CONNECTED HABITATS

Identify and preserve significant wildlife habitats and connected vegetative corridors, as large and continuous as possible, in the development process.

Land clearing, fences, roads, drained wetlands, paving, and domesticated landscapes encroach upon, and eventually replace, natural landscapes. As the forests become more fragmented by suburban uses, plant and animal species retreat and disappear. Species extinction is occurring at an alarming rate.

We treasure our natural heritage and we consider sustainable landscapes to be a worthy goal. "Connected Habitats" presents a way to develop homes for people without destroying the home bases of other species.

Whose Land Is It?

A Shared Landscape...

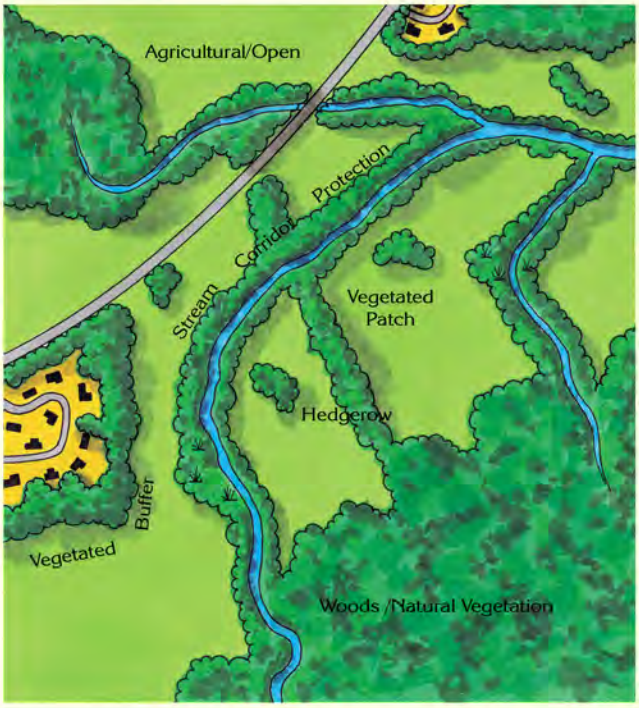
We belong to a living and changing community of interdependent parts, including the surrounding soils, water, air, plants and animals.

The flora and fauna staked claim to Dutchess County long before human settlement. While mountaintops, steep slopes and wet areas have provided some self-defense from development, the remainder of the land area also contains essential wildlife habitats. This guide extends the concept of Fitting into the Landscape (A1), to **coexistence** by identifying a process to maintain our natural heritage, even as we grow and prosper.

Land ownership and subdivisions only meet human needs. But possession of space and habitats are common to all species. For some species needing deep woodlot protection, 1,800 feet to the forest interior or more than 7,000 contiguous acres may be necessary. We should begin by asking that the straight line of the surveyor be drawn only after a site's inherent qualities, including its wildlife attributes, are understood.

Habitat Size Requirements

Less than 20 acres	Cottontail Skunk Squirrel
20-99 acres	Brown Headed Cowbird Whitetail Deer Wild Turkey Black Capped Chickadee
100-999 acres	Coyote Bobcat Red Fox Red Tail Hawk
More than 20 acres	Ovenbird Red Shouldered Hawk



Habitat Protection Goals

- Map and maintain a system of stream bank protection areas, hedgerows, road and trail corridors, wetlands, development buffer areas, small and medium sized forest patches, and woodland reservations.
- Strive for connectivity (vegetated corridors) and proximity (stepping stones) among the vegetated open space tracts.
- Limit development on large, consolidated open space tracts.
- Allow smaller wildlife areas (patches) of 20 acres or more to be liberally scattered throughout the town.
- Work to establish soft feathered edges along woodland boundaries.
- Allow fingers of wild land to connect with suburban and urban districts.
- Encourage use of native species in landscaping.

Creating a Network Landscape

We possess an impressive network of wooded open space. It shows up on USGS maps, aerial photographs, and town and county land use maps. The figure above depicts a system of connected habitats. This map shows a kind of "natural zoning," boundaries encompassing protected home regions for many wildlife species. **Local conservation advisory commissions (CACs)** and the **Environmental Management Council (EMC)** are in an ideal position to help the town develop wildlife preservation strategies.

Local Management

Habitat system planning should happen townwide in communication with adjacent municipalities, as well as on a site-by-site basis. Localities should know and publicize habitat requirements of wildlife residents.

Inventory →	Strategies →	Implementation
• Identify species • Map habitat locations • Determine conflicts or threats	• Set protection goals • Involve public • Adopt policies	• Engage applicants • Approve land use regulations • Agree to permanent conditions (e.g., easements, no development areas, purchase of critical areas)

5 Methods to Protect Habitats

1. Require very low density residential and conservation zones in prime wildlife areas.
2. Use conservation subdivisions to preserve habitats.
3. Use setback requirements and development policies to protect wetlands and stream corridors.
4. Selectively purchase critical conservation areas or secure protective easements on these properties.
5. Designate priority growth areas and provide for utility districts to encourage compact development patterns.

Sources:
DeGraaf and Rudis, *New England Wildlife: Habitat, Natural History and Distribution,* USDA, 1992
Dutchess County Department of Planning and Dutchess County Environmental Management Council, *Natural Resources,* 1985
T.T. Forman, *Land Mosaics: Ecology of Landscapes and Regions*
National Audubon Society, *Migrating Birds and the Great Northern Forest,* December 1993