

MANAGING FOR BIODIVERSITY IN MAINE'S FORESTS: A MAINE NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM PERSPECTIVE

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As forest certification programs have grown in Maine, the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) has played a key role in providing a number of biodiversity related services to landowners and foresters. Both SFI and FSC require assessment of biodiversity issues, and MNAP routinely provides a number of helpful services. MNAP data and products are also an important component of cost-sharing and forest management plans developed by consulting foresters, who may now acquire a variety of natural resource information at no charge through “one-stop shopping” at MNAP. MNAP’s forestry-related services include:

- (1) computer-based “screening” of the MNAP database to determine if any important features (see description of Beginning with Habitat below) are known from a particular site,
- (2) field-based site reviews to evaluate potential impacts and develop harvesting plans that are compatible with protection of important features.
- (3) ownership-wide “landscape analysis” using air photos, satellite imagery, and GIS-generated data to determine sites likely to support important features,
- (4) ownership-wide field surveys to document rare species and exemplary natural communities, and
- (5) field-based training on how to recognize and manage sensitive habitats.

Many of these services and projects may be available from Natural Heritage programs in other states.

A substantial amount of the state’s biodiversity-related information has been mapped and distributed statewide through a groundbreaking, collaborative program known as “Beginning with Habitat (BWH).” BWH information includes rare species, exemplary natural communities, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) essential habitats (e.g., bald eagle nests), MDIFW significant habitats (e.g., waterfowl and wading bird habitats), large habitat blocks (important for wildlife home ranges), streams and wetlands, and other related data. MNAP is spearheading the accessibility and use of this information by foresters, land use planners, land trusts, and private landowners.

The Maine Natural Areas Program, a division within the State’s Department of Conservation, is part of an international network of similar “Natural Heritage” programs that obtain, assess, and disseminate information on biodiversity. MNAP shares information and works cooperatively with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, which manages wildlife species and information in the state. See the MNAP and BWH web sites (www.mainenaturalareas.org and <http://www.beginningwithhabitat.org> for details).