



STAYING
CONNECTED
INITIATIVE

Staying Connected Initiative

> Spring 2025 Newsletter



Dear Staying Connected Initiative partners,

Now more than ever, our efforts to conserve and restore connected landscapes across the Northern Appalachians in the United States and southeast Canada matter. People, nature and wildlife are counting on us to remain focused on work and to lean into partnership and collaboration to create meaningful conservation impacts.

The Appalachians provide crucial wildlife habitat, access to nature and cleaner water, and they sustain land-based livelihoods. These benefits are valued and appreciated by the public and many of the stakeholders we work with. Our approach to conservation may be adapting and changing, but I'm proud to be doing this work with all of you.

While our accomplishments span the full SCI region, I'd like to especially highlight:

- There has been significant progress on increasing wildlife crossings over the last few years, and the U.S. Federal Highways Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program is now moving into its third year. The demand for this competitive funding program is incredibly strong, including from transportation departments in our region.
- In Canada, Parks Canada's National Ecological Corridors program is also in its third year. This program supports and funds connectivity conservation and restoration projects across Canada, including several projects in our SCI linkage areas. There is significant municipal leadership and momentum on connectivity efforts in our region. This includes the recently adopted New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers Resolution 45-2 on ecological connectivity, as well as commitments to 30x30 and other conservation and sustainability targets by provincial and state governments.
- SCI partners continue to strategically protect important lands within the linkages. As you read on, you'll learn more about some of these recent land protection wins.

Your contributions to the Staying Connected Initiative help us maintain ongoing connectivity coordination among our partners and across the region. I thank you for your support and your continued efforts on behalf of connected landscapes.

Sincerely,



Mikael Cejtin,

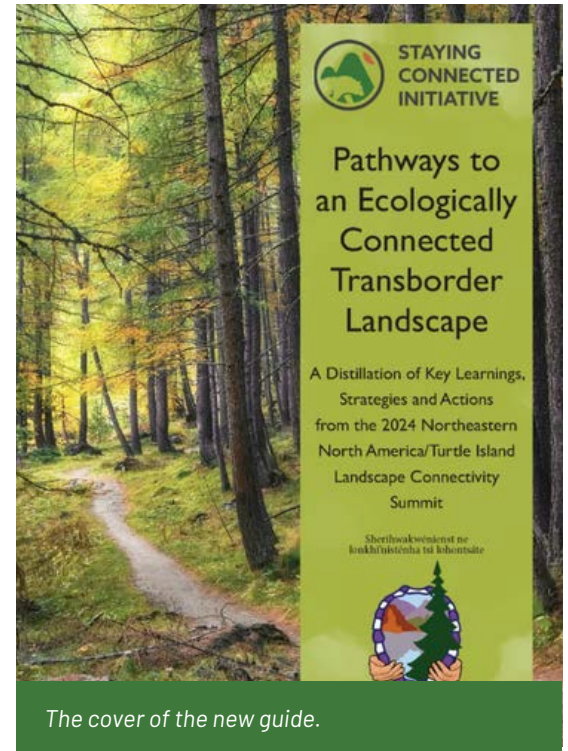
Staying Connected Initiative Coordinator

A New Publication To Help Guide and Inform Regional Connectivity Efforts

The Staying Connected Initiative recently shared a new publication that synthesizes key learnings, strategies and recommended actions from participants at the Landscape Connectivity Summit held in Montreal in June 2024—a gathering of nearly 200 conservation leaders from across the northeastern region of North America/Turtle Island.

The publication, *Pathways to an Ecologically Connected Transborder Landscape*, is intended to inform and inspire transboundary, ecological connectivity conservation and restoration efforts eastern Canada, the northeastern United States, and many Indigenous territories—including those of the Haudenosaunee and Wabanaki. This globally significant region contains the Northern Appalachian Mountains, one of the world's last great deciduous forests and a continental-scale wildlife corridor that is increasingly threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation due to unsustainable development.

The publication highlights the need for a multi-scaled, holistic and integrated approach to conserve and restore resilient and connected landscapes for the benefit of wildlife, people and future generations.



The cover of the new guide.

Northeast States Successful in Second Round of u.s. Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program

Several projects in the northeast U.S. were selected to receive funding through the second round of the U.S. Federal Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program. Below is a snapshot—[click here](#) to read the full list of awards.

- **New York Statewide Planning Study to Reduce WVCs and Improve Habitat Connectivity:** The New York State Department of Transportation will receive \$323,850 to conduct a two-phase study about wildlife-vehicle collisions and ways to improve habitat connectivity. The first phase will locate and map hot spots of wildlife-vehicle collisions, identify habitat improvement zones along state roadways, and designate wildlife corridors. The second phase will develop a standardized decision-making process for improving roadway safety and habitats for humans and animals.
- **I-90: Mass Pike Appalachian Trail Pedestrian-Wildlife Shared Use Crossing:** The Massachusetts Department of Transportation will receive \$1.7 million to fund pre-construction design and permitting for a wildlife crossing project along the Appalachian Trail over Interstate 90 through western Massachusetts. The project includes replacing an existing bridge crossing near Becket in an area with a high number of vehicle collisions with deer. The project will offer separate and distinct areas for wildlife, pedestrians and hikers and include fencing to help funnel wildlife to the crossings.
- **Caribou Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Crossings Project:** The Maine Department of Transportation will receive \$9.3 million to construct a wildlife crossing using a pre-cast concrete arch culvert to provide passage for moose, deer and other large wildlife in the city of Caribou. The project will improve safety by reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions in the area, remove two existing barriers for wildlife and fish passage, and improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.

Parks Canada Corridors Program Awards Funds for Projects in the Chignecto Isthmus and A2A

The government of Canada [announced nearly \\$7 million in funding](#) to support nine corridor projects to enhance ecological connectivity in priority areas across Canada.

Two of the projects are within transboundary corridors identified as Staying Connected Initiative [linkage areas](#) for ecoregional scale connectivity. These include the Chignecto Isthmus that links New Brunswick to Nova Scotia, and the Algonquin to Adirondacks (A2A) linkage that links Ontario to New York.

Read the project descriptions below, and see the full list of awarded projects [here](#).

Connecting Chignecto: Ecological corridor protection, improvement and stewardship between Sa' qewi-ilnuwey Awti (Big Salmon River IPCA) and Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area

Birds Canada will receive \$826,142 to build capacity and leverage a network of partners to improve ecological connectivity from Sa' qewi-ilnuwey Awti (Big Salmon River IPCA) to the Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area. Improvements to species monitoring and Indigenous Land Use and Guidance will expand knowledge of wildlife movement to determine the effectiveness of current actions and prioritization of future ones. There is a dual focus on land acquisition and community and landowner engagement to strengthen stewardship.

Restoring Ecological Connectivity within the Frontenac Arch Region through Ethical Space and Co-governance

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve Network will receive \$369,528 to advance work and conservation planning underway in the Algonquin to Adirondack transboundary corridor through Indigenous to non-Indigenous relationship-building, collaborative stewardship, corridor mapping, and road ecology research in the region, and advance co-management using Two-Eyed Seeing and Ethical Space.



Parks Canada developed the above map of national priority areas for ecological corridors using national-scale data and [methods](#). These priority areas indicate where ecological corridors are most urgently needed in Canada to conserve and/or restore connectivity.



An aerial view of a wetland complex that is part of the Chignecto Isthmus linking Nova Scotia to New Brunswick.

Québec Government Releases Guidelines for “Other Effective Conservation Measures” and Pledges To Integrate Connectivity Into Transport Ministry Operations

The government of Québec recently released two new policies on conservation and ecological connectivity.

The Québec Ministry of the Environment, the Fight Against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks released new guidelines for Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs), accessible [here](#) in English.

OECMs, an internationally recognized concept, are areas not strictly protected for conservation but with measures in place (legal, regulatory or otherwise) to conserve biodiversity in the long term. Unlike protected areas, OECMs do not necessarily have an overriding conservation objective, but they still effectively generate positive biodiversity outcomes. These conservation measures are managed through various governance systems and by different stakeholders, such as local communities, local communities, the private sector and government agencies.

Examples of potential OECMs include parks created primarily for recreational activities, areas protected for drinking water supply, and community forests. The [government website](#) where the new guidelines are posted states that Québec is committed to achieving the global conservation target of 30% of its territory by 2030, and that recognition of OECMs will contribute to the achievement of this target.

The Québec Ministry of Transport and Sustainable Mobility also recently unveiled its [Sustainable Development Action Plan](#). The plan identifies twenty priority actions to advance the Ministry of Transport’s sustainability mission and mandates, with the number one sustainability action being to integrate the issue of ecological connectivity into the operation of its road network.



Quebec transportation officials and conservation partners, courtesy of Horizon-Nature Bas-Saint-Laurent.

New Vermont Land Use Law Intended To Promote Smart Growth While Conserving Forests and Habitat Connectivity

Vermont recently updated its statewide land use review law to promote smart growth while reducing forest fragmentation and maintaining habitat connectivity.

Act 181, an Act Relating to Community Resilience and Biodiversity Through Land Use Planning, was passed in 2024 with the goal of modernizing Vermont's statewide land use review law, Act 250. Act 181 streamlines review through a tiered process to promote well-planned housing in smart growth locations while reducing harm to critical natural resource areas and working lands. Local and regional planning will identify areas to incentivize compact development where Act 250 statewide review will be removed or limited. In the interim, to help address the immediate housing crisis, housing in identified smart growth locations will be exempt from statewide review and go through local environmental review.

To help maintain natural resource areas, Act 181 adds new criteria to reduce forest fragmentation and promote proactive site design to maintain connectivity. The criteria would require that any undue, adverse impacts on forest blocks and habitat connectivity areas be avoided, minimized, or mitigated based on guidance, which will be developed through a rulemaking and stakeholder engagement process.

Act 181 also discourages forest and habitat fragmentation by reviewing the environmental impacts of long roads, and it creates a process to identify critical resource areas where Act 250 review should be applied.



*An aerial view of farms and the Connecticut River in Maidstone, Vermont and Stratford, New Hampshire.
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Appalachian Corridor Reaches Fundraising Goal To Protect Forested Parcel Critical for Connectivity in the Northern Greens

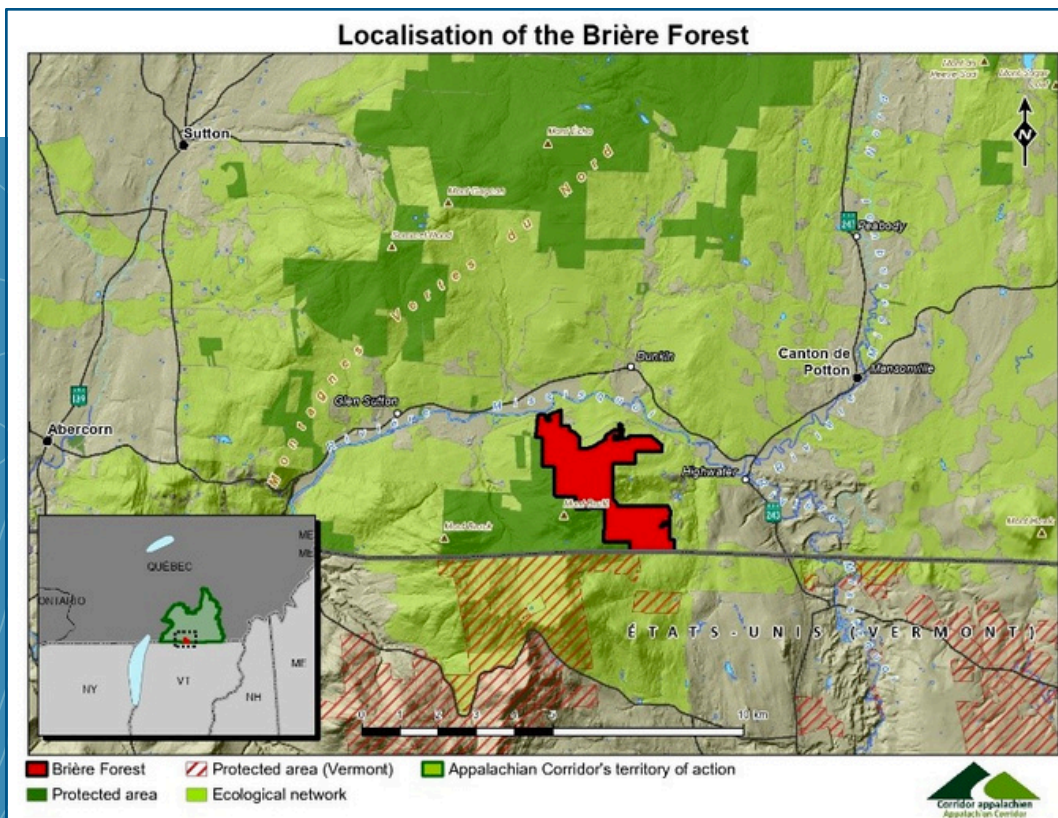
An ambitious fundraising target has been reached! Appalachian Corridor and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) have successfully fundraised \$17 million CAD to conserve the Brière Forest.

Located along the Canada-U.S. border, the 1,334-acre Brière Forest is vital for maintaining ecological connectivity between the forests of the Northern Green Mountains in Vermont and the Sutton Mountains in Québec. The area also contains high biodiversity, including a number of rare plant and animal species.

Faced with the threat of an imminent real estate development project this past November, Appalachian Corridor met with the forest landowner, Guy Brière, who not only agreed to halt the development, but also donated a portion of the property valued at \$7.4 million.

Encouraged by this initial success, Appalachian Corridor and NCC sought to permanently protect the entire Brière Forest by raising the remainder of the necessary funds.

After successfully mobilizing over 500 donors and raising more than \$1,000,000 in private contributions—and with crucial backing from both the federal and Québec governments as well as U.S. partners—the fundraising campaign is now complete, and the Brière Forest secured in perpetuity.



A map locating the Brière Forest.

Ton Ka Wa Project in the New York Tug Hill to Adirondacks Linkage

Staying Connected Initiative partners at The Nature Conservancy, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust recently partnered together to acquire and conserve 768-acres in the [Tug Hill to Adirondacks linkage](#), a crucial, large-landscape scale corridor for wildlife movement. The project will have lasting benefits for water quality, wildlife and people in the Black River valley and surrounding landscape.

Located in Herkimer County and known as the Ton-Ka-Wa property, the newly protected land was conserved through an easement that will keep it in private ownership while being managed to protect clean drinking water. The Nature Conservancy received over \$500,000 to acquire the 768-acre conservation easement through a grant from the New York State DEC Water Quality Improvement Project Program. A portion of the grant was used to protect Hinckley Reservoir, a property within the town of Ohio and a drinking water source for more than 125,000 New Yorkers. The conservation easement will be held and stewarded by the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust.

This project is a tremendous example of SCI's integrated approach to connectivity conservation, with science directly informing collaborative conservation action on the ground. Prior to receiving the grant, The Nature Conservancy analyzed data to identify parcels in the Black River watershed that either currently, or following restoration, have the potential to contribute to source water protection and landscape connectivity. The Ton-Ka-Wa parcel was one of the top-rated properties for both.

Conservation of the Ton-Ka-Wa property also supports [New York State's 30x30 initiative](#), and national and international goals of conserving 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.

Read the NYSDEC [press release on this story here](#).



[Click here to learn more about the Tug Hill to Adirondacks linkage.](#)

Open Space Institute's Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund Surpasses Goal

Open Space Institute's (OSI) Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund (ALPF) has [surpassed its goal of conserving 50,000 acres](#) of critical habitat and forestland across the Appalachian Mountain region.

Launched in 2021 with seed capital from the Doris Duke Foundation, the \$18 million fund has awarded nearly \$10 million in grants to 27 organizations in 7 states, protecting more than 65,000 forested acres. For every dollar committed, ALPF-funded projects have leveraged an average of \$7 in matching public and private dollars.

The ALPF has supported several partner projects in the [SCI linkage](#) that connects Vermont's Northeast Kingdom to Northern New Hampshire, the Western Maine Mountains, and Southern Québec:

[Bucks Ledge Community Forest in Woodstock, ME](#)

The Mahoosuc Land Trust, the Northern Forest Center, the Forest Society of Maine, and the Town of Woodstock, Maine leveraged funding through the ALPF to create the 646-acre Buck's Ledge Community Forest—securing wildlife habitat and preserving public access to a scenic overlook.

[Grafton Wilderness Preserve in Grafton Township, ME](#)

With \$175,000 in support from the ALPF, Northeast Wilderness Trust closed on 6,000 acres in Maine's Mahoosuc Mountains as "forever wild," including 450 acres of a geology type that is highly correlated with biodiversity and underrepresented among conserved lands in the region.

[Grey Mist Farm in Northumberland, NH](#)

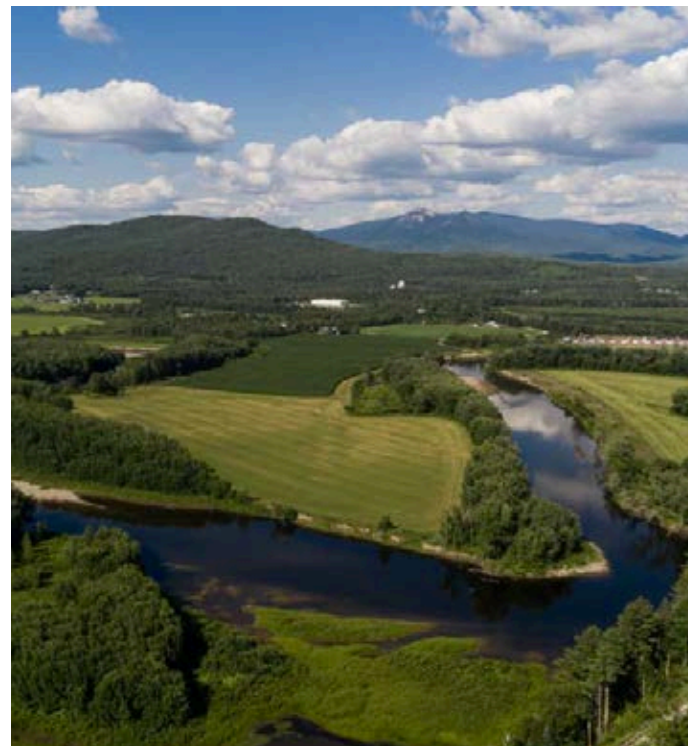
OSI gave a \$75,000 ALPF grant to support The Nature Conservancy's protection of 486 acres of the Gray Mist Farm, part of a larger two state effort to restore and protect the Maidstone Bends—a critically important east-west corridor of expansive floodplain forests along the Upper Connecticut River that links Vermont's Northeast Kingdom and Northern New Hampshire.

In addition to funding partner projects through the ALPF and other programs, OSI also continues to conserve key lands directly.

In August 2024, for example, [OSI acquired one of the last unprotected parcels](#) in a vital corridor of undeveloped land between Sterling Forest and Harriman State Parks, securing 90 acres of forested habitat and critical drinking water supplies within New York's Hudson Highlands region, which connects narrowly through the Taconics of Eastern New York, to the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts and the Green Mountains of Vermont.

These land protection successes are adding up, helping to secure a connected Northern Appalachian to Acadian region to benefit wildlife and people.

Congratulations to OSI and the many other partners involved in these efforts!



Grey Mist Farm, NH

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New Short Film Tells the Story of Ecological Connectivity Work in Quebec

Nature Conservancy Canada’s short film “Corridors” is now available to watch (with subtitles).

The beautifully shot film conveys the importance and the challenge of conserving ecological connectivity, and it tells the story of the Quebec Ecological Corridors Initiative (QECI).

[The film](#) stars and is narrated by Kateri Monticone, previous coordinator of QECI and a longtime leader in the Staying Connected Initiative as well.

Bon appetit!



[Click the image above to watch the film!](#)



STAYING CONNECTED INITIATIVE

About the Staying Connected Initiative:

The Staying Connected Initiative is an international public-private-academic partnership that works to maintain landscape connectivity across the Northern Appalachian-Acadian Region of the U.S. and Canada. We facilitate a collaborative community of practice along with partner coordination and collaboration at multiple scales—advancing important connectivity work across the region through an integrated, cross-cutting approach consisting of six primary strategies.

Contact:

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