

Wildlife, key to Corinth's Rural Character

In a rural town like Corinth it isn't unusual to see a variety of wildlife, often right in our backyard. What can seem common can only remain that way if we protect the habitat that all species need to thrive and multiply.

People excel at creating the habitat they need to survive but animals are dependent on what nature provides. When human habitat alters or invades other animals territories those animals are often displaced or forced to feed in areas farther from their homes including needing to cross roads or open ground that leaves them vulnerable.

This is why understanding what other species need to survive is important to keep from unnecessarily destroying essential animal habitat. Uninterrupted forest is one of the most important habitat requirements as is access to water. These two things form the foundation of wildlife corridors, basically animal highways for feeding and breeding. That is why the State passed Act 171 and why protecting these limited zones are part of our town plan.

Corinth's 2019 Town Plan addresses these issues and lays the groundwork for maintaining the rural character of our community. The Conservation Commission has taken on the role of educator and facilitator to help every landowner recognize their role in meeting the goals of our land use planning.

In our last article we focused on the issue of Forest Blocks....defined as a contiguous area of forest not currently developed for non forest use. According to the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources upwards of 90% of the land area in Corinth is characterized as Forest Blocks.

This discussion will focus on the second element, Wildlife Corridors. Certainly healthy forests will always be key to thriving wildlife. But equally as important is the ability of species to move safely within multiple habitat areas for food, water, shelter and mates to survive.

From the Vermont Fish and Wildlife and Natural Resources Agency;

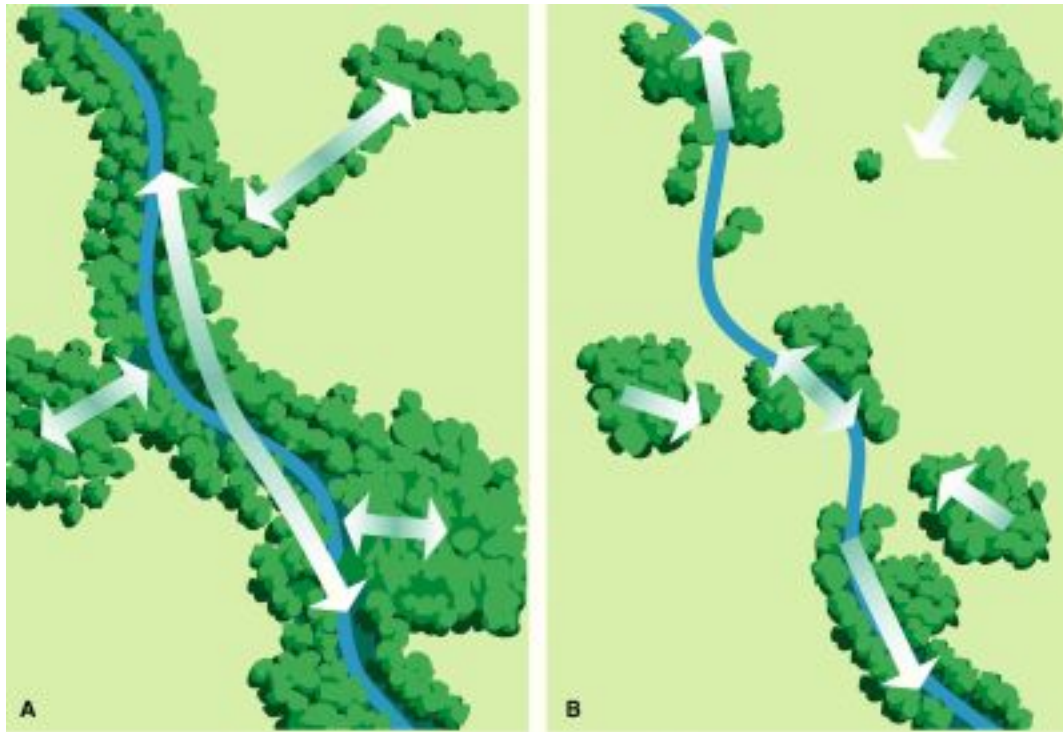
"....Habitat connectors (Wildlife Corridors in today's parlance) refer to land or water that links larger patches of habitat within a landscape to allow for the movement, migration, and dispersal of animals and plants. They can be a forest block, riparian area, or a specific road crossing that wildlife repeatedly use. Examples include small habitat blocks that serve as stepping stones between core forest, riparian habitat along streams and rivers, strips of forest cover between developed areas, hedgerows, or fencerows. Sizes can range from a fraction of an acre to one or two hundred acres.

Movement of animals from one habitat patch to another is the most common function attributed to habitat connectors. This is true for both wide and small ranged animals. Bobcats and black bears might use connections quite frequently, whereas spotted salamanders might use them only a few nights each spring to move from hibernation sites to breeding pools."

As our population expands development of rural land has grown far out of proportion to the actual increase in people. This development disrupts wildlife habitat by fragmenting the land, reducing food and water supplies, shelter and the ability to safely migrate.

Again from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife and Natural Resources Agency;

“Building homes, businesses, shops and services further from our historic centers on larger lots of land can take a toll on Vermont’s natural environment. These buildings, along with the roads and other infrastructure needed to service these developments, can carve up habitat that our wildlife needs to survive. From 1980 to 2000, Vermonters consumed land at a rate of 2.5 times the rate of population growth.



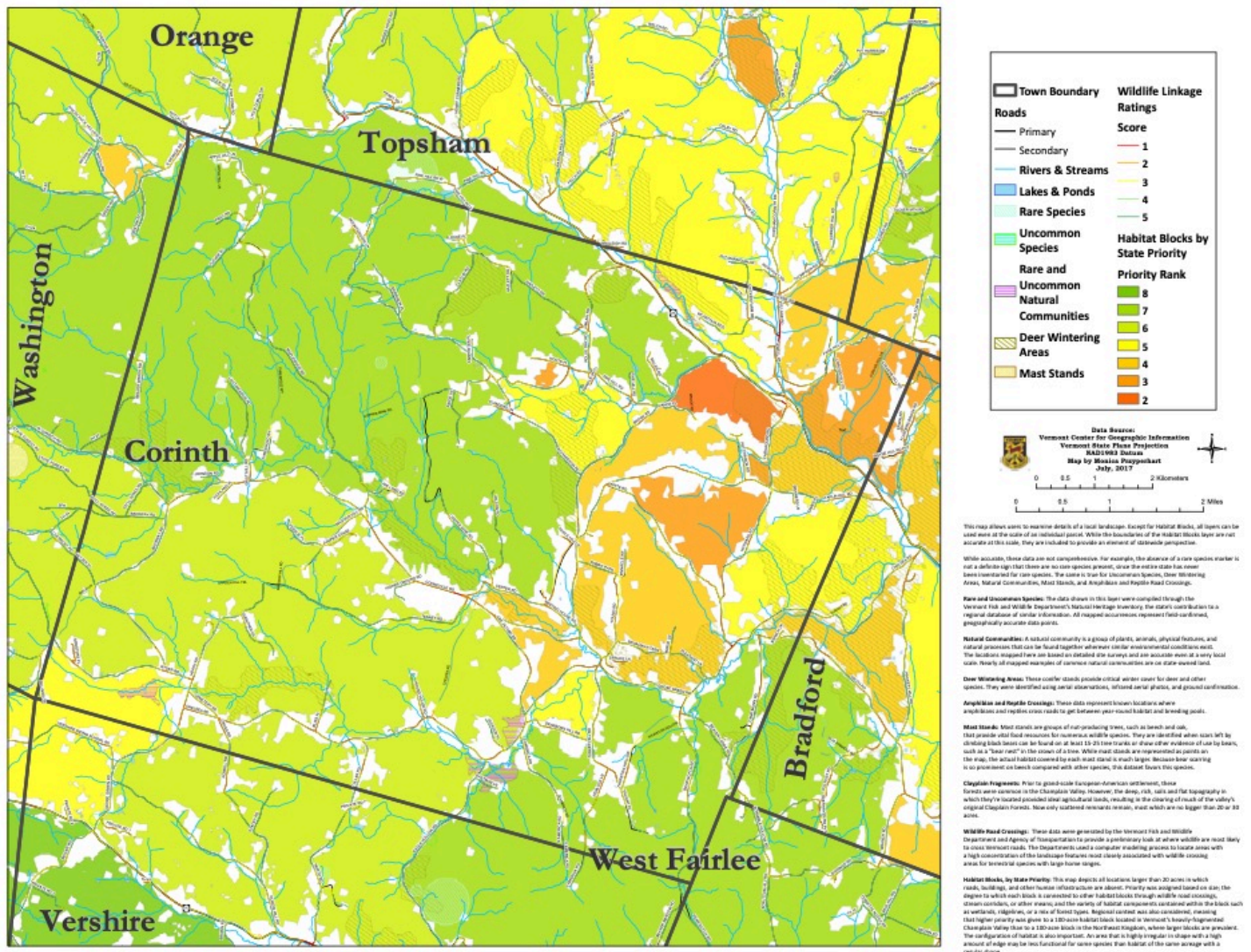
These illustrations compare an area (A) that has wildlife corridors linking habitat with an area (B) where habitat is fragmented and has limited wildlife corridors. (Source: Federal Interagency Stream Restoration Working Group (FISRWG))

As land is converted for human activities, habitats that were once contiguous become divided into separate fragments. If populations of plant and animal species are not free to move from one area to another, population extinction or inbreeding may result. Providing linkages between habitats reduces these risks and helps maintain genetic diversity and a population’s health. Conservation of large tracts of habitat linked via corridors are both necessary to maintain our wildlife habitat and natural areas”

It’s clear that if we want to increase (or at a minimum maintain) our favorite wildlife species Corinth must be conscious of the barriers we erect that restrict movements. Using data from Vermont’s Agency of Natural Resources the map below shows the large extent of high priority habitats within our boundaries.

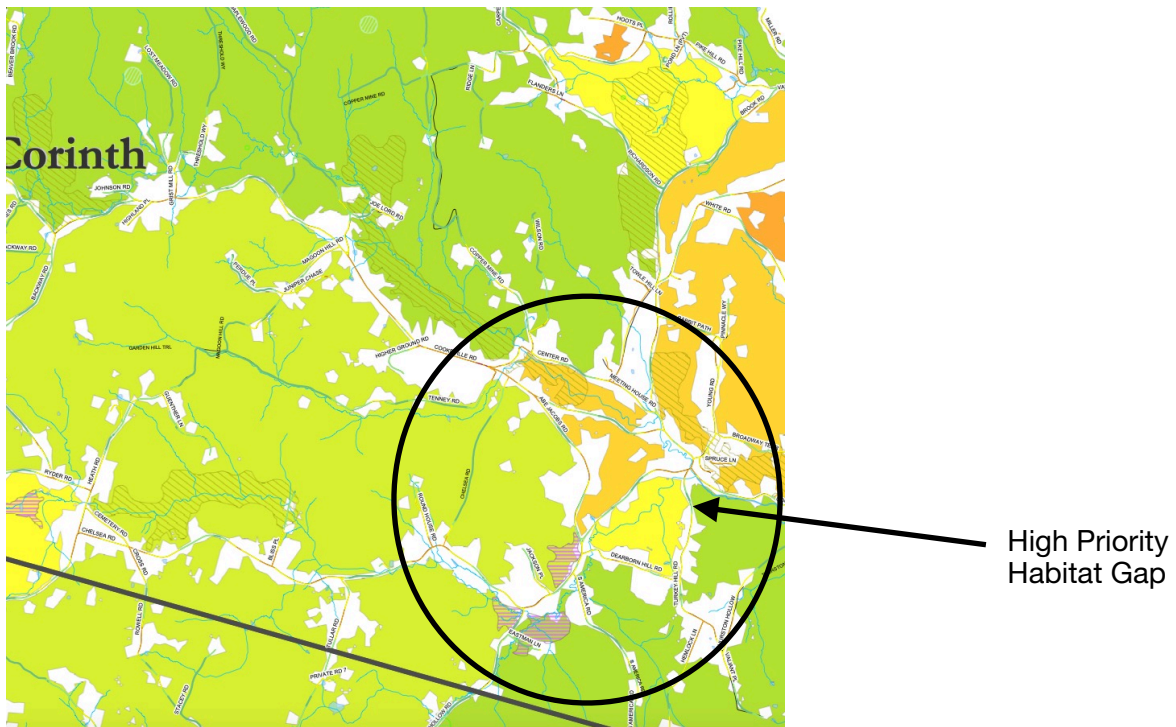
MAP 6: COMMUNITY AND SPECIES SCALE RESOURCES

CORINTH, VT



Click on the link below to access a webpage that allows you to zoom in on the map's details
https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder2016/Documents/MVNH%20Town%20Maps/CORINTH/Map6_Community_and_Species_Scale_Features_CORINTH.pdf

Notice that there are two high priority habitats separated by an "orange gap"....



This area adjacent to Abe Jacobs Road is critical to the movement of wildlife between these two habitats. Fortunately today there are no physical barriers, and the area is lightly populated. But it is also quite “open” with limited forest cover for large animals to traverse. The key question is what can our community do to insure the continued freedom of movement needed.

Wildlife have no recognition of town boundaries...movements between communities must be considered as well. Corinth must begin working with our neighbors to facilitate critical wildlife corridors.

An example of towns working together is the Shutesville Wildlife Corridor activities discussed here <http://stayingconnectedinitiative.org/shutesville/> involving Waterbury and Stowe.

Corridors can also be streams....many of which have been degraded by poor forestry practices and general neglect. Corinth’s own Redstart Forestry is actively working on restoring these critical pathways by using Strategic Woody Additions right now for local landowners.

The challenges we face in maintaining the character of our town are significant. The pressure on our land for new developments has grown as a result of the pandemic. It is vital that our long term planning addresses what we know to be the key issues...Forest Blocks and Wildlife

Corridors. We need to come together and realistically deal with the needs of landowners who will do the heavy lifting of preserving our forests, streams, and wildlife habitats. The Conservation Commission will continue to provide information and resources for Corinth residents.

Mark your calendars now for a key presentation by Jens Hilke of the Vermont Department Fish and Wildlife at the Corinth Town Hall on September 14th at 6:30 pm. Jens will bring his vast knowledge to bear on the challenges facing Corinth's Forest Block and Wildlife Corridor preservation requirements .