

# How can more shrubland/ young forest habitat be created to increase the health of our environment?

Beaver activity and hurricanes can create young forests, but are unpredictable. Well-designed and implemented timber harvest techniques, such as clearcutting and shelterwood cutting, are more predictable and controllable avenues to healthy forests.

Clearcutting is one of the most publicly maligned and misunderstood forest regeneration treatments. It is the only way to grow trees that require full sunlight to reproduce, such as tulip poplar, black cherry, and aspen, and the fastest way to provide/create shrubland habitat.

Shelterwood harvests can be described as “clearcuts in slow motion.” A forest is cut gradually over the course of about 10 years to create a young forest that develops within the “shelter” of an old one. This technique is used when reproducing species, such as oaks and hickories, that have irregular crops of acorns or nuts. With a shelterwood cut, the entire original forest is ultimately cut, just not all at once, as would occur with a clearcut.

Clearcutting and shelterwood cutting should be part of any responsible overall forest management plan to make sure that forests are sustainable and provide the most benefits for wildlife.



**Chestnut-sided warblers travel 2,100 miles from Central America to raise their young in our young forests.**

PHOTO BY PAUL J. FUSCO

**Young forests provide thick cover for nesting sites and escape from predators, and have a greater variety of fruit-producing shrubs than mature forests.**



**Recent clearcut**



**One year after clearcut/  
final shelterwood**



**Ten years after clearcut**



**Gray dogwood**



**Spicebush**

*For information on forestry practices and wildlife benefits, or on how to manage private land to benefit the landscape, contact:*

*Hartford Forestry: 860-424-3630*

*Western District State Lands Management: 860-379-7085*

*Western District Private/Municipal Lands: 860-485-0226*

*Eastern District: 860-295-9523*

*Franklin Wildlife: 860-642-7239*

*Sessions Woods Wildlife: 860-675-8130*

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COVER PHOTO BY PAUL J. FUSCO

# The “Clear Cut” Advantage for Wildlife and Forest Health



**Connecticut Department of Energy  
and Environmental Protection  
Bureau of Natural Resources  
Forestry Division  
Wildlife Division  
[www.ct.gov/deep](http://www.ct.gov/deep)**

**Question:** What two characteristics do New England cottontail rabbits, golden-winged warblers, brown thrashers, yellow-breasted chats, blue-winged warblers, indigo buntings, eastern towhees, prairie warblers, box turtles, and over 200 other species of reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and birds all have in common?



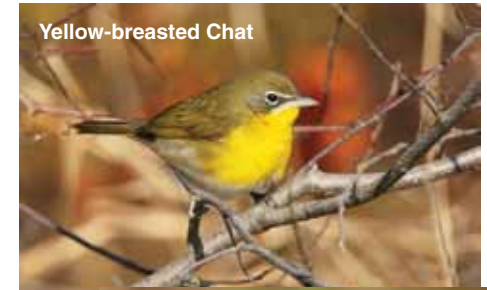
Eastern Towhee



Prairie Warbler



New England Cottontail



Yellow-breasted Chat



Eastern Box Turtle



Indigo Bunting



Golden-winged Warbler



Brown Thrasher



Blue-winged Warbler

PHOTOS BY PAUL J. FUSCO / CT DEEP-WILDLIFE

**Answer:** 1) They require early successional, shrubland, or young forest habitat, and;  
2) The majority of their populations are declining as Connecticut's forests grow older.

Young forest, early successional, or shrubland habitat – whatever you wish to call it – is a critical component of any healthy forest ecosystem and is defined as the thick re-growth of seedlings, shrubs, and tree saplings after a major disturbance removes the forest canopy. Disturbances include weather events such as hurricanes and tornadoes, flooding by beavers, severe forest fires, and forest management activities like clearcutting and shelterwood cutting. Shrubland habitat also is created when farmland is abandoned. Due to a lack of sustained timber harvest over the past 50 years, many of Connecticut's forests currently have an unhealthy absence of younger-aged stands. Forests are more prone to catastrophic weather events, disease outbreaks, insect infestations, and other detrimental processes when there is an imbalanced age structure.

Young forests are rare in Connecticut. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that only six percent of Connecticut's woodlands are made up of seedling and sapling-sized forests. A healthy forest ecosystem should contain approximately 20% young forest. This current lack of ecological resiliency to environmental

factors is a major problem for Connecticut's woodlands and wildlife. Our landscape tends to be either mature forest or farmland, with nothing in between. Unfortunately, many agricultural lands are developed before they have an opportunity to revert to forest.

**Forest Cuts Are a New Beginning:** Many people have the misconception that cutting forests causes an unsightly blight on the landscape, leaving a permanent scar, much like development does. This misconception could not be farther from reality. Natural processes involve disturbance. Cutting forests is a way of mimicking nature. When done sustainably, timber harvesting creates a balanced distribution of trees of different ages. Trees are a renewable resource. The year after a forest disturbance – whether caused by a planned timber harvest or naturally by a severe storm – grasses, wildflowers, shrubs, and tree saplings will take over the site, providing critical habitat for many of the above mentioned species. Within 10 years, the site is lush with new growth and teeming with birds, rabbits, and bees that require young forests for survival.