

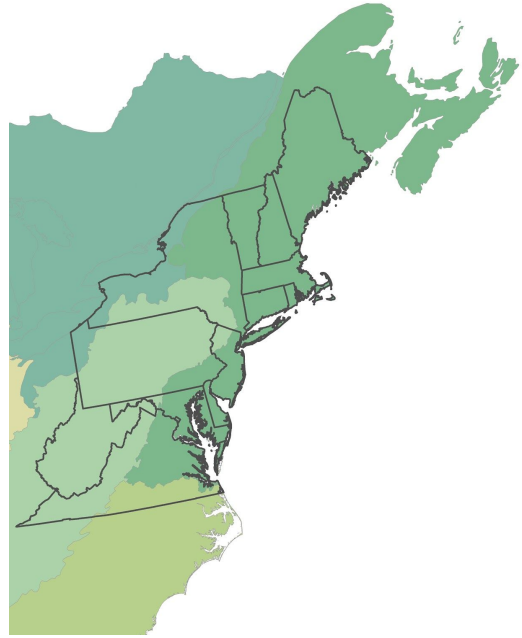
Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas Version 1.0

One region, 13 states, thousands of opportunities to move conservation forward together

The problem: From the Canada lynx that dwell deep in Maine's spruce-fir forests to the unique communities of freshwater mussels found in the Tennessee River Basin in Virginia, thousands of species have found their niche in the Northeastern U.S. Some are common, some are on the brink, but all depend on habitat in this region to survive.

The resources that sustain these species also provide essential benefits like clean water and recreation to the tens of millions of people who also call the Northeast home. Yet ensuring a sustainable future for fish, wildlife, and people, across a 13-state region is an increasing challenge in the face of threats from climate change and development. Unless we work together.

The response: In response to these threats, a team of partners from 13 states, the North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, nongovernmental organizations, and universities worked together for more than a year to develop a regional conservation design that lays the groundwork for unified conservation action across the entire Northeast region.



Initially termed "Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas" by the team, the project has resulted in a suite of resources that partners can use voluntarily as a complement to their own information to help identify the best opportunities for conserving and restoring terrestrial, aquatic, and coastal ecosystems and the range of species that depend on them.

The results: Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas Version 1.0 synthesizes information and expertise to offer scientific guidance based on regional consensus. The first iteration of a landscape conservation design for the Northeast reflects:

- Habitat needs for more than 3,000 species of animals and plants, including those identified as species of greatest conservation need by the Wildlife Action Plans revised by the states in 2015.
- Important areas for conservation of several hundred common and rare aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem types, and habitat connections needed for species to move across the landscape.
- Pioneering work throughout the Northeast conservation community, from the 10-year effort by Northeast states to combine information from State Wildlife Action Plans and pool resources to better support imperiled species and their habitats, to the Service's cross-programmatic work to support Strategic Habitat Conservation.
- Knowledge and lessons learned from the Connect the Connecticut project, a landscape conservation design for the Connecticut River watershed led by a diverse conservation partnership.
- Ongoing feedback from test users. The release of the first Version 1.0 of these products provides an opportunity for users to help improve them by reviewing, testing and providing critical input that will directly inform the next iteration, Version 2.0.



More than a map, RCOA Version 1.0 is a suite of decision-support tools that can be customized to address the unique objectives of individual agencies. The tools represent the following conservation approaches:

- **Terrestrial Core Networks** - Connected network of intact and diverse terrestrial, wetland, and coastal systems
- **Aquatic Core Networks** - Connected network of intact and diverse aquatic systems
- **Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need (RSGCN) Habitats** - Important habitat for vulnerable species not fully captured in core networks
- **Restoration Opportunities** - Degraded or fragmented places where restoration will make the most difference
- **Regional Connectivity and Marsh Migration** - Best opportunities to maintain regional connections and connect tidal marshes to adjacent uplands

Used together, or individually, these tools offer voluntary guidance for:

Identifying the highest conservation priorities - Many areas in the Northeast already provide critical habitat for thousands of species identified as priorities in State Wildlife Action Plans. These sites are the highest conservation priorities in the region -- the places we cannot afford to lose to prevent imperiled species from going extinct, and to make sure common species stay common.

Restoring areas that hold potential - Address the many opportunities to better support wildlife and human needs by restoring, buffering, and expanding degraded sites and connecting them to others that are in good condition

Maximizing limited resources - Conservation agencies and organizations have limited time, money, and staff, yet threats from climate change and development make the work of conservation more important than ever. Science-based guidance on the highest conservation priorities in the region empowers states and other partners to use limited resources effectively.

Looking ahead to make better decisions today - By taking into account projections about how development and climate change may impact the landscape over time, we can ensure that today's investments in conservation will pay off in the long run.

Reinforcing local priorities with a regional perspective - Looking at how local conservation efforts fit into the landscape picture can help boost priorities by demonstrating their significance on a regional scale. Zooming out can even help local practitioners discover new potential priority areas that warrant a closer look.

Connecting partners to connect natural areas - Conserving fish, wildlife, and natural benefits in the face of increasing threats is beyond the scope of a single agency. With the benefit of shared regional data, partners can look across state borders for opportunities to work together at scales that matter for wildlife and landscapes.

For more information about the RCOA Version 1.0 contact:

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