

Focus Areas of Statewide Significance

What are Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas?

Beginning with Habitat (BwH) Focus Areas are natural areas of *statewide* ecological significance that contain unusually rich concentrations of at-risk species and habitats. These areas, identified by biologists from the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP), Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Maine Audubon, and Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT), support rare plants, animals, and natural communities, high quality common natural communities; significant wildlife habitats; and their intersections with large blocks of undeveloped habitat. BwH Focus Area boundaries are drawn based on the species and natural communities that occur within them and the supporting landscape conditions that contribute to the long-term viability of the species, habitats, and community types.

One or more of the following must be present before an area is considered a Candidate Focus Area (in most cases, two or more are present):

- Globally rare plant or animal
- 3 or more healthy populations of a rare plant species
- Any healthy population of a rare animal species
- Rare natural community
- Excellent example of a common natural community
- Good example of a common natural community and one or more high value wildlife habitats
- Large undeveloped block and at least one of the following: a good example of a common natural community OR high value wildlife habitat OR two or more healthy populations of a rare plant species

To date, collaborative efforts by state, federal, and conservation organization biologists have resulted in the designation of [140 Focus Areas](#) (link to map) of statewide ecological significance. For a list of Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas and to find fact sheets about each area, visit the [Focus Area Description website](#).

Why Designate Focus Areas?

It is hoped that the mapping of a BwH Focus Area will help to build regional awareness, and draw attention to the exceptional natural landscape conditions that result in a convergence of multiple

resource occurrences. The resulting appreciation of these truly special places can then provide momentum to municipalities, land trusts, and regional initiatives focused on strategic approaches to conservation.

Are Other Areas Insignificant?

Areas that rise to the level of *statewide* ecological significance may not occur within the jurisdiction of every land trust or within the boundaries of every town. Strategic conservation planning is important at all levels and can be pursued to identify areas of local or regional significance as well. Although the frame of reference of BwH efforts has been a comprehensive analysis of Maine 's organized territories, the criteria used in designating focus areas can be easily adapted to the local or regional perspective. BwH maps such as [Map 2 \(High Value Plant and Animal Habitats\)](#) and [Map 3 \(Undeveloped Habitat Blocks\)](#) offer a good starting point to identify unique locations rich in significant habitat feature convergence that can then be designated as local focus areas that serve as a starting point for developing your town's or land trusts conservation blueprint.

Strategies for Local Action:

- Incorporate Focus Areas into long-term plans for conservation. Towns and land trusts can work together on [comprehensive](#) and [open space plans](#) and capitalize on opportunities where goals coincide
- Identify property owners whose lands host significant natural features and investigate conservation options ranging from voluntary actions to fee purchase
- Become familiar with the rare plants, animals, and habitats and learn better how to manage them for long-term preservation
- Educate landowners and the general public about significant natural areas and create support for local conservation initiatives
- Cooperate with neighboring landowners and jurisdictions
- Incorporate Focus Areas in grant applications
- Work with state agencies to garner support for projects