What's In Your Woodland?

Ever wonder how a bird looks at the woods? Here's a quick and easy way to recognize the habitat features that are important for birds (and other wildlife as well). Having an idea of what habitat features your forest has can help you to enhance the diversity within your woods. You can do this simply by looking at your woods and noting the features that you see. This guide will help you to identify the features that are important for birds and other wildlife, and will provide you with some ideas for how to enhance your woods. The FFM website (maineforest.org/ffmb) has more information, including a worksheet that you can use to record your results.

1 (thumb) — Gaps. Can you find small openings (from 100' x 100' up to 2 acres) in the forest overstory? How many and what size openings?

2 (index finger) — Overstory (30'-60'). For each layer, what are the dominant tree species? When you look up through each layer, do they have high cover (leaves block out >70% of the sky) or low cover (leaves block out <30% of the sky) or medium cover (in between)?

3 (middle finger) — Midstory (6'-30'). High: 6'-15' tall. Mid: 3'-6' tall. Low: 0'-3' tall. Do you have many species or just a few?

4 (ring finger) — Understory (1'-6'). How many species do you have? What is the diversity of your understory?

5 (pinky) — Water. As you walk through the stand, note the presence of any streams, ponds or wetland areas, including vernal (or seasonal) pools.

6 (thumb) — Tree Size. Are your woods dominated by older trees, younger trees, or a mix?

7 (index finger) — Snags. Count the number of dead or dying trees over 6' tall. Do you have more than one or two? Are any larger than 12' in diameter?

8 (middle finger) — Large Downed Wood. Look on the ground for logs or large branches over 6' in diameter and over 4' long. Are there any standing snags less than 6' tall? Do you have many, or just a few?

9 (ring finger) — Small Downed Wood. Look on the ground for tops of trees or piles of twigs or small branches. How many piles can you find?

10 (pinky) — Leaf Litter. In hardwood stands, estimate the thickness of the dead leaf layer as adequate (over 1.5") or inadequate (less than 1.5").

Ask Your Forester...

to do a more in-depth assessment of the habitat features in your woods. Your forester can use this information to develop a plan of management activities that will...

- Create a mix of the three vegetation layers over space and time in order to promote habitat for priority bird species (and other wildlife), and healthy forest growth.
- Create small gaps (less than two acres) in the canopy, strategically placed near the edges of larger forest blocks.
- Retain as many standing snags and cavity trees as possible, where safe to do so. The bigger the snag, the better.
- Leave some broken tree tops, limbs and large fallen logs in the ground, including after timber harvests.
- Keep trees with big healthy crowns to promote thick leaf litter on the ground.
- Maintain high canopy cover in buffer areas around water bodies, preferably going beyond minimum state standards.
- Identify invasive plants, and apply appropriate control measures, including washing equipment to reduce the spread of invasive species.
- Use Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect water quality by limiting soil compaction and erosion from roads and trails, including those used for timber harvesting and other heavy equipment.
- Encourage native tree and shrub species desirable for wildlife, including those that will thrive in a changing climate.
- Work with loggers who are familiar with BMP techniques, and understand the way you want your woods to look after harvest activities.