

Interior Forest Blocks

Forest blocks are areas of contiguous forest and other natural communities and habitats, such as wetlands, ponds, and cliffs, that are unfragmented by roads, development, or agriculture (Sorenson and Osborne 2014). Forests blocks are the first foundational unit of the Vermont Conservation Design.

Ecological Functions

Interior Forest Blocks provide many ecological and biological functions critical for protecting native species and the integrity of natural systems (Austin et al. 2004). These include: supporting natural ecological processes such as predator-prey interactions and natural disturbance regimes; helping to maintain air and water quality and flood resilience; supporting the biological needs of many plant and animal species, particularly those that are wide-ranging or sensitive to human encroachment; supporting viable populations of wide-ranging animals by allowing access to important feeding habitat, reproduction, and genetic exchange; and serving as habitat for source populations of dispersing animals for recolonization of nearby habitats that may have lost their original populations of those species.

In addition, large, topographically diverse forest blocks will allow many species of plants and animals to shift to suitable habitat within a forest block in response to climate change within the next century without having to cross developed areas to other forest blocks (Beier 2012).

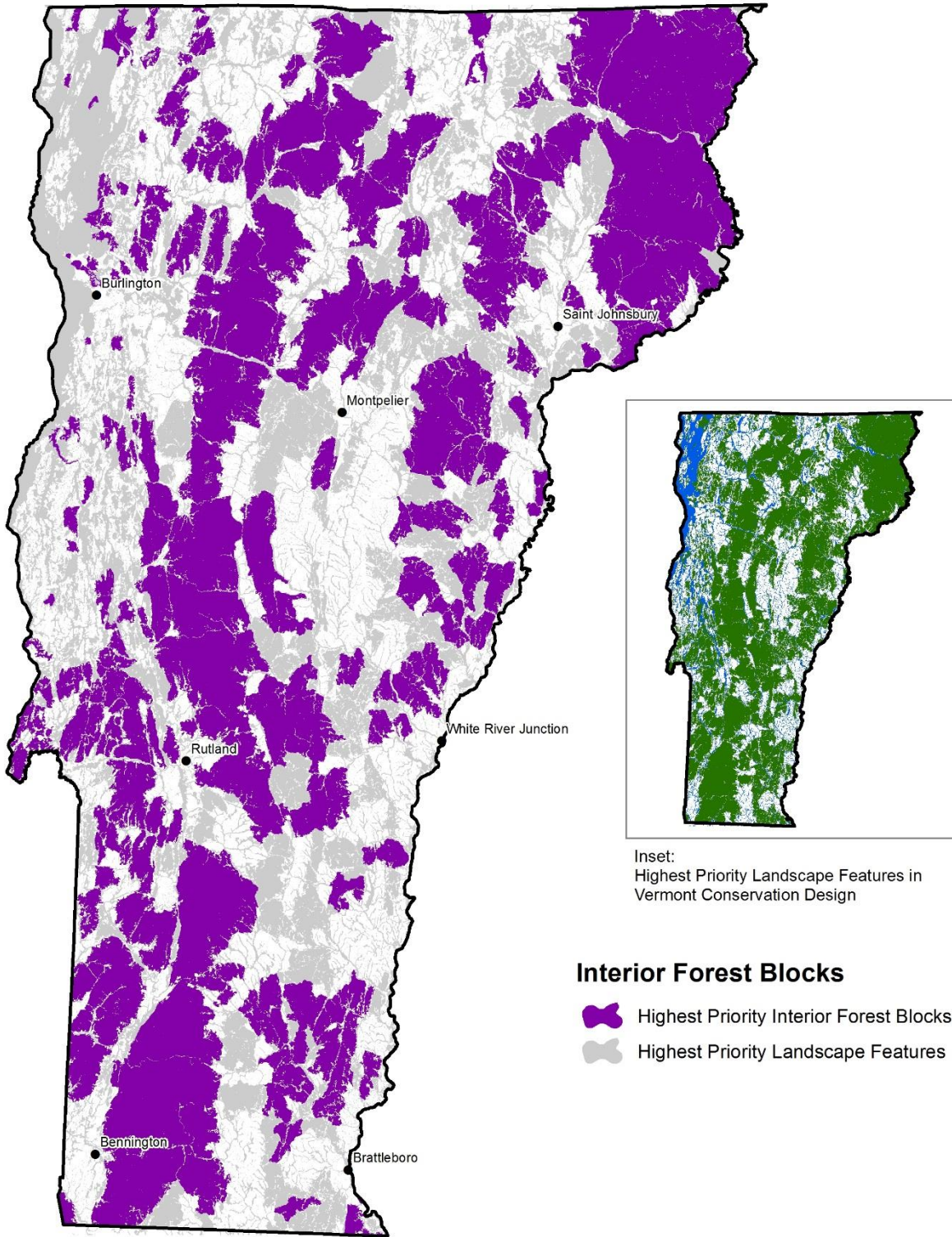
Highest Priority Features and Guidelines for Maintaining Ecological Function

Vermont Conservation Design identifies a set of forest blocks across the state that are highest priority for maintaining interior forest. These are the largest and/or highest ranked forest blocks from all biophysical regions that provide the foundation for interior forest habitat and associated ecological functions. The primary goal for these areas is to maintain the interior forest condition by avoiding permanent fragmentation from development. Limited development on the margins of large forest blocks may not have a significant adverse effect, provided it does not reduce connectivity between blocks or encroach into the forest block interior. Forest management that maintains forest structure and results in a distribution of all ages classes is compatible with maintaining the ecological functions of these forest blocks.

For more information on interior forest blocks, see the following section in the Part 1 Vermont Conservation Design Technical Report:

- Interior Forest Blocks





Map 1. Highest Priority Interior Forest Blocks.