



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge (Proposed)

*Draft Land Protection Plan/
Environmental Assessment*

January 2016



Front cover:

Shrublands in Maine

Kirk Rogers

Clockwise from top right:

New England cottontail

Meagan Racey/USFWS

Prairie warbler

Kevin Fleming

Monarch butterfly

Bill Thompson

American woodcock

Carlos Guindon/USFWS

Back cover:

Shrublands in Maine

Kirk Rogers



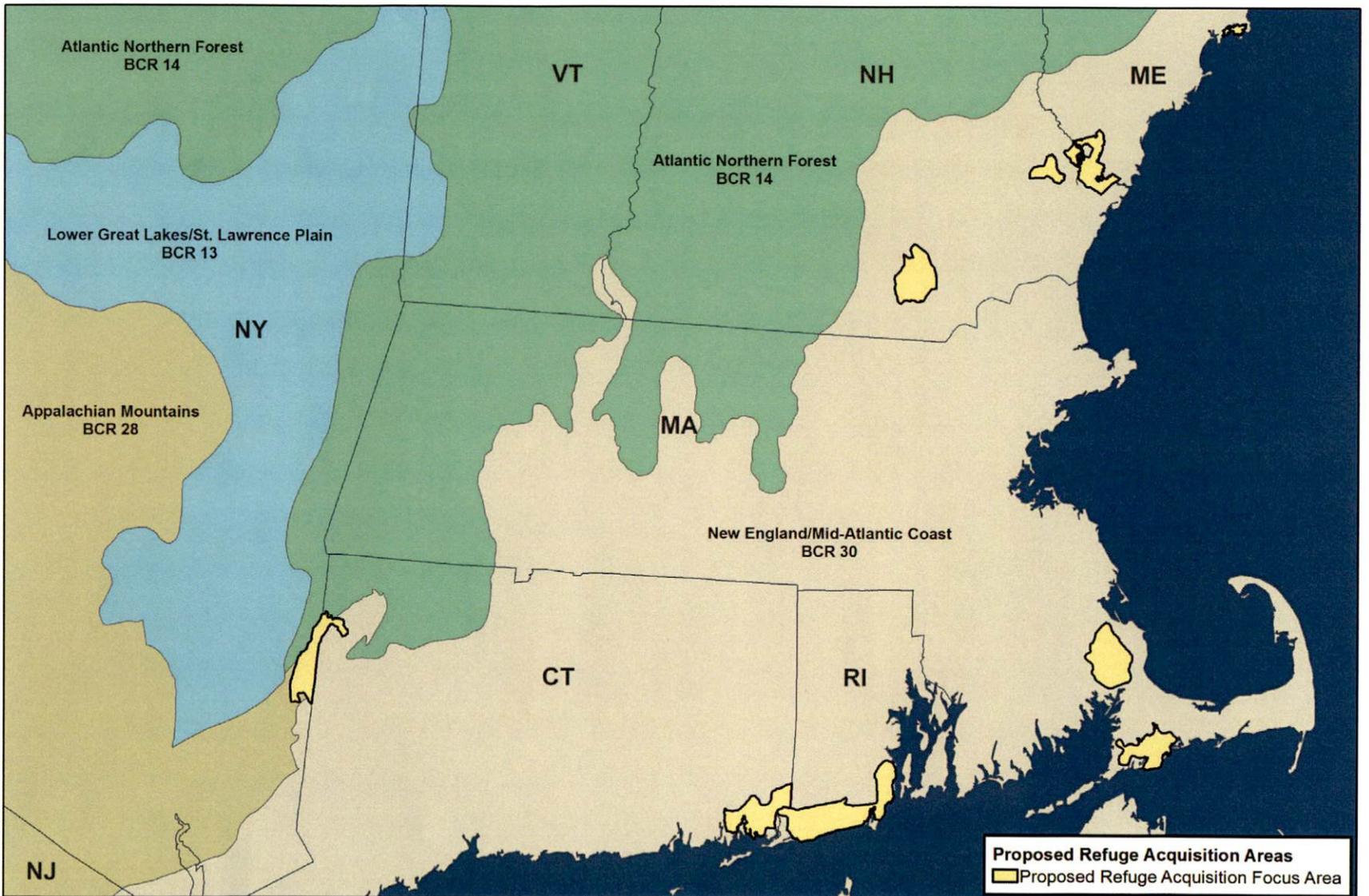
This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service* is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 560 national wildlife refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance Program which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State wildlife agencies.

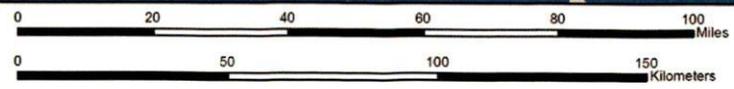
Bird Conservation Regions

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge (Proposed)



Proposed Refuge Acquisition Areas
 Proposed Refuge Acquisition Focus Area



NOTE: Bird Studies Canada and NABCI. 2014. Bird Conservation Regions. Published by Bird Studies Canada on behalf of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

This map is not intended for use as a land survey or as a representation of land for conveyance or tax purposes. For more information visit the USFWS Northeast Region GIS website at <http://northeast.fws.gov/gis/>

for the blue-winged warbler and 6.8 percent for the prairie warbler, both BCR highest-priority species, on a relatively small number of acres compared to the total amount of BCR acres (PIF 2013, 2015). Map 1 shows the general vicinity of the proposed refuge acquisition areas in relation to the entire BCR 30. The BCR supports an estimated 10 percent of the blue-winged warbler total breeding population, and it has the highest breeding density of all BCRs as recorded by the Breeding Bird Survey, indicating high value of creating additional habitat in this region in terms of expected bird response (PIF 2013, 2015). Shrubland habitat within the project area also plays a crucial role in providing migratory stopover habitat for landbirds. An analysis of weather radar data has identified the southern New England coastal area as one of three areas in the Northeastern United States that supports the highest density of fall migrating birds (Buler and Dawson 2012, 2014).

Other Plans

All of the refuges within the project area have identified goals and objectives for shrubland and young forest restoration and management in their 15-year management plans, known as Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCPs). These generally include the maintenance of maritime shrubland and forest, pitch pine-scrub oak communities, shrub-dominated wetlands, and successional shrublands and young forest stages, for the purpose of providing nesting and migratory stopover habitat for landbirds of conservation concern, to benefit the NEC, and also breeding and migratory bats. The cottontail is also the subject of a Service Northeast Region Spotlight Species Action Plan and two state Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances.

Status of Shrubland-Dependent Wildlife

As shrubland and young forest habitats have been declining throughout the Northeastern United States for decades, the wildlife species associated with them have experienced a similar reduction in population levels. For instance, 12 of 16 shrubland birds have declining population trends in the region. Many are listed as threatened or endangered by several northeastern states. Additionally, American woodcock have declined by 40 percent over the past 30 years, and the native NEC occurs in only 20 percent of the area in which this species was historically found.

Field sparrow



James Junda 2013

Although the NEC is the most well-known shrubland-dependent species, numerous other species utilize these important early successional habitats, including 136 species of butterflies, moths, birds, reptiles, other mammals, amphibians, and beetles, all of which have been identified by states in the northeast as species that are in need of protection. Additionally, several shrub-dependent bird species, such as the American woodcock and golden-winged warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) have declined significantly in the northeast from lack of habitat availability and have been identified by Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV) plans as priority species of concern. Thus, landscape-level conservation for the NEC, the most dispersal-limited surrogate species, will provide significant habitat creation and improved connectivity for an entire suite of species, many of which are also current NALCC surrogate species for shrubland habitats in the region. These include the blue-winged warbler, prairie warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, field sparrow, and eastern hognose snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*). Species such as blue-winged warbler rank high in regional concern, and the woodcock is a species of regional and global concern.

Summary



Bill Thompson

Blue-winged warbler

Executive Summary

- Executive Summary

Shrublands and young forest habitats in the Northeastern United States have declined dramatically over the past century, primarily as a result of the decline of agricultural land use, forest maturation, development pressures, and wetland draining and filling. Many shrubland-dependent wildlife species are rapidly disappearing along with their now-imperiled habitat, and have been identified as high priorities for conservation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and state wildlife agencies. Due to the urgency of this situation, state, Federal and non-governmental partners have begun a six-state collaborative shrublands restoration and protection effort. Conservation activities are already in progress, including assistance by numerous agencies and organizations to restore shrublands on private lands, and restoration on existing state and Federal secured lands, including shrubland management on existing National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) lands. This partnership effort has identified a need for additional secured acreage and management capability to meet population and habitat goals.

In this draft Land Protection Plan/Environmental Assessment (draft LPP/EA), we propose to establish the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) as an additional Service contribution to help stem the decline of shrubland-dependent wildlife species. As part of our proposal, we have identified 10 Refuge Acquisition Focus Areas (RAFAs) encompassing approximately 298,820 acres across six northeast states. Within these larger focus areas, the Service would acquire approximately 15,000 acres total in fee title or easements. This approach allows us the flexibility to assist partner efforts over time as needed in areas most critical to landscape connectivity.

Several surrogate species, including the New England cottontail (NEC), prairie warbler, blue-winged warbler, field sparrow, American woodcock, and brown thrasher, have been identified to represent the entire suite of declining shrubland wildlife. Modeling and spatial analysis related to several of these species and other Federal trust resources were used to guide the design and development of this proposal. As a result, several areas within the proposed Great Thicket NWR

Prairie warbler



Kevin Fleming

represent overlapping opportunities to benefit populations of species currently listed as threatened or endangered, such as the bog turtle and the northern red-bellied cooter, as well as numerous declining priority breeding landbirds identified in the New England/Mid-Atlantic Bird Conservation Region Plan 30 (BCR 30). For example, we estimate that we will contribute up to 5.4 percent of the BCR 30 population goal for the blue-winged warbler and 6.8 percent for the prairie warbler, both BCR highest-priority species, on a relatively small number of acres compared to the total amount of BCR acres. We also expect this proposal to make measurable contributions towards habitat and population goals identified in the multi-agency Conservation Strategy for the NEC by increasing the long-term certainty of shrubland management and success in strategic locations throughout the northeast.

This proposal represents the application and implementation of multiple Service directives, policies and planning guidance, including the concept of Strategic Habitat Conservation, Landscape Conservation Design, and strategic growth of the NWRS. This draft LPP/EA closely aligns with the conservation priorities of many Service programs as well as Service partners including the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York, the NEC Executive and Technical committees, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Wildlife Management Institute. To

date, these partners have committed significant resources toward protecting, maintaining and managing shrubland habitat and will continue to do so in the future. For example, as of January 2015, the NRCS has created or maintained approximately 1,500 acres of NEC habitat through the Working Lands for Wildlife program, which provides financial assistance to landowners who voluntarily participate in habitat-related projects that can reverse population declines for certain wildlife species. The proposed Great Thicket NWR will complement these commitments made by our partners.

The estimated cost to acquire the entire 15,000 acres for the proposed Great Thicket NWR is between \$84 million and \$129 million. Because the method of acquisition would be decided on a case-by-case basis for each landowner, it is impossible to determine exactly how many acres would be acquired in fee title and how many acres would be acquired in conservation easements. Therefore, we have provided a low range based on the acquisition of conservation easements on all 15,000 acres and a high range based on the fee title acquisition of all 15,000 acres. The cost-per-acre values used in this rough estimation are based on land purchases associated with nearby national wildlife refuges for each RAFA.

Given the costs associated with this project and in light of our willing-seller-only approach, it could take 30 years or more to acquire fee or easements for the entire proposed 15,000-acre refuge. A long-term commitment of this nature is not at all uncommon when compared to the status of other NWRS land protection projects. However, unlike some wildlife species that require large unbroken blocks of habitat, shrubland-dependent species can be sustained on smaller, scattered parcels connected by linear features such as power lines. Indeed, existing shrublands that currently support targeted species occur in smaller patches across the landscape identified in this proposal (i.e. within RAFAs). This has positive implications for the timing of future acquisitions in that we are already working in a fragmented landscape and our efforts will not be compromised by projected future land use changes or human population growth.

In areas with more persistent and stable types of shrublands we encourage passive management techniques and allow for natural vegetative growth. In other areas, we will engage in active restoration and maintenance of shrublands and young forest habitat types, where appropriate. Managing habitat for shrubland species can take many forms, depending on the acreage and current condition of the tract of land and how much effort we are able to commit to management. Depending on soils, hydrologic regimes, and vegetation, we may consider

mechanical cutting, prescribed burning, herbicides, riparian area restoration, or planting habitat areas to create and maintain optimal conditions.

While national wildlife refuges are managed specifically for wildlife and wildlife habitat, public uses are often allowed. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-57; 111 Stat. 1235) directs the Service to give special consideration to allowing wildlife-dependent recreational activities—namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental interpretation, and environmental education—on national wildlife refuges when these uses are compatible with the mission of the NWRS and the purposes of the refuge. As lands are added to the proposed Great Thicket NWR, we will complete our agency’s process for determining when, where, and how to permit public uses.

Shrublands



USFWS

Chapter 1

Carlos Guindory/USFWS



American woodcock

The Purpose of, and Need for, Action

- Introduction
- Relationship to Service Policies and Landscape-level Conservation Goals
- Status of Shrubland-Dependent Wildlife
- Threats to Resources
- Purpose of this Proposal

Introduction

Shrublands and young forest habitats in the northeast have declined dramatically over the past century, primarily as a result of the decline of agricultural land use, forest maturation, development pressures, and wetland draining and filling. As a result, many shrubland-dependent wildlife species have declined and have therefore been identified as high priorities for conservation in the Northeastern United States. The intent of this draft Land Protection Plan/Environmental Assessment (draft LPP/EA) for the establishment of Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, the refuge) is to help reverse this disturbing trend of shrubland habitat and species loss in strategic locations across the northeast landscape and to restore the mosaic of habitats that wildlife need.

Shrubland and young forest habitat, also known as “early successional” habitat, are frequently described as thickets (Litvaitis 2001). (Throughout this document we use several terms when referring to this habitat, including “shrublands,” “shrublands and young forest,” “early successional,” and “thicket.”) This habitat is generally characterized as dense, primarily deciduous understory cover created when trees and other woody vegetation are growing back following disturbances caused by factors such as logging, fire, flooding, mortality from disease or insects, and high winds. Historically, the presence of these habitats was related to the frequency and distribution of these natural disturbances across the landscape, with certain areas such as coastal zones and sand plains much more prone to frequent or extreme storms or fires and, therefore, characterized by greater amounts of these habitats. However, human populations and the accompanying housing, agricultural and industrial development have been most concentrated in coastal zones and river valleys, resulting in severe losses of the early-successional habitats in much of the region (USFWS 2009a). Because of this habitat loss and forest maturation across the region, along with now limited natural disturbance, most wildlife and plant populations restricted to these habitats are in serious decline. These species are increasingly reliant upon managed areas such as relatively small protected barrens, power line rights-of-way or recent timber harvests.

Numerous conservation tools are currently being applied on the landscape by state, Federal and non-governmental partners, in a six-state shrublands restoration and protection effort within the Northeastern United States. This effort includes restoration on existing state and Federal secured lands, assistance by numerous agencies and organizations to restore shrublands on private lands, and shrubland management on existing National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS, Refuge System) lands. If approved by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS, Service, we, us), this draft LPP/EA will allow an expanded Refuge System contribution to this effort by allowing us to secure lands or easements in key locations.

Over the past year, we have collaborated with six states (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York), the New England Cottontail (NEC) Executive and Technical committees, state NEC/shrubland land management teams, state and Service migratory bird biologists, and other partners to develop this draft LPP/EA.

Relationship to Service Policies and Landscape-level Conservation Goals

This draft LPP/EA represents the application and implementation of multiple Service directives, policies and planning guidance. The concept of Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) has been adopted by the Service to guide us to work strategically with partners to conserve landscapes capable of supporting self-sustaining populations of fish and wildlife, and to address conservation challenges that cross jurisdictional boundaries. In addition, the Refuge System has adopted an approach in which refuge land protection proposals result from participation in Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) efforts, developed by the

greater conservation community, and facilitated through multi-partner regional landscape conservation cooperatives. LCD efforts are consistent with SHC and involve the development of a partnership-driven conservation strategy.

Strategic Habitat Conservation

The Service has adopted SHC as a science-based approach for determining where and how to deliver conservation efficiently to achieve specific biological outcomes, in collaboration with partners, the public, and landowners. It requires us to set specific biological goals, allows us to make strategic decisions about our work, and encourages us to constantly reassess and improve our actions. The SHC approach integrates:

- *Biological planning*—development of a comprehensive landscape vision with partners, including identifying common goals, objectives, and surrogate species.
- *Conservation design*—development of a spatially explicit design needed to meet population objectives, and identification of management objectives.
- *Conservation delivery*—cost/benefit evaluation, selection and implementation of best actions to meet objectives.
- *Monitoring*—to evaluate delivery, progress, success, and adapt as necessary.

This draft LPP/EA is one result of several years of biological planning and conservation design accomplished through a multi-state partnership effort, involving close collaboration with all six state wildlife agencies and additional agencies and organizations. All six states have identified shrublands and young forest habitat as high priorities for conservation attention in their respective State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs), along with Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) dependent upon them. There is a high degree of land conservation commitment by all the entities involved, such as the dedication of competitive state wildlife grant and Pittman-Robertson funding for restoration and acquisition, the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Working Lands for Wildlife activities, and the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program which works with private landowners within the project area. Limited Refuge System acquisition is proposed as one additional tool, part of the regional cooperative effort to create and conserve early-successional habitat with suitable landscape connectivity for the species that depend on this resource.

Landscape Conservation Design using Surrogate Species

The Service is facilitating a coordinated network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) across the United States, with the assistance of partners. The science provided by these partnerships is expected to inform biological planning and strategic conservation design, and help direct research and monitoring necessary to inform decisions about conservation delivery. The proposed Great Thicket NWR is located within the North Atlantic LCC (NALCC), which extends from Maine to Virginia. Early successional/shrubland/young forest habitat is listed as a NALCC priority habitat due to its importance in supporting populations of several designated NALCC highest priority species (USFWS 2009b).

The SHC approach recommends the use of a subset of priority trust species, or surrogates, to represent larger suites of priority species, as a tool for strategically conserving habitat at landscape scales. The NALCC has developed a list of surrogates for the major habitat types within the Northeastern United States to help focus biological planning and conservation design work. Conservation actions implemented for these species are intended to benefit associated priority species within a given habitat type. The NALCC further

sponsored the development of habitat capability models for selected surrogates, led by the University of Massachusetts, to enhance the capacity of partners to design sustainable landscape conservation in the northeast. These models are being used across the NALCC area to:

- Predict capability of current landscapes to support populations of surrogates.
- Predict impacts of landscape-level changes on capability of habitats to support surrogates.
- Target conservation programs to efficiently achieve habitat objectives and evaluate progress.
- Enhance coordination among partners to make conservation design more effective.

Several surrogate species, including the NEC (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*) (cottontail, rabbit), prairie warbler (*Dendroica discolor*), blue-winged warbler (*Vermivora pinus*) chestnut-sided warbler (*Setophaga pensylvanica*), field sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*), American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*), brown thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), eastern towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), and bog turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), have been identified to represent the entire suite of declining shrubland wildlife. Modeling and spatial analysis related to several of these species has been used to guide the design and development of this proposal.



Bill Thompson

Eastern towhee

Habitat relationship models were developed for surrogates representing a range of habitats, including several early successional species such as the woodcock, prairie warbler, and ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*). An additional radar study, sponsored by our NWRS Program's Division of Natural Resources with recent support from the NALCC, the Migratory Bird Program, and several states, is helping to identify stopover sites in the Northeastern United States important for sustaining migratory landbird populations (Buler and Dawson 2012, 2014). Conservation efforts are increasingly focused on identifying these critical areas needed by migrants to rest and replenish energy reserves. This project is building upon prior work by the University of Delaware and U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) to use weather surveillance data and field surveys to map and predict important migratory bird stopover sites. These were used in conjunction with NEC model outputs to inform the development of areas of acquisition for the proposed Great Thicket NWR.

Strategic Growth of the National Wildlife Refuge System

The Service's recently adopted Strategic Growth policy directs that growth of the Refuge System must focus on acquiring interests in lands and waters that support the following:

- *Recovery of threatened and endangered species*, where land acquisition is prescribed in threatened or endangered species recovery plans or subsequent revisions.
- *Implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan*, where acquisition will contribute toward achieving the waterfowl population objectives identified in this plan and associated joint venture step-down management plans.
- *Conserving migratory birds of conservation concern*, where acquisition is identified as contributing toward achieving population objectives in plans such as the Partners in Flight (PIF) North American Landbird Conservation Plan and associated step-down plans.

Early
successional
forest habitat



Kelly Boland/USFWS

This draft LPP/EA is intended as a Service contribution to help stem the decline of an entire suite of species, help accomplish recovery plan goals for Federal-listed endangered and threatened species, and contribute to goals for numerous declining priority migratory landbirds. The proposal will also allow us to contribute to accomplishing goals for the recovery of the NEC, as identified in the Conservation Strategy for the New England Cottontail (Fuller and Tur 2012) (NEC Conservation Strategy, the strategy). In execution of their charge to initiate priority-setting under the Region 5 State Wildlife Grant (SWG) Regional Conservation Needs Program, the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee in 2007 named the NEC as the top priority SGCN for landscape conservation, and concurrently initiated a cooperative effort to secure competitive SWG funding for a multi-state conservation effort, in the hope of averting a listing action by the Service under authority of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Several areas of acquisition for the proposed Great Thicket NWR represent the intersection of high priority NEC sites and populations of currently listed species, most notably the bog turtle and the northern red-bellied cooter (*Pseudemys rubriventris*)(cooter). The bog turtle recovery plan specifies acquisition of additional habitat in its Hudson/Housatonic recovery unit, which overlaps our southeastern New York/western Connecticut focus area.

Management for shrubland species and the bog turtle can be targeted to benefit both. Similar benefits can be provided in southeastern Massachusetts for the cooter, where important cooter habitat has been designated and where the cooter recovery plan specifies additional acquisition of pond-shore habitats and corridors for genetic interchange (USFWS 2007a).

The proposed Great Thicket NWR is also designed to contribute to goals for numerous declining priority landbirds identified in the New England/Mid-Atlantic Bird Conservation Region Plan 30 (BCR 30). For example, we estimate that we will be able to contribute up to 5.4 percent of the BCR 30 population goal

Euro-American settlement within the RAFAs began in the early 17th century, resulting in the founding of numerous colonial towns. Euro-American land use featured the establishment of villages, farms, fishing and seafaring points, and early industries such as grist mills, sawmills, and tanneries. Today, undeveloped locations that feature favorable agricultural soils in the RAFAs and are found near water sources, thoroughfares, or centers of early colonial occupation, are likely to contain archaeological evidence of agrarian land use and settlement over the last four centuries.

New York/Connecticut Border Sub-Region

Lands within this sub-region that may be considered for acquisition are likely to include undeveloped, open spaces and current, or former, agricultural areas. Depending on the proximity of such properties to freshwater resources (e.g., wetlands, streams, rivers) and to locations that witnessed historic land use (e.g., settlement, agriculture, early industries), expected historic properties in the acquired lands may include Native American and Euro-American archaeological sites, and historic agricultural structures.

The Northern Housatonic RAFA is the only focus area in this sub-region. This area is less than 10 percent developed and is nearly 60 percent forested. It has the highest percentage of its land classified as agriculture (32 percent) of the five sub-regions. Within the Northern Housatonic RAFA, 1,353 acres of land are protected. Of that total, nearly half (623 acres) is owned by conservation organizations and approximately one-quarter (380 acres) is protected as Federal land.

Table 20: New York/Connecticut Border Sub-Region Conserved Lands

Ownership	Northern Housatonic RAFA Acres
Federal	380
State	108
Local	1
Non-government conservation organization	623
Private landowner conservation easement	241
Total	1,353

Table 21: New York/Connecticut Border Sub-Region Land Cover Types

Land Cover Types	Northern Housatonic RAFA Acres
Grassland and Shrubland	85
Northeastern Upland Forest	19,320
Northeastern Wetland Forest	1,768
Agriculture	8,063
Freshwater Marsh	923
Open water	1,893
Developed	3,243
Cliff and Rock	382
Total	35,677

New England cottontails use thick shrubs and young trees to hide from predators.



Emily Reuber/SUNY-ESF

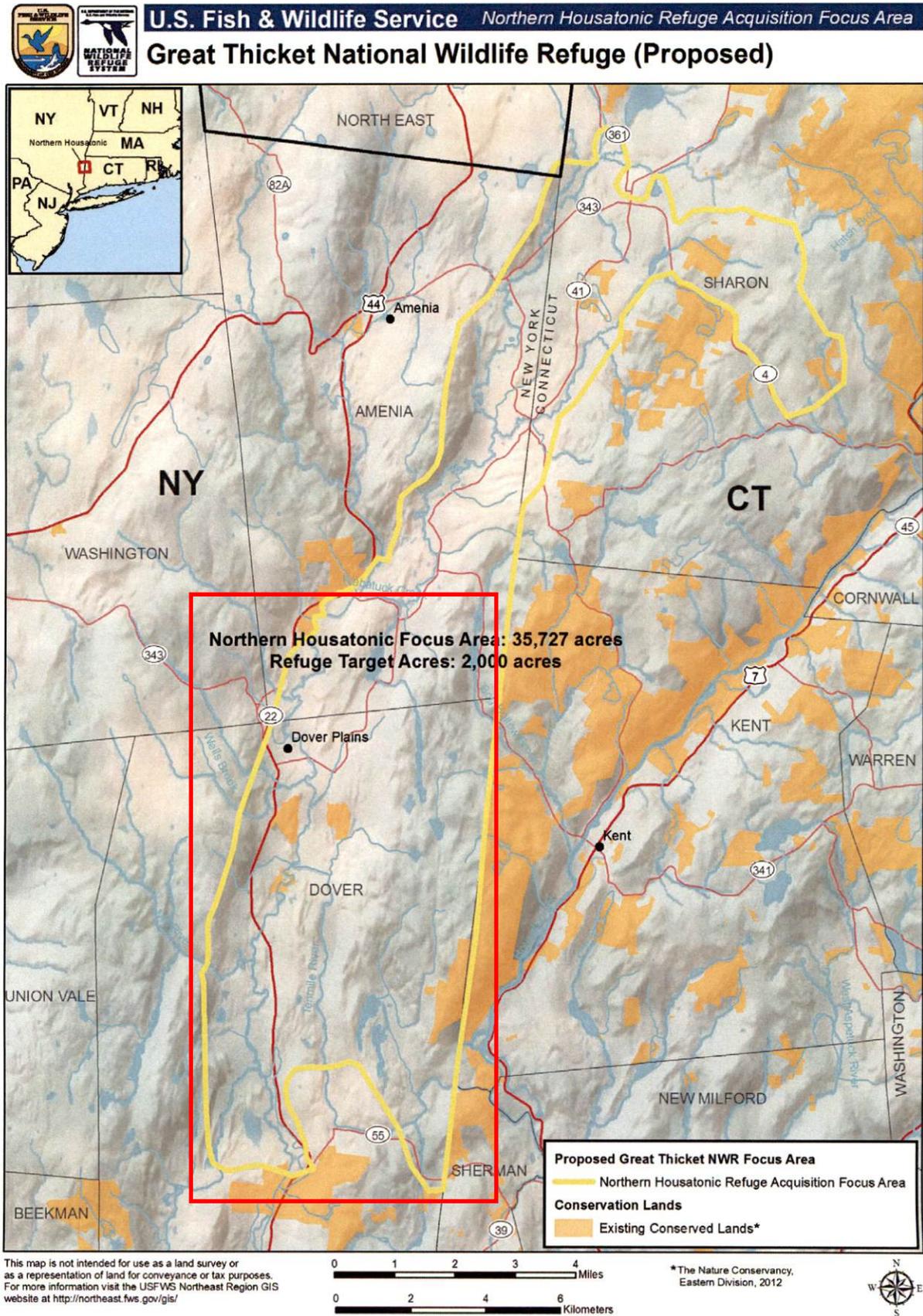
The archaeological record within this sub-region has provided evidence of Native American settlement that began more than 11,000 years ago. There is archaeological evidence of settlement occurring in subsequent periods, up until the time of European contact, although this area was somewhat isolated from more focal areas of Native American settlement within the Hudson River Valley, the lower Housatonic River drainage, and in coastal Connecticut. Even until the early 18th century, the lands within the Northern Housatonic RAFA were not well-known to the colonial authorities of New York and Connecticut.

The Northern Housatonic RAFA is characterized by a glaciated landscape, with multiple ponds, streams, and wetlands distributed among rugged, forested ridges and gently rolling valley floors. Although changing environmental conditions affected the types of plant and animal species that were available to Native Americans for their subsistence, their settlement systems appear to have been oriented around these freshwater resource areas throughout the ancient past. Consequently, undeveloped areas in settings such as wetland margins have high sensitivity for Native American archaeological sites, including long-term settlements and seasonal camps. Today, the descendants of the Native American people of this RAFA include members of the federally recognized Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Nation.

Historical Euro-American settlement began in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, resulting in the founding of multiple townships near the Northern Housatonic RAFA. Euro-American land use featured the establishment of villages, farms, and early industries such as grist mills, sawmills, and iron works. Today, undeveloped locations that feature favorable agricultural soils in this sub-region, and are found near water sources, thoroughfares, or centers of colonial occupation, are likely to contain archaeological evidence of agrarian land use and settlement over the last three centuries.

Lands within this sub-region that may be considered for acquisition are likely to include undeveloped, open spaces and current, or former, agricultural areas. Depending on the proximity of such properties to freshwater resources (e.g., wetlands, streams, rivers) and to locations that witnessed historic land use (e.g., settlement, agriculture, early industries), expected historic properties in the acquired lands may include Native American and Euro-American archaeological sites, and historic agricultural structures.

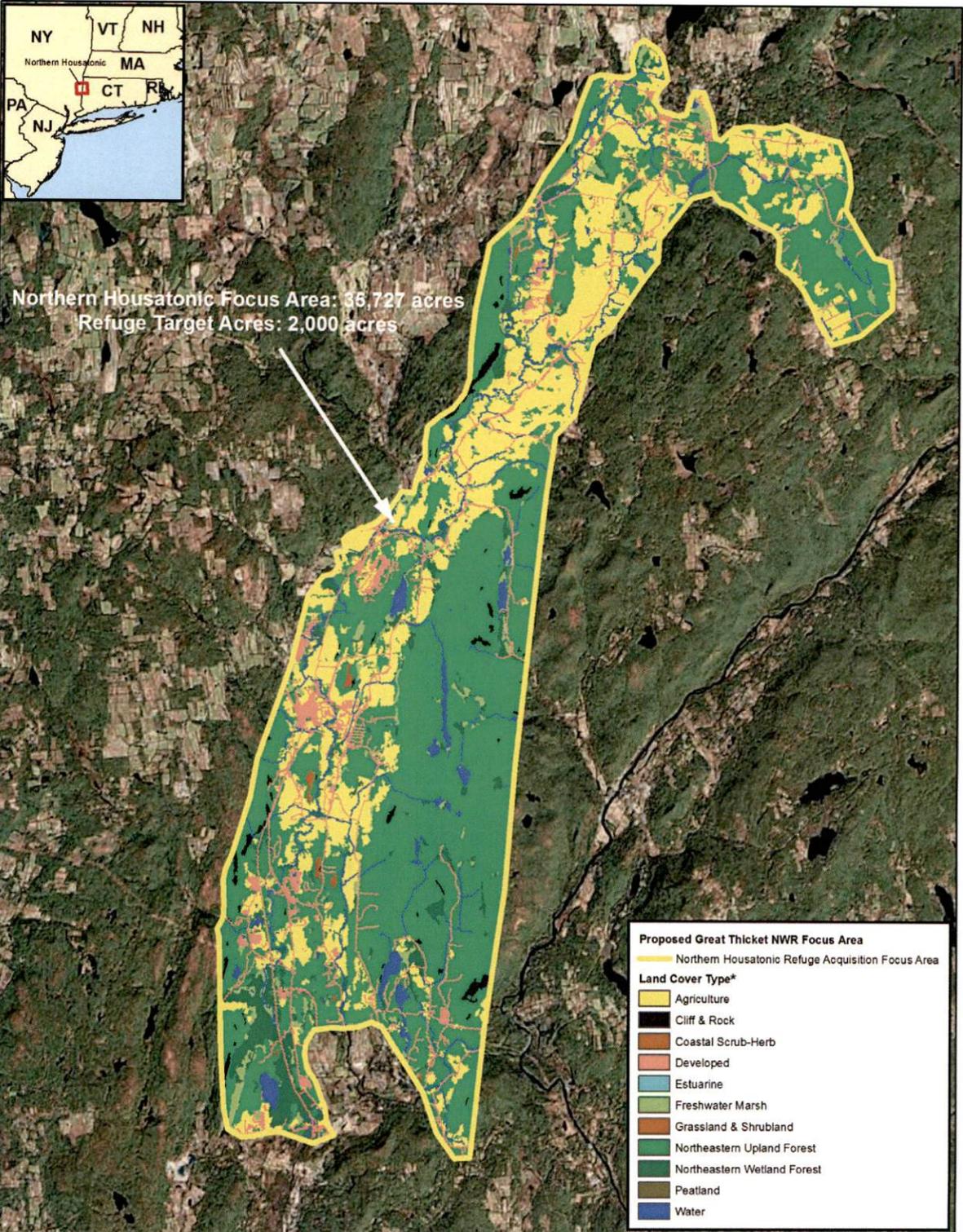
Map 20: Northern Housatonic Refuge Acquisition Focus Area



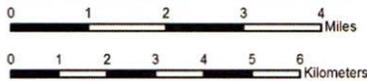
Map 21: Northern Housatonic Refuge Acquisition Focus Area: Land Cover Types



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Northern Housatonic: Land Cover Types
Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge (Proposed)



This map is not intended for use as a land survey or as a representation of land for conveyance or tax purposes. For more information visit the USFWS Northeast Region GIS website at <http://northeast.fws.gov/gis/>



*McGarigal et al. 2014. Designing Sustainable Landscapes. Univ of Massachusetts.





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LINDA FRENCH
 Supervisor
KATIE PALMER-HOUSE, E.A.D.
 Town Clerk

TOWN OF DOVER TOWN BOARD REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2016

The Town of Dover Town Board held a regular meeting at 6:30 pm on Wednesday, December 7, 2016 at the Dover Town Hall, 126 East Duncan Hill Road, Dover Plains, NY with the following members present:

Supervisor Linda French
 Deputy Supervisor Richard Yeno
 Councilwoman Jane Meunier
 Councilman Paul Palmer
 Councilman Joshua Viertel

(RESOLUTION #2932016)
RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE TOWN SUPERVISOR TO EXECUTE TERMINATION OF CONSERVATION EASEMENT

This following Resolution was offered by Councilman Viertel, seconded by Councilwoman Meunier, to wit:

WHEREAS, the Nature Conservancy is currently the fee simple owner of certain real property located in the Town of Dover known as Nellie Hill Preserve; and

WHEREAS, the Nature Conservancy granted the Town of Dover a conservation easement dated July 31, 1992 that encumbered the property for the purpose of conserving the natural values of the protected property; and

WHEREAS, the Nature Conservancy desires to convey the protected property to the United States of America, to be administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an addition to the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge; and

WHEREAS, the United States of America has a policy of not acquiring land which has restrictions on the property which is why the conservation easement is being terminated.

WHEREAS, the Town of Dover is satisfied that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service stewardship of the property will be consistent with the goals of original Conservation Easement signed by the Town of Dover.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Board of the Town of Dover does hereby authorize the Town Supervisor to execute a cancellation and Termination of Conservation Easement with a Nature Conservancy for the property known as Nellie Hill Preserve; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Town Clerk is authorized to provide a copy of the executed termination to the Nature Conservancy.

The question of the adoption of the foregoing Resolution was duly put to a vote which resulted as follows:

Supervisor French	Voting Aye
Deputy Supervisor Yeno	Voting Aye
Councilwoman Meunier	Voting Aye
Councilman Palmer	Voting Aye
Councilman Viertel	Voting Aye

The Resolution was thereupon adopted on December 7, 2016.

CERTIFICATION

I, **KATHRYN PALMER-HOUSE**, hereby certify that I am the **TOWN CLERK** for the **TOWN OF DOVER**, in said County of **DUTCHESS**, and do hereby certify the above is a true copy of the **RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE TOWN SUPERVISOR TO EXECUTE TERMINATION OF CONSERVATION EASEMENT**.

I further certify the record is located at the Dover Town Hall, in the Town Clerk's Office located at 126 East Duncan Hill Road, Dover Plains, New York. I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of said Town this 8th day of December, 2016.

(Seal)


 Kathryn Palmer-House, Town Clerk

Mid-Hudson

Refuge

Continued from Page 3A

Dover parcel 1st in 6-state wildlife refuge

Recreational uses to return after public comment time

JOHN FERRO
POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

DOVER PLAINS - Recreational uses are expected to remain largely unchanged and the town of Dover will see a slight increase in revenue following the acquisition of a 144-acre parcel in the town by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The Nature Conservancy has donated its Nellie Hill Preserve to the federal government. The transfer marks the official establishment of the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge, a six-state effort to acquire and preserve grassland habitats.

Federal, state and local officials gathered at Dover Town Hall Wednesday to formally announce the transaction, which was completed in December.

In October, the Fish & Wildlife Service finalized plans to acquire — either through purchases, donations or conservation easements from willing landowners — 15,000 acres of grasslands in New York, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

See REFUGE, Page 4A

About 1,500 of those acres are targeted within Dutchess County.

The loss of shrubby habitat, or young forest, has resulted in declining populations of more than 65 songbirds, mammals, reptiles, pollinators and other wildlife that depend on it, the agency has said.

"This is the largest conservation effort in the nation," said Wendi Weber, director of the Fish & Wildlife Service's Northeast Region.

Wednesday's announcement provided the first glimpse of a process that officials hope will take place repeatedly in the coming decades.

Locally, it means a brief moratorium on recreational uses at Nellie Hill. The pause is needed because federal regulations require a public-comment period prior to allowing access to newly acquired lands.

Refuge Manager Michael Horne said the comment period for all activities other than hunting will be two weeks. He expects the preserve to reopen for those uses before the end of February.

Horne said the review



Dover town Supervisor Linda French, center, applauds at the unveiling of signs marking the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge at a ceremony at Town Hall on Wednesday.

period for hunting takes longer, in part because of safety concerns and other impacts. The parcel will likely not be reopened to hunters until 2018, he said.

The town will see a slight revenue increase as a result of the transfer, according to town Supervisor Linda French.

The parcel has been exempt from property taxes since it was purchased by the nonprofit Nature Conservancy in 1991.

Under federal ownership, however, the town will benefit from the Fish & Wildlife Service's Refuge Revenue Sharing pro-

gram, a form of payments in lieu of taxes, albeit at a reduced rate. How much the town receives is subject to a formula determined each year by Congress, Horne said.

The Nellie Hill parcel was acquired by The Nature Conservancy from a local farming family to protect a number of rare plant species.

"By donating the property, that purpose is magnified," said Stuart Gruekin, chief conservation officer for the nonprofit's New York chapter. "It's leveraged to provide additional values to both peo-

ple and nature." The donation establishes Great Thicket as the nation's 566th wildlife refuge.

Bill Place, 68, a Dover Plains resident, said the property will benefit from the added management resources available from the Fish & Wildlife Service.

"And it's a huge honor to be the first property in this gigantic refuge," he said.

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