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**Protected Forests in the New Jersey Highlands: Spatial Diversity and Related Management Challenges**

Like many other states, New Jersey is an urbanizing landscape which has committed considerable resources to forest conservation through easements and direct land acquisition. These Protected Forests (PFs) are diverse in terms of size and individual land use history, although their common legal status sets the expectation that protection yields forests of similar quality. This study examines the spatial diversity of PFs within the NJ Highlands, a focal area for forest conservation, and identifies some management challenges related to their spatial context. Approximately 53% of the total PF area is held within forest patches less than 500 hectares (Ha) and 47% is in patches 1000-5000 Ha. Protected patches over 500 Ha exist only in the northern region. Consequently, the current arrangement of PFs in the southern Highlands may create a sort of landscape ‘filter’ for northward migration of species responding to climate change. Habitat conversion in and around Protected Area also contributes to diversity among PFs. Urban development has exposed a subset of PFs to new landscapes, potentially introduced new forest dynamics. PFs should be understood as existing along a gradient of internal and external disturbance. Although legally ‘protected’, wildlife communities in highly disturbed PFs will be difficult to sustain without long-term management.