

VERMONT WOODLANDS ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT

Early-Successional Forests

POSITION

The Vermont Woodlands Association believes that areas composed of early-successional forest species provide an important component to biological diversity. Early successional forest areas have declined in Vermont over the last 3 decades due to maturing forest and regulatory/special interest constraints on the management of public forests. Public forests should be managed to provide all forest age classes. Public land needs to play a greater role in providing areas of early-successional habitat.

BACKGROUND

“Biological Diversity refers to the diversity of life in all its forms and all its levels of organization” (Hunter, pg. 7) Wildlife species have different habitat needs. Some species require early-successional habitat (ruffed grouse, hare, rabbit, deer, many songbirds) for all or part of their lives. A diversity of forest stands (ranging in species composition, age and structure dispersed over the landscape) leads to a diversity of forest wildlife. “A forest landscape with stands of many ages will, all other things being equal, have more kinds of wildlife than a single age landscape” (Hunter pg. 50-51). Diverse forests will be more resistant to disease and insect outbreaks.

Between 1983 and 1997, the number of acres in Vermont forests composed of primarily aspen and birch have declined by over 49,000 acres or 16%. Between 1973 and 1997 the number of acres of Vermont forest composed of seedling and sapling stands of all species has declined 367,000 acres or 46%. Total timberland area has increased due to natural reforestation of abandoned farmland by nearly 52,000 acres between 1973 and 1997.

Public forests are managed in response to the desires asserted by various groups in society. Many people promote the development of old-growth stands, but fail to acknowledge the ecological importance of creating early-successional stands.

Land managers are sometimes criticized for the use of silvicultural techniques that result in disturbance to the forest. The appropriate use of these techniques result in areas which appear unattractive for a time, but which create conditions highly suitable for the establishment of early-successional stands.

Sources cited:

Wildlife, Forests and Forestry, Malcolm Hunter, 1990.

Forest Statistics of Vermont – 1973 and 1983, Res. Bull. NE-87.

Forest Statistics of Vermont – 1983 and 1997, Res. Bull. NE-145.