

How Does Corinth Maintain its Rural Character and Natural Resources?

Did you know that about 90% of Corinth's land area is composed of Primary Forest Blocks and Wildlife Corridors? Since 2018 the State of Vermont requires all municipalities to address the maintenance of these natural resources in their planning for future land use.

From Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.....

Although forests cover 74% of the state today, Vermont wasn't always the "Green Mountain" state. At the time of European settlement, forests covered almost all of Vermont, but wide-scale clearing begun in the early 1800s significantly changed the landscape to an agricultural haven. Clearing reached its peak in the mid- to late-1800s and reduced forest cover to about 35% of the state. Over the last century, westward expansion, the decline of the sheep industry, and reduced timber harvesting have contributed to the steady regrowth of Vermont's forests. Today's forests are the result of significant reforestation.

At present, reforestation is slowing as commercial and residential development increases. For the first time in a century, Vermont is experiencing an overall loss of forest cover. While it is hard to pin down the exact amount of acreage, a US Forest Service report indicates Vermont may have lost up to 69,000 acres of forest land between 2010 to 2015.

A look at the larger pattern shows that the primary driver of forest fragmentation is rural sprawl. This type of fragmentation occurs incrementally, beginning with cleared swaths or pockets within an otherwise unbroken expanse of tree cover. Over time, new roads, homes, businesses, driveways, and yards intrude into connected forest acres. Eventually, the contiguous forest is reduced to scattered and disconnected forest islands surrounded by land uses that threaten the health, function, and value of these forests as animal and plant habitat. Furthermore, as forest fragments become ever smaller, practicing forestry becomes operationally impractical, economically nonviable, and culturally unacceptable. In turn, we lose the corresponding and significant contributions that forestry makes to our own economy and culture.

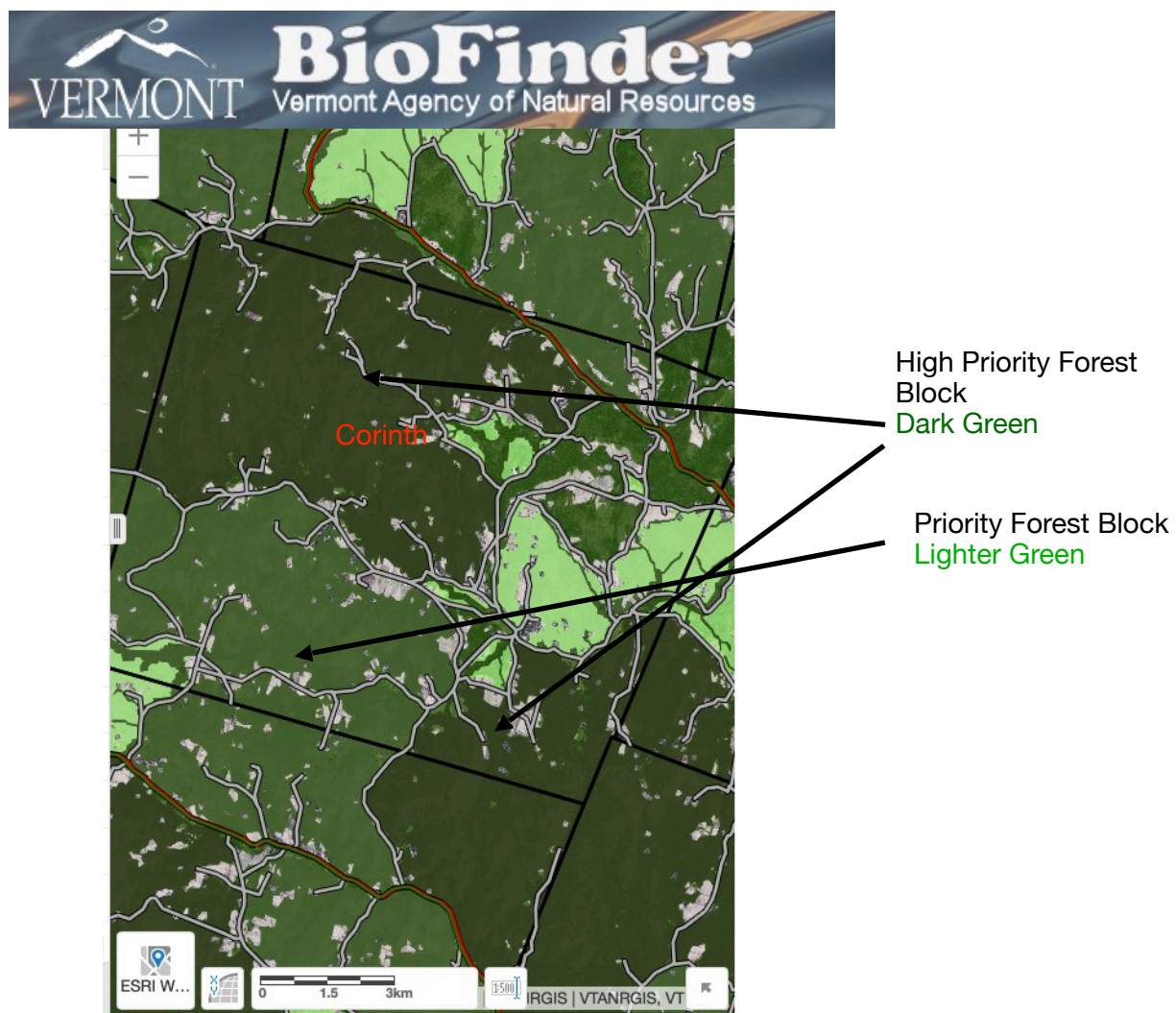
The benefits provided by Forest Blocks and Wildlife Corridors include:

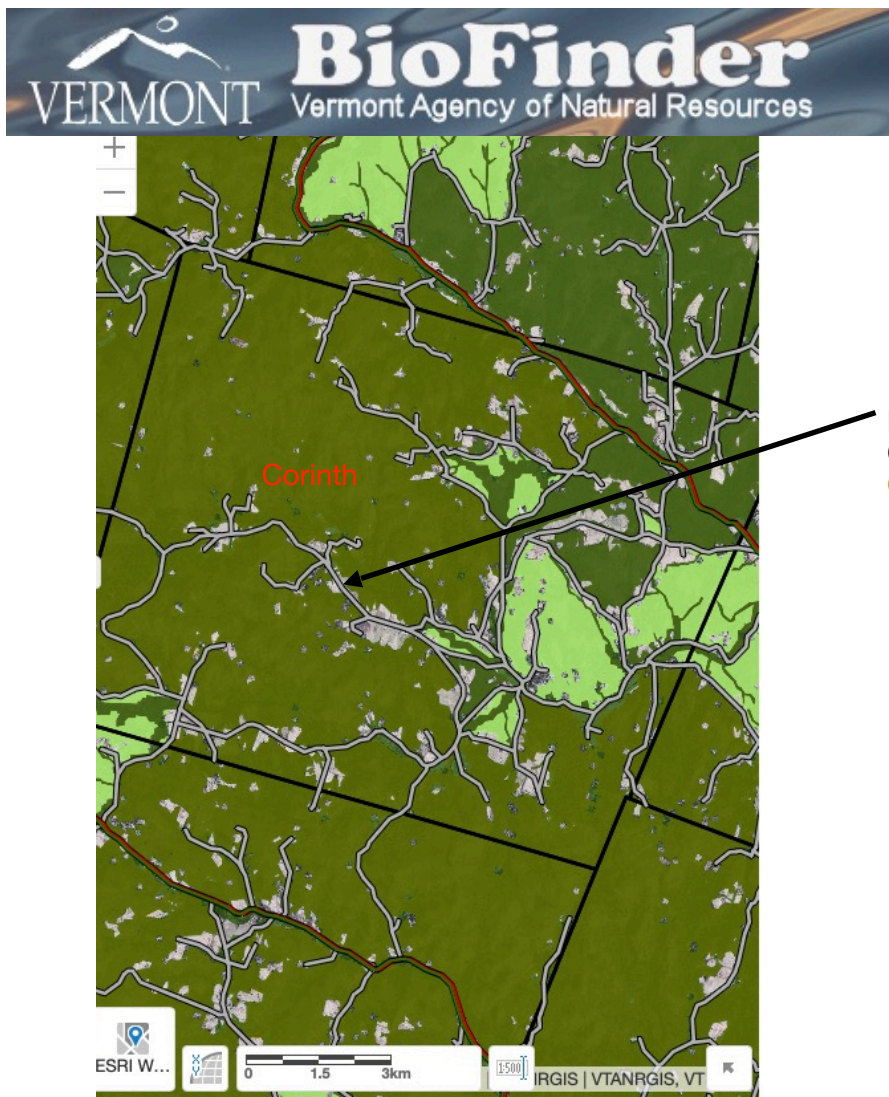
BENEFITS	FOREST BLOCKS & HABITAT CONNECTORS
Forest Products Economy	The harvest and manufacturing of forest products contributes \$1.4 billion in annual economic output to Vermont's economy.
Economics of Scenery, Fall Foliage, Tourism, and Recreation	A large percentage of recreation and tourism activities are vitally linked to the forest. Money flowing in to Vermont's economy can be attributed directly or indirectly to forest based recreation and tourism.
Flood Protection	Healthy forests play a vital role in absorbing water and moderating its movement across the landscape. Although forests cannot prevent large floods, they do temper flood frequency, intensity, and extent, which in turn significantly reduces the loss of life and damage to property caused by serious flooding.
Clean Water Supply	Forests provide clean water for drinking, recreation, and habitat. This contribution reduces, and in some cases eliminates, the need for expenditures related to manmade infrastructure designed to ensure clean water.
Clean Air	Forests intercept many air pollutants and store them temporarily on leaves and ultimately on the forest floor and within soil. Fine particulate air pollution has serious human health effects, including premature mortality, pulmonary inflammation, accelerated arteriosclerosis, and altered cardiac functions.

Corinth has been fortunate, the development pressure that faces many towns within Vermont has been minimal. The rural character of our community which forms the basis for what we love about our town remains pretty much in tact. But the handwriting is on the wall....thanks in part to the Pandemic. Interest in our way of life, open spaces, presumed safety from Covid has driven the real estate market crazy in Vermont this year.

Vermont recognized the threat years ago....working with the state Agency of Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Department and various non profits concerned about the environment, natural resources, and land use the legislature developed Act 171. Enacted in 2017, it created the requirement for all towns in Vermont to address our diminishing forests and wildlife habitat in their town plans. Specifically ACT 171 requires towns to address designated Forest Blocks and Wildlife Corridors in their future land use planning.

As you can see below Corinth's boundaries encompass almost entirely designated forest blocks and wildlife corridors.





What is a Forest Block?

A contiguous area of forest in any stage of succession and not currently developed for non-forest use. A forest block may include recreational trails, wetlands, or other forest features that do not themselves possess tree cover, and uses exempt from regulation under 4413(d) of Act 171.

What is a Wildlife Corridor?

Land or water, or both, that links patches of wildlife habitats within a landscape, allowing the movement, migration, and dispersal of animals and plants and the functioning of ecological processes. A wildlife corridor may include recreational trails and uses exempt from regulation under subsection 4413(d) under Act 171.

If you're interested in a more detailed explanation of Forest Blocks and Wildlife Corridors visit this presentation by Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nwe98OS33tQ>

What Actions are Currently Ongoing in Corinth?

Guidance provided by the state for Corinth's Town Plan to be compliant with Act 171 includes the following: (See Planning: A Key Step Towards Protecting Forest and Wildlife Resources - ACT 171 GUIDANCE, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, March 2018)

Municipalities that have plans approved by the Regional Planning Commission must include

(2) A land use plan, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses, that:

(A) Indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural lands identification process established in 6 V.S.A. §8), residence, commerce, industry, public, and semi- public uses, and open spaces, areas reserved for flood plain, and areas identified by the State, the regional planning commission, or the municipality that require special consideration for aquifer protection; for wetland protection; for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors; or for other conservation purposes.

(D) Indicates those areas that are important as forest blocks and habitat connectors and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests. A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the municipality.

Corinth's 2019 Town Plan addresses these requirements in the Natural Resources Section as follows:

Policies

- 1 Encourage long-term protection of high priority forest habitats.
- 2 Deer wintering areas and endangered species sites should be protected from developments and other uses that adversely impact the resources.
- 3 Development shall be designed so as to preserve continuous areas of wildlife habitat.
- 4 Fragmentation of wildlife habitat is discouraged. Effort shall be made to maintain connecting links between such areas.
- 5 Preference shall be given to development that utilizes existing roads and field lines.
- 6 Development including the construction of utilities and roads in high priority forest blocks and habitat connectors is incompatible with this Plan.
- 7 Encourage sound forest management practices.
- 8 Public investments should be planned to minimize development pressure on agricultural

and forest lands.

The Conservation Commission believes a realistic approach to maintaining the forest and wildlife resources that contribute to what we all love about Corinth will take more than words in a plan.

Our community, including land owners, land users, foresters, hunters, fishermen and farmers should work together to protect what we have. Recognize the future value of these resources and don't allow their sacrifice for near term benefits.

Clearly Corinth's landowners are the frontline workers in this effort. Their decisions on land use, subdivisions, and development define our future. The Conservation Commission will be working hard to make sure everyone who is privileged to own land within our Forest Blocks and Wildlife Corridors has all the knowledge, resources and support they need to make wise decisions.

To that end we plan to:

- Educate Corinth on ACT 171 Implementation.....Continue to publish informative articles on the Conservation Commission web page within the Town's official web site.
- "SEE IT FOR YOURSELF..." Conduct outdoor seminars led by wildlife and forestry experts within our high priority forest blocks and wildlife corridors.
- Support Land Owners.....Provide access to resources for long term planning, opportunities for increased value and affordability and help in decision making.

Check out the quarterly newsletter for future events and further information on the web.