

Connectivity

Ecological systems provide many natural functions. They remove particulate matter and carbon dioxide from the air, purify surface and ground water, reduce flooding, and maintain biological diversity. These functions depend on a connected ecological “framework” of central hubs of larger land spaces interconnected by corridors that provide for the movement of energy, matter, water, and species across the landscape. This framework of connectivity is threatened by road development, agricultural and forestry practices, and “urban sprawl” that fragment the landscape. Maintaining ecological connectivity protects the entire system. *From the EPA Report on the Environment, 2012.*

The Nature Conservancy leads the four-state, 21-partner Staying Connected Initiative which strives to restore and maintain connectivity – allowing wildlife species the freedom to roam, survive and thrive. Connectivity creates a network of resilient lands that allows for plant and animal species to shift their ranges in response to changing climates and conditions. Additionally, maintaining and improving connectivity benefits our economy, supports recreational opportunities like hunting, fishing and hiking, and enhances quality of life. *From Nature Conservancy, Great Places in the Granite State, Fall/Winter 2016.*

Collaboration is central to the future of conservation success. While past conservation efforts focused on conserving sites and species, there is increasing emphasis placed on managing landscapes and processes. Ecological processes do not respect our socially constructed boundaries of who lives where and for how long, so adequate management of the landscape as a whole requires a collaborative approach. Collaboration has in fact been part of much mainstream conservation practice for the last 30 years. *Carina Wyborn, Fenner School of Environment and Society Australian National University.*

The Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire (SELT) is a nonprofit organization also concerned about connectivity in our region. One of their main goals is to protect a large swath of land from Pawtuckaway State Park to Great Bay, which will link more than 10 strategically important landscapes through a network of conserved lands and public trail corridors. The Harveys’ Kennard Hill Forest conservation easement is a large piece of that project. Every citizen in Epping can be proud of the March 2015 vote that authorized the town to contribute money to the Harveys’ Forest cause. Your conservation commission also donated funds to help make it happen. With all of us working together, we have allowed wide-ranging species like bear, bobcat, fisher and moose to continue moving in a relatively uninhibited way through the region to locate sufficient food and shelter and find a mate. Give yourselves a pat on the back!