# Northeast Region Landscape Conservation Design
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 call the Northeast home.

Yet land-use and climate change threaten the long-term sustainability of resources that support fish, wildlife, plants, and people across the 13 states that make up our region. In order to address landscape-level threats to the diverse natural and human communities that define the Northeast, we need to work together across boundaries.
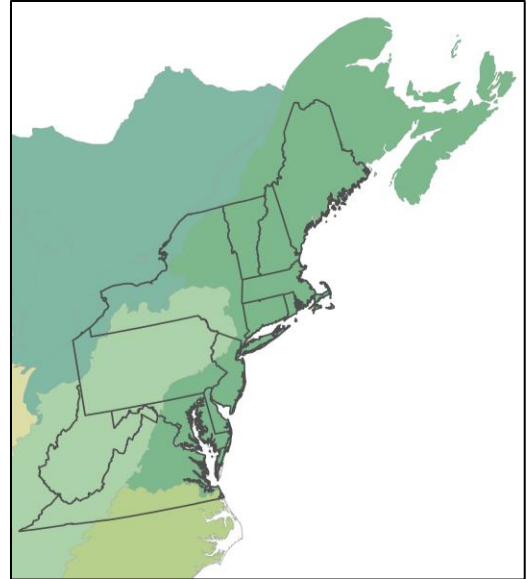
The response: The North Atlantic LCC and Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) organized and facilitated a team of partners from 13 states, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, nongovernmental organizations, and universities that worked together for more than a year to develop a regional conservation design that lays the groundwork for unified conservation actions across the entire Northeast region.

Termed "Regional Conservation Opportunity Areas" by the team, the project has resulted in a suite of resources that partners can use voluntarily in complement to their own information to 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 identify priority areas for conservation action. 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 (SGCN) by State Wildlife Action Plans revised in 2015.
- Important areas for conservation of more than one hundred 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 NEAFWA to combine information from State Wildlife Action Plans and pool resources to better support the region's 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 pilot landscape conservation design for the Connecticut River watershed led by a diverse partnership.
- Ongoing feedback from users. The release of 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, Version 1.0 is a suite of tools that can be customized to help partners make conservation decisions that address the unique objectives of individual agencies and organizations. The tools represent the following conservation approaches:

- **Terrestrial and Freshwater Core Networks** - Connected network of intact and diverse terrestrial, wetland, and coastal systems and habitat for representative species
- **Aquatic Core Networks** - Connected network of intact and diverse aquatic systems and habitat for representative resident and anadromous species
- **Imperiled and Species of Greatest Conservation Need Habitats** - Important habitat for vulnerable species that is not fully captured in core habitat networks
- **Restoration Opportunities** - Degraded or fragmented places where restoration will make the greatest 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:

Protecting an ecologically connected network of conservation areas – The most intact and resilient places to start for strategic conservation of a diversity of lands and waters and important habitat for imperiled, SGCN, and representative species.

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 larger landscape can help boost priorities by demonstrating their significance on a regional scale. Zooming out can help local practitioners discover 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 towards an ecologically connected and resilient network of conservation areas.

For more information about the RCOA Version 1.0 contact:
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Explore the data and tools on the RCOA Version 1.0 website: http://rcoa.cicapps.org/