

# Beginning with HABITAT

## An Approach to Conserving Maine's Natural Space for Plants, Animals and People

[www.beginningwithhabitat.org](http://www.beginningwithhabitat.org)

### Comprehensive Planning and *Beginning with Habitat*

*To be effective, a comprehensive planning committee should regularly ask itself: "will this set of measures in fact encourage most of the development during the next decade to locate in growth areas, and away from rural areas?"* (Comprehensive Planning: A Manual for Maine Communities)

In Maine, local comprehensive planning has become an essential process for promoting both the responsible growth that supports our economy and for maintaining and enhancing the qualities of place that drive our decisions to live where we do. From the standpoint of plant and animal habitat conservation, comprehensive plans provide an ideal vehicle for highlighting a town's significant natural resources and helping local citizens develop the strategies and policies that can conserve these special places and attributes for future generations. The purpose of Beginning with Habitat is to assist this effort.

A comprehensive plan is the starting point for developing a town's conservation priorities. When coupled with a suite of local strategies and management tools this "conservation blueprint" can shape what a town will look like for many decades to come. Ultimately, the suggested strategies included in a comprehensive plan can provide the legal underpinning of subsequent municipal investments and land use ordinances, and often serve as the catalyst for the development of a follow-up open space plan. Beginning with Habitat's planning resources—consisting of maps, background information, and an on-line toolbox—are intended to provide all the elements necessary to create and implement a comprehensive plan that adequately considers water quality, species diversity, habitat functionality, and all the essential natural elements of a municipality.

Key to the success of any comprehensive planning effort is the clarity and specificity of suggested strategies to facilitate future implementation. While many Maine towns have crafted comprehensive plans that have resulted in positive on-the-ground changes, and most of those plans have emphasized the need to steer growth and maintain "rural character," 60-80 percent of the new growth in Maine in recent decades has occurred in the rural portions of towns where costs for municipal services and impacts on wildlife habitat are highest. To help minimize these potential future costs, comprehensive plan committees should craft a plan that includes a thorough inventory and analysis of existing natural resources, develops clear policies and specific strategies for addressing these resources, and assigns responsibilities and establishes a credible timetable for strategy implementation. It is critical to a plan's success that the public is cognizant of its suggested strategies and is supportive of moving forward with actions to address its identified priorities. The BwH staff is ready and willing to help comprehensive plan committees translate BwH maps and data into actionable comprehensive plan strategies.



This Beginning with Habitat disk and accompanying map set is intended to address the basic approach to incorporating plant and animal habitat considerations into a comprehensive plan. Also included on the disk in PDF format is a comprehensive "how to" resource for drafting *all* plan elements: "Comprehensive Planning: A Manual for Maine Communities" is a thorough and easy-to-use resource for communities undertaking the planning process for the first time or for those updating existing plans. Even for those not currently involved with a comprehensive planning committee, the manual provides a great introduction to the municipal process and the variety of land use issues that are best addressed at the local level. Printed copies are available from the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

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## **REQUEST ADDITIONAL PAPER MAPS:**

You may request an additional set of paper maps at no charge. Please contact one of the above staff members to request this material.

## **REQUEST DIGITAL GIS DATA:**

If you have GIS capabilities, you may request a CD containing GIS shapefiles at no charge. Please contact one of the above staff members to request this material.

## **UPDATED TOWN/REGION MAPS AVAILABLE:**

The most recent maps for Maine's towns and regions are available online at [www.beginningwithhabitat.org](http://www.beginningwithhabitat.org). Click on 'The Maps,' then 'Map Availability/Request Maps,' and select the letter of the town/region of interest. All maps are viewable in PDF format. This website is updated as new maps are created, and as maps older than two years are removed. Maps of towns that are not currently available can be produced on request.

## **NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION ACT (NRPA) INFORMATION:**

Data requests for NRPA purposes (seabird nesting islands, high and moderate value waterfowl and wading bird habitats, and shorebird feeding and staging areas) should be directed to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Data to view in Google Earth or GIS systems are available at: <http://www.maine.gov/dep/gis/datamaps/index.html#nrpa>.