

PART TWO:
Forest
Habitat
Management



4. FOREST MANAGEMENT: AN OVERVIEW

In Vermont today, nearly 76 percent of the landscape consists of forest. This is in stark contrast to the Vermont landscape of the 1800s when vast areas were cleared for farming and agriculture. Over time, the Vermont landscape has returned to a largely forested condition a wide variety of forest community types. This matrix of forest habitats, which comprises large and small patches connected by streams, wetlands, fencerows, and forest strips, creates valuable wildlife habitat. On the landscape scale, these forest blocks provide habitat for many, if not most, of Vermont's native wildlife. In fact, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department developed a GIS layer that illustrates the extent of forest blocks throughout Vermont and serves as a valuable tool for understanding the location, distribution, size and condition of these habitat features at a broad scale (see Figure 4.1).

Forest habitats consist of many different tree and plant species that comprise an array of natural communities ranging from the large and widely distributed northern hardwood forest to the scarce and sensitive clayplain forest. To fully benefit from the natural community concept for habitat management, you will need to gain an understanding of a wide range of plants and animals that interact together to create the various communities. While not essential for managing habitat for wildlife, this understanding of, and appreciation for, natural communities will allow your land to achieve greater benefits from your management actions.

Fine scale habitat elements, such as snags, stumps, dead and down trees, rock piles, concentrated areas of nut-producing trees (mast) such as red oak and American beech, are all part of the larger forest habitat conditions and are especially important to identify and understand for effective forest habitat management.

Many of the important concepts covered in Chapter 3, “Habitat Concepts and Features,” will help you make informed decisions about how to manage an area of forest to benefit wildlife habitat. For instance, if you wish to develop old forest conditions (a condition that is uncommon in Vermont), you may elect to increase the density of large diameter live and dead trees within the management area. This in turn requires that consideration be given to retention of snags and down woody material for perch sites, cavity trees, drumming logs, and escape cover. It also requires careful attention and patience to increase the density of large diameter trees. Old forests are highly complex forest systems and provide important wildlife habitat values not found in mid-aged forests, such as habitat for American marten, a rare wide-ranging carnivore that is native to Vermont, and dependent upon mature, old, softwood forests with diverse structure consisting of standing and down woody material that attracts and supports the small mammals it preys upon.

This chapter provides information on some important forest habitat conditions that should be considered when developing a management plan for forest wildlife habitat. Many useful and important references on this subject exist and you are encouraged to supplement the information in this guide book through the recommended readings referenced at the end of each chapter in Resources.

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F5 BLOCK SIZE

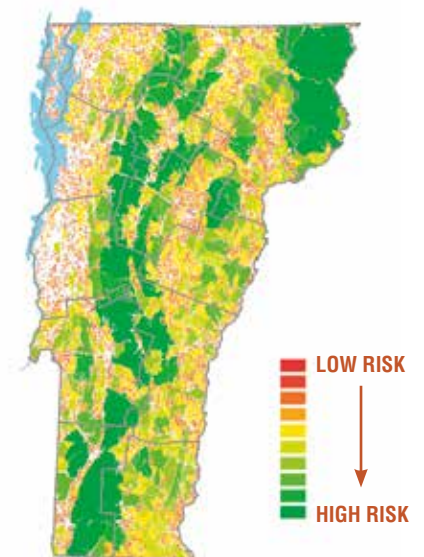


Figure 4.1 Forest blocks in Vermont as seen through GIS