Interior Forest Blocks Summary

BioFinder 4.0 2023 www.BioFinder.vt.gov

Interior Forest Blocks

Interior Forest Blocks are a selection of habitat blocks that best provide interior forest conditions in each biophysical region of Vermont. Habitat blocks themselves are areas of contiguous forest and other natural habitats that are unbroken by roads, development, or agriculture. This dataset is a selection among all the available habitat blocks in each biophysical region to those with the best likelihood of offering interior forest conditions. Vermont's habitat blocks are primarily forests, but also include wetlands, rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, cliffs, and rock outcrops. Forests included in habitat blocks may be young, early-successional stands, actively managed forests, or mature forests with little or no recent logging activity. The defining factor is that there is little or no permanent habitat fragmentation from roads, agricultural lands and other forms of development within a habitat block.

Why is it Important?

Interior forest blocks support the biological requirements of many native plants and animals. They support viable populations of wide-ranging animals, including bobcat, American Marten, and black bear, that require large areas to survive by allowing access to important feeding habitat, the ability to move and find mates for reproduction, and as a result ensure genetic integrity of populations. Larger forest blocks serve as habitat for source populations of dispersing animals for recolonization of nearby areas that may have lost their original populations of those species. Habita Blocks supports natural ecological processes such as predator/prey interactions, hydrologic regimes and natural disturbance. They also serve to buffer species against the negative consequences of fragmentation, maintain air and water quality and allow many species of plants and animals to shift their range in response to a changing climate.

Priority Interior Forest Blocks are highly ranked forest blocks from all biophysical regions that provide important interior forest habitat and provide ecological support to the highest priority Forest Interior Blocks. *Highest Priority Forest Blocks*: are the largest forest blocks from all biophysical regions with certain minimum "Core Forest" thresholds that provide the foundation for interior forest habitat and associated ecological functions.

How was it made?

Interior Forest Blocks are a selection (i.e., a subset) of all the available Habitat Blocks in Vermont. New Habitat Blocks were created in 2023 (See Habitat Blocks for more information on how that data was created.)

Two metrics were used to select Highest Priority & Priority Interior Forest Blocks; acreage and core forest. A minimum acreage was set to capture the largest blocks in each biophysical region. Each of the biophysical regions has experienced different amounts of forest fragmentation because of human settlement patterns. Consequently, what a big forest looks like varies by location (e.g. the Champlain Valley where there is exponentially more biological diversity but also much more human

settlement) . Core Forest was measured by creating an internal buffer 200 meters within each habitat block. This is a way of addressing different shaped habitat blocks and selecting ones that are more round and have more interior area than ones that are more narrow and have less interior area. Minimum acreages were set between 1,00 and 5,000 acres and Minimum Core Forest set between 0 and 500 depending on the biophysical region. Below are the minimum acreages and minimum core forest acreages for each biophysical region.

For more technical information about the Interior Forest Component see the 2023 Technical Abstract