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Introduction to Focus Species Forestry

Focus Species Forestry is a method to simplify the task of integrating timber management with conservation of biological diversity, including healthy and diverse plant and wildlife habitats. It accomplishes this by identifying and managing for a few ***Focus Species*** whose habitat needs cover those of many other species, and by ensuring that known rare species habitat or exemplary natural plant communities are conserved. A goal of managing for the focus wildlife species is to also ensure that the natural plant diversity of the habitats they require is maintained, and that other habitats, such as dead and decaying wood used by insects and fungi, is also provided.

Details of this approach are outlined in the forest management handbook ***Focus Species Forestry, a Guide to Integrating Timber and Biodiversity Management in Maine***¹, which was published by Maine Audubon in partnership with the Maine Forest Service, Maine Natural Areas Program, Professional Logging Contractors of Maine, and the Small Woodland Owners of Maine. The reader is encouraged to become familiar with the ***Focus Species Forestry*** guidebook.

Focus Species Forestry includes a group of focus species for each of Maine's major commercial forest types. This approach helps forest managers and owners develop habitat targets for specific species, like the fisher and snowshoe hare, which are associated with some of Maine's most common forest types. By providing adequate habitat for a suite of focus species that represent the range of habitats and stages of forest maturity in the region, many other components of biodiversity will benefit as well.

| Overview of Habitat Types and Species Groups for Focus Species Forestry in Maine | |
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| Habitat Type | Examples of Focus Species |
| Early-successional Forest | Ruffed grouse, chestnut-sided warbler |
| Large areas of older Intermediate and Ecologically Mature Forest | Northern goshawk, wood and hermit thrush, fisher and marten |
| Late-successional Forest | Certain lichens |
| Riparian Management Areas | Beaver, brook trout, dusky salamander |
| Vernal Pools | Spotted salamander, wood frog |
| Dead and Decaying Wood and Tree Cavities | Pileated woodpecker, barred owl |
| Other Special-value Habitats | Important wildlife and plant habitats mapped by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Maine Natural Areas Program. |

On large ownerships (thousands of acres) the goal would be to try providing all of these habitat types. On smaller parcels (tens to hundreds of acres) it may not be possible to provide habitat for both young and mature-forest species at the same time. On smaller woodlots the goal should be to 1) protect the values associated with unique and/or special value habitats such as late successional forest, vernal pools, riparian

¹ Bryan, R.R., 2007. *Focus Species Forestry, a Guide to Integrating Timber and Biodiversity Management in Maine*. Maine Audubon, Falmouth, ME. Copies are available for \$12 by calling the Maine Audubon Conservation Department at 781-6180 x 222 or by free download from <http://www.maineaudubon.org/resource/index.shtml>.

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areas, dead and decaying wood and known special value habitats and 2) consider the character of the surrounding landscape while deciding on management for young and old forest habitat. For example, if young forest is lacking in the area, a goal might be to create some patches of young forest habitat. The character of the existing forest and other landowner objectives will also play an important role. A general approach suitable to many small ownerships is to manage primarily for mature-forest character while occasionally making small openings in the forest (1/10 to 1/2 acre or more) that will provide patches of early-successional habitat.



Habitat management for a suite of focus species will benefit a wide range of wildlife and other native forest biodiversity. This suite includes ruffed grouse (early successional forest), fisher (older- intermediate and mature forest) and pileated woodpecker (large cavity nest trees and decaying wood)



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Frequently Asked Questions

How does timber production fit in?

Focus Species Forestry is designed to be used by any landowner, including those whose primary objective is income from timber production. The different habitat management strategies are linked to management techniques used in commercial forestry. The key to achieving focus species objectives is in the planning for the location, timing, and intensity of timber harvests based on the habitat need of focus species.

How does this differ from other wildlife management guides?

Focus Species Forestry differs from other guides for forest wildlife management because it is primarily a guide for maintaining and restoring biodiversity and the ecological health of managed forests, not simply management for vertebrate wildlife species. While ***Focus Species Forestry*** uses wildlife species to help develop an integrated approach to ecosystem management, the individual species, or wildlife habitat in general, are not intended to be the only end points of management.

How many species do I need to consider?

Most of the species in the guide are what conservation biologists call “umbrella species.” By managing for one of these species, a forester or landowner can be reasonably assured that other species that share the same habitats will also benefit. On most woodlots a forester could develop a framework for management based on the habitat needs of less than 10 of the 25 species in the guide, thus greatly simplifying the process of developing a biodiversity-friendly management plan.

The species we are most interested in are not in the guide. What should we do?

Depending on the area under management, the ***Focus Species Forestry*** approach can be used to maintain suitable habitat conditions for all wildlife that inhabit the forest types on the property. However, if a landowner has a strong interest in a particular species that is not featured in this guide (for example, wild turkey or woodcock) other sources should be consulted for management recommendations specific to those species. Those species would then become a primary focus species for that property and might form the core of the management plan. Other focus species and the habitat guides from the ***Focus Species Forestry*** guidebook would then be incorporated into the plan to ensure that a diverse and healthy forest ecosystem is maintained.

If the goal is biodiversity, then why use only vertebrate species?

Most landowners relate more quickly to vertebrates than to other elements of biodiversity, so the focal species in the guide become “ambassadors” for the other elements of biodiversity. Also, we know more about how to manage most vertebrates than invertebrates or other life forms. For those landowners with little knowledge of forestry the guide can provide assurances that forest management is an appropriate stewardship function.

How do rare, threatened, or endangered species and natural communities fit in?

Before the plan is prepared information on rare species and habitats known to the Maine Natural Areas Program and Maine Department of Inland Wildlife is used to identify areas of special management concern. Other sensitive sites that are identified during the field inventory are identified and included in the management plan.

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