

# NATURAL HERITAGE IMPORTANT AREAS

## Conservation Data for the Hudson Valley



Hudson River  
Estuary Program

Nature in the Hudson Valley supports diverse plants, animals, and habitats, and also provide numerous vital benefits to people – from clean water and flood control to recreation opportunities and scenic beauty. Conservation of this rich natural heritage depends in large part on proactive planning by communities, land trusts, and other agencies, and access to current biological data is essential.

The New York Natural Heritage Program (NYNHP) maintains the most comprehensive database on rare animals, rare plants, and significant ecological communities in the state. The Hudson River Estuary Program partnered with NYNHP to ensure these biodiversity data were accessible and useful to Hudson Valley communities. The resulting “Important Areas” represent zones that are important to the health of rare species and significant ecological communities, and can be incorporated into land-use and conservation plans.

### What are Important Areas?

Important Areas include the lands and waters needed to support the continued presence and quality of:

- known populations of **rare animals and rare plants**,
- known locations of **rare ecological communities**, and/or
- high-quality examples of **common ecological communities**.

Important Areas include the specific locations where the animals, plants, or ecological communities have been observed, as well as:

- habitat to support rare animal and plant populations, including areas which may be used by rare animals for breeding, nesting, feeding, roosting, or over-wintering;
- areas that support the natural processes critical to maintaining these plant and animal habitats, or critical to maintaining significant ecological communities (e.g., stream buffers).

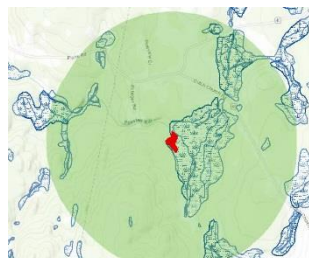
Conserving habitat for rare species also benefits many common plants and animals found within the Important Areas.

### How are Important Areas mapped?

Important Areas for rare animal and plant populations are delineated around documented locations based on the species' habitats and life history. They also include lands that provide a buffer against disturbance to the core habitat area. For example, the Important Area for a Blanding's turtle would include wetlands it may use during different seasons and adjacent uplands it may use for nesting, plus a buffer around the wetlands.



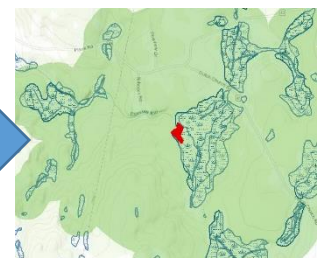
NYS-Threatened Blanding's turtle  
Photo: Ryan von Linden



Known location (red) and adjacent area (green area)



All nearby wetlands (blue) with protective buffers (green area)



All areas combined into final Important Area



Globally-rare dwarf pine ridge at Sam's Point Preserve. Photo: Ingrid Haeckel

### Which species are included?

- NY State-listed animals (Endangered, Threatened, some Special Concern)
- Unlisted rare animals (<20 locations statewide)
- Rare plants (<20 locations statewide)
- Migratory fish (diadromous species)

### Which ecological communities?

Important Areas are mapped for significant examples of different types of forests, wetlands, grasslands, lakes, etc. that are notable in New York because they are rare types (such as dwarf shrub bog) or exceptional examples of common types (such as very large or very old patches of chestnut oak forest).

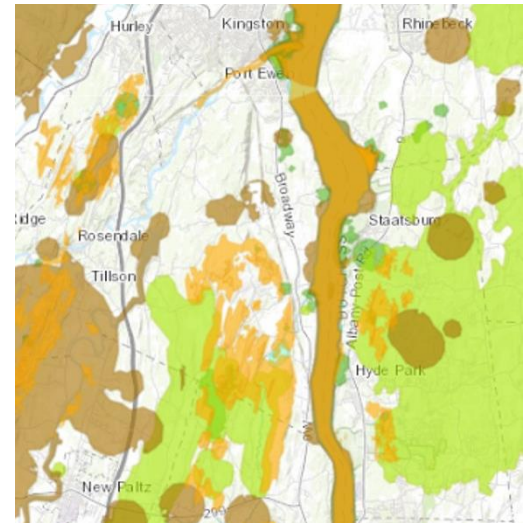
## How can you use Important Areas?

Important Areas can be incorporated into proactive conservation and land-use planning processes in your community, including:

- Natural resources inventory
- Comprehensive plan
- Open space plan or conservation plan
- Watershed assessment or plan
- Critical environmental area (CEA) designation
- Conservation overlay zoning

Combined with other data sets and community priorities, the Important Areas data can help identify conservation targets.

Note that the Important Areas are based on best available information, but do not represent a comprehensive inventory of all resources or habitats in every Town. NYNHP is continually adding new information to its databases. Lands outside of Important Areas may also support rare animals and plants and significant ecosystems, or provide ecological benefits.



Important Areas are available for viewing using the Hudson Valley Natural Resource Mapper

### How can I get more information about an Important Area?

Municipalities and conservation organizations may request a list of rare species with Important Areas mapped in the community from the Hudson River Estuary Program. To request more detailed information for conservation planning purposes, contact NYNHP. See contact below.

To learn more about species and ecological communities included in the Important Areas, see **NYNHP Conservation Guides** [www.guides.nynhp.org](http://www.guides.nynhp.org)

### Where can I find the data?

Hudson Valley Natural Resource Mapper (see Biodiversity layers) - viewing [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/112137.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/112137.html)

NYNHP Important Areas - download [www.nynhp.org/important-areas](http://www.nynhp.org/important-areas)  
NYS GIS Clearinghouse - download

## Are Important Areas regulatory?

Important Areas have no state regulatory authority and are not intended for site-specific project review, including under SEQR. They may nonetheless provide a starting point to learn about natural heritage records on or near a site and help focus site visits or ecological assessments. Important Areas can provide ecological context and be used in combination with other data to identify where overlapping biological priorities may exist. Note that Important Areas do not always coincide with the screening areas for listed species used by NYSDEC in regulatory and permitting reviews. For more information about state regulatory requirements, consult your NYSDEC Regional Permit Administrator. Municipalities can establish their own environmental review standards and regulations to increase protection of biological resources.

In general, the nature and severity of any potential impacts on biodiversity resources should always be explored and considered during the planning, design, and review of a project or activity. Decisions should be made based on site-specific information.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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**NYS Department of Environmental Conservation**  
[www.nynhp.org/important-areas](http://www.nynhp.org/important-areas)

## Examples of Important Area Uses

Important Areas (IAs) have been used in a variety of ways by Hudson Valley municipalities and conservation organizations. Numerous communities have included the data in natural resources inventory maps of biological resources. The Town of Wawarsing designated a Critical Environmental Area based on IAs with significant habitat values. The [City of Kingston Open Space Plan](#) used IAs along with other data to delineate priority conservation areas. Similarly, the [Town of Red Hook Community Preservation Plan](#) incorporated IA data to prioritize parcels eligible for protection under a local conservation fund. Rensselaer Land Trust integrated IAs into a strategic [County Conservation Plan](#). Scenic Hudson includes Important Areas in the [Hudson Valley Conservation Strategy](#), a dynamic decision-support tool for landscape-scale conservation that meets multiple ecological objectives.