

Habitat Blocks

A Habitat Block is an area of natural cover (including forest, wetland, shrubland, rivers, streams, lakes & ponds). It is bounded by roads, development and agriculture. Habitat Blocks vary in size from small to very large, but for these purposes are only larger than 20 acres. In total there are 4,214 Habitat Blocks ranging from 20 acres to 150,294 acres, with an average size of 1,078 acres.

Habitat Blocks are an essential unit in conservation planning. Since they encompass important habitats for a huge range of species, protecting these blocks indirectly protects the many other species that use them. So, in Vermont Conservation Design they are the building blocks for the terrestrial landscape scale components. Selections of Habitat Blocks are the basis for several components in Vermont Conservation Design that appear in BioFinder 4.0 including: Interior Forest Blocks, Connectivity Blocks & Geological Diversity Blocks. These display in the “Prioritization” map theme. Habitat Blocks are displayed in their entirety in the “Inventory” map theme on BioFinder.

Why is it Important?

Many wildlife species rely on large blocks of contiguous forest and secure connections to other large forest blocks for all or part of their habitat needs. For instance, the home range of an adult male black bear can be as large as 50 square miles. Black bear, fisher, otter, bobcats, and other species of wildlife move great distances to find food, water, dens, refuge, and other important habitat resources. Many songbirds require large areas of forest cover that are free from fragmentation and human disturbance. There are many other recognized ecological, social, and economic values of large contiguous forest blocks. These areas represent many of the natural heritage values and support the rural working landscape that makes Vermont unique in the developing landscape of the northeast.

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How was it made?

The 2023 Habitat Blocks were created by adding together several available datasets to show “natural cover”. Then “developed lands” were removed from natural cover to create the blocks.

“Natural cover” is the combination of tree canopy, surface waters (excluding Lake Champlain), shrublands, wetlands, and significant natural communities. Mapping of significant natural communities relies on a mix of satellite data and boots-on-the-ground fieldwork by scientists.

Habitat Blocks Summary



BioFinder 4.0 2023

www.BioFinder.vt.gov

A separate “developed lands” layer was created by combining railroads, larger roads, buildings, ski trails, and areas where agriculture/wetland overlap. All buildings were given a 150-ft buffer to include the area of disturbance.

With the natural cover and developed lands created, Habitat Blocks were created by removing developed lands from natural cover.