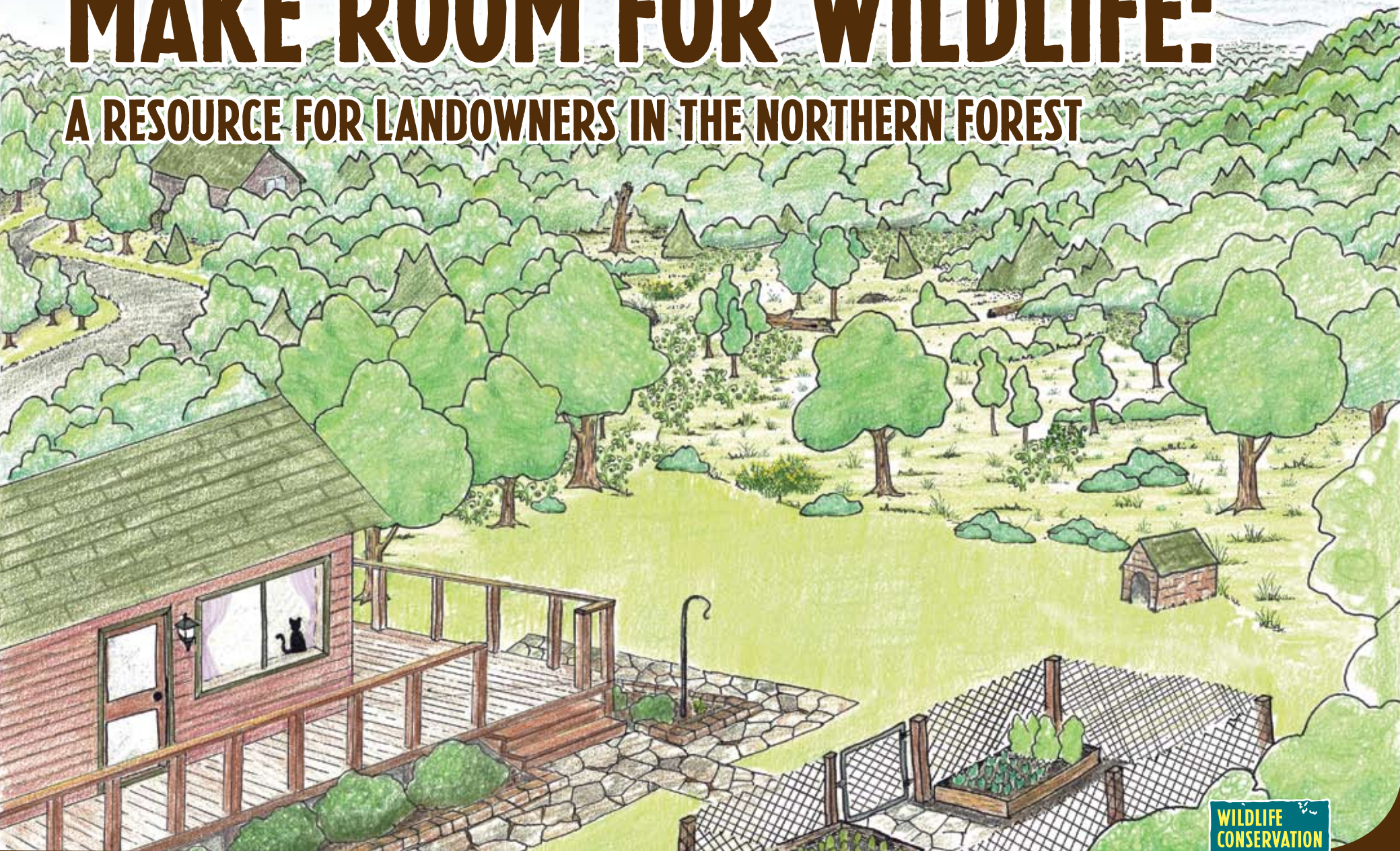


MAKE ROOM FOR WILDLIFE:

A RESOURCE FOR LANDOWNERS IN THE NORTHERN FOREST



Wildlife Conservation Society





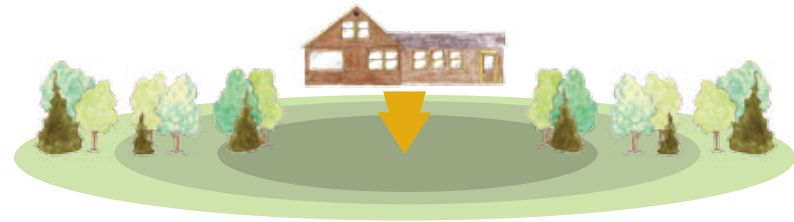
WILDLIFE AND PRIVATE LANDS

This pamphlet will help landowners in the Northern Forest consider wildlife when managing their property or building a home. Although some large expanses of habitat in this region are protected by state and federal governments, many animals require or prefer habitats found on privately owned lands. Other species must travel long distances across a mix of public and private lands to meet their basic needs. To maintain the native wildlife found here, Northern Forest residents must be thoughtful and smart about how to live on our private lands.

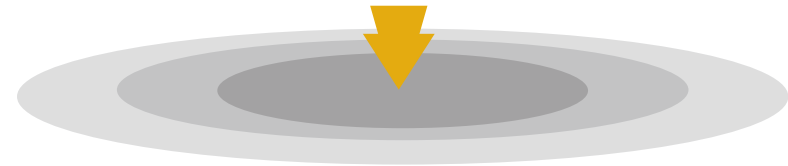
Decisions—both small and large—made by landowners have as much power as state and federal agencies in determining the future of wildlife in this region.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are two of the most significant threats facing wildlife. However, landowners can make informed decisions that will minimize adverse effects and protect wildlife.

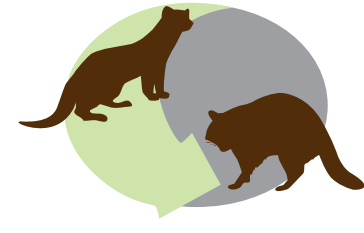
IF A HOUSE “FALLS” IN A FOREST, DO THE WILDLIFE “HEAR” IT?



WCS has been studying the impact that houses have on wildlife, and through our research we have learned that even if a house is surrounded by native vegetation (such as forest), it changes the wildlife community in ways that are measurable.



- The impacts on wildlife from development can extend away from the house, up to 600 feet. This is due to factors like noise, nighttime lighting, use of pesticides, pets running free, and physical changes to the forest. As a result, a new house has a “wildlife shadow” of 15 – 30 acres.



- When residential development occurs, wildlife often still live nearby, but the species tend to be different. Development creates conditions that attract generalist species (common species able to use a wide range of resources for food and shelter) like raccoons and blue jays, while more rare, specialized species such as martens and warblers do not thrive near houses. Scientists refer to this as biotic homogenization or a loss of biotic integrity.

WHAT ROLE DOES YOUR LAND PLAY?

As wildlife travel through our human landscape, they rely on a combination of landscape features to ensure safe passage.

Where does your land fit in?

Core habitat

Large blocks of contiguous forest provide the necessary habitat for animals to find food and shelter, and to reproduce. In order to maintain healthy populations and genetic diversity, however, animals must be able to move between these large blocks of habitat.

Hedgerows

Many Northern Forest species prefer not to pass through open or agricultural areas, and take advantage of the cover provided by hedgerows between fields.

Riparian areas

Rivers, streams and their banks provide important habitat along which animals often travel. Maintaining cover (trees and shrubs) in these areas provides safer and more secure corridors for wildlife.

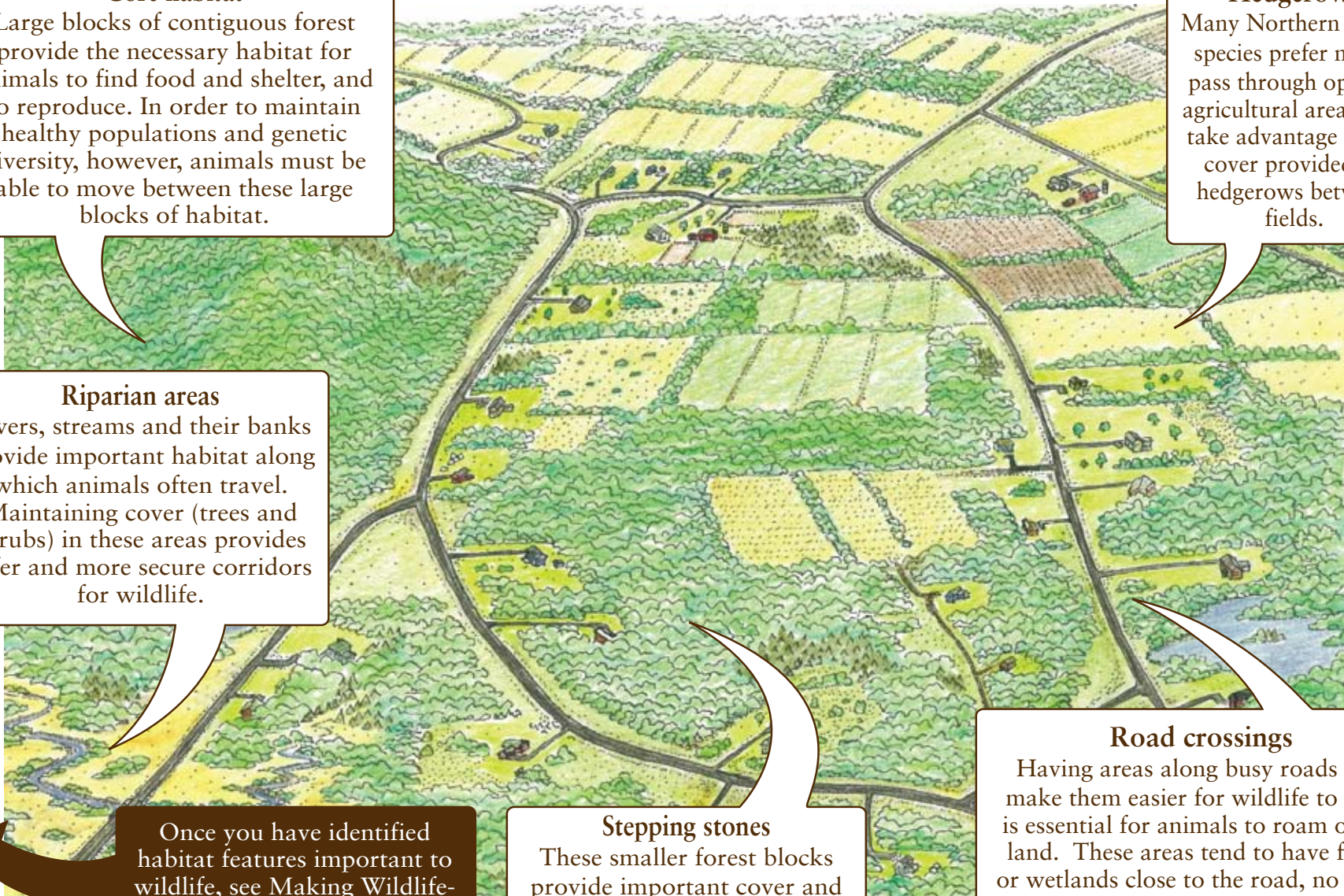
Road crossings

Having areas along busy roads that make them easier for wildlife to cross is essential for animals to roam on the land. These areas tend to have forest or wetlands close to the road, no guard rails, gentle terrain, and sometimes wildlife crossing structures.

Stepping stones

These smaller forest blocks provide important cover and food as animals roam between blocks of core habitat.

Once you have identified habitat features important to wildlife, see Making Wildlife-Sensitive Decisions for ideas about how to preserve them.



IF YOU CHOOSE TO BUILD A HOME

Your house will permanently change the landscape; take time to think carefully about how you can make sensitive decisions while maximizing your own enjoyment of your property.

Know your site

Take the time to get to know your property; learn about its natural features and the wildlife habitats it provides, such as wetlands, riparian areas (near waterbodies), mature forests, nesting and wintering sites, vernal pools and other features. Once you have identified these features (with help from a naturalist and forester if necessary), you will be better able to plan to protect them.

Think about your site in context

Your property may offer a locally unique attribute (such as the only stand of conifer trees for miles). It may be part of a large connected forest, or the only block of forest in a sea of farmland. Factors like these influence the ecological role of your land; consider these before you decide how to develop your site.

Design and landscape thoughtfully

This is your best opportunity to address many long-term issues in your house. For example, size and site glass windows appropriately or use bird-friendly glass to prevent bird mortality. Plan to use native, non-invasive plants when landscaping.

Build carefully

Select a contractor who will be responsive to your desire to minimize environmental impacts. Mark trees and snags to protect and be clear about a no-impact zone. Avoid undertaking construction in relevant locations during critical amphibian movement periods or bird nesting seasons. Plan and budget for post-construction restoration.

The most important decision: where to build your home

Once you are armed with information and perspective about the natural value of your property, you are ready to think about how to develop the site sensitively. Here are some guiding questions to help you make these decisions:

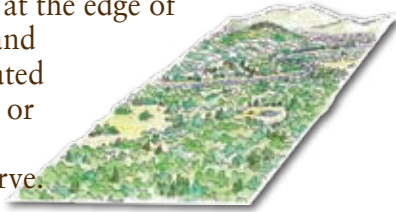
- What steps can you take to protect the natural features that you have identified through your research? Remember to think BOTH about the features on the site and the big picture of your land's regional context.
- Can you site the house on or near part of the property that has been cleared previously or has been heavily impacted by human activities in the past?
- Can you achieve adequate privacy while building reasonably close to the parcel boundary, neighbors' houses, or the road? Your home will have a "wildlife shadow"—area of impact—of 15 – 30 acres. By keeping the driveway short and locating the house close to other structures, you will maximize the space available for wildlife.
- Can you maintain buffers from sensitive features? Clearing and building should ideally not occur within 300 feet of sensitive habitats like rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands.

MAKING WILDLIFE-SENSITIVE DECISIONS

If you own or manage land in the Northern Forest, you make decisions that affect wildlife and the environment.

Maximize ecological connectivity

You can do this by: keeping large stands of forest or habitat intact; concentrating ecological disturbances at the edge of large blocks of habitat; and by maintaining and improving connecting features such as vegetated riparian buffers alongside streams and lakes, or hedgerows through fields. The wider these features can be, the more species they will serve. Try for buffer widths of 100 feet or more.



Maintain healthy habitat

You can do this by: protecting important ecological features such as vernal pools from disturbance; letting natural processes dominate (for example, maintaining native plants and letting deadfall decompose in place); and by planning for the needs of particular species.



Minimize ecological disturbances

You can do this by: minimizing the amount of pavement and hardened surface you introduce, including the length and width of roads; using best practices for erosion and sediment control; or by harvesting carefully if you are logging your land.



Create and restore habitat

You can do this by: improving degraded areas of your property with vegetation; removing non-native plants and planting native species in their place; and adding habitat opportunities such as nest boxes.



WHAT: Take birdfeeders down from May to September.

WHY: Birds have ample natural foods during the summer, and birdfeeders left up in the summer can attract bears or other unwanted wildlife to your yard.



WHAT: Minimize outdoor lighting and select light fixtures that direct light downward to where it is needed by humans, not out and up to where it creates light pollution. Close your blinds at night to cover large, brightly lit windows.

WHY: Night lighting is disorienting to wildlife and can adversely affect animals.



WHAT: Clean your grill regularly, or keep it in your garage or shed.

WHY: Bears have an excellent sense of smell, and they can be attracted to small pieces of food or grease on the grill. Once habituated to human food sources such as grills, bears often become increasingly problematic.



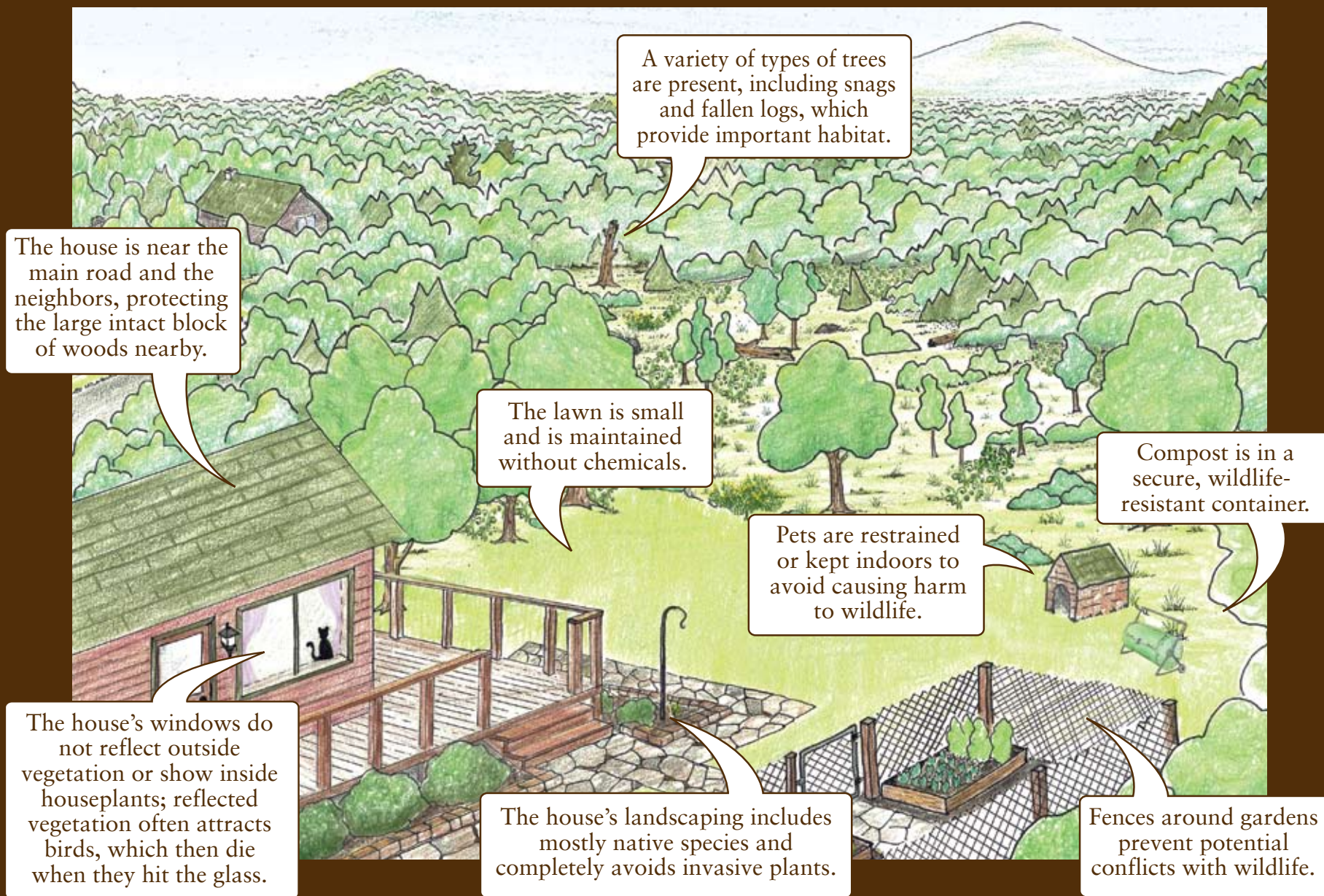
WHAT: Don't leave garbage outside overnight.

WHY: Trash is another human food source that can attract bears and other animals. By minimizing unwanted interactions with wildlife, you can protect your own property and safety and also the health of wildlife.



A WILDLIFE-SENSITIVE HOME IN THE NORTHERN FOREST

Whether you are building a new home or making management decisions in your existing home, you have a variety of opportunities to minimize adverse impacts and maximize benefits to wildlife.



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF YOUR LAND

You can have a lasting legacy of stewardship

Think beyond subdivision. Keeping your land intact is one of the best ways to protect ecological connectivity. Check out the ideas below on alternatives to subdivision.

- Gather information. Learn about natural features and wildlife on your land as a great step towards careful management of it, for you or for future stewards.
- Consider an easement. Conservation easements allow you to protect your land from development in perpetuity, even if you sell the land. Easements have tax benefits as well, and you can determine the terms that work for you. Your local land trust can help you learn about the process and your options.
- Learn about alternative revenue opportunities. If you feel the need to sell or subdivide to pay your property taxes, you may be able to generate revenue with the help of government-funded land and habitat management programs, well-managed forestry, or alternative opportunities such as emerging markets for carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services.
- Get help. Estate planners can help you think about the tax considerations and the family implications of your long-term planning decisions. Consulting foresters can provide insights about potential revenue options. The Natural Resources Conservation Service manages several habitat management programs.

Long-term thinking will benefit not just wildlife. You will also be protecting air and water quality, reducing the severity of flooding, keeping land available for traditional economic and recreational activities, and maintaining the rural character of our landscape.

GETTING STARTED

There are many resources available to help you learn more about opportunities to protect the wildlife on your land. You may want to seek out other organizations: from state agencies to non-profits, many groups can help you be a good steward. WCS staff are also happy to answer questions; please contact us. Additional resources and links on this topic are also available at our website, www.wcsadirondacks.org.

ABOUT US

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) saves wildlife and wild lands through careful science, international conservation, education, and the management of the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks.

WCS's Adirondack Program is based in Saranac Lake, NY. WCS is a partner in the Staying Connected Initiative (SCI), a transboundary collaborative to maintain and restore a network of connected lands for wildlife across the region.

WCS' Make Room for Wildlife Program has received generous support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation through the Wildlife Action Opportunities Fund, International Paper Foundation, and SCI's US Fish and Wildlife Service Competitive State Wildlife Grant.



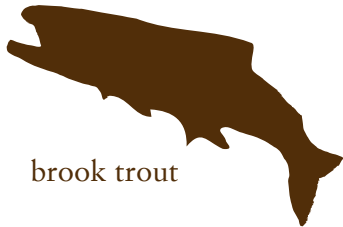
WHICH WILDLIFE WILL THANK YOU?



marten



common loon



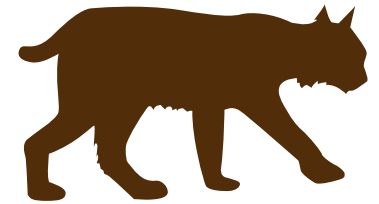
brook trout



evening grosbeak

Wide-ranging animals

Black bear, bobcat, marten, and moose are examples of species that need lots of space and will appreciate planning that protects large, well-connected forest blocks. Conserving ecological connections may require coordination between multiple landowners since wildlife do not heed property boundaries. These efforts will help maintain healthy wildlife populations.



bobcat

Amphibians and reptiles

Amphibians and reptiles are particularly susceptible to the impacts of roads and other fragmenting features because they use a variety of habitat types during their life cycle. Some, like turtles, do not even begin to reproduce until they are quite old (> 20 years). Knowing the parts of your property that are most important for these animals will allow you to avoid building structures or roads near these critical habitats.



bald eagle

Interior forest dwellers

Edges between forests and openings like roads or lawns pose many dangers, and some species will not use forests that are fragmented by roads and houses. Maintaining large forest blocks with plenty of interior habitat will ensure suitable areas for species like scarlet tanager, ovenbird and American marten.



spotted
salamander

Small mammals

Species such as shrews, voles and flying squirrels are an important part of the food chain and the ecosystem of the Northern Forest. Maintaining snags and downed woody debris provides habitat for these animals. Minimizing driveways, roads and the size of lawns helps curb threats to these species—as does keeping domestic pets indoors.

Aquatic birds and mammals

Whether an animal lives on a lake, stream or river, or simply uses these features for periodic habitat or as travel corridors, these aquatic habitats are essential. Buffering water features from shoreline development and enhancing riparian corridors with native plants protects water quality and the value of these ecosystems for wildlife.



otter



ADIRONDACK PROGRAM

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