

Management Issue # 2 - Habitat Fragmentation

Background

The enclosed article “Carving up the Landscape – Habitat Fragmentation and What to Do About It” from the UCONN NEMO program provides a good background on the causes and impacts of habitat fragmentation. The Eightmile River Watershed has substantial unfragmented areas – 26% of the unfragmented blocks are greater than 500 acres in size, 15% are greater than 1,000 acres in size and 5% are greater than 2,500 acres in size. The map “Eightmile River Watershed – Existing Habitat Blocks” depicts the large intact areas still in existence in the Watershed. The second map “The Potential Affects of Buildout on Unfragmented Habitat Blocks – Eightmile River Watershed” depicts locations in each town where large unfragmented habitat blocks exist, the location of existing protected lands associated with the habitat blocks, and the potential increase in density of residential units if each community were fully built out. As can be seen significant habitat fragmentation is potentially feasible, changing considerably the habitat characteristics and ultimately species composition of the Eightmile River Watershed.

Recommendation

Commit to making protection of important habitat blocks an open space conservation priority and be a partner in pursuing federal funding to support such types of acquisitions.

Actions

The most effective strategy to protect key habitat blocks in the watershed is through working with willing landowners on a voluntary basis to achieve open space conservation of important habitat areas.

1. Endorse the remaining unfragmented habitat blocks as high priority open space conservation areas through pertinent town planning documents such as the Town Plan of Conservation and Development and the Town Open Space Plan.
2. Establish a land protection goal for each community and the watershed as a whole.
3. Commit to working with other partners, such as local land trusts, the Nature Conservancy and the State to leverage resources and collaborate when opportunities arise to protect priority lands.
4. Endorse support for federal funding assistance to help support such open space conservation actions. While the federal government will not own or manage any land associated with a Wild & Scenic designation, a designation may create an opportunity to access federal funds that local agencies could use to support open space conservation. Clearly stating such an interest in the Management Plan will be helpful in pursuing such funding resources.