

State and Federal Grants Support Habitat Restoration at Oyster River Forest and Thompson Forest in Durham, NH

September 3, 2020

Durham received two grants that have helped control invasive plants and allow native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees to thrive at two conservation areas: Oyster River Forest (ORF) and Thompson Forest (TF). A two-year \$9,050 grant from the State Conservation Committee was used to contract with the Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) to apply targeted herbicide on glossy and common buckthorns, autumn olive, multiflora rose, bush honeysuckles, barberries, and Asiatic bittersweet vines growing among native vegetation in a section of the 60-acre early successional habitat at Oyster River Forest. This grant is supported by funds from the sale of the Conservation License Plate (Moose Plate) through the NH State Conservation Committee grant program.



The project is part of a long-term effort begun in 2014 with initial funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve habitat for birds, pollinators, monarch butterflies, and other wildlife. As part of the “moose plate” grant, Durham provided 119 hours of volunteer time to hand-pull and dig invasive plants around the ORF trailhead and historic cellar hole, pulled invasive wild parsnip in the field, and mowed the trails/management access through the field.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife Program provided a \$4,350 grant to Durham focused on creating and enhancing early successional shrub and young forest habitat at Thompson Forest. The grant was based on a habitat improvement plan developed by Durham Land Stewardship Coordinator, Ellen Snyder, part of an effort begun in 2017 in partnership with NH Fish and Game. The overarching goal of this project is to control invasive plant species to enhance habitat for New England cottontail and other early successional habitat-dependent species. The grant helped Durham contract with the RCCD to apply targeted herbicide on invasive plants on 7.5 acres of field-shrub-young forest habitat. The Conservation Commission contributed another \$500 to target a particularly dense patch of invasive autumn olive, glossy buckthorn, and bittersweet vine.

Several other methods were used by Town staff and volunteers at Thompson Forest to mechanically control invasive plants in the field and along the treeline and forest border. Along the field/tree edge, this included hand pulling and digging out invasive plants using rogue hoes, hand saws, and loppers. These efforts were primarily focused on seedlings and small saplings. We also used a smothering technique on 11 larger glossy buckthorn. The stems were cut at 6 inches in height and a thick, black plastic “buckthorn baggie” was placed over the stem and secured with a zip tie. These will be left in place for a year to ensure no regrowth occurs. Using handsaws, volunteers cut several dozen large autumn olives growing in the east field. This is an attempt to reduce the re-growth so that future treatments will require much less herbicide. Town staff and volunteers contributed 26.5 hours of time on invasive control at Thompson Forest this year.

Durham will continue to monitor and adapt its early successional habitat management at Thompson Forest and Oyster River Forest in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, NH Fish and Game, RCCD, and other partners.