tivoli Bays WMA	3	1,720	461	7
Bear Spring Mountain WMA	4	6,849	6,747	8
Capital District WMA	4	4,144	3,981	9
Louise E. Keir WMA	4	188	188	10
Margaret Burke WMA	4	245	150	11
Partridge Run WMA	4	4,594	3,776	12
Stockport WMA	4	290	126	13
Vinegar Hill WMA	4	394	240	14
Vosburgh Swamp WMA	4	125	40	15
Wolf Hollow WMA	4	52	51	16
Ausable Marsh WMA	5	601	25	17
Carters Pond WMA	5	447	76	18
Chazy Highlands WMA	5	1,001	165	19
East Bay WMA	5	38	11	20
Kings Bay WMA	5	684	435	21
Lake Alice WMA	5	1,488	1,200	22
Lewis Preserve WMA	5	1,331	1,296	23
Montys Bay WMA	5	318	122	24
Parcel 45 WMA	5	59	54	25
Saratoga Sand Plains WMA	5	513	369	26
Wickham Marsh WMA	5	726	434	27
Ashland Flats WMA	6	2,030	545	28
Black Pond WMA	6	526	290	29
Brownville WMA (Maintenance Center)	6	242	220	30
Collins Landing WMA	6	52	14	31
Cranberry Creek WMA	6	138	13	32
Fish Creek WMA	6	4,438	2,266	33



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Location	Region	Total Acres	Forested Acres <sup>1</sup>	Map Number
French Creek WMA	6	2,265	865	34
Honeyville WMA	6	110	15	35
Indian River WMA	6	968	333	36
Lakeview WMA	6	3,475	237	37
Oriskany Flats WMA	6	791	68	38
Perch River WMA	6	7,860	537	39
Plantation Island WMA	6	300	100	40
Point Peninsula WMA	6	1,124	245	41
Rome WMA	6	1,229	200	42
Tug Hill WMA	6	5,112	3,280	43
Upper and Lower Lakes WMA	6	9,121	2,506	44
Utica Marsh WMA	6	213	0	45
Wilson Hill WMA	6	3,454	660	46
Cicero Swamp WMA	7	4,949	264	47
Connecticut Hill WMA	7	11,645	9,488	48
Cross Lake Islands WMA	7	31	31	49
Deer Creek Marsh WMA	7	1,771	463	50
Hamlin Marsh WMA	7	1,686	22	51
Happy Valley WMA	7	8,898	6,685	52
Little John WMA	7	7,918	6,865	53
Pharsalia WMA	7	4,677	4,338	54
Three Mile Bay/Big Bay WMA	7	3,966	252	55
Three Rivers WMA	7	3,678	1,585	56
Tioughnioga WMA	7	3,737	2,953	57
Braddock Bay FWMR	8	2,801	388	58
Catherine Creek WMA	8	598	71	59
Conesus Inlet WMA	8	1,175	91	60
Erwin WMA	8	2,507	2,392	61
Galen WMA	8	763	112	62
Helmer Creek WMA	8	126	73	63
High Tor WMA	8	6,603	4,433	64
Honeoye Creek WMA	8	694	110	65
Honeoye Inlet WMA	8	1,977	577	66
John White WMA	8	329	34	67
Lake Shore Marshes WMA	8	6,179	2,329	68
Northern Montezuma WMA	8	8,612	3,715	69
Oak Orchard WMA	8	2,571	247	70

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Location	Region	Total Acres	Forested Acres <sup>1</sup>	Map Number
Rattlesnake Hill WMA	8	5,105	4,845	71
Stid Hill MUA	8	842	732	72
Tonawanda WMA	8	5,813	286	73
West Cameron WMA	8	164	160	74
Willard WMA	8	154	19	75
Allegheny Reservoir WMA	9	1,110	500	76
Canadaway Creek WMA	9	2,180	1,943	77
Carlton Hill MUA	9	2,484	600	78
Cazenovia Creek FWMA	9	110	102	79
Chautauqua Lake FWMA	9	123	7	80
Clay Pond WMA	9	182	8	81
Conewango Swamp WMA	9	995	55	82
Genesee Valley WMA	9	717	604	83
Hampton Brook Woods WMA	9	61	55	84
Hanging Bog WMA	9	4,571	4,031	85
Hartland Swamp WMA	9	401	61	86
Harwood Lake MUA	9	338	79	87
Kabob WMA	9	38	10	88
Keeney Swamp WMA	9	708	25	89
Spicer Creek WMA	9	34	8	90
Tillman Road WMA	9	245	33	91
Watts Flats WMA	9	1,324	150	92
<b>Total:</b>		<b>196,211</b>	<b>102,538</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Forested acres includes deciduous, evergreen and mixed forest types. All acreage is from WMA habitat inventory data maintained by the Land Management and Habitat Conservation Team.

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*Table 2. Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) that will not be included in the Young Forest Initiative (n=32).*

Location	Reg.	Total Acres	Forested Acres <sup>1</sup>	Map Number	Reason that WMA will not be included:
Cherry Island WMA	3	14	8	93	Legal considerations (DEC and another party both have Deeds of Record indicating ownership)
Great Vly WMA	3	191	9	94	Ecological considerations (wetlands)
Whiteport WMA	3	10	10	95	Ecological considerations
Black Creek Marsh WMA	4	424	70	96	Topographical/physical limitations, Ecological considerations (wetlands)
Bronck Island	4	57	*	97	Ecological considerations
Crumhorn Mountain WMA	4	60	60	98	Legal considerations (no legal access)
Franklinton Vlaie WMA	4	203	47	99	Topographical/physical limitations, Ecological considerations (wetlands)
Hooker Mountain WMA	4	83	*	100	Legal considerations (no legal access)
Rogers Island WMA	4	281	90	101	No access
Sewards Island	4	72	*	102	Ecological considerations
Chubbs Dock WMA	5	404	45	103	Adirondack Park Forest Preserve
Pauline Murdock WMA	5	68	66	104	Adirondack Park Forest Preserve
Putts Creek WMA	5	113	56	105	Adirondack Park Forest Preserve
Victory Mills WMA	5	46	0	106	No forested area
Washington County Grasslands	5	286	9	107	Ecological considerations (managed for grassland habitat)
Dexter Marsh WMA	6	1,339	0	108	No forested area
Lake Ontario Islands WMA	6	45	15	109	Ecological considerations (colonial waterbird nesting)
Curtiss Gale WMA	7	46	46	110	Legal determination pending on ability to implement management on this WMA
Owasco Flats WMA	7	12	0	111	No forested area

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Location	Reg.	Total Acres	Forested Acres <sup>1</sup>	Map Number	Reason that WMA will not be included:
Peter Scott Swamp WMA	7	251	0	112	No forested area
Canoga Marsh WMA	8	104	9	113	Ecological considerations (trout stream buffer)
Cold Brook WMA	8	116	4	114	Ecological considerations (<4% forested, WMA is already primarily scrub-shrub)
Junius Ponds Unique Area	8	107	27	115	No access, Ecological considerations
Squaw Island Unique Area	8	0.25	0	116	No forested area
Waneta-Lamoka WMA	8	159	49	117	Legal considerations (DEC has long-term easement but does not own this property)
Alder Bottom WMA	9	818	10	118	Topographical/physical limitations, Ecological considerations (wetlands)
Birch Run Ponds WMA	9	39	0	119	No forested area
Great Beahre Swamp WMA	9	270	9	120	Topographical/physical limitations
Hartson Swamp WMA	9	98	2	121	Ecological considerations (<2% forested), Topographical/physical limitations
Jacquins Pond WMA	9	31	3	122	Topographical/physical limitations
Motor Island WMA	9	6	3	123	Ecological considerations (colonial waterbirds nesting)
Silver Lake Outlet WMA	9	10	0	124	No forested area, No access
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,763</b>	<b>647</b>		

<sup>1</sup> Forested acres includes deciduous, evergreen and mixed forest types. All acreage is from WMA habitat inventory data maintained by the Land Management and Habitat Conservation Team.

\* Acreage not currently available in inventory.

Areas 2015-2020 

