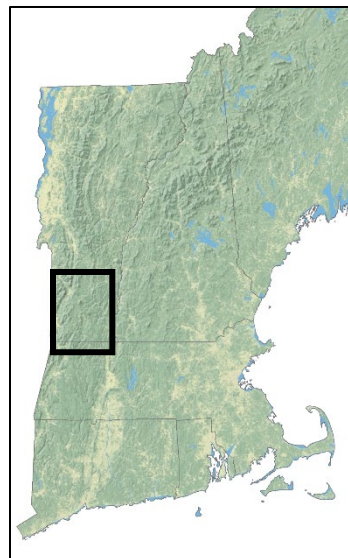


NELF Explorer Case Study: **Windham Connectivity Collaborative Working Group**

Who: Windham Connectivity Collaborative

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The Windham Connectivity Collaborative (WCC) is a group of town officials, community volunteers, and conservation organizations from six towns in southeastern Vermont working together to preserve a critical wildlife linkage from the Green River Valley in Massachusetts to Green Mountain National Forest. The WCC formed in 2019 and seeks to inform land conservation and municipal action in this area with community values through events and outreach. The collaborative also aims to provide stewardship tools and resources for community members and landowners, as well as citizen science opportunities.



What: Community Visioning and Values Mapping

The WCC planned to convene community visioning sessions in which participants identify places and resources that matter to them and use NELF Explorer to consider how future development patterns may affect those places, leading to conversations about regulatory and non-regulatory ways to protect them.

COVID-19 disrupted this plan, which was imagined as a series of in-person events, but the WCC working group team leaders creatively pivoted to a hybrid virtual and socially distanced in-person model of community engagement. First, they held an online community values mapping session. The following two weeks were open for independent online engagement, as well as in-person values mapping with a paper map in an outdoor community space. Finally, the WCC convened an online event to present the results of the community values mapping and use NELF Explorer to begin discussing future development patterns and scenarios in their area and what those could mean for protecting community values.

Why: Forest Connectivity at Risk

The WCC formed in response to ongoing development pressure and forest fragmentation in southeastern Vermont. The WCC aimed to bring together many groups working at a local level and develop a cohesive regional conservation strategy. NELF Explorer was able to add to this work by providing science and stakeholder driven visuals about future landscape changes in their region.

What's next: Continuing the Conversation

In this working group project, NELF Explorer was used as a visual and conceptual aid to open discussion about what the future may bring to southeastern Vermont, and how to protect the places that matter to people there. Although the NELF working group component has ended, the WCC and partners will continue these conversations with the goal of creating a locally driven regional conservation strategy.