



The Berkshire Wildlife Linkage: A Corridor for Wildlife and People

Hike the Massachusetts portion of the Appalachian Trail and you'll pass through seven large parks where wildlife and people move unimpeded across the landscape. Along these 90 miles of trail, you'll also cross more than 40 roads. The Berkshire Wildlife Linkage of western Massachusetts links the vast forests of the Green Mountains in Vermont and the rolling Hudson Highlands in New York. But it's a link that's being divided into smaller and smaller pieces. No matter how large, habitat that is disconnected from other similar habitat becomes an island—with dire consequences for the species living there. Within the Berkshire Wildlife Linkage, The Nature Conservancy and partners are maintaining connected habitats and restoring connections between areas fragmented by roads and development. Our vision is both ambitious and achievable:

We envision a landscape stretching from the Green Mountains in Vermont to the Hudson Highlands in New York and beyond, where core habitats are protected as well as corridors between them. People and wildlife of all types, from bears to beetles, move freely and safely: people move along roads, and wildlife and water move under roads. Foxes, otters, salamanders, and other moderately mobile wildlife are our measuring stick. If we are successful, these animals can always reach their next home through a landscape that provides for their needs as well as for ours.

How will we achieve our vision?

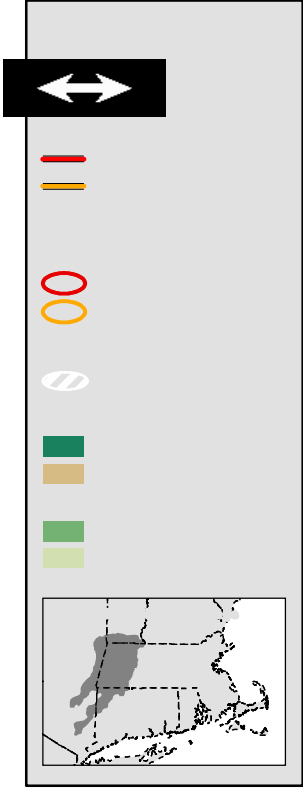
1. Fill in the gaps to create a continuous path of protected land in natural cover across western Massachusetts.
(see connectivity areas marked by ovals on map below)
Five-year goal: Complete protection of the path between one pair of forest core habitats.
2. Maintain or increase the ability of animals to cross all major roads within this path.
(see road segments marked by lines on map below)
Five-year goal: Create a wildlife passage under or over high-priority road barriers, focused on the major barriers to north-south movement: possibly Route 2 or the Mass Pike
3. Encourage land stewardship that allows for wildlife movement and maintains the ability of land to produce drinking water and remove greenhouse gases from the air.
Five-year goal: Through landowner outreach programs, connect the need for animals to move in response to climate change to the many other values of forested corridors.

Why is this important?

If we do these three things, we can expect less property damage and injury due to animal-vehicle collisions, safer roads that withstand storms even as severe as Irene and Sandy, healthier wildlife populations that are able to move to adapt to climate change, and a higher quality of life for communities in the linkage that depend on nature for their livelihood. This approach provides multiple benefits, increasing the return on financial investments. For example, replacing an undersized culvert that washes out after each major storm with a right-sized culvert reduces the chances of animal-vehicle collisions and also helps prevent washouts and associated expenses.



Bobcat in Berkshire Wildlife Linkage



A vertical panel on the left side of the map. At the top is a black box with a white double-headed arrow. Below it is a legend with several items: a red vertical line, a yellow vertical line, a red circle, a yellow circle, a white circle with a black outline, a green square, a brown square, a light green square, and a light yellow square. At the bottom of the panel is an inset map showing a larger geographical area with a grey shaded region.

