

# A Safe Harbor for Nature

New England's Resilient and Connected Network of Land

The Nature  
Conservancy



Protecting nature. Preserving life.



Nature is in peril. Since 2001, in America, we have degraded 24 million acres of natural land to make way for things like housing development, roads, traffic, agriculture, and energy infrastructure. It's no wonder species are currently disappearing at a rate up to 100 times higher than the average rate of extinction over the past 10 million years. Climate change is also accelerating the damage. One-third of animal and plant species could face extinction in the next 50 years due to climate change, according to a recent study from scientists at the University of Arizona.

Science has an answer. For over a decade, a team of scientists at The Nature Conservancy has worked to identify which land areas in the United States are most resilient to climate change—and can support the most diverse range of plants and animals into the future. These are the pieces of land we are focused on conserving because they hold the promise of a safe harbor for nature.

These resilient strongholds, many of which are in New England, have varied elevations, soils, and temperatures that create diverse “micro-climates” that support a diverse array of species, even as the Earth’s overall climate changes. Wildlife need these rich, life sustaining lands since rampant development and accelerated climate change are leaving them with less places to go.

As the climate evolves, animals and plants will need to migrate to and between these resilient strongholds to survive. And they’ll need to follow natural pathways to get there. Therefore, we have identified which lands are not just resilient and biodiverse but also connected to one another.

Conserving these resilient lands safeguards not only animals and plants but humans, too. Plants and animals transform the physical world of rock and soil into ecosystems that provide the oxygen, food, and clean, filtered water that sustain all life. Resilient lands, including forests and wetlands, capture and store larger amounts of carbon helping offset greenhouse gas emissions—a critical natural climate solution.

Saving nature from the effects of climate change might seem impossible. But by focusing on conserving naturally resilient lands, we can keep our planet habitable for a vast array of species, including our own.

# Focal Landscapes of New England

The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Network of land covers more than 20 million acres, more than half the land area of New England.

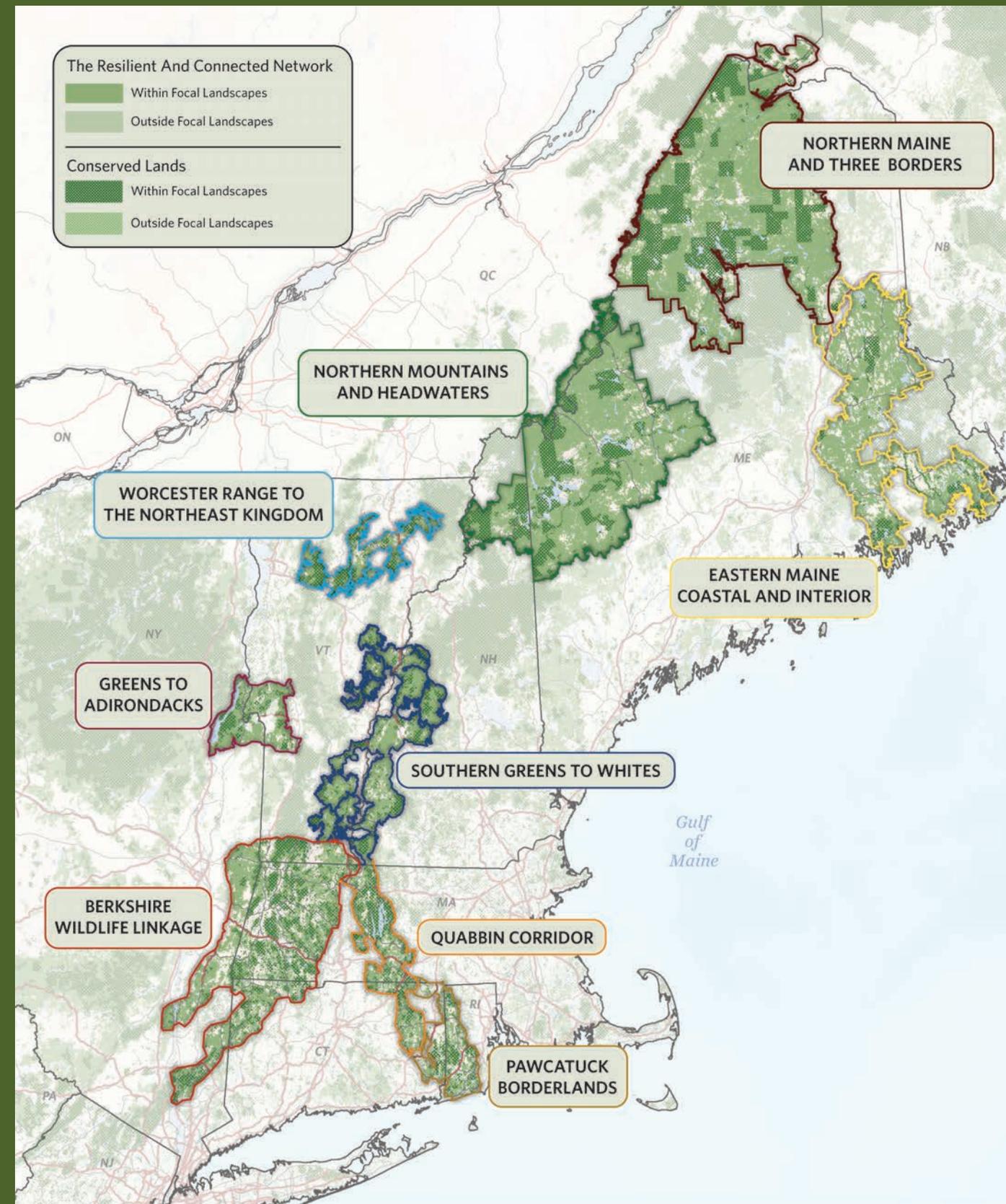
This research offers a roadmap for preserving New England's wildlife and natural landscapes. When used as a guide, the maps allow The Nature Conservancy and our partners to home in on the most important places to conserve.

While conserving all of this land will provide native biodiversity the best chance at persisting in the face of climate change, we can't do it all at once, and certain areas require more immediate action. But we need a place to start.

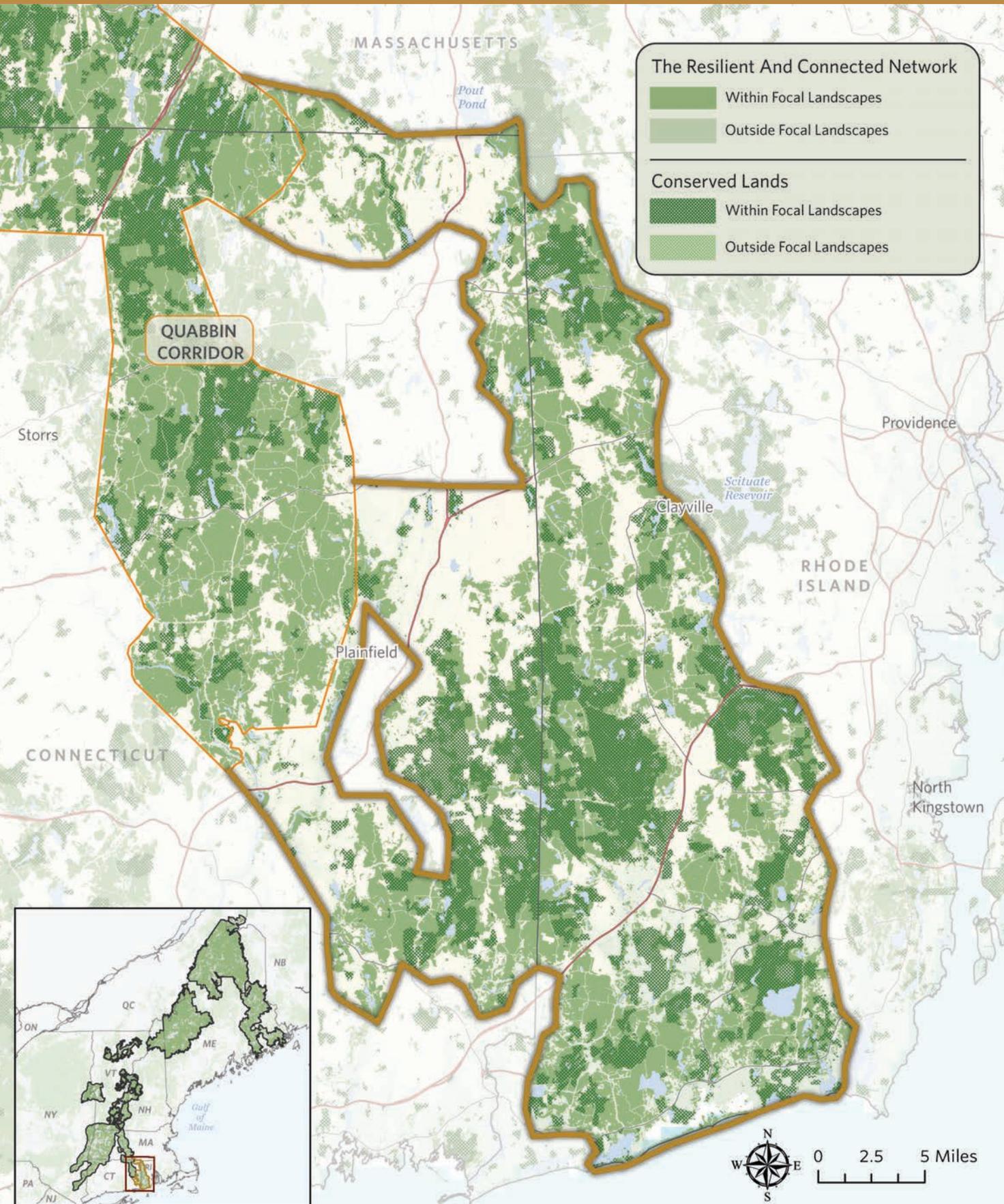
Conservation experts from across New England worked together to identify a set of focal landscapes for the region. These focal landscapes are critical for conservation because of their contribution to thriving biodiversity and functioning ecosystems today, and into the future as the climate changes. Focal landscapes are places within the Resilient and Connected Network of land where:

- Conservation strategies will be most successful through collaboration across state borders
- Conservation action by The Nature Conservancy is essential in the next 5-10 years to combat imminent threats or seize opportunities to have a large-scale impact.

This book showcases the nine Focal Landscapes we have identified in New England. We invite you to learn more about these special places and our work to safeguard them, for the benefit of our natural and human communities.



# Pawcatuck Borderlands



## Overview

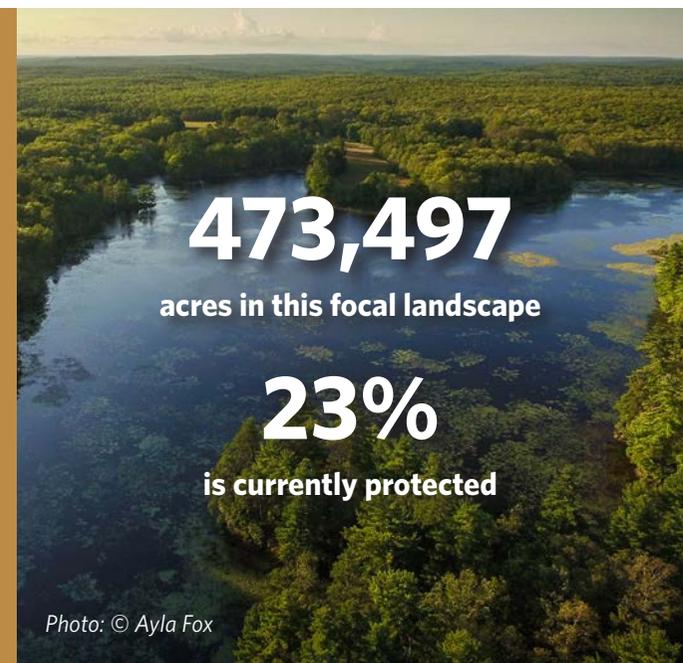
The Pawcatuck Borderlands stretches northward from the barrier beaches, coastal plain and lagoons of Rhode Island's south coast, through a core of forest that includes a network of state forests and local and private conservation land. The focal area continues northward along the Rhode Island/Connecticut border and connects with more conserved land at the border of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The landscape then connects across the villages of the Thames River to link with the Quabbin Corridor.

The Pawcatuck Borderlands is the southern segment of a connectivity flow zone linking the low coastal habitats of southern Rhode Island to the connected mountain habitats of northern New England and beyond. This landscape includes a unique complex of freshwater systems created by the coastal plain ponds, moraine, small tidal streams and the Wild and Scenic Pawcatuck River. At the forested heart of this landscape are four adjacent forest blocks that together form a relatively undeveloped "oasis" in the middle of the highly developed coastal corridor from Washington, D.C. to Boston, visible as a dark spot on nighttime satellite photos.

The proximity of the region to the highly developed New England coast provides a number of challenges, but also presents great opportunity. Outdoor recreation is increasingly important; this landscape provides hiking, paddling, swimming, and other opportunities to many people from the surrounding urban and suburban population centers.

## Conservation actions include:

- Land protection to secure large parcels and to improve landscape connections so wildlife can move
- Supporting partner organizations in land protection
- Engagement on renewable energy siting to avoid compromising key natural lands
- Supporting land trust partners with science, planning, and capacity funding
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



**473,497**  
acres in this focal landscape

**23%**  
is currently protected

# Quabbin Corridor



## Overview

The Quabbin Corridor is a narrow north-south landscape in Massachusetts and Connecticut encompassing the most intact and resilient areas of the Worcester Plateau, an area of highlands rising out of the Connecticut River Valley from the west and descending in the east into the coastal plain. It is almost entirely within the Resilient and Connected Network, and only 37% is currently conserved.

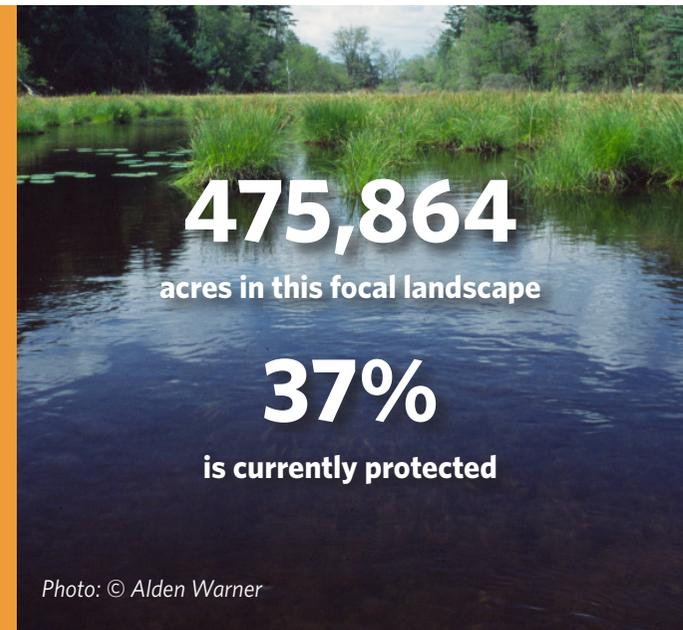
The 100,000-acres of protected land around the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts serve as the anchor for a network of resilient and connected lands that includes large blocks of forest relatively unfragmented by roads and excellent examples of forest types typical of southern New England.

The area contains the Last Green Valley, a National Heritage Corridor recognized as a relatively undeveloped rural island of forest and farmland in the midst of an otherwise urbanized region. Yet this area is also facing increased development pressure due to its proximity to several large urban areas. The landscape includes small rural and suburban settlements connected by areas of intact forests and active agriculture. Local towns seek to encourage traditional and compatible residential and economic development while conserving natural resources and the rural and cultural character of the region.

Major landowners include forest product companies, academic institutions and the states. Several very effective land trusts and regional conservation partnerships are active in this region.

## Conservation actions include:

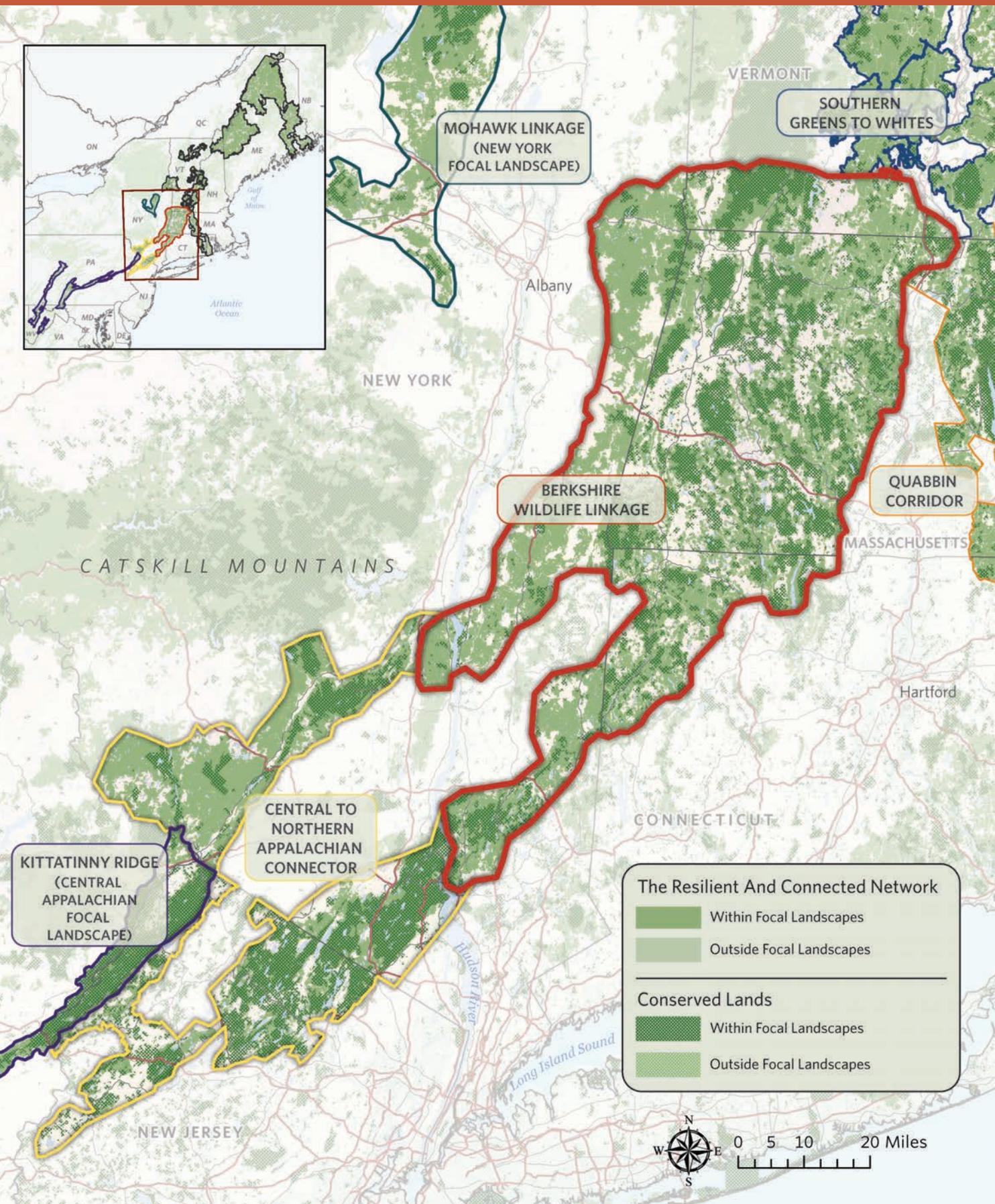
- Supporting partner organizations in land protection
- Collaborative engagement with family forestland owners (parcels of 30-2500 acres) to improve forest management practices, including implementation of carbon market programs (Family Forest Carbon Program and/or Forest Carbon Co-ops)
- Outreach to and collaboration with land use planners to avoid development of key natural lands
- Supporting land trust partners with science, planning, and capacity funding



**475,864**  
acres in this focal landscape

**37%**  
is currently protected

# Berkshire Wildlife Linkage



## Overview

The Berkshire Wildlife Linkage encompasses the Berkshire Plateau and Taconic Ridge in Massachusetts and extends north to the Green Mountains in Vermont, and south and west through Connecticut and New York to the Hudson Highlands. It serves as a critical corridor to the Central Appalachians, feeding into lands of the Central to Northern Appalachians Connector in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The Berkshire Wildlife Linkage includes the most intact forest ecosystems in southern New England and some of its highest carbon stocks. While ownership patterns are fragmented, there are still abundant parcels greater than 100 acres (many above 200 acres) representing important and time-sensitive land protection opportunities. Intergenerational transfer of land has been important and will continue.

The geography is dominated by non-industrial private forest landowners, complemented by significant state-owned lands and some municipal, non-profit and federal holdings. Many state properties exceed 5,000 acres, with some greater than 10,000 acres, and in some towns, more than 40% of the land is owned by the state.

The economy in this landscape is largely tourism-and recreation-based, with a small and diminishing forest products industry. Many towns have small populations and are struggling financially. Exceptions are in the

Southern Berkshires, where there is a more diverse economy based on second home development. While land values have been as low as \$1,500/acre, a COVID-19-influenced population influx is likely to change this.

## Conservation actions include:

- Land protection to secure large parcels and to improve landscape connections so wildlife can move
- Supporting land trusts and partners with science, planning, funding, and land protection projects.
- Collaborative engagement with family forestland owners (parcels of 30-2500 acres) to improve forest management practices, including implementation of carbon market programs (Family Forest Carbon Program and/or Forest Carbon Co-ops)
- Outreach to and collaboration with land use planners to avoid development of key natural lands
- Engagement on renewable energy siting to avoid compromising key natural lands
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



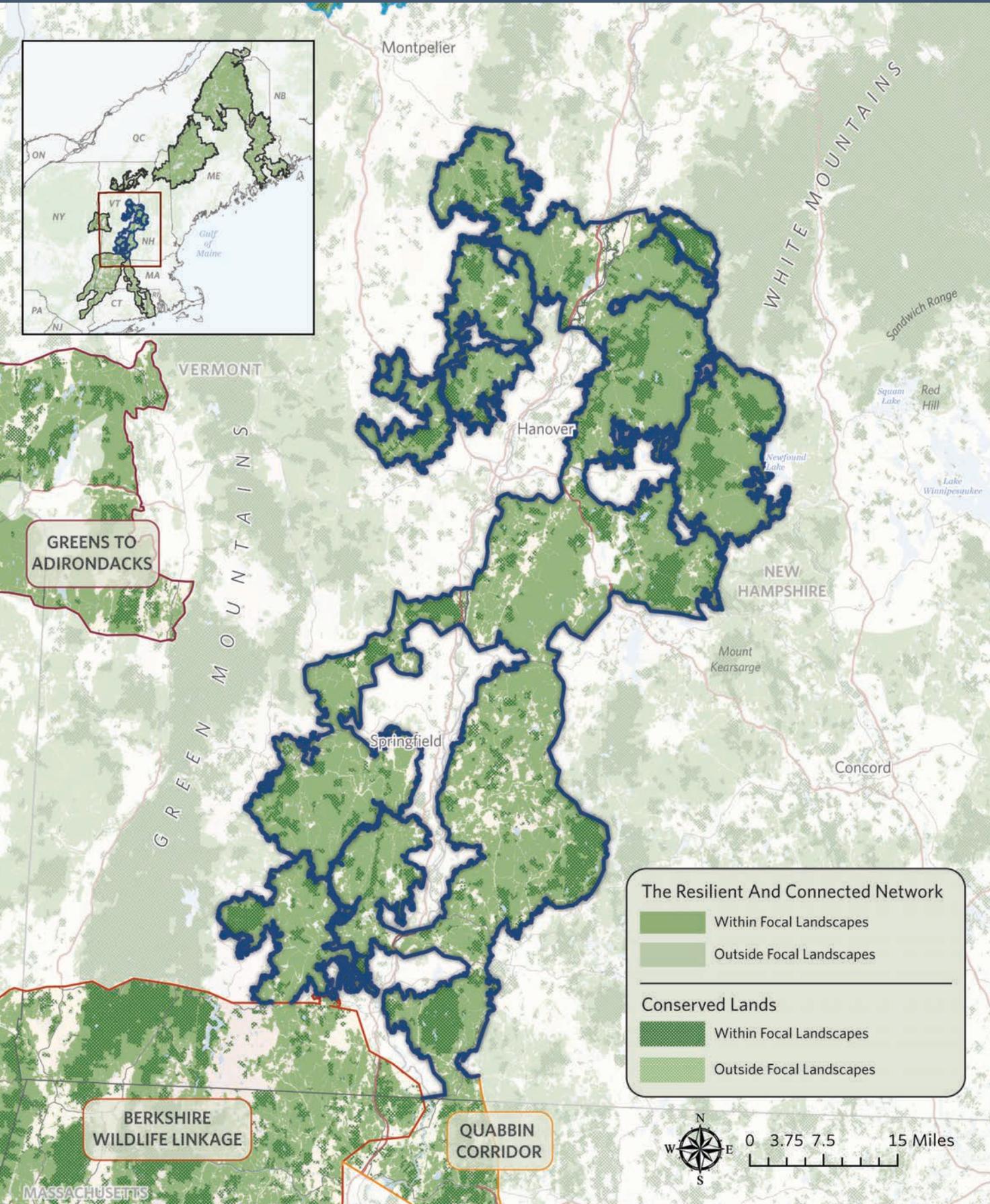
**1,579,566**  
acres in this focal landscape

**31%**  
is currently protected

# Southern Greens to Whites



Photo: © David Barnum



## Overview

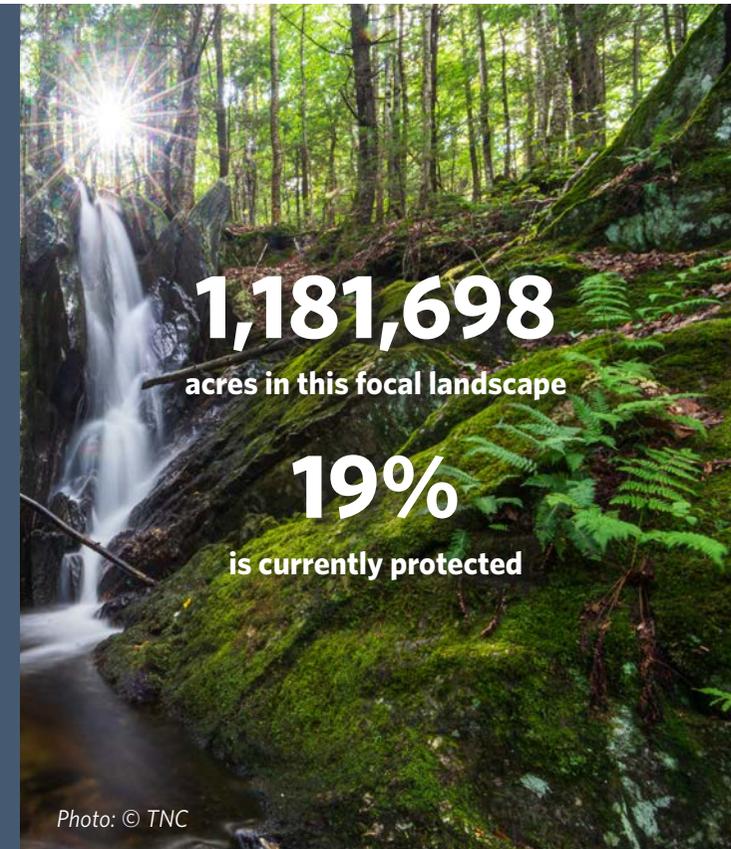
The Southern Greens to Whites extends from southern Vermont and New Hampshire northwards along the Connecticut River valley through the Green Mountain National Forest and Monadnock Highlands to the White Mountain National Forest. It encompasses large contiguous blocks of intact northern hardwood/mixed hardwood-softwood forest as well as critical pinch points where the focal landscape crosses major highways and the mainstem of the Connecticut River.

The region contributes to outdoor recreation and forest products and includes some populous communities. The economy of this region varies; affluent areas such as Hanover, Keene and New London have strong economies, and smaller communities, particularly those with a mill factory past, have struggled to diversify and thrive. Land ownership is a mixture of private and public lands, and good opportunities to protect large parcels (1,000+ acres) can be found.

Key threats to this focal landscape include areas with more rapid and concentrated development along the shores of the Connecticut River and around towns such as Keene, NH. Sprawling development is a factor in some communities such as New London, NH, particularly where the road network allows commuting to Boston.

## Conservation actions include:

- Land protection to secure large parcels and to improve landscape connections so wildlife can move
- Supporting land trusts and partners with science, planning, funding, and land protection projects.
- Improved forest management through carbon market programs for both large and small forest tracts.
- Outreach to and collaboration with land use planners to avoid development of key natural lands
- Engagement on renewable energy siting to avoid compromising key natural lands
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



**1,181,698**  
acres in this focal landscape

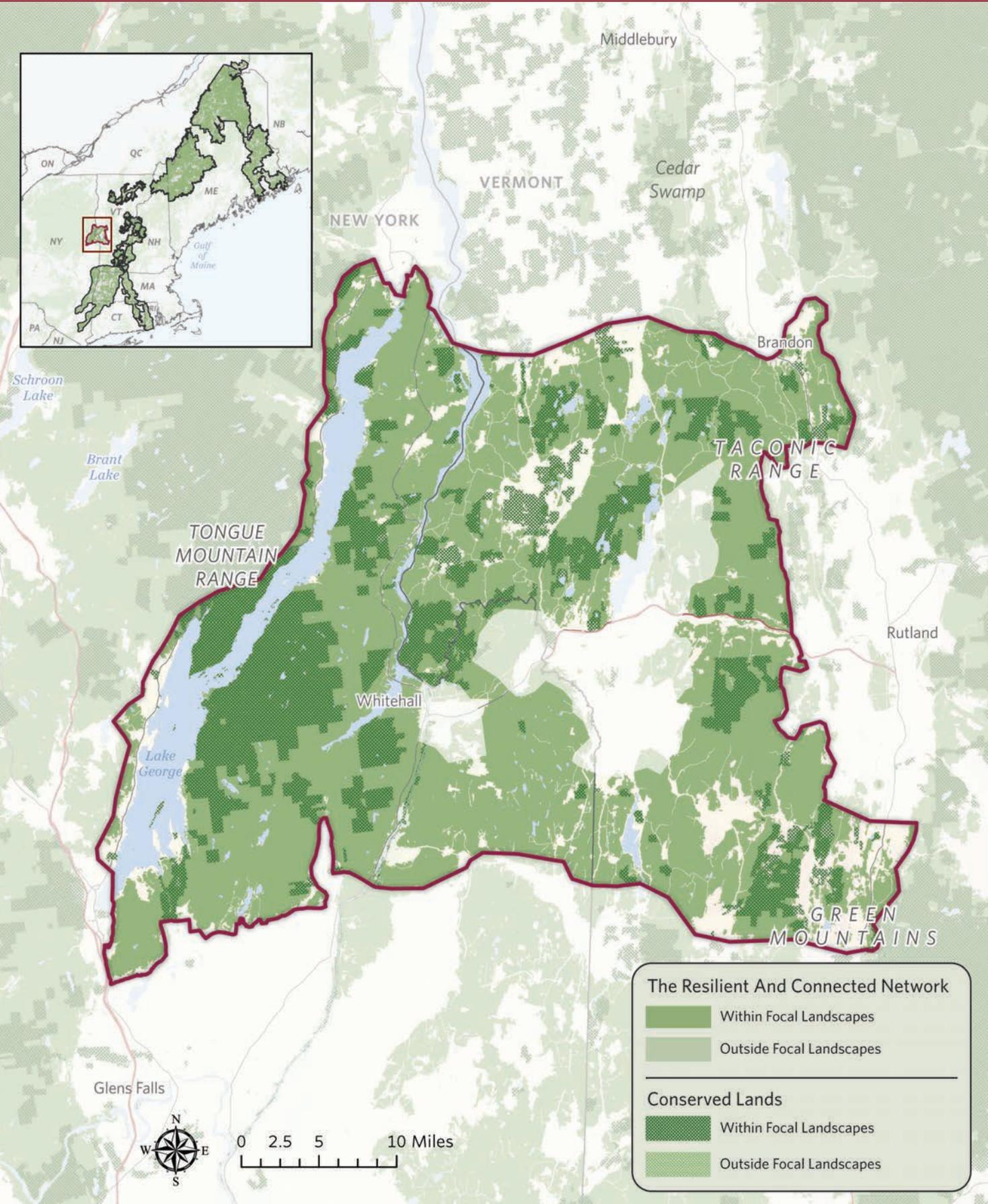
**19%**  
is currently protected

Photo: © TNC

# Greens to Adirondacks



Photo: © TNC



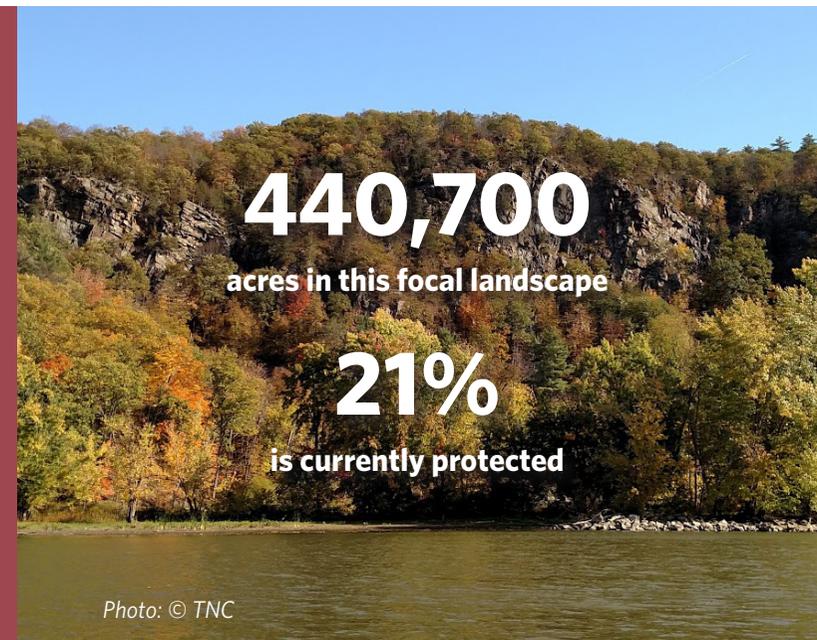
## Overview

The Greens to Adirondacks consists of a mosaic of forested ridges, farms, towns, wetlands, river valleys and lakes of all sizes. It is also the only remaining ecologically viable connection between the Green Mountains in Vermont and the Adirondacks in New York. If kept intact, it has the potential to expand connectivity to the boreal forest in Canada through the Adirondacks to Algonquin connector. Medium-sized woodlots found in the hills still provide connectivity in conjunction with neighboring properties. However, this region has limited and uneven land-use planning and regulation, which increases the risk of forest fragmentation. As a key linkage area, even small areas of fragmentation could degrade the focal landscape and its function as a critical connector.

This area is ecologically and topographically one of the most diverse in Vermont, supporting a host of plant and wildlife species—some that are considered endangered like the eastern timber rattlesnake, or declining, such as the eastern whip-poor-will. While a diversity of forest types provides high quality habitats for bobcat, moose and bear, this landscape also encompasses the popular tourist destination of Lake George, New York, and Vermont's second largest city, Rutland, potentially elevating development tensions in what is a politically conservative region of Vermont.

## Conservation actions include:

- Land protection to improve landscape connections so wildlife can move
- Supporting partner organizations in land protection
- Supporting land trust partners with science, planning, and capacity funding
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



**440,700**  
acres in this focal landscape

**21%**  
is currently protected

Photo: © TNC

# Worcester Range to the Northeast Kingdom

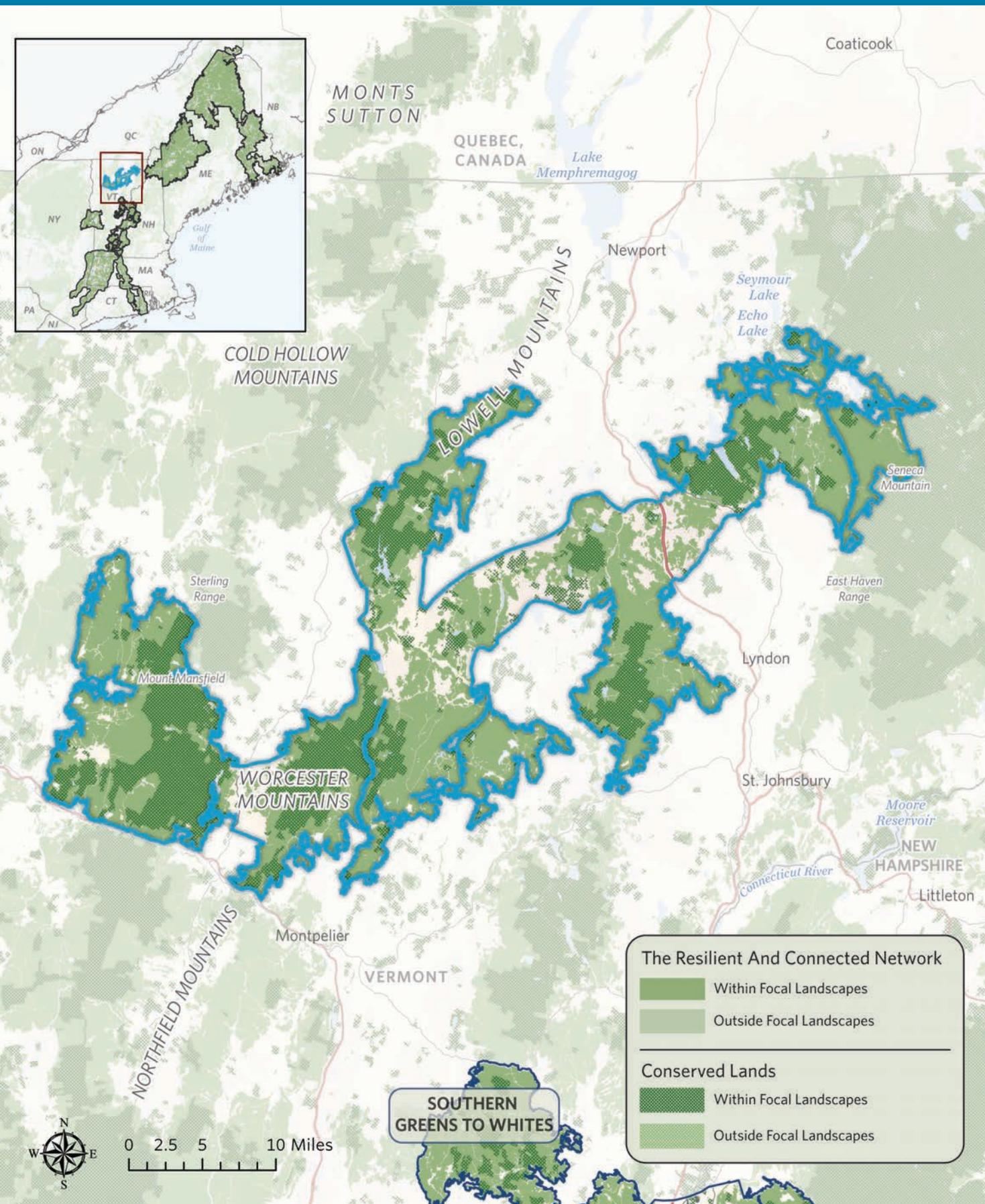


Photo: © TNC

## Overview

The Worcester Range to the Northeast Kingdom focal landscape extends from the northern Green Mountains and Worcester Ranges northeastward through the Northeastern Highlands of Vermont. Within this area there are three distinct biophysical regions, each one contributing to the sense of identity of regions within the landscape. These are the Green Mountains, the Piedmont, and the Northeastern Highlands of Vermont. The landscape includes parts of many watersheds, from the Winooski and Lamoille in the west to the St. Francis, Passumpsic, and Connecticut River systems in the east.

Interspersed among these are fantastic, wild places like the Nulhegan Basin, Lake Willoughby, Green River, and Waterbury Reservoirs. The area includes thirty Vermont towns from Stowe and Waterbury to Newark, Ferdinand and Brunswick—each with its own culture and yet broadly sharing many similarities and connections to the land. Lifestyles vary from traditional land-related professions of agriculture, sugaring and logging, to ecotourism and outdoor recreation.

The communities in this region range from some of the most affluent to some with high rates of poverty, often determined by proximity to ski areas. While these socio-economic differences can be stark, there is a level of shared support for conservation actions, especially when connected to the economic benefits of outdoor recreation. At the same time, the recreational opportunities afforded by this area are driving land development, leading to increasingly smaller parcels and fragmentation, making this one of the most threatened landscapes. There are only a few critical yet tenuous connections left here that, if lost, could compromise the entire focal landscape.

## Conservation actions include:

- Supporting land trusts and partner with science, planning, funding, and land protection projects.
- Land protection and improved forest management through establishment of carbon market agreements on larger working forest ownerships (>2000 acres)
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



**442,780**  
acres in this focal landscape

**29%**  
is currently protected

Photo: © TNC

# Northern Mountains and Headwaters



## Overview

The Northern Mountains and Headwaters extends from near the Vermont border, through northern New Hampshire, and is primarily comprised of the western Maine mountain region. It includes a rich diversity of ecosystems, from alpine tundra and subalpine forests, to diverse wetlands and floodplains. Its relatively unfragmented forests and topographic diversity make it a highly resilient landscape. This region contributes to forest products, outdoor recreation, and tourism economies.

The area is a very popular destination for four-season recreation and is home to Maine's largest downhill ski areas, an extensive snowmobile trail network, popular hiking and mountain biking destinations, and hunting and fishing opportunities that are largely reliant on Maine's tradition of public access to private lands. This region is also reliant on the forest products economy. Development is a key threat in this focal landscape.

Land ownership is mostly private and includes large investment ownerships of up to nearly one million acres. The Appalachian Trail Corridor is a major connector of many conservation properties in this landscape; other significant blocks of conserved lands are connected by private forestlands. The Penobscot Indian Nation and Passamaquoddy Tribe also hold lands within this region.

## Conservation actions include:

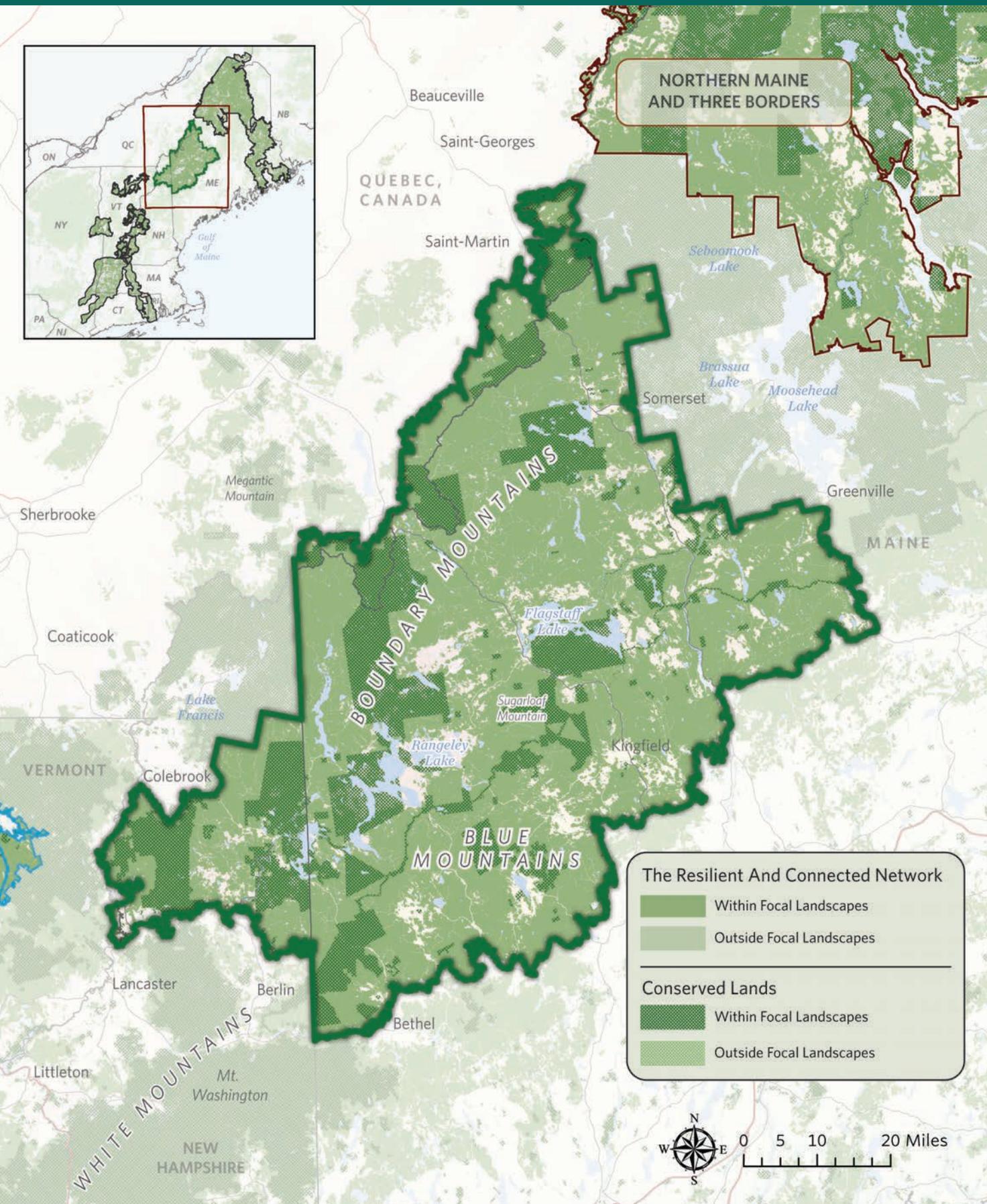
- Land protection to secure large parcels and to improve landscape connections so wildlife can move
- Supporting land trusts and partner with science, planning, funding, and land protection projects.
- Improved forest management through carbon market programs for both large and small forest tracts.
- Outreach to and collaboration with land use planners to avoid development of key natural lands
- Engagement on renewable energy siting to avoid compromising key natural lands
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



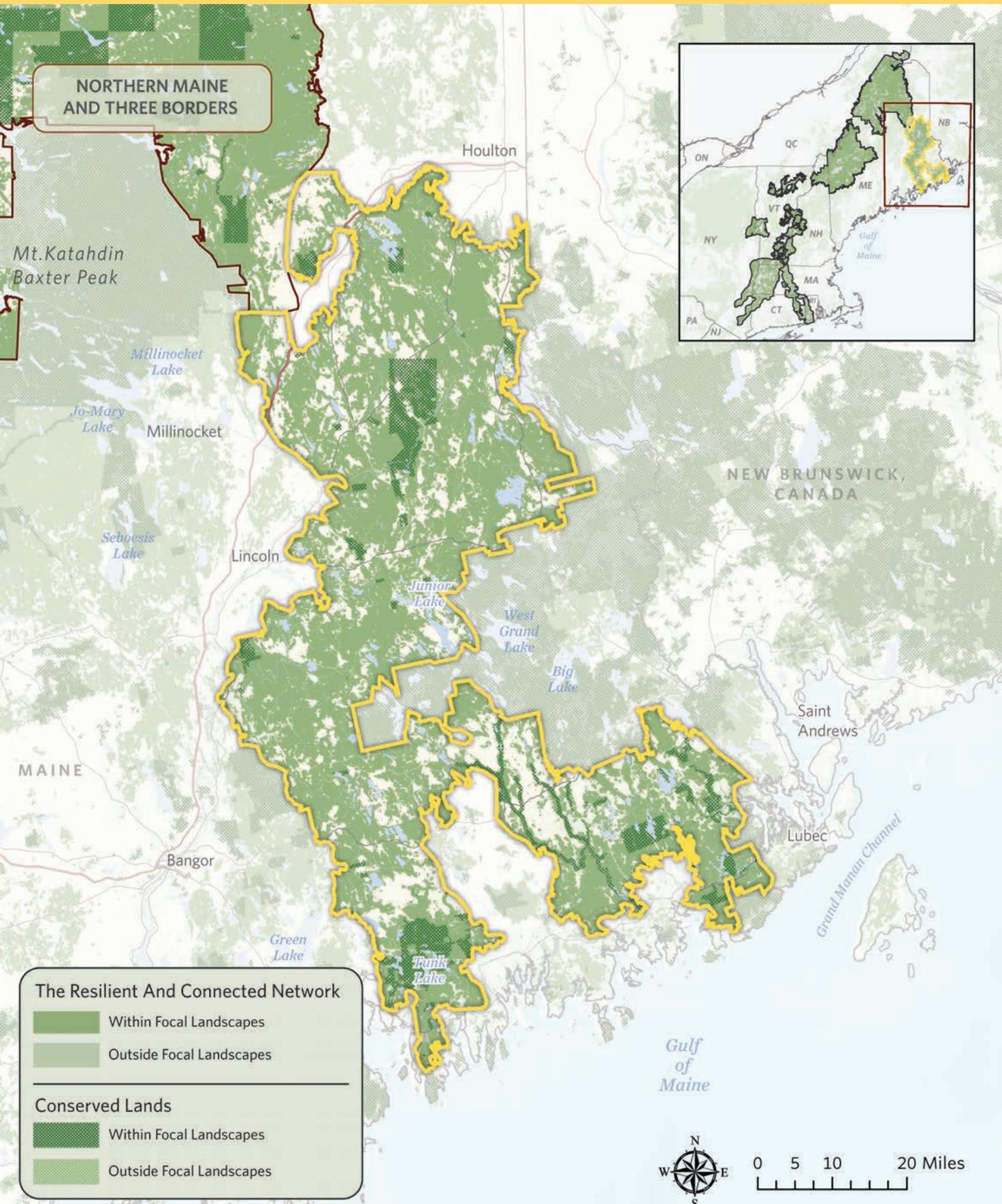
**3,104,289**  
acres in this focal landscape

**20%**  
is currently protected

Photos this page: © TNC



# Eastern Maine Coastal and Interior



## Overview

The Eastern Maine Coastal and Interior focal landscape is comprised primarily of low-elevation forests. It includes diverse and extensive peat wetland systems and river systems with excellent connectivity to the Gulf of Maine. The landscape includes two intact habitat corridors connecting the coast of Downeast Maine to the interior forests of the Katahdin region and northern Maine: one at the Schoodic Peninsula and the other at the Bold Coast of easternmost Maine.

This landscape contributes to Maine's forest products, outdoor recreation, and tourism economies. It includes coastal and inland small organized towns, as well as portions of Maine's Unorganized Territories. Traditional lands of the Penobscot Indian Nation and Passamaquoddy Tribe are contained within this landscape. Acadia National Park, near the southwest edge, is a major economic driver for the region, while the northern end is close to Baxter State Park and Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

While 69% of the landscape is within the Resilient and Connected Network, only 7% is currently conserved. Land ownership is mostly private, featuring large investment and family owned properties up to 250,000 acres as well as smaller parcels. The forest products economy helps to maintain forest on the landscape, yet intensive management for commercial forest products can threaten ecological integrity.

## Conservation actions include:

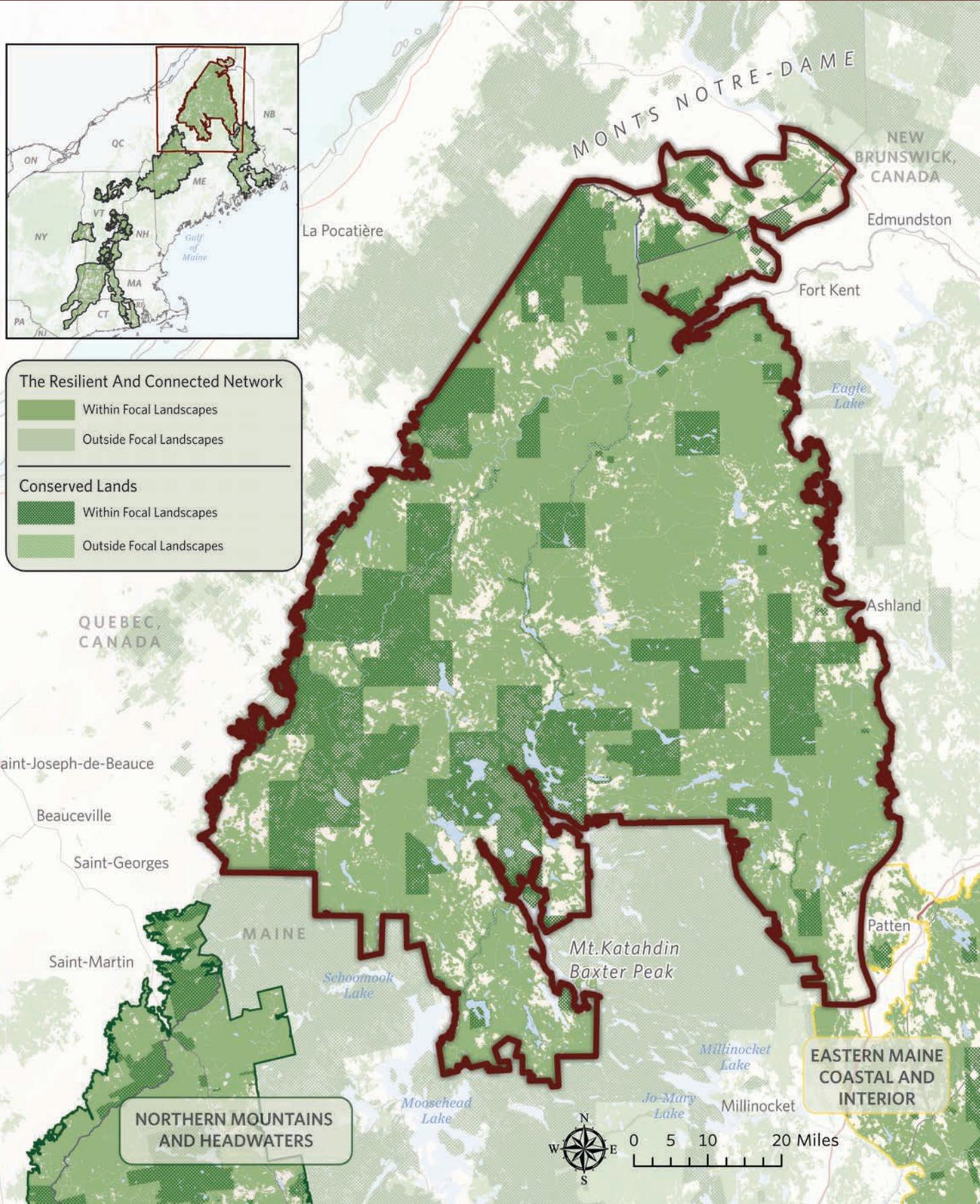
- Land protection to secure large parcels
- Supporting partner organizations in land protection
- Improved forest management through carbon market programs for both large and small forest tracts.



**2,105,054**  
acres in this focal landscape

**7%**  
is currently protected

# Northern Maine and Three Borders Forest



## Overview

The Northern Maine and Three Borders Forest focal landscape is one of the largest blocks of forested habitat in the Resilient and Connected Network (RCN) in the eastern U.S. It provides extensive habitat for iconic north woods wildlife species such as moose, lynx, marten and brook trout. Key conserved properties include TNC's 160,000-acre St. John River Forest and 4,583-acre Big Reed Forest Reserve (which is the largest old-growth forest in New England), the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, Deboullie Public Lands, and conservation easements on private timberlands.

This landscape is the least populated large region in New England, with few public or paved roads. Most of this landscape is within Maine's Unorganized Territories, and policies under the Land Use Planning Commission provide some restraint on development. Land ownership is mostly private, featuring very large (up to one million acres) commercial and investment ownerships. It sustains a forest products economy and provides recreation opportunities, with guides and sporting camps contributing to economic activity. Much of this focal landscape is within the North Maine Woods recreation management system, which charges access fees and manages campsites.

The region includes traditional Wabanaki homelands primarily of the Maliseet and Micmac nations, and of the Penobscot Indian Nation.

## Conservation actions include:

- Land protection to secure large parcels
- Supporting land trusts and partner with science, planning, funding, and land protection projects.
- Improved forest management through carbon market programs for both large and small forest tracts.
- Outreach to and collaboration with land use planners to avoid development of key natural lands
- Engagement on renewable energy siting to avoid compromising key natural lands
- Collaboration with the transportation sector to lessen the impacts of roads that fragment the landscape



**4,107,423**  
acres in this focal landscape

**25%**  
is currently protected

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Help us conserve a connected  
landscape for people and nature.

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