Young Forest is Natural—and Needed

Oh, to be young again...

For most people, youth is a time of energy and activity, a stage of life that's vibrant and full of possibility. The same is true for forests.

A young forest is a light-filled place rich with quickly growing trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and other plants. It may look like so much brush, but it provides essential food and shelter for an amazing range of wild creatures, including many whose numbers have been falling in recent decades.

In times past, wildfires and flooding created patches of young forest by scouring off areas of woods, leaving them fresh for new growth. Today, because we have largely controlled those natural processes to protect life and property, the responsibility falls on us to make enough new young forest so that wildlife can thrive: Mammals like bobcats and snowshoe hares. Birds like towhees and brown thrashers, woodcock and whip-poor-wills. Reptiles such as wood turtles and green snakes. Insects like regal fritillaries and Karner blue butterflies.

The good news is that young forest can be created through habitat management. When carefully planned and carried out, timber harvesting, prescribed fires, and mowing can help breathe new life into woodlands, transforming them into dense, food-rich hideaways that more than 80 species of dwindling wildlife in the Northeast need to survive. Rare, imperiled creatures like the New England cottontail and golden-winged warbler share that dense cover with more-abundant animals such as ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, black bears, and many kinds of songbirds.

Who Are We?

We’re conservationists and private citizens. We’re your neighbors and folks down the road. Many partners are hard at work making young forest in appropriate places and in a thoughtful, science-based way: state and federal agencies, wildlife organizations, private companies, land trusts, Native American tribes, and the U.S. military. Foresters and habitat biologists are helping people make young forest on their working farms and woodlands and vacation properties throughout the northeastern United States.

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www.youngforest.org
Improve Wildlife Diversity Through:

**Planting Shrubs and Trees**
Abandoned fields can be planted with light-loving native shrubs and trees to create wildlife-friendly thickets.

**Mechanical Cutting**
Low-impact machines with mulching or mowing heads can chew down shrubs that have gotten too old. After cutting, the shrubs grow back more densely, along with diverse other plants.

**Controlled Burning**
Trained specialists set fires that knock back older vegetation and increase soil fertility, spurring the dense regrowth of trees and shrubs. Native Americans used fire to renew habitats and boost the populations of animals they hunted. Today conservationists employ firebreaks, water tankers, and up-to-the-minute weather forecasts to keep fires under control and grow new habitat where it’s needed.

**Harvesting Trees**
At first, timber harvests can look drastic and messy, but right away the stumps and root systems of trees send up thousands of new little trees. Light reaching the forest floor spurs the growth of shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers. As it quickly regrows and greens up, the resulting young forest becomes home to a wide range of birds, plus small mammals and the predators that hunt those creatures to survive.

Young forest doesn’t last forever – generally around 10 to 20 years – so management activities must be fairly frequent and ongoing. Responsible habitat managers look across the landscape and choose the best spots to make and renew young forest.

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**Help Conservationists Help Wildlife**

**Become a well-informed wildlife advocate:** Learn about young forest at [www.youngforest.org](http://www.youngforest.org).

Do your part by supporting young-forest projects on public and private lands – projects that often provide revenue, jobs, and sustainable, locally produced timber products as well as more and better opportunities for outdoor recreation such as birding and viewing wildlife.

Want to make some young forest on your property? Most land in the Northeast is privately owned, so it’s vitally important for our native wildlife that landowners create and maintain young forest on patches as small as 5 acres and preferably on tracts 20 acres and larger.

Contact your state wildlife agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service, or a certified forester to learn how to proceed. For some projects, full or partial funding may be available.