**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE**

**Press Release**

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**New High-Resolution Data Helps Identify Habitat Connections for Conservation**

MONTPELIER, Vt. – Towns, planners and conservation organizations in Vermont can now take advantage of new high-resolution data to find and protect important habitat features like wildlife road crossings.

The new data are available in the most recent update to [BioFinder](https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder4/), a free mapping tool that uses [Vermont Conservation Design](https://vtfishandwildlife.com/conserve/vermont-conservation-design) to show Vermont’s most important landscapes for wildlife and climate resilience.

“This update is a major step forward in mapping the connections between Vermont’s most important wildlife habitats,” said Jens Hawkins-Hilke, conservation planning biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.  “As wildlife populations adjust their ranges to a changing climate these connections will become even more important.”

The updated Vermont Conservation Design analysis uses new data that is 60 times more detailed than previous versions.  Higher resolution data allows Vermont Conservation Design to accurately capture the edges of large areas of uninterrupted habitat, and the connections between them.  The online BioFinder tool lets planners and conservation organizations see those connecting landscapes in the areas where they work.

“We are watching species move in real time as a result of our changing climate,” said Gus Goodwin, senior conservation planner and ecologist with The Nature Conservancy.  “Our state plays an outsized role in supporting that movement throughout the entire Northern Appalachians, a vision supported by the BioFinder tool.  With these updates, Vermont Conservation Design is ready to help us meet the conservation challenges of the coming decade.”

Vermont Conservation Design and BioFinder were developed by a team led by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, along with scientists from the Nature Conservancy, the Northeast Wilderness Trust, the Vermont Land Trust, and the University of Vermont.

“This partnership brought together critical perspectives needed in assessing Vermont’s landscape for climate and ecological resilience, and the results will help guide our future conservation work,” said Tracy Zschau, president of the Vermont Land Trust.

Updating Vermont Conservation Design and BioFinder offered collaborators an opportunity to revisit the science that underpins both products.  The Vermont Conservation Design team reaffirmed this underlying research, even taking into account evolving climate data over the last decade.

“I was consistently impressed with the amount of expertise in the room developing this updated model,” said Shelby Perry, wildlands ecologist with the Northeast Wilderness Trust.  “Everyone on the team was motivated by protecting an ecologically functioning landscape here in Vermont, and it was an honor to work together on this.”

BioFinder is available online for free, for everyone from scientists and town managers to students and private landowners, on the [Vermont Agency of Natural Resources’ website](https://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder4/).

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VTF&W Photo

Three images of the same landscape showing an orange pre- and maroon post-update Vermont Conservation Design readout in BioFinder.  The post-update analysis excludes areas around houses from important habitat areas and shows new connecting habitats that wildlife can easily move through.

A picture containing text, plant

Description automatically generated

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