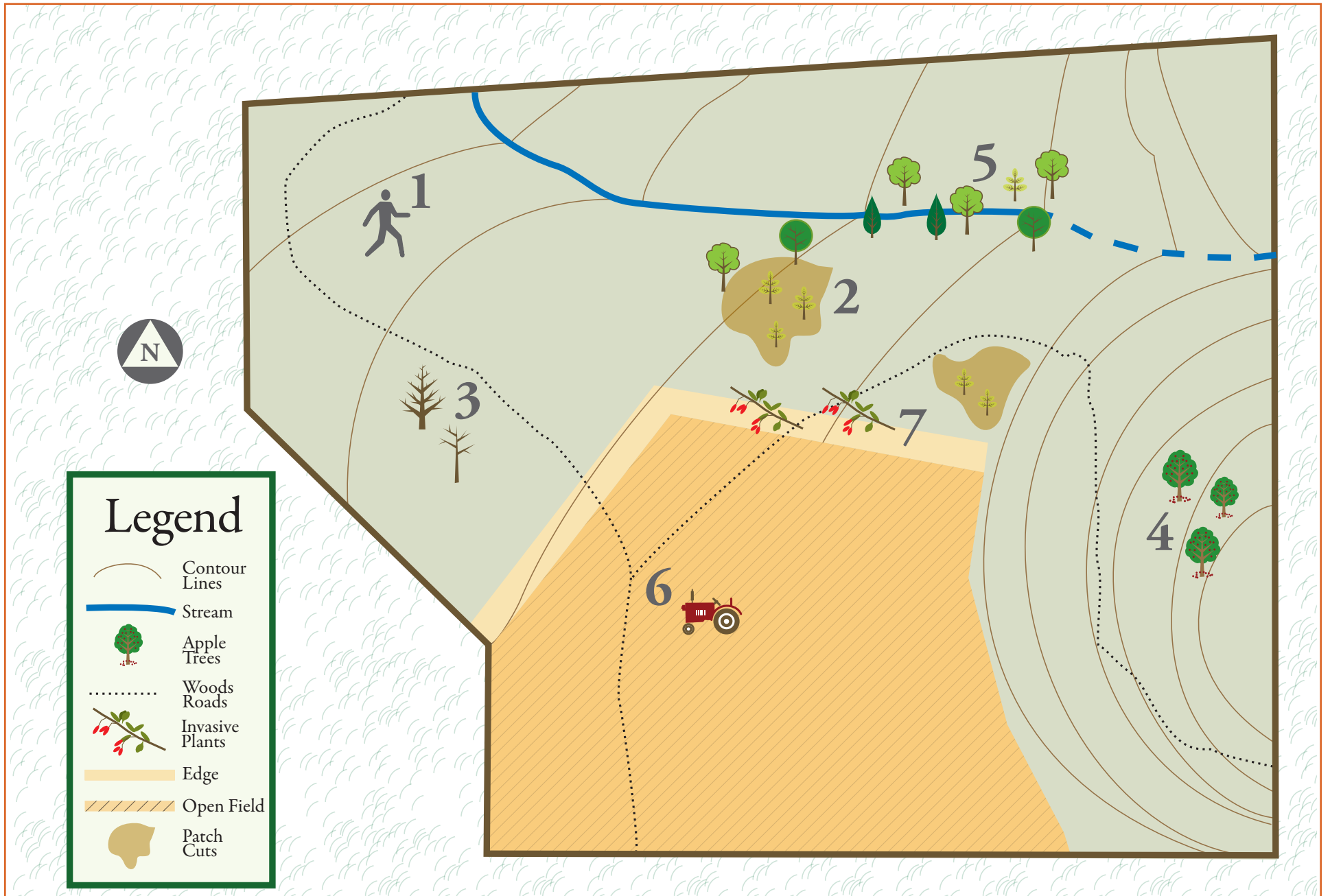


7 STEPS FOR LANDOWNER ACTION



What Practical Steps Can You Take to Improve Your Woodlands for Wildlife?

A variety of management prescriptions are available to improve your forest land for wildlife by creating or enhancing a diversity of habitat and successional stages.

1. Know Your Land

Take an inventory of your land and walk it in all seasons. Identify habitat features which will provide food, shelter and water for various species. Review maps and aerial views. Note habitat features of neighboring properties as your land is just one part of a larger landscape.

2. Create a Variety of Forest Age Classes

Early successional habitat, characterized by seedlings and saplings 10-15 years old, is an important habitat requirement for many species. Late successional habitat, with trees greater than 100-150 years in age, is another feature of diversity.

Openings of up to one acre and larger can be created with patch cuts removing all understory and overstory. This starts a process of forest regeneration and early successional habitat. New growth provides food and cover for many animals and birds, such as chestnut-sided warblers and ruffed grouse.

A variety of timber stand improvement methods can encourage regeneration on a much smaller scale. One example is crop tree release where adjacent trees competing for sunlight and nutrients are removed. This opens the crowns of valued trees and at the same time stimulates a cycle of regeneration on the forest floor

3. Retain Deadwood

Trees that are dying, standing snags and downed deadwood provide roosting and denning sites and other benefits to wildlife and the forest.

And, when you have a logging event, always make sure to leave plenty of tree tops on the ground. This creates habitat diversity at the same time you enrich the soil for a regenerating forest.

4. Create/Enhance Mast Stands

Mast trees produce nuts, fruits and berries providing a variety of food for wildlife. Soft mast are fleshy fruits and berries that offer the most nutrition as they ripen, such as apples, blueberries, cherries and raspberries. Hard mast are the nuts produced by a variety of trees such as beech, oak, and hickory.

Learn how to manage these stands. For apple trees it may mean releasing the tree from competition. For hard mast it may mean conducting a crop tree release by releasing trees with vigorous, healthy crowns to increase production of nuts.

5. Create and Maintain Forested Buffers around Water Sources

Water is an essential habitat requirement. Forested buffers around riparian areas help to maintain water quality and temperature and also provide travel corridors, allowing wildlife safer travel between preferred habitat types.

Fifty-foot buffers maintain cool water temperature and protect water quality. Larger buffers are needed on steeper slopes and to function adequately as wildlife habitat and travel corridors. Buffers also should be maintained around natural seeps and vernal pools.

6. Manage Transition Zones and Open Areas

Transition zones are areas where two habitat types meet, such as fields and contiguous forest. In these areas work to soften the edge to create a gradual change between habitat types.

If your property contains open field areas you will want to mow or brush hog at least once every three years. This will knock back woody stems. Mowing should take place no earlier than July 15th, and after August 1st if possible, to ensure that most ground nesting birds, such as bobolinks, have fledged. Consider having someone hay your field. Removing

the duff allows for early green up which is attractive to nesting birds in the spring.

7. Control Invasive Plants

Invasive plants, which outcompete native species, are a significant problem in many areas of Vermont and can inhibit forest regeneration. They often thrive along the edges where fields are adjacent to woods.

Learn to identify the invasive species on your property and mark locations on a map so you can monitor the spread of invasives and the effectiveness of control measures.

Some invasive plants can be removed by manual pulling before their root structures are firmly established. Manual control is labor intensive, but the work is easier if it becomes an automatic response to signs of early invasive regeneration as you walk your wood. The use of herbicides is an option to control invasives and herbicides may be needed where infestations are widespread.

COOPERATE WITH NEIGHBORS

Coordinating a habitat improvement plan with neighboring landowners enhances opportunities for wildlife. Together you can affect a larger landscape area and support a greater diversity of habitat types to support plant, animal and bird species.

Your local landscape also may be less likely to suffer devastating loss by insects, disease or wind and storm events.

In talking with your neighbors, keep in mind that there are several ways to assess habitat diversity.

Structural diversity is a reference to the mixing of vegetative types, sizes of classes, and an assortment of features, such as cavity trees.

It can be vertical, as in layers from forest floor to canopy and include herbaceous plants and shrubs in the understory. Or it can be horizontal, transitioning from one habitat type to another such as openings within the forest or large forested patches.