

# STAYING CONNECTED



## What is special about where *you* live?

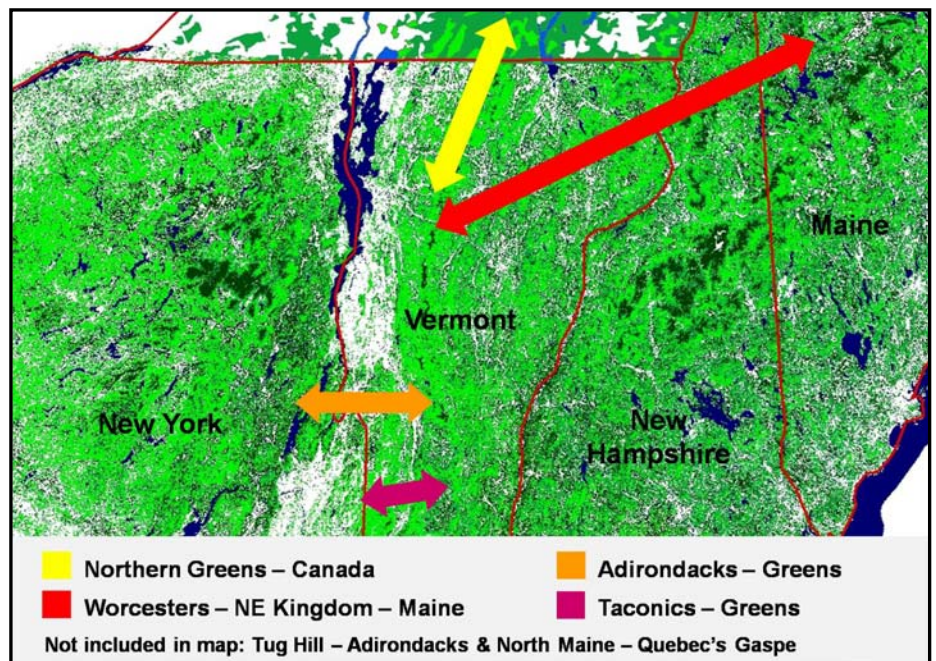
Time and again, people point to forests and wildlife when sharing what they love and value in our communities. Young and old, natives and newcomers, well-to-do and just scraping by, everyone seems to share this passion. Indeed, our natural resources define our quality of life. Clear air and clean water keep our families healthy; forests provide countless recreation opportunities (including hiking, hunting, fishing, photography, and snowmobiling); and the forest products, agriculture and tourism industries anchor our local economy. In Vermont, wildlife associated recreation alone generates more than \$400 million in revenues annually.

The Staying Connected Initiative is a partnership of local, state and national organizations and agencies working with communities to encourage the stewardship of these precious resources.

## At the crossroads...

Just as healthy local economies often require healthy regional economies, healthy local wildlife populations require healthy regional populations. Year in and year out, we see wildlife outside our doors because of the high quality habitat across the region.

We live at the crossroads of an extensive wildlife habitat network spanning the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada—from New York's Tug Hill Plateau and Adirondacks, across Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, and north to Québec's Gaspé Peninsula and the Canadian Maritime Provinces.



*Four regionally important wildlife connections*

**What's a wildlife network?** It's the combination of blocks of forest and connecting lands that many animals need for sufficient food, cover, and access to mates. The forest blocks provide prime wildlife habitat while the connecting lands—often small forest and woodland patches, wetlands and river corridors—allow wildlife movement across the landscape between larger forested blocks.

**We live at the crossroads of an extensive wildlife habitat network**

## A changing landscape

Our forests have mostly re-grown from intensive clearing in the 1800s. In response, wildlife that were once nearly gone from the state have returned. But now, modern development in the form of new roads and scattered development is fragmenting our forests in ways more difficult to reverse. The result is increasingly isolated “islands.”

### Wildlife and the changing landscape

While squirrels, blue jays and raccoons thrive in our backyards, many wildlife species, including black bear, moose, bobcat and fisher, will not survive over the long term in small forest patches. These species and many more need to move freely across the landscape to survive—between summer and winter food sources, to find mates, and in response to environmental changes. For this reason, in the face of increasing habitat fragmentation, the connections between larger patches of forest and between different habitats are critical for healthy wildlife populations.



### People and the changing landscape

Because our communities were built on a strong connection to the land, we can see the effects of increasing forest fragmentation. Fewer jobs tie us to the land and we have fewer opportunities to connect with nature and our region’s history – we are losing farms and farmers, logging is more difficult with decreasing lot sizes, and hikers, hunters and snowmobilers encounter challenges gaining access to land.



## The Staying Connected Initiative—linking it all together

Staying Connected seeks to connect landscapes for communities of wildlife *and* people. We are working with municipalities, citizens and partner organizations to maintain, enhance and restore landscape connections across our region. While wildlife habitat is our primary focus, we seek to collaborate with those interested in maintaining a healthy landscape for related purposes as well. By tailoring our efforts to each community’s needs, interests, and values, we offer a variety of tools and support. These may include:

- Raising awareness about local natural history, wildlife needs and movement patterns, and other land-based topics through community events
- Identifying local wildlife movement areas and improving key wildlife road crossings
- Assisting landowners interested in protecting or managing their land for the benefit of wildlife and other natural resources
- Providing technical assistance to municipalities interested in maintaining landscape connections



If you are interested in wildlife and maintaining connections to the land, or simply want to learn more about Staying Connected, please visit: [www.StayingConnectedInitiative.org](http://www.StayingConnectedInitiative.org)