

# STAYING CONNECTED

Empowering Communities to protect wildlife and local values in a changing world

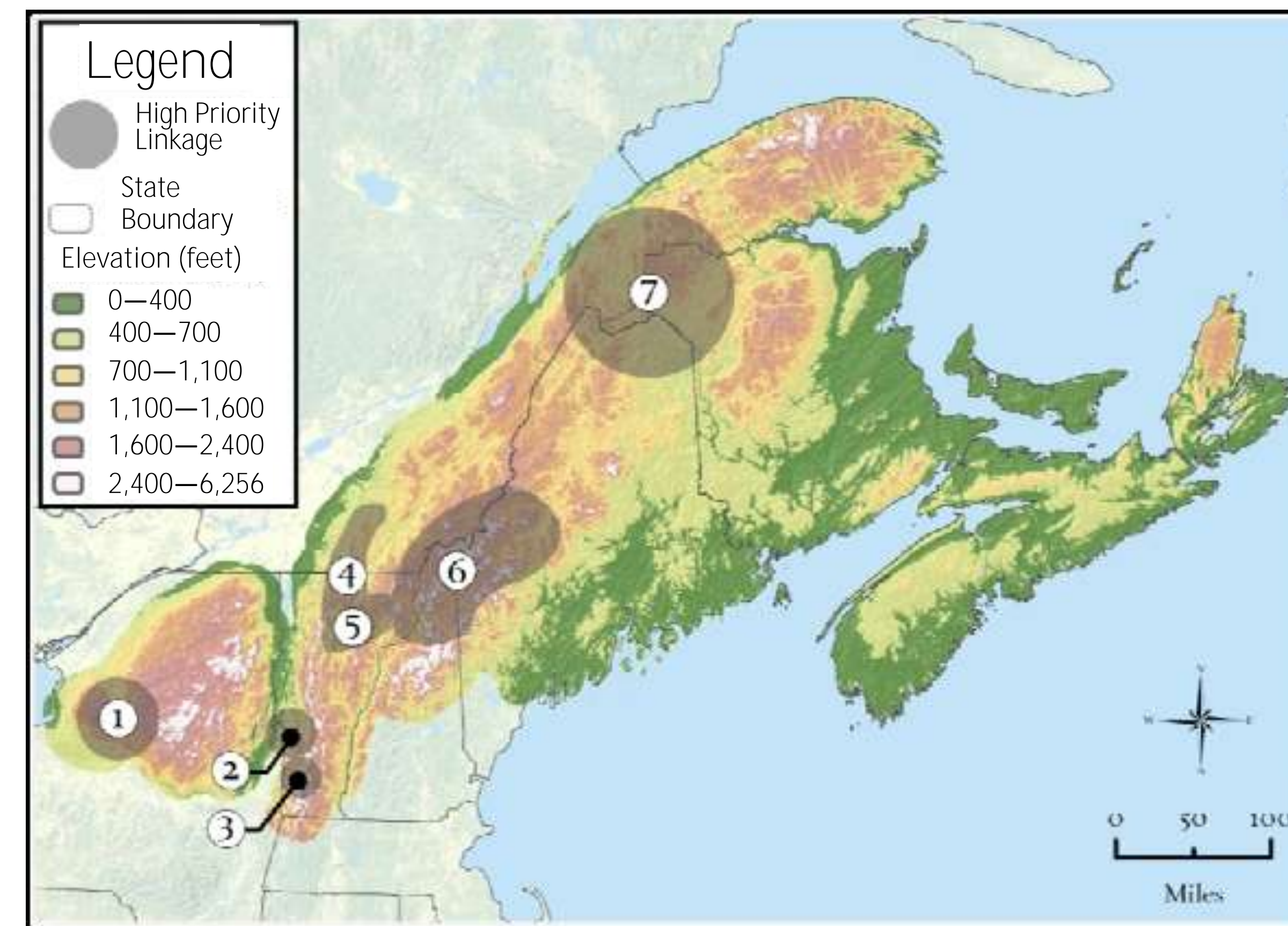
## What is the Staying Connected Initiative?

*Staying Connected in the Northern Appalachians* is an initiative to help safeguard wide-ranging and forest-dwelling wildlife such as bear, moose, lynx, marten and bobcat from the impacts of habitat fragmentation and climate change by maintaining and restoring landscape connections across the Northern Appalachians region.



Andre Jenney

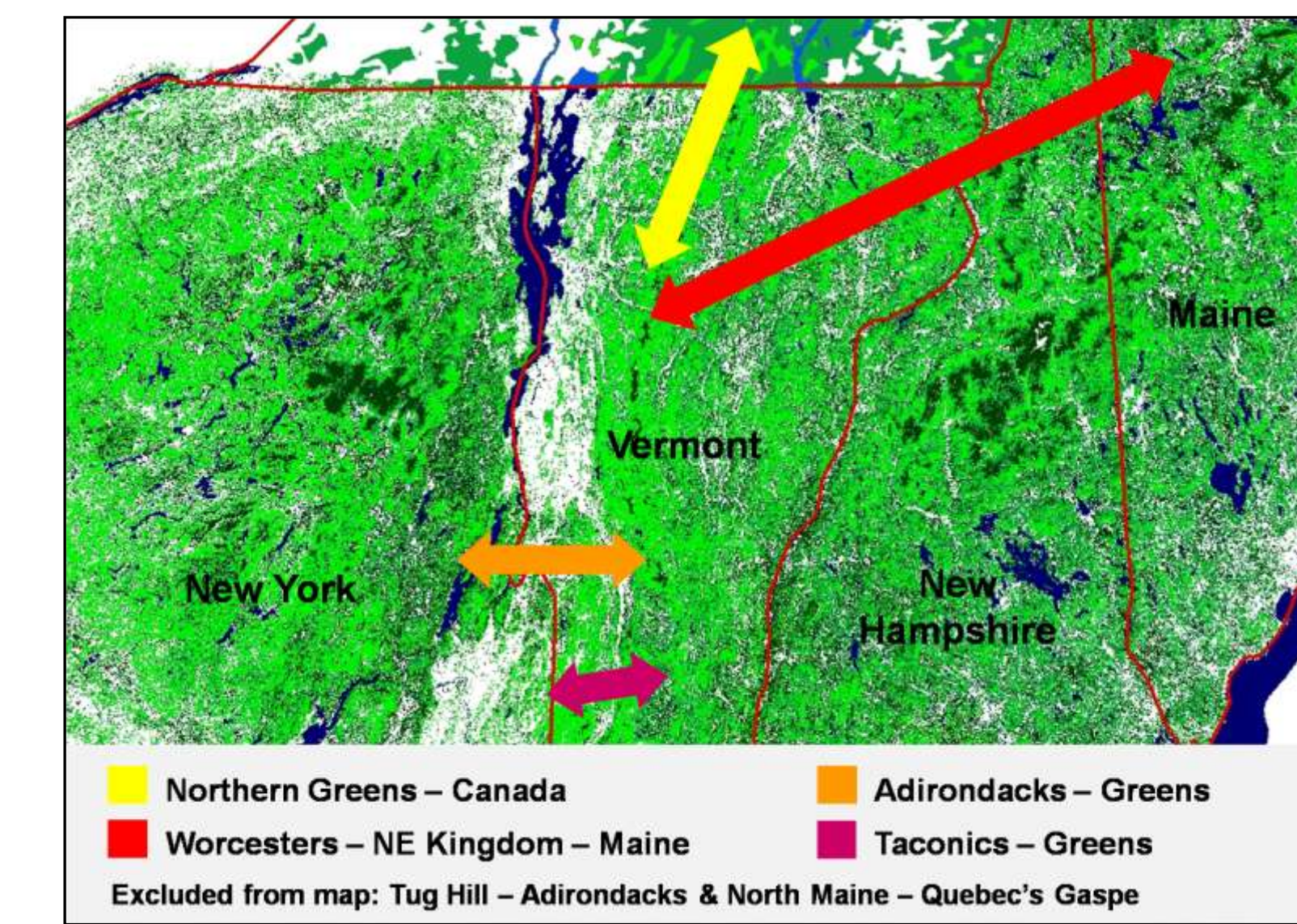
- 1- Tug Hill Plateau ↔ Adirondack Mountains (NY)
- 2- Adirondack Mountains ↔ Green Mountains (NY-VT)
- 3- Taconic Mountains ↔ Southern Green Mountains (NY-VT)
- 4- Northern Green Mountains (VT-Canada)
- 5- Worcester Range ↔ Northeast Kingdom (VT)
- 6- Northeast Kingdom ↔ Northern NH ↔ Western Maine Mountains (VT-NH-ME)
- 7- Maine's North Woods ↔ Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula (ME-Canada)



Regionally Important Linkages that are focus areas for the Staying Connected Initiative.

## What is 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.



Staying Connected Linkage Areas in Vermont. The "Crossroads" of Habitat Connectivity

## What is the Staying Connected Initiative doing?

*Staying Connected* is helping individuals and communities to choose actions that will sustain wildlife and local community values such as hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation in a rapidly changing world. The initiative focuses on seven priority areas across the Northern Appalachians where landscape connections for wildlife movement are at risk due to development and roads. (See map at center)

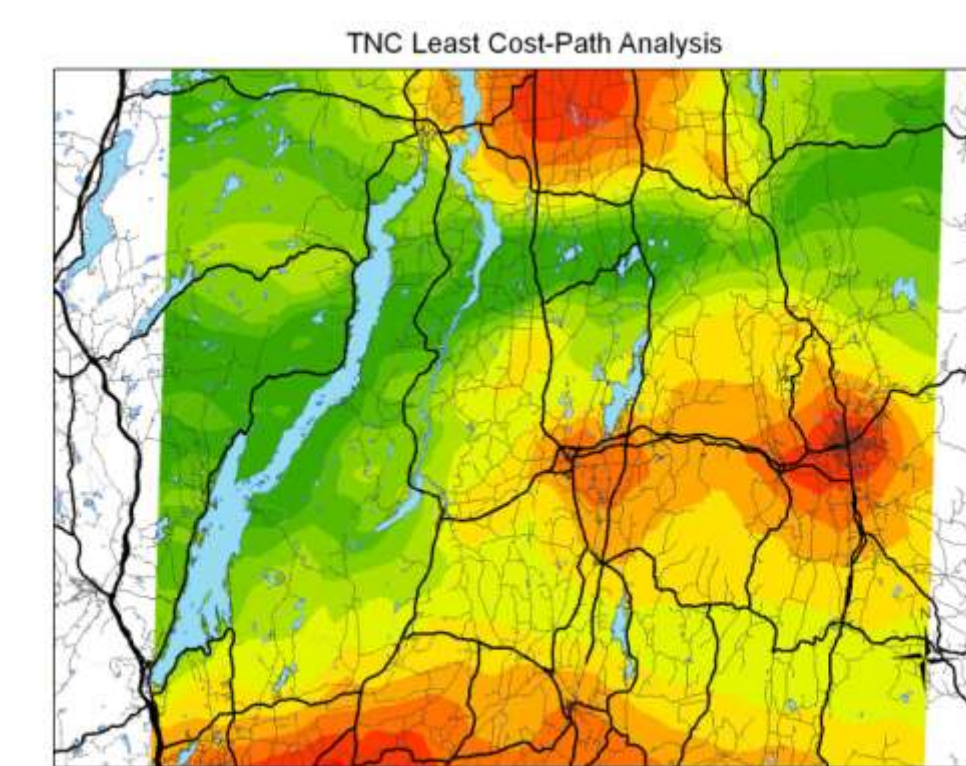
Within these landscapes, project partners and communities are identifying the key areas of local connectivity – or linkages - that allow wildlife to successfully move through intact and fragmented landscapes. We are engaging landowners, organizations and municipalities to protect, restore, maintain, and enhance habitat blocks and the connections among them. And we are working with state transportation agencies and local communities to reduce the dangers to wildlife seeking to cross well-traveled roads.

## Conservation Science

*Staying Connected* partners and staff have performed in-depth modeling of key linkage areas on regional and local scales using GIS. The Nature Conservancy has led an in depth species-specific wildlife habitat suitability modeling effort in the Northern New Hampshire linkage and Vermont Land Trust has worked on a Habitat Blocks and Connectivity model for all of Vermont. This modeling is being verified by aerial reconnaissance (with the help of volunteers from LIGHTHAWK) and with extensive field work (like the Critical Paths projects).



A computer model showing core forest areas (in green) and likely connecting lands (in orange) in the Taconics to Greens Linkage Area



Least-cost path is one type of computer model used to identify areas of likely wildlife movement (in green) in the Adirondacks to Greens Linkage Area



Conserved land creates key "stepping stones" in the system of wildlife habitat connectivity

## Land Protection

Vermont Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land have been actively working with willing landowners to secure easements on key connecting lands across Vermont and beyond.



Every year, thousands of animals are hit crossing busy roads and drivers lives are put at risk. Identifying places where the network of wildlife habitat connectivity and our road system overlap is critically important for wildlife and people

## Technical Assistance to Communities & Landowners

*Staying Connected* has hired Linkage Coordinators for most of the linkage areas in Vermont to work with local communities, matching local interests and projects with appropriate Staying Connected partners so that communities decide what connectivity looks like and what regulatory and non-regulatory tools are most appropriate to be used in each area.



A partner "Organizational Mapping" effort in the Worcesters to Kingdom Linkage area shows which partner groups are doing what and where.



Public input from community groups such as recreational groups, rod and gun clubs, watershed associations, historical groups, conservation and planning commissions and many more, is critically important to defining local visions for habitat connectivity.



## Key Road Sections

*Staying Connected* has worked through a variety of partners to field-identify key road sections for wildlife to cross roads as a way of further verifying GIS modeling and adding specificity to local decision-making. Critical Paths projects are supported by USFWS as a State wildlife grant with VT Fish & Wildlife Department, National Wildlife Federation and Vermont Natural Resources Council. Vermont Agency of Transportation has been actively involved in this effort.

## How is Staying Connected funded?

*Staying Connected* is one of only 12 projects funded nationwide in 2009 through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Competitive State Wildlife Grants Program – the country's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered in every state. Additional funding comes from the Wildlife Conservation Society's Wildlife Action Opportunities Fund, established with support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and from project partners. With these commitments, *Staying Connected* is able to launch the partnership, fund core operations, and initiate conservation actions through early 2012. Maintaining and restoring landscape connections across the Northern Forest is a much longer-term effort, however, and success will require greater capacity, additional funding and expanded partnerships.

We live at the crossroads of an extensive wildlife habitat network