

Wildlife Corridor Public Meeting Minutes
Question and Answer
1/20/2011

Q: What if you live in a developed parcel that is field verified as a wildlife corridor?

A: Nothing will happen to your land until you decided you want to further develop it (i.e. subdivide, construct a house, etc). If so a discussion will occur with the Williston Conservation Commission at the permit application stage. The WCC will work with you meet both development and conservation needs (i.e. put the house in the western corner of the parcel instead of the east).

Q: What is meant by a mitigation project?

A: A mitigation project is when a developer seeks to mitigate the adverse effects that their development project will have on the environment. For example, if developer wants to build a condo complex but the only place to put a parking lot is on a wildlife travel corridor, then the developer may be still able to build that parking lot with the condition that they buy a parcel or easement elsewhere in town where an important wildlife habitat corridor has also been identified.

Q: What is meant by a transfer of development rights?

A: Transferring the development rights from one piece of land to another can be an effective tool for preserving important agricultural lands and other environmentally sensitive landscapes. The transfer of development rights (TDR) option provides an incentive to protect open space resources, including wildlife travel corridors, while allowing a higher density in receiving land where development is encouraged. For example, if someone wants to develop their parcel but an important wildlife travel corridor is present, then the developer can transfer the development rights (the houses) from that piece of land to another where a wildlife habitat is not an issue.

Q: How is a parcel of land verified as a corridor area?

A: By definition a corridor area is where wildlife demonstrates a greater use of a particular area than the surrounding area. Field verifying corridor areas only provide a snapshot in time as to whether certain species are using the land for habitat or movement and may need to be reassessed every 5-10 years as development in town continues to increase.

Q: How can you use the fact that a land parcel is identified as a habitat corridor by this study as a basis to restrict development if the corridor is likely to change overtime?

A: This study will produce a baseline map that will help the town recognize when development projects are proposed in or near mapped corridor areas (i.e. raise a 'yellow flag'). If a significant amount of time has passed (~5 years) since the baseline map was updated, then it is likely that the corridor area in question will need to be field verified again before development decisions are made.

Q: Does this study apply to agricultural practices?

A: No. Bona fide agricultural and forestry practices are exempt from any town regulations that may result from this study.

Q: If I have 21 acres of land that is currently undeveloped but is approved for a single family home and I decide down the road I want to sell that land but it has been field verified as a wildlife corridor will it prevent me from selling the land as a single family home?

A: No it will not. Knowledge of a wildlife travel corridor on the property will benefit the future landowner because it will help them to more effectively site the new home.

Q: A property value will go down if it is field verified as a wildlife corridor because the developer will have more to worry about. Correct?

A: No the property value will not go down because chances are that a development can be configured in a way that meets both development and conservation needs (i.e configuring the development away from the travel corridors). The development value would go down if a policy was written that excluded mapped wildlife corridors from density calculation (as is the case for Class II wetlands and streams and their associated protection buffers) (See our wetlands webpage page for more information). The developer would not have to go through any extra steps in the permitting process if a wildlife travel corridor has been identified on the property unless the corridor needed to be re-verified in the field. Also, it is important to mention that the Town of Williston already has an open space rule which states if your parcel of land is located in the Agricultural/Rural Zoning District and is greater than 10.5 acres then 75% of that parcel must remain as

designated open space in perpetuity. Wildlife travel corridors and other sensitive environmental features, such as wetlands, should all be included in the boundaries of the protected open space.

Q: How would this study affect you property if it is zoned as industrial?

A: The Conservation Commission would likely recommend that the development is situated away from the corridor to the greatest extent possible.

Q: I noticed that some of the parcels identified on the map are located where the Circ Highway is going to be built, how will this study affect the Circ Highway?

A: Bridges and wildlife crossings have already been considered while planning the Circ. This study will provide more data for the Circ Highway developers to consider as the evolution of the plans continue.

Q: What is the amount of the grant being used to fund this study?

A: The grant is from the Lake Champlain Basin Program in the amount of \$10,000. This money is being split three ways between the UVM Spatial Analysis Lab, Arrowwood Environmental, and the Vermont Natural Resources Council.

Q: What wildlife species will be studied?

A: We record all species of wildlife that we see in the field.

Q: What constitutes balance between wildlife and humans?

A: Not sure. That is why we have hired an expert (VNRC) to figure it out. Ultimately it is up to the towns people to decide what that balance will be for Williston. All policy decision will go through a rigorous public review process.

Q: Is there existing evidence showing a negative effect from development patterns on wildlife?

A: Yes the effect is extensive. Once development reaches a specific density of roads the amount and diversity of wildlife drops significantly. Many of the species lost are larger wildlife like the bobcat, black bear, wolf, etc., while other species like white-tailed deer, skunk, and raccoons are attracted to development. Also breeding habitat for wildlife is especially sensitive to development and can decrease the amount available significantly.

Jeff Parsons, the biologist present at the meeting from Arrowwood Environmental talked about three wildlife models based on density of roads/development which will attract different species to the area. They are they 1) black bear model (least amount of roads/development); 2) bobcat (medium roads/development); and 3) skunk (high amount of roads/development).

Q: If I give permission for you to track wildlife on my land, how long will you be on it?

A: It can vary depending on the terrain anywhere from 40 minutes to 2 hours. I spend only enough time on the land to cover all of the different habitat types and edges and then I leave.

Q: If a parcel is not identified as a corridor now but is identified as one in the future due to develop on surrounding land what happens to that landowner?

A: That is something the Williston Conservation Commission (WCC) and the towns' people will have to decide. Remember this study is providing the town with baseline data and future studies are at the discretion of the WCC and public. If the land cover of your abutting has changed significantly since this baseline study was done, then it is possible that field verification of the nearby wildlife corridors will have to be re-verified by the developer prior to any permit approvals.

Q: How does WCC buy land? How does it compare to a developer who is also looking at buying land?

A: The WCC hires an appraiser to assess the land and determine its value. The value of land given by the appraiser should theoretically match that of the developer unless the developer really wants the land in which case they could offer more money than the appraised value. The town does not typically purchase land for an amount greater than the appraised value.

Q: How is the width of a wildlife corridor determined?

A: It is determined by the towns' people and what species they decided they want to keep in town. It also depends on what model the town chooses to adopt: bobcat, black bear, or skunk, for example. Each model requires different size corridors, black bear being the largest area and skunk being the smallest. Corridors are planned for and used most often by females with young because they are the most sensitive to development. Once field verification is completed we (biologists) are going to combine our

information with the information provided by the UVM Spatial Analysis Lab as well as information from scientific literature to develop the best estimate of a suitable corridor width.