



# HOW IS YOUNG

Through a natural process known as **succession**, open areas like grassland or disturbed areas can start to grow shrubs and other woody vegetation and develop into young forest habitat. However, young forest does not stay young forever. It will become a more mature forest within 10 to 20 years if left alone. As the forest matures, larger trees will block sunlight from reaching the forest floor, and shade-loving species will populate the area. While this is beneficial to some animal species, many that depend on young forest habitat won't do well. Without periodic disturbances like floods caused by beavers, tree loss due to forest pests (such as insects), wildfires, or cutting down trees, young forest habitat can eventually disappear and cause a decline in the animal species that need it.



There are many ways to create and maintain young forest habitat. Allowing natural succession to take place on grassland habitats is one way. Old fields will slowly grow into shrubby, brushy areas. Sun-loving tree species will start to grow, as will a variety of wildflowers and grasses. In other cases,

mature trees are killed by forest pests, flooding, or other natural causes, creating openings in the forest habitat. Light is now able to reach the forest floor, and new trees begin to grow from seeds, saplings, or sprout from old stumps.

Another way is to create a **disturbance**, such as by cutting trees in an area of mature forest and then letting the area regrow. Many people think that cutting down trees is bad, but when it is done in the right place and at the right time, it can be good. Foresters, biologists and loggers work together to manage forest habitat. Having a variety of habitats—open meadows, young forests and mature forests—is beneficial for wildlife. A diversity of habitats leads to a diversity of wildlife, and a careful balance must be maintained to ensure that a diversity of habitats exist.



# FOREST CREATED?

Small areas can be cut in patches, or larger areas may be clear-cut to create an opening. As long as large cuts are not made in sensitive areas, such as on steep slopes, or without considering how the species living there will be affected, they can be a good way to manage habitat. Mature forest should be left nearby to provide food and shelter for wildlife while the cut area is growing back.



## Natural Cycle of Disturbance and Succession

Mature Forest



Disturbance Occurs  
wind, fire, flood, pests



Young Forest  
lasts 10-20 years



Forest Regenerates  
takes 1-2 years



Habitat Opening  
Created



Forest images: Ben Novak, Revive & Restore

Proper forest management can lead to a healthy forest **ecosystem**, one that has a variety of ages and types of trees and other vegetation. An ecosystem is the group of plants and animals found in a particular location. Besides being important wildlife habitat, healthy forests also benefit people. They help the environment with improved air quality and production of oxygen; nutrient cycling; and improved water quality through slowing runoff. They provide a place to enjoy activities such as hiking, photography, and watching wildlife. Healthy forests also provide many jobs and are an important part of the overall economy, providing products made from wood, such as paper, lumber, and furniture.

## What Is DEC Doing for Young Forests and Wildlife?

For decades, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has been managing state lands for wildlife habitat, watershed protection, open space preservation, timber production, and outdoor recreation.

DEC is working to benefit young forest wildlife as part of a larger effort occurring throughout the northeastern United States—the Young Forest Project. Learn more about the project at <http://youngforest.org/>.

DEC is helping young forest wildlife by creating more of the habitat on 90 DEC-owned Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) across the state. A minimum of 10% of the forested areas on these WMAs will be managed as young forest. Learn more about DEC's Young Forest Initiative at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/104218.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/104218.html).

