

Why Monitor Wildlife?



The fragmentation and destruction of habitat is a primary cause of decline in wildlife populations. When development or irresponsible resource extraction occurs, critical habitat is often unwittingly harmed, simply because no one realizes that the area affected is an important denning, feeding, wintering or travel area for one or more species. Insular populations in fragmented habitats severely compromise the long-term well-being of many species. By

monitoring potential habitats and threatened regions – systematically searching for and recording evidence of use by focal species over the long term – citizens can obtain the information needed to make informed decisions about wildlife habitat stewardship. Our training program is designed to turn volunteers into practitioners of a scientific methodology that will stand up under the scrutiny of town and regional boards, courts, developers and scientists.

Keeping Track concentrates on certain focal mammal species, specifically area-sensitive carnivores, threatened and endangered carnivores, keystone species, and species with rapidly shifting populations. In Northern New England, for example, focal species include black bear, bobcat, moose, fisher, river otter, and mink. Threatened and Endangered species include American marten, Canada lynx, mountain lion, and wolf.

The Keeping Track training consists of a multi-day field course with additional classroom time. During training, team members are taught to recognize the tracks, sign and habitat of selected focal species. Trackers learn to develop a “search image” for likely habitat features and conditions in which to locate tracks and sign. The goal is to maximize the likelihood of finding evidence of the wildlife that is there. Team members also participate in in-depth discussions of the habitat selection patterns, ecology and life cycles of those species, and are challenged to perfect their ability to detect and interpret tracks and sign in the wild.

Following the training you will be required join two or three other trained class members to form and thereafter function as a team. Based, in the case of teachers, the location of your school, you will set up study areas (transects) and run your own monitoring program, keeping accurate written and photographic records with the support of the Willowell Foundation and Keeping Track.