

Ward Marsh: Class 1 Petition: Draft Criteria Language

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Reference the following documents for support produced using BioFinder:

- WardMarsh\_RiparianWildlifeConnectivity;
- WardMarsh\_Aquatic&RiparianConnectivity;
- WardMarsh\_ConnectivityBlocks;
- WardMarsh\_InteriorForestBlocks; and
- WardMarsh\_Resilient&ConnectedNetwork-Details

**Section 18.3 Intact Landscape:** *If applicable, describe how the wetland is part of an intact and unfragmented landscape.*

Ward Marsh is part of a significant undeveloped river corridor that stretches 22 miles along the Poultney River, one of Vermont's most biologically diverse rivers. The entirety of Ward Marsh is mapped as either a *Highest Priority-* or *Priority Surface Waters and Riparian Area* component of Vermont Conservation Design, indicating its statewide importance within the network of connected lakes, streams, and riparian areas.

Although some agricultural land is present in the surrounding matrix of lands, significant blocks of intact upland forest, floodplain forest, and wetland communities are connected to Ward Marsh. Together, these lands constitute a narrow, but critically important corridor of high-quality, intact, and natural lands between the Adirondack Mountains and the Green and Taconic Mountain Ranges. As such, Ward Marsh is regionally significant as part of an intact landscape spanning Vermont and New York state.

**Section 18.4 Connectivity:** *If applicable, describe how the wetland serves as an important wildlife or waterfowl corridor, connecting natural areas or serving in migration.*

Ward Marsh provides significant value as a wildlife and waterfowl corridor by virtue of its connectivity to surrounding aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Ward Marsh provides important stopover resting and feeding habitat for bird species migrating along Lake Champlain. The deep-water marsh and emergent marsh communities provide this value at an especially high value for waterfowl and wading bird species. Mammals moving along the Poultney River, such as mink, bobcat, and otter likely make use of Ward Marsh's riverine floodplain forest and various wetland types. Reptiles and amphibians migrate between Ward Marsh and its surrounding uplands. The entirety of Ward Marsh is mapped in Vermont Conservation Design as *Riparian Wildlife Connectivity*, reflecting the many values this area provides to species making use of the riparian network.

Furthermore, Ward Marsh lies at an important interface between aquatic and terrestrial communities. Immediately to the north of the Marsh lies a matrix of state-significant natural communities, including Mesic Clayplain Forest, Mesic Maple-Ash-Hickory-Oak Forest, and Dry Oak-Hickory Hophornbeam Forest. Because of the high degree of connectivity between Ward Marsh and its surrounding upland habitats, wildlife can move relatively unimpeded between habitat types to fulfill a variety of their life needs (e.g. foraging, breeding, dispersal). Reflecting these important values, Ward Marsh is mapped as a *Highest Priority Connectivity Block* and *Highest Priority Interior Forest Block* in Vermont Conservation Design.