

Keeping Maine's Forests Pilot Project Summary: Downeast Deer and Riparian Habitat Project Summary

Goal:

- ◆ Create a positive, non-regulatory incentive for landowners to manage for deer habitat over a large block of land, improving deer and fish populations, and benefiting the recreation industry in Downeast Maine.

Background:

The white-tailed deer is the most important big game species in Maine, both economically and culturally. In March 2011, The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (MDIFW) announced a new plan to restore white-tailed deer populations in northern, eastern, and western Maine. Downeast Maine is situated near the northern limit of the white-tail's range. Severe winters in this region challenge deer and habitat managers. Deer traditionally winter in “yards” – mature softwood stands – often located on or near streams they use as travel corridors. Dense coniferous stands provide protection from wind and cold and reduce snow depths. By congregating in numbers, deer are able to develop snow-packed trail systems.

By focusing on winter habitat, forest managers can benefit deer by focusing scarce funds on a modest acreage within the larger landscape. Management of stream corridors to provide deer wintering habitat has the additional benefit of protecting aquatic habitat for salmon, brook trout, and other valuable game species.

Deer winter primarily under mature spruce, hemlock, cedar, and fir. Although the value of these species can be maximized through long-term, sustained-yield management to produce both deer cover and wood products, often these species are managed without attention to deer habitat requirements, and managed stands may not provide the winter cover or other needs deer require. Coordinated management of sufficiently large areas can meet their habitat needs, while allowing timber harvests of the primary and secondary tree growth at the same time.

There are no economic incentives for landowners to engage in deer habitat management. Some forest landowners are currently following deer habitat management guidelines provided by MDIFW, but these management practices are not required. The goal of this project is to create a positive, non-regulatory incentive for landowners to manage for deer habitat along streams over a large block of land, thereby improving deer and fish habitat. Improving the populations of these game species will, in turn, benefit the recreation industry in Downeast Maine.

Cooperating Entities:

Collectively, the project participants below own and/or manage approximately 1 million acres of forest in eastern Maine, and have established cooperative relationships as neighboring Downeast forest managers. MDIFW is a central partner in this effort as well.

- ◆ Downeast Lakes Land Trust (DLLT)
- ◆ American Forest Management (AFM)
- ◆ Maine Bureau of Parks & Lands (BPL)
- ◆ Lyme Timber
- ◆ Passamaquoddy Tribe
- ◆ Wagner Forest Management

Project Description:

Project partners DLLT, MDIFW, BPL, Lyme Timber, and the Passamaquoddy Tribe met to begin mapping priority deer habitat and riparian corridors in the Downeast region extending from the Machias to the Saint Croix rivers. MDIFW is currently adding additional historical data to these maps. The partners will meet again to establish priorities, including a core of habitat corridors on lands of BPL, DLLT, Lyme Timber, and the Passamaquoddy Tribe.

The partners will work to develop landowner incentives and mechanisms, and then evaluate them with industrial forest managers within the project area.

Project Area – the Downeast Forest Landscape:

The Downeast Lakes region extends from eastern Hancock County through the inland portion of Washington County to the Saint Croix River at the eastern edge of Maine. Its fisheries, including native landlocked salmon and brook trout, as well as smallmouth bass, are widely renowned. The area is home to diverse and abundant wildlife. The economy depends upon natural resources, which provide livelihoods for forest industry workers as well as craftsmen, guides, and sporting camp owners and employees. Grand Lake Stream is in the heart of the region, and has long been a destination for outdoor recreation.

Downeast Forest Managers: Potential Coop. Deer Habitat Project Area

