

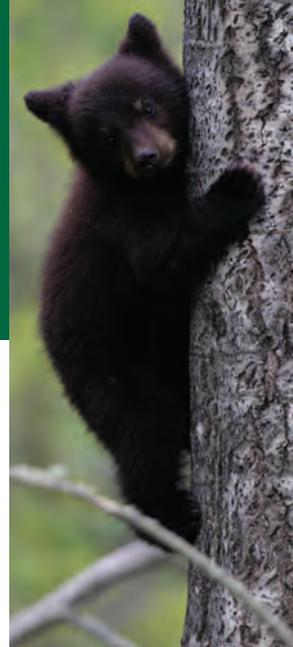
Hidden in Plain Sight:

11 million acres of family woodlands in **30 target watersheds** in the Northeast offer a little known opportunity to save some of region's most important wildlife, but active stewardship of these woods is key.



Northeast forests provide a whole suite of forest benefits and are particularly important for supporting diverse species of wildlife.

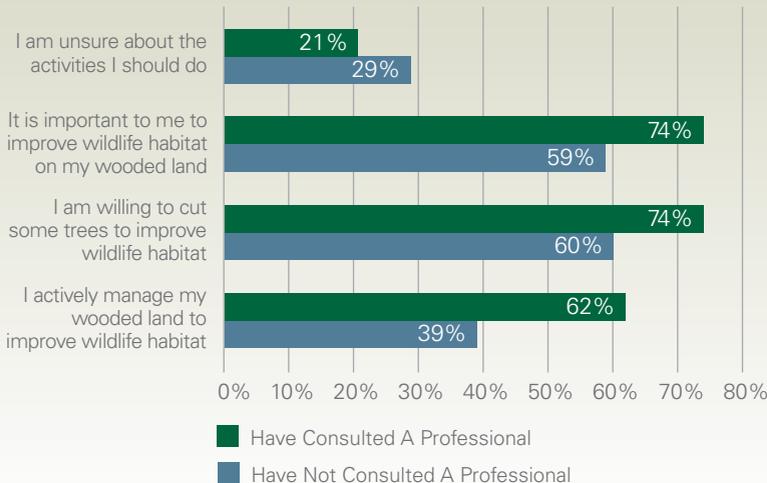
- The 13-state northeastern U.S. is the most heavily forested region of the country, with two-thirds of the land – more than **100 million** acres – covered in forests.
- The region supports a robust forest products industry that has industry shipments in excess of **\$46 billion** annually.
- These forests also contribute to providing clean water for approximately **30 million** people.
- Yet, of all these benefits, wildlife stands out as one that is most valued. Nationwide, **90%** of people surveyed agree it's important to protect wildlife.
- What's more, wildlife-related outdoor recreation contributes **\$27 billion** annually to the regional economy, and wildlife watching alone contributes **\$12 billion** annually.



Despite the tremendous perceived value, regional forests are out of balance and putting wildlife at risk.

- 19th century heavy clearing of forests set up a dynamic of abandonment and regrowth leaving most forests roughly the same age and composition. These forests, and the wildlife that depend on them, are at greater risk from droughts, insects, and a changing climate.
- Essentially our forests are "middle-aged;" there is a relative paucity of both younger forests and older forests, which both provide habitat qualities needed for the full array of wildlife in the region to thrive.
- This imbalance puts wildlife at risk. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife agencies, there are **37** species at risk, **13** of which depend on forests, and an additional **23** species of great concern.

CONSULTING A PROFESSIONAL IS GOOD FOR WILDLIFE



The opportunity is in the hands of family woodland owners.

- **More than half** the forests of the region are owned by families and individuals.
- Protecting and improving wildlife habitat is an important reason they own their land (**85%**) and a large majority of family owners are concerned about the loss of wildlife habitat (**77%**) and want to take steps to protect it.
- Fewer than half, however, are managing to protect wildlife habitat on an ongoing basis, and **9** of **10** landowners acknowledge that they could do more on their land. Indeed, there is tremendous opportunity for these landowners to do more for wildlife on the ground.



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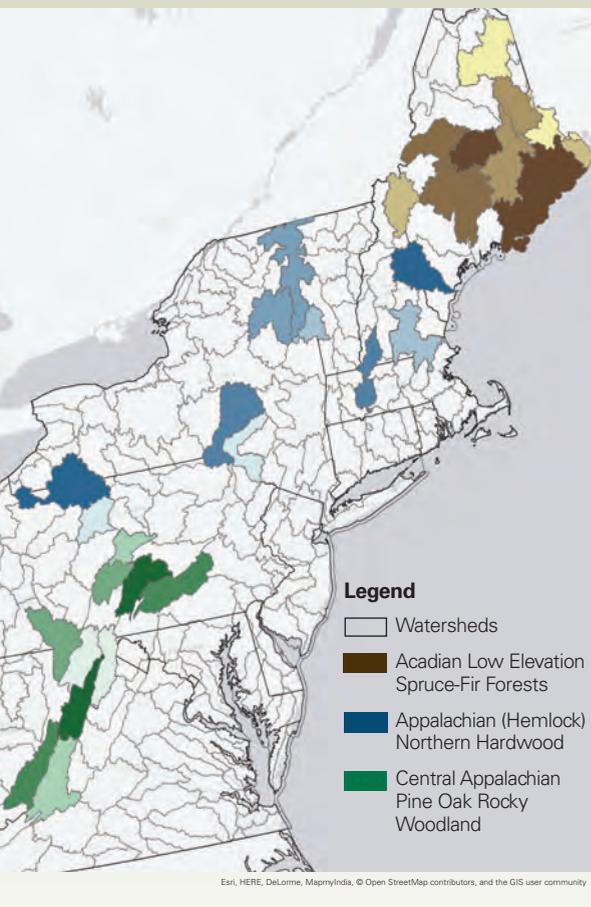
Professionals are key to on-the-ground results.

- Family owners who consult with a natural resource professional do more than twice as much to protect and improve wildlife habitat through active stewardship.
- Yet, according to our survey, only **14%** of landowners have recently consulted with a professional.
- Connecting landowners with trained public and private natural resource professionals will increase the rate at which wildlife habitat is restored and enhanced.

Active stewardship can rebalance the forest.

- While permanent protections are important for keeping forests as forests, the only way to rebalance the forest is through active stewardship.
- In key watersheds, there is an unhealthy shortage of early- and late-successional forests, differing from historic conditions by **17** and **32 percent**, respectively.

AFF'S 10 TARGET WATERSHEDS IN EACH OF THE 3 FOREST HABITAT TYPES



- Stewardship can restore desired conditions.
- For example, landowners can harvest to create young forest stands or selectively thin mature stands to mimic older forest conditions, increasing growth on remaining trees and enhancing desired old forest amenities such as snags, and structural diversity.
- Landowners can best afford these targeted stewardship activities when there are healthy and diverse forest products markets, and markets necessitate a continuous flow of wood, reinforcing the value of on-going stewardship.

High opportunity areas yield the greatest impact

- AFF's analysis found that more than **11 million** acres in **3** important habitat types are owned by families and individuals, meaning family woodland owners can have a tremendous impact on enhancing wildlife habitat.
- To focus limited resources, AFF's analysis identified 30 watersheds across the 3 habitat types where family woodland owner stewardship activities can make a significant impact. These high opportunity areas complement focal areas identified in Forest Action Plans and Wildlife Action Plans.



RECOMMENDATIONS

AFF recommends three strategies unlock these hidden opportunities to save some of the region's most important wildlife through active family woodland stewardship:

- **Promote** forest policies, like state and federal tax programs; technical assistance, like NRCS Farm Bill programs and the US Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program; and markets that help northeast family woodland owners keep their woods as woods while simultaneously rebalancing the forest and improving wildlife habitat through stewardship.
- **Increase** landowner access to professionals, improve training and education for natural resource professionals, and expand inter-agency collaboration to ensure boots-on-the-ground technical assistance is available to provide wildlife habitat recommendations to landowners.
- **Work** with northeast regional and local partners to develop landscape-scale projects in the 30 target watersheds, that reach and engage family woodland owners in stewardship activities that improve wildlife habitat.

For more information visit

forestfoundation.org/woodland-owners-protecting-wildlife

or contact Christine Cadigan, Director Northeastern Woodland Conservation at ccadigan@forestfoundation.org



American Forest Foundation