

Seven Easy Ways You Can Manage Your Land For Wildlife

Vermonters care about their environment, and they value the presence of wildlife. Time and again, these values are confirmed in surveys that illustrate strong public support for conservation of wildlife and land.

Vermont conservationists and wildlife enthusiasts face a challenge in developing management plans to protect and conserve wildlife, however. A full 85% of land in this rural state is privately owned. So how can we as conservationists and scientists effectively manage wildlife, given that the land is in private hands? The answer is to work with you, the landowners.



Luckily, Vermont landowners are and have been excellent partners. With this partnership in mind, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept., under the guidance of habitat and lands program director John Austin, has recently co-authored a 132-page book for landowners entitled *A Landowner's Guide – Wildlife Habitat Management for Lands in Vermont*. Available for \$12 from the Fish & Wildlife [website](#), the book was nearly ten years in the making and combines the knowledge and experience of wildlife biologists, fisheries biologists, foresters, and land managers. It is designed to act as a layman's guide to wildlife management, and provides information on topics such as managing for production of wildlife food resources; wetland, pond and riparian area habitat management; habitat management for game or non-game species; and invasive species management.

Although not a substitute for the far-more detailed information in the book, here are seven easy summarized recommendations that provide landowners with ideas for promoting wildlife on their property:

- 1. Leave Dead Trees Standing.** Dead trees are alive with wildlife! Dead trees, often referred to as 'snags', provide nesting sites for cavity-nesting birds such as owls, and create perches and feeding sites for insect-eating birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches. Many of Vermont's endangered bat species use snags with sloughing loose bark as daytime roosts and maternity colonies. And wood ducks, mergansers and other waterfowl use dead tree cavities found near wetlands as nest sites.
- 2. Don't Sterilize Streams.** Good aquatic habitat is full of downed trees, sticks, leaves, plants, things for fish to hide under and insects to cling to. It is often messy looking, but this type of complexity is just what aquatic wildlife need.

3. **Don't Clean Up the Woods.** Just as with aquatic habitats, a healthy forest ecosystem includes a lot of structural complexity, including brush piles, downed trees, old rock walls, and even blow downs. Cleaning out undergrowth may look nice and neat, but decreasing the complexity of your forest will also decrease its ability to support wildlife.
4. **Promote Mast Species.** Many wild plant species, including oak, beech, hickory and apple trees, and berry bushes and thickets, are crucial food sources for a wide-ranging variety of wildlife. Everything from bear to birds rely on these wild food sources. You can promote wildlife by becoming familiar with these food sources on your land, and releasing them to allow for healthy growth.
5. **Leave Buffers Along the Water's Edge.** The water's edge is a surprisingly important place for both aquatic and land animals. Vegetated shorelines moderate water temperatures, provide nesting habitat for birds, give cover to land animals seeking a peaceful place to drink, and improve the quality of the water flowing through the property. Leaving a 100-foot buffer of natural forest vegetation along ponds, lakes, rivers and streams can drastically improve the usefulness of these resources for wildlife species.
6. **Wildlife Require Connected Land.** In Vermont, we are seeing a trend of homeowner's carving small blocks out of forest habitat in order to build their homes, lawns and driveways. The forest fragmentation that results can impede the movement of wildlife throughout their territories. Human activities in these places can disturb or scare animals during crucial nesting or young-raising stages. As a landowner, you can plan development to keep large forested blocks of land intact. If land must be interrupted, try to leave wooded travel corridors, near water bodies and around areas of development. If possible, limit human activity in areas that are used by wildlife to travel from one area to another.
7. **Don't Drain or Develop Wetlands.** Wetlands, including temporary spring seeps and vernal pools, are some of the most productive wildlife habitat on Vermont's landscape. Animals rely on these areas not just for water and food, but as breeding grounds and nursery pools. Wetlands benefit people too! They act like sponges on the landscape, soaking up excess water and moderating its destructive capacity during flood events. Wetlands sequester carbon as well. Maintaining wetlands is one of the best thing everyday landowners can do to help mitigate climate change.