

4 May 2011

Tom Ritchie, Project Manager
Kleinfelder/SEA Consultants
215 First Street, Suite 320
Cambridge, MA 02142-1245

Re: Wildlife Habitat Assessment, Utility Pit Location
Contract 12 Project, Cambridge MA

Dear Mr. Ritchie,

At DCR's request, a Visual Assessment of the Contract 12 project site was conducted on the afternoon of Tuesday, May 3 from 1 to 2pm. The site was traversed in a zig-zag pattern with transects spaced approximately 15 feet apart beginning at one corner of the site, as staked by surveyors, and ending at the far corner stake. The visual assessment was conducted looking for wildlife or the presence of wildlife (nests, burrows, droppings, etc.) in the area identified as the proposed utility pit location. Virtually no signs of wildlife were identified with one notable exception - Rabbits. The only other wildlife observed was Robins (*Turdus migratorius*). Three Robins were seen on site during the one hour visit, but no nests were found. One Rabbit was seen, as well as burrows and droppings. The rabbit appeared to be an Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*).

The Eastern Cottontail can be found in meadows and shrubby areas in the eastern and south-central United States, southern Canada, eastern Mexico, Central America and northernmost South America. Mating occurs from February to October, depending on the weather. Originally, it was not found in New England, but it has been introduced and now competes for habitat with the native New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*).

It is nearly impossible to distinguish a New England cottontail from an eastern cottontail by looking at them. The minor differences of ear length, body mass, and presence or absence of a black spot between the ears and a black line on the front of each ear are subtle enough to be missed and are not 100 percent accurate. Scientists use DNA analysis of fecal pellets. New England cottontail numbers are declining. As recently as 1960, New England cottontails were found east of the Hudson River in New York, across all of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, north to southern Vermont and New Hampshire, and into southern Maine. Today, this rabbit's range has shrunk by more than 75 percent. Its numbers are so greatly reduced to only five smaller populations throughout its historic range. The New England cottontail prefers early successional forests, often called thickets, with thick and tangled vegetation. These young forests are generally less than 25 years old. Once large trees grow in a stand, the shrub layer tends to thin, creating habitat that the New England cottontail no longer finds suitable. Biologists believe the reduced extent of thicket habitat is the primary reason for the decline in numbers and range of New England cottontails. Eastern cottontails appear able to thrive in a greater variety of habitats and are gradually replacing the New England cottontail in many habitat patches.



The New England cottontail is the subject of research and habitat management in New York and the New England states. Halting the decline of scrub and brushland habitat is paramount, as is identifying potential habitat free of competing eastern cottontail to which New England cottontails could be restored. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service share the concern for the future of New England's only native cottontail.

With the exception of the slight possibility of the rabbit population being New England Cottontails, the site is not currently supporting notable wildlife.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug Smith', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Doug Smith
Professional Wetland Scientist #1156
Senior Project Manager

Photos from May 3, 2011 Site Assessment



Photo #1: Rabbit burrow



Photo #2: Rabbit burrow



Photo #3: Eastern cottontail rabbit



Photo #4: Rabbit burrow



Photo #5: Rabbit burrow



Photo #6: Eastern cottontail droppings