



# Adirondack Park Agency

## PROJECT GUIDELINE: BIOLOGICAL SURVEYS

**Objective:** To avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to the biological resources of the Park.

### Background:

Before issuing a permit for an activity on private land, the Agency must find that the proposal will not have an undue adverse impact on the natural, ecological, wildlife, open space, or other resources of the Park.<sup>1</sup> When making this finding, the Agency takes into account 37 “development considerations” listed in §805(4) of the Adirondack Park Agency Act; these considerations include factors that relate to the biological resources of a project site, including forest resources, vegetative cover, rare plant communities, habitats of rare and endangered species and key wildlife habitats, alpine and sub-alpine life zones, wetlands, and fish and wildlife.



Spruce Grouse, *Falcipennis Canadensis*  
Audubon Society

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<sup>1</sup> Adirondack Park Agency Act §809; Environmental Conservation Law §24-0801(2) (the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Act); 9 NYCRR §577.8(b)(3) (Agency regulations implementing the New York State Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers System Act).

**Basic Biological Information Survey:**

The first step in reviewing a proposal's potential to impact biological resources involves submission by a project sponsor of all of the information required by the project application, including any applicable Supplemental Information Request, for the proposed activity. Application materials generally ask about existing species, as well as site conditions that may indicate the presence of important habitats.

Upon receipt, the Agency reviews these application materials, often in conjunction with biological information obtained during site visits and from existing maps, databases, websites, and literature. The Agency looks for any record of rare, threatened, or endangered species, or any other identified species or habitats on or near the project site, as well as indications of unusual or high combinations or numbers of species. The Agency also analyzes topographic and landscape features on and near the site, including river and stream corridors and other shorelines, wetlands, vernal pools, coverts, soils, slopes, floodplains, and cliff faces, for evidence suggesting the presence of important, unique, or sensitive habitats. In addition, the Agency examines any indications of human use or impact, such as road corridors and structures.



Trillium Erectum

This survey of the basic biological information available for a site may provide the Agency with the information necessary for a full assessment of the proposal's potential impact on the biological resources of the Park. However, where additional verification of information is required, the Agency may determine that a more intensive biological survey must be completed. In addition, a more intensive survey may be required where a rare, threatened, or endangered species has been identified on or near the project site, or where the scope or configuration of the proposal could lead to significant fragmentation or disruption to a species or habitat of concern. For example, the construction of roads or driveways through identified movement corridors may indicate a need for an intensive biological survey.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Agency may also require submission of an intensive biological survey for certain project proposals regardless of the basic biological information available for the area. For example,

### **Intensive Qualitative and Quantitative Biological Surveys:**

The purpose of intensive biological surveys is to ensure that the Agency has the information necessary to assess a proposal's impacts to Park resources. There are two types of intensive biological surveys that may be required as part of a project's review: **Qualitative** and **Quantitative**. It is usually the responsibility of the applicant to carry out an intensive biological survey, following Agency staff approval of the methods and protocol, format of the resulting report, and qualifications of the investigators. The type and scope of survey necessary often depends on the specific proposal and site conditions. The Agency will always consult with the applicant's biologist on the requirements for a specific survey.

#### **1. Qualitative Biological Survey**

A qualitative biological survey generally involves the verification and recording by a qualified biologist of basic site conditions, topographic and landscape features, the presence of plant and animal species and other organisms, habitat types unique to the regional setting, and existing or historic human uses and structures. A detailed, site-specific report consisting of maps, data, and lists of documented species is required.

#### **2. Quantitative Biological Survey**

Quantitative biological surveys involve gathering all of the information required as part of a qualitative survey, in addition to a more detailed study of the site using established and standardized methods of vegetation and organism sampling. Quantitative biological surveys allow for the collection of spatially explicit data to characterize and aid in analysis and protection of a site's biological resources. Quantitative biological survey sampling methods vary depending upon the taxa or landscape feature being reviewed. A detailed, site-specific report consisting of maps, data, survey methods, and resource impact analysis is required.

### **For Further Information:**

NYS Natural Heritage Program - <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/29338.html>

NYSDEC Protective Plant List - <http://www.dec.ny.gov/regs/15522.html>

NYSDEC Protective Animal List - <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7494.html>

Ecological Communities of NYS - <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/97703.html>

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subdivisions creating more than 50 lots outside of hamlet areas generally require completion of a qualitative biological survey, at a minimum.