



How to Stay Connected in VERMONT

Now that you've learned about the importance of landscape connectivity for wildlife and the special role that your community plays in the broader region, please consider getting involved. Without active efforts to maintain and enhance existing landscape connections, both humans and wildlife will lose these valuable areas.

The following actions are ones that anyone can take, regardless of experience level or skills. There is a *Resources* handout in your folder (or you can download a copy at <http://stayingconnectedinitiative.org/resources/>) to help you get started and phone numbers in case you get stuck. Good luck and remember that we're rooting for you!

– The Staying Connected Team

If you are interested in conserving lands within the wildlife corridor:

- **Reach out to landowners – especially those with lands in or near the wildlife corridor – who have not yet conserved their land, or enrolled their parcel in the Current Use program.¹**

Compare your town's parcel map with its wildlife connectivity map and identify parcels in and near key habitat blocks. Write down the name, address, and parcel ID # for each and then:

- Check the Agency of Natural Resources' Natural Resources Atlas (<http://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/anra/>) to determine if any of the parcels have been conserved by easement or enrolled in the Current Use program.²
- Contact the landowners (by letter or door-to-door visit) to share information about: (1) the Staying Connected linkage, (2) the importance of this parcel given its location in/near a habitat block, and (3) tools that are available to help the landowner support connectivity. In particular, you might want to share information on the Current Use Program, estate planning, conservation easements and land trusts.



¹ The "Current Use" or Use Value Appraisal Program is run by the State of Vermont to help ensure that forests and farms are taxed for their productive use, rather than their development value.

² Go to "Show Map Layers," click on "Forests Parks and Recreation" (beneath the heading "ANR Atlas Layers"), and check the boxes next to "Use Value Appraisal Parcels" and "Conserved Lands."

- **Current Use:** See Chapter 6 (p. 19) of *Community Strategies for Vermont’s Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action*: <http://vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/>.
- **Estate Planning:** See *Keeping Forests for the Future: Planning a Legacy for Your Woodlands*: www.vnrc.org/landownersummit.
- **Conservation Easements:** See Chapter 8 (p. 25) of *Community Strategies for Vermont’s Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action*: <http://vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/>.

If your community is (or will soon be) working on a town plan update:

- ❑ **Discuss wildlife and landscape connectivity in the transportation, energy, and natural resources sections of the town plan.**
- ❑ **Include clear goals, policies, and actions that will maintain or enhance connectivity for wildlife.**

It is particularly important that *policies* are clearly stated – these may be used during the Act 250 review process to determine whether a proposed development upholds your town’s stated policies. In this respect, it is best to be decisive in your choice of language (for instance, “development on slopes over 25% shall be prohibited”). Don’t forget that town plans are also consulted for regional reviews, like Act 250 (which addresses proposed developments and large subdivisions) and Section 248 (which addresses proposed electricity generation and transmission, as well as telecommunication projects).



VNRC

If your community is or will be working on a zoning bylaw update:

- ❑ **Improve existing natural resource zoning districts – Conservation, Forest or Natural Resources Overlay – or rural residential districts in your town.**

You can ensure that your existing zoning districts are maintaining or enhancing wildlife by updating related *definitions* (or adding new ones) and *standards* within zoning and subdivision regulations. **Tip: Don’t forget to address wildlife in your rural residential district, too** – studies show that the majority of subdivision and subsequent habitat fragmentation are taking place in these zoning districts in Vermont.

- For more information, see Chapter 18 (p. 68) for sample **definitions** and Chapter 11 (p. 36-40, 73-77) for **standards** in *Community Strategies for Vermont’s Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action*: <http://vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/>.
- For more on subdivision trends in Vermont: <http://www.vnrc.org/subdivisionreport>.

- ❑ **Create or expand a Conservation, Forest or Natural Resource Overlay Zoning District.**

If your town does not have a Conservation, Forest or Natural Resources Overlay District, then your planning commission can propose the creation of one. Similarly, if your town already has one or

more of these zoning districts, but their boundaries do not adequately cover the land within the wildlife corridor, the planning commission can propose the expansion of the district(s). (The selectboard ultimately approves zoning changes.)

- For more information, see Chapter 12 (p. 41) for **Conservation Districts**, Chapter 13 (p. 46) for **Forest Districts**, and Chapter 14 (p. 50) for **Overlay Districts** in *Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action*: <http://vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/>.



VT Agency of Transportation

If your town has adopted subdivision regulations:

- Review your town's subdivision regulations to see whether they will adequately protect connectivity.**

Standards govern aspects of subdivisions (for instance, lot layout, the location of roads and utilities, and the size and location of building envelopes). Examine the standards in your subdivision regulations. Do they ensure that development will be located so that it does not disturb important forest and wildlife resources?

Also, check your zoning and subdivision regulations to see if they allow or require clustering, planned unit developments, or density averaging. These approaches to development consider the resources on the site, and allow flexibility in the layout of lots in order to avoid impacting the resources.

- See Chapter 11 (p. 36-40, 73-77) in *Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action*: <http://vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/>.

If your town does not have a zoning bylaw or subdivision regulations, but you would like the community to move in this direction:

- Encourage your planning commission, selectboard, and most importantly, your neighbors to support the adoption of a zoning bylaw and subdivision regulations.**
 - To learn more about zoning or subdivision regulations, please visit VNRC's Community Planning Toolbox (<http://vnrc.org/resources/community-planning-toolbox/>) and the Vermont Planning Information Center (www.vpic.info).

If you would like to address the role of roads within your linkage:

- Adopt a road or trail policy or ordinance – one that is not part of the town plan or zoning bylaw – and work to ensure that landscape connectivity is protected by it.**

If your community has a town plan, your planning commission can include road or trail policies in it. Additionally, regardless of whether your community has a town plan or zoning regulations, the selectboard has the power to create stand-alone road and trail ordinances. Since roads can fragment the landscape and act as barriers to the safe passage of animals from one forest block to another, they are an important topic to address.

- See Chapter 17 (p. 63) of *Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action*: <http://vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/>.

□ **Identify priority road crossings for wildlife.**

Once you have identified priority road crossings for wildlife in your town or region, you can focus your efforts to improve crossings in these geographical areas. The Staying Connected Initiative partners can help you. For their contact information, see *How to Map Wildlife Data in Your Town* in the *Resources* handout in your folder or download a copy online at: <http://stayingconnectedinitiative.org/resources/>.

□ **Assess your town's culverts and bridges for wildlife connectivity and prepare recommendations.**

Towns usually replace culverts on an as needed basis. To improve wildlife road crossing safety, you can assess culverts, as well as bridges, and be ready with recommendations on size or materials for the replacement. Recommendations should be presented to the selectboard and the leader of the Road Crew.

Please check with town officials to see whether your community already has a culvert and bridge inventory – if yes, you should work off of this document.

- See Chapter 2, p. 24-50 in the *2012 Vermont Transportation & Habitat Connectivity Guidance Document*: http://stayingconnectedinitiative.org/assets/vtrans_transport_habitat_connectivity_guidance_final_dec2012.pdf.

□ **Encourage your regional planning commission (RPC) to incorporate wildlife connectivity into their bridge and culvert prioritization process.**

- To learn more about this process, contact your RPC and ask to speak to the transportation planner on staff. To find contact information for your RPC, go to www.vapda.org.
- See *Wildlife Crossings Structure Handbook - Design and Evaluation in North America*: http://www.cflhd.gov/programs/techdevelopment/wildlife/documents/01_Wildlife_Crossing_Structures_Handbook.pdf.



Wildlife shelf under I-89, Route 2