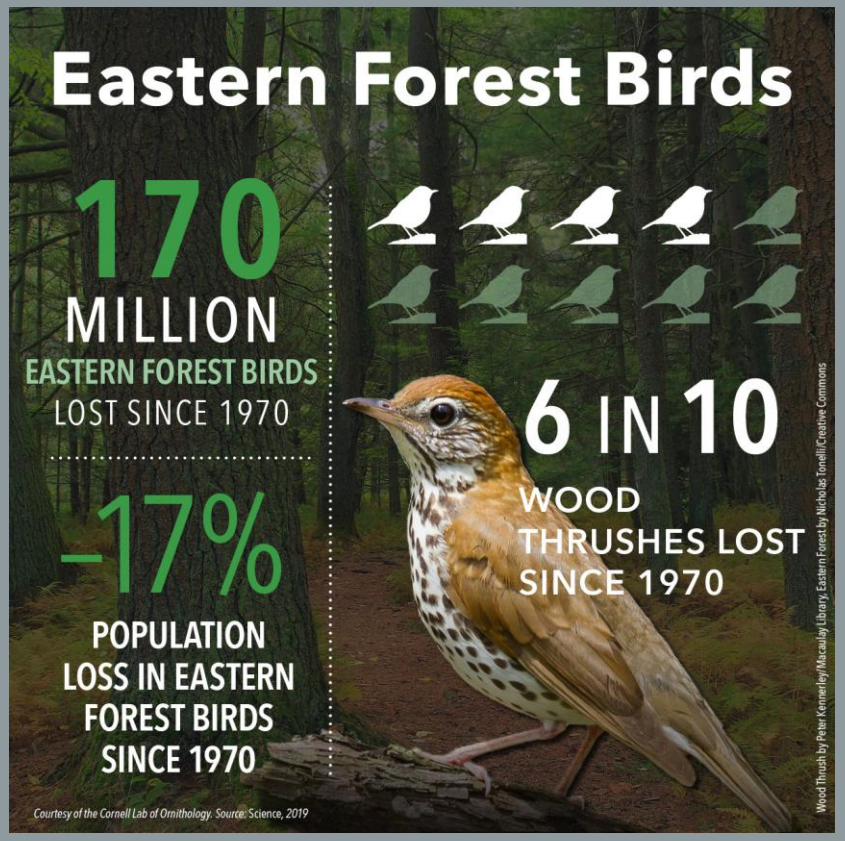

Audubon


2.9 billion
birds gone since 1970
0
-1,000,000,000
-2,000,000,000
-3,000,000,000
1970 1980 1990 2000 2010
Courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Source: Science, 2019
Forest by Nicholas Tonelli/Creative Commons, Map from Birds of North America birdsna.org


Migratory Birds
2.5
BILLION
MIGRATORY BIRDS
LOST SINCE 1970
-28%
POPULATION LOSS
IN MIGRATORY
BIRD SPECIES
SINCE 1970
2 IN 5
BALTIMORE ORIOLES
LOST SINCE 1970
Courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Source: Science, 2019
Baltimore Oriole by Gary Mueller/ Macaulay Library, Forest by Nicholas Tonelli/Creative Commons


Eastern Forest Birds
170
MILLION
EASTERN FOREST BIRDS
LOST SINCE 1970
-17%
POPULATION
LOSS IN EASTERN
FOREST BIRDS
SINCE 1970
6 IN 10
WOOD
THRUSHES LOST
SINCE 1970
Courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Source: Science, 2019
Wood Thrush by Peter Kennerley/Macaulay Library, Eastern Forest by Nicholas Tonelli/Creative Commons

ACT 59: AN ACT RELATING TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/26/climate/bird-declines.html

Birds Aren't Just Declining. They're Declining Faster, a New Study Finds.

Scientists studying data collected over more than three decades found accelerating losses. Their research offers clues about the causes.

Listen to this article · 5:30 min Learn more



By Catrin Einhorn

Feb. 26, 2026, 2:00 p.m. ET

Birds in the United States are not only declining, but they are declining faster, especially in areas with intensive agriculture, according to new research. Overall drops in bird population, measured from 1987 to 2021, were sharpest in warm and warming areas, suggesting that climate change may play a role.

The study, published on Thursday in the journal Science, shows only correlation with intensive agriculture and temperature, not causation. It does not factor in other circumstances that may be affecting birds along migratory routes or while they are overwintering. But it adds to an ever more robust body of evidence that birds — one of the best measured families of animals on Earth, and a sentinel for the health of other species — are not OK.

ACT 59: AN ACT RELATING TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

LEGISLATIVE FINDING

has developed Vermont Conservation Design, a framework to sustain the State's ecologically functional landscape into the future.

(13) Intact and connected ecosystems support Vermont's biodiversity, reduce flood risks, mitigate drought, and sequester and store carbon.

(14) Vermont's most effective and efficient contribution to conserving biological diversity and maintaining a landscape resilient to climate change is to conserve an intact and connected landscape.

(15) In order to maintain ecological functions in intact and connected ecosystems, the full range of conservation approaches is needed, including supporting private landowner education, technical assistance, and programs; conservation easements that promote sustainable forest management; and conservation easements and fee acquisitions focused on passive management.

ACT 59: AN ACT RELATING TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

CONSERVATION VISION & GOALS

§ 2802. CONSERVATION VISION AND GOALS

(a) The vision of the State of Vermont is to maintain an ecologically functional landscape that sustains biodiversity, maintains landscape connectivity, supports watershed health, promotes climate resilience, supports working farms and forests, provides opportunities for recreation and appreciation of the natural world, and supports the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas.

(b) It is the goal of the State that 30 percent of Vermont's total land area shall be conserved by 2030, and 50 percent of the State's total land area shall be conserved by 2050. The Secretary of Natural Resources shall lead the effort in achieving these goals. The land conserved shall include State, federal, municipal, and private land.

ACT 59: AN ACT RELATING TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

CONSERVATION VISION & GOALS

(6) "Conserved" means permanently protected and meeting the definition of ecological reserve area, biodiversity conservation area, or natural resource management area as defined in this section for purposes of meeting the 30 percent goal in subsection 2802(b) of this title. For purposes of meeting the 50 percent goal of subsection 2802(b) of this title, "conserved" primarily means permanently protected and meeting the definition of ecological reserve area, biodiversity conservation area, or natural resource management area as defined in this section, although other long-term land protection mechanisms and measures that achieve the goals of Vermont Conservation Design that are enforceable and accountable and that support an ecologically functional and connected landscape may be considered.

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INVENTORY SHALL INCLUDE:

permanently protected from development by fee ownership or subject to conservation easements.

(3) A summary of the totality of conservation practices, both permanent and intermediate, available for reaching the goals of this chapter, including what they are, what they do, how they contribute, and what metrics are available to quantify them.

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INVENTORY SHALL INCLUDE:

(d) The conserved land inventory established in 2803 of this title shall be updated biennially to track progress toward meeting the vision and goals of

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this chapter, which shall be publicly available, and the Secretary shall submit a report to the relevant committees on or before January 15 following each update.

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CONSERVATION PLAN SHALL INCLUDE:

§ 2804. CONSERVATION PLAN

(a) On or before December 31, 2025, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, in consultation with the Secretary, shall develop a plan to implement the conservation goals of Vermont Conservation Design and to meet the vision and goals established in section 2802 of this title. The plan shall be submitted for review to the House Committees on Environment and Energy and on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

(b) The plan shall include:

(1) a comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of section 2802 of this title while continuing to conserve and protect Vermont's agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters;

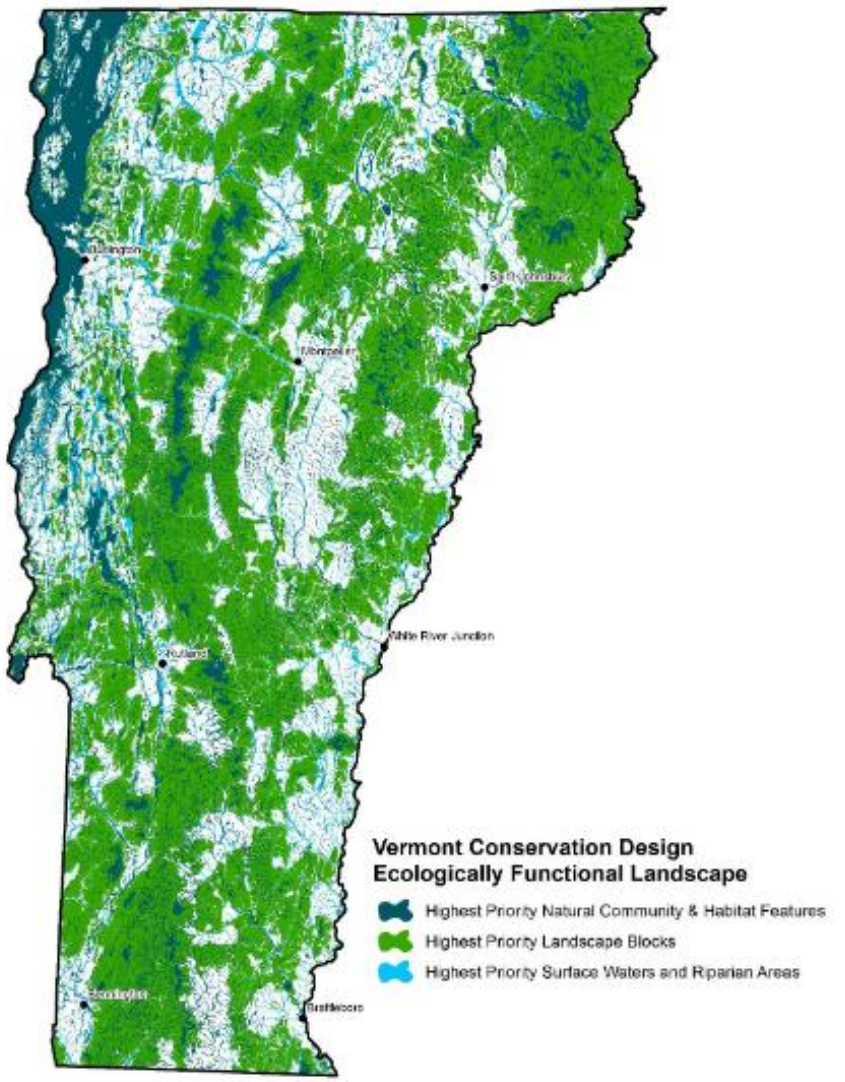
(2) the implementation methods for achieving the vision and goals of this chapter using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide;

ACT 59: AN ACT RELATING TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

CONSERVATION PLAN SHALL INCLUDE:

(3) recommendations to provide and increase equitable access to protected and conserved lands and land-based enterprises, including recreational access to and use of conserved lands; and

(4) recommendations to implement the vision and goals of this chapter while also enhancing the State of Vermont's current investments and commitments to working lands enterprises, rural landowners, and the broad conservation mission implemented by the Secretary and VHCB, including conservation of agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters.



Map 12: The Ecologically Functional Landscape of Vermont Conservation Design. Note that all three of the highest priority feature types shown on this map can overlap.

Implementing Vermont Conservation Design



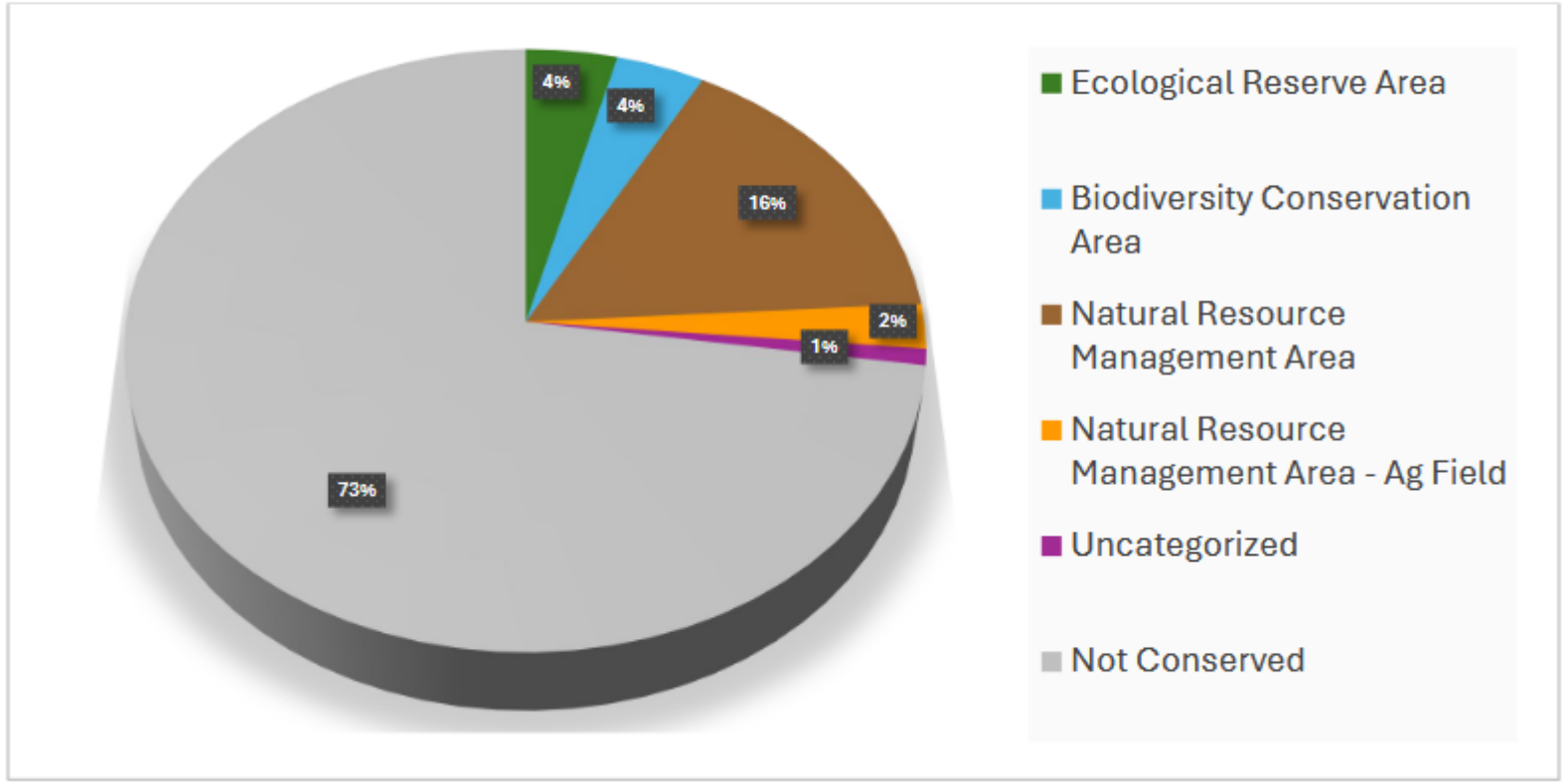
Priorities for Using Permanent Land Protection to Maintain an Ecologically Functional Landscape

March 21, 2025

Working Group:
Robert Zaino, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jens Hilke, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
Jared Nunery, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
Gus Goodwin, The Nature Conservancy
Shelby Perry, Northeast Wilderness Trust
Pieter van Loon, Vermont Land Trust
Chris Moore, Vermont Land Trust

AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
VERMONT

As reported in the VHCB Conserved Lands Inventory Report, 27% of Vermont is currently conserved through fee acquisition, conservation easements, and other permanent protections.



Implementing Vermont Conservation Design



Priorities for Using Permanent Land Protection to Maintain an Ecologically Functional Landscape

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AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
VERMONT

"A preliminary analysis of the UVA Forestland category (which encompasses approximately 2 million enrolled acres) shows that it very much complements permanent land conservation. Approximately 43% of the VCD Highest Priority Forest Block acres are enrolled in UVA Forestland, and three-quarters of these acres do not have any permanent conservation status (Figure 9)."

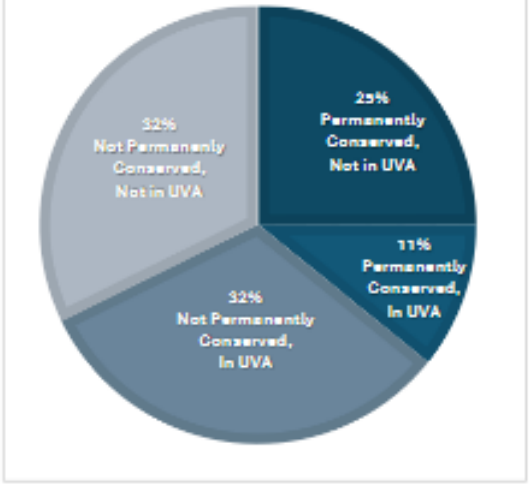


Figure 9. The role of UVA Forestland in maintaining 3.5 million acres of VCD Highest Priority Forest Blocks. Preliminary analysis conducted by VFWD.

	Acres	%
Conserved lands inventory (Category 1,2 and 3)	1,576,785	26.77%
UVA enrolled lands that overlap with Cat 1,2,3	540,885	
UVA enrolled lands that are not conserved	1,769,408	30.05%
Conserved land if UVA enrolled parcels are included		56.82%

Trust for Public Land Analysis Based on UVA Shapefile Data from 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Do not weaken the Act 59 goals by eliminating permanent conservation strategies.
- Let the Conservation Plan process play out to determine the full range of strategies and conservation programs (permanent and intermediate) that are needed to meet the vision and 2030 and 2050 goals of Act 59.
- Recognize the value of the UVA Program in the Conservation Plan and track enrolled acreage in the inventory (which is already authorized).
- Continue to recognize and support the UVA Program and the flexibility it provides as an intermediate conservation program.
- Look at strategies to incentivize or promote long-term enrollment in UVA.
    - Study mechanisms that would allow landowners to enroll in UVA for a long time, or even permanently.
    - Study incentives to promote long-term enrollment in UVA on a voluntary basis.