

Station 12: Light Gaps

Light gaps in forests are openings in the canopy that allow sunlight to reach the forest floor, and they play a critical role in forest ecology. Light gaps promote the growth of a variety of understory plants, increasing species diversity. This diversity supports various animal species that depend on these plants for food and habitat. Light gaps provide the necessary light for the regeneration of tree seedlings. Many tree species, especially those that are shade-intolerant, require direct sunlight to thrive. Some species of wildlife prefer these open areas for foraging or nesting, increasing habitat variety within the forest. Light gaps are essential for the natural dynamics of forests, allowing for succession processes. They contribute to the formation of different age classes of trees, promoting a more resilient and stable ecosystem.

As you wander through Hayes Woods, look for areas where there are light gaps. Can you tell what created the light gap? Is the abundance and diversity of plant species below the light gap different from the surrounding area?

