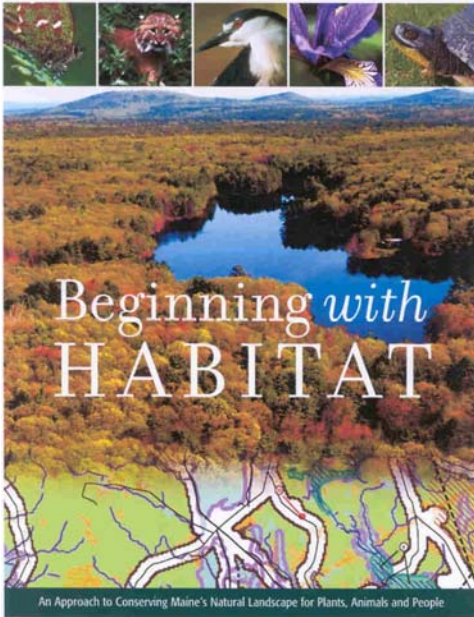


# State of Maine

## *Beginning with Habitat*

*...A landscape approach to habitat conservation...*



**The Problem:** Maine's diverse assemblage of wildlife, plants, and natural communities is threatened. Over two-thirds of the state's rare and endangered species are endangered because of habitat loss.

Today, development in Maine is spreading out, sprawling across our landscape, contributing to the loss of habitat and outdoor experiences. The Maine State Planning Office reports, in its 1997 report, *The Cost of Sprawl* that "...the fastest growing towns in Maine have been 'new suburbs' 10 to 25 miles distant from metropolitan areas." Sprawl, or unplanned development, has ecological consequences. Again, from *The Cost of Sprawl*, the Maine State Planning Office notes:

...Habitats for wildlife in Maine have been seriously fragmented by development sprawl....In southern Maine nesting sites for endangered birds, such as the piping plover and least tern, have been lost to development.

A study of 8 towns in southern Maine in 1985 found that 76% of the wetlands were visible from a road or within 2,000 feet of a road, and thus of limited habitat value.

Of 2,700 Maine lakes, over 200 have already been harmed by development, and another 300 are at risk if current trends continue.

**The Solution:** *Beginning with Habitat* (BwH) embodies a fundamental change in the way that state and federal agencies approach wildlife habitat conservation. It is a habitat-based model that provides the information to cooperatively create a landscape with local decision-makers that will support all breeding species of wildlife occurring in Maine into the future. Too often, the ability of the landscape to support wildlife is eroded by the impacts of unplanned, sprawling development. *Beginning with Habitat* takes habitat data from multiple sources, integrates it into one package, and makes it accessible to communities to use pro-actively. *Beginning with Habitat* partners can then work with communities to design a landscape that accommodates the growth they need with the highest resource conservation, by creating a functional landscape based on the resources available and the habitat needs of species that are present. The program is designed to help towns create a vision for their future that includes maintaining the ability of their landscape to support all wildlife 100 years from now.

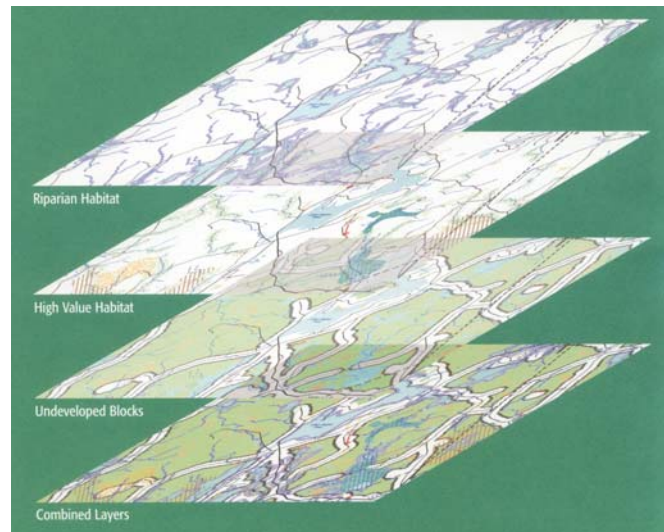
**Collaboration:** The most important first step to protecting habitat is knowledge. This program brings together the expertise and resources of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the Maine Department of Conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Maine State Planning Office, Maine Audubon Society, and Maine's 13 Regional Planning Commissions.

BwH provides the best available data from these partners in an integrated format that is accessible and easy to use. The partnership also provides coordinated technical assistance. Unprecedented levels of cooperation among the coalition members make these innovations possible.

**The Beginning with Habitat Model:** The *Beginning with Habitat* project provides municipalities, land trusts, and other organizations engaged in habitat conservation with maps of habitat data and conservation recommendations in three primary areas that are used to build a functional wildlife landscape based on a system of interconnected and conserved lands to promote habitat conservation for Maine's diverse assemblage of wildlife and plants, including rare and endangered species.

**Riparian Habitat** provides habitat for many species that use the transition zone between aquatic and terrestrial habitats. It includes all areas adjacent to streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes and ponds, and can function also as travel corridors linking areas together on the landscape.

**High Value Plant and Animal Habitats** that are special habitats required by wildlife, such as nesting sites, special vegetation communities, deer wintering areas, locations of endangered, threatened, or rare species – any location or habitat that may require special consideration.



**Large Habitat Blocks** are relatively unbroken areas of habitat including forest, grasslands, and agricultural lands that are crossed by few roads and have relatively little development and human habitation. These areas are essential for wildlife species with large spatial requirements or that are sensitive to human disturbance.

**Accomplishments:** Since its inception in 2000, the *Beginning with Habitat* project has met with and provided information to more than 140 cities and towns in Maine and with 35 land trusts and regional planning commissions. Many towns have incorporated the information they have received from BwH into their comprehensive plans. Improved scientific understanding by local planners is reflected in better planning for habitat conservation and land use decisions. By educating local decision-makers about the link between wildlife habitat and other resource functions such as water and air quality, flood flow control, and aesthetics and recreational opportunities provided by open space, communities are better prepared to plan. In 2003, an interactive website was developed [www.beginningwithhabitat.org](http://www.beginningwithhabitat.org) to provide quick, efficient access to all of the BwH information.

**Replication:** *Beginning with Habitat* is a model for the way government agencies can cooperate with non-profit conservation organizations and local communities across the country. In Maine, the program has already provided a model for the dissemination of other types of data to local planners. As demonstrated by its replication in Maine, many aspects of this program are transferable beyond the conservation and planning fields. For example, harnessing the power of private non-profit organizations to assist with government efforts is an effective use of both government and non-profit resources. Similarly, when local decision-makers have quality information, training, and technical assistance they are better able to support state conservation goals and leverage state and federal resources while ensuring that solutions are relevant and effective at a local level.

**Recognition:** The New England Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized *Beginning with Habitat* with an Environmental Merit Award at a special Earth Day ceremony held at Faneuil Hall in Boston on April 22, 2004. The EPA's Environmental Merit Award is an annual award that recognizes outstanding environmental advocates who have made significant contributions toward preserving and protecting our natural resources.