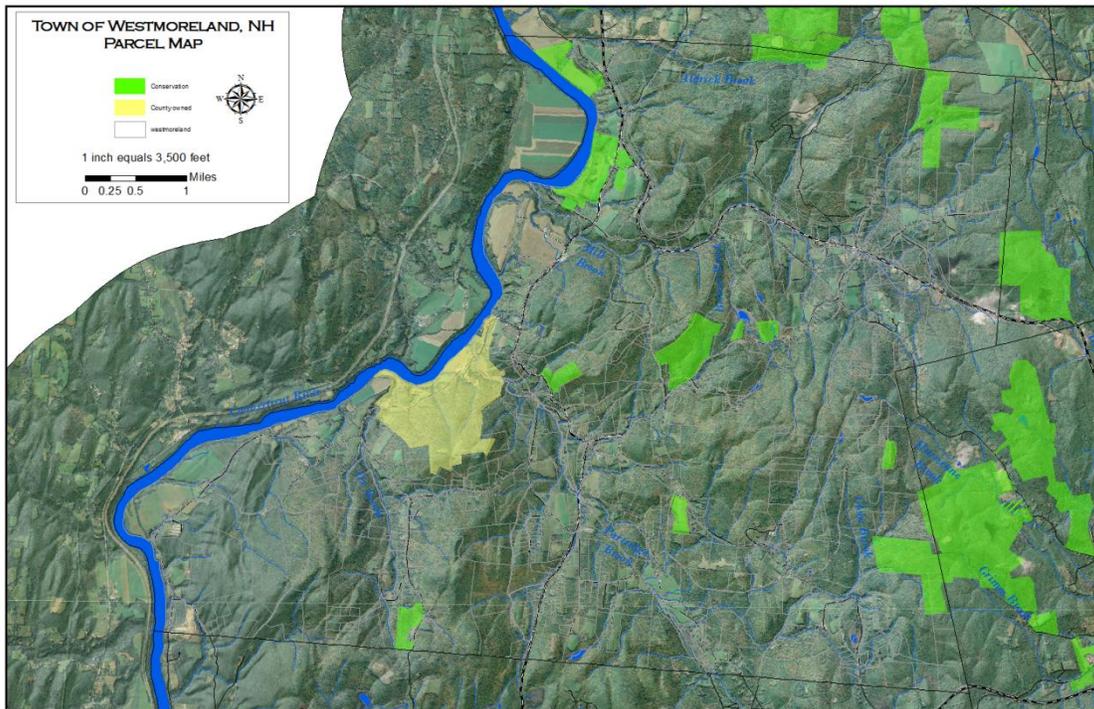


TOWN OF WESTMORELAND NEW HAMPSHIRE

Conservation Plan



2012

SUMMARY

Westmoreland residents value the “rural character” of their community. Retention of the rural character is highlighted in the 2003 Master Plan and expressed by resident opinions in the survey conducted prior to the Plan’s preparation. It is also a priority of attendees of the two Community Forums held to obtain input for the Conservation Plan. Assuring that Westmoreland will be a similar place for future generations to live, work and prosper is the goal of actions suggested in this plan.

The process of producing the plan was a community led effort to evaluate the town’s natural and cultural resources and identify areas of the landscape most desirable for permanent protection. Behind the analysis are values expressed by the public in the Master Plan Survey and the Community Forums. These values fall into six major themes:

- **Agriculture** – working farms, prime agricultural soils
- **Cultural Identity** – historic homes & village district, scenic vistas & rural character
- **Economic Vitality** – small business
- **Natural Areas & Wildlife** – habitat & biodiversity
- **Recreational Activities** - trails, water based, school/town facilities
- **Water** – wells, water quality in streams, ponds & the Connecticut River

Combining the town natural and cultural resources with the community values, the Community Work Group developed a simplified conservation priorities map. **Actual conservation of any parcel of land is a voluntary action on the part of its owner.** Many Westmoreland landowners have their land enrolled in the Current Use Program, which affords a temporary degree of preservation of a property’s existing amenities and use. Increasing that level of protection via various options such as conservation easements, sale of development rights, and sale or outright donation to a third party, are all choices a landowner makes voluntarily.

Implementation of the recommended strategies requires people interested enough to get involved:

- Initiate education and outreach to build understanding of and support for land conservation.
- Generate awareness about conservation options and benefits for landowners.
- Be a resource for landowners who want to protect their land.

This plan simply provides guidance for land conservation. No regulations or requirements are presented. The voluntary protection of Westmoreland land parcels will occur to the degree that landowners choose to participate and see land conservation actions as useful ways to maintain the rural character they treasure.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The 2003 Westmoreland Master Plan describes Westmoreland as a “rural community with small town character and abundant natural resources. While it is a bedroom community like many of the towns surrounding Keene, it retains a rural character and supports a diversity of natural resources. Among these are working farms, forests, wetlands and abundant wildlife habitat. As expressed by citizens prior to preparation of the 1986 Master Plan and reaffirmed in a 2002 survey, retaining the rural character and the natural resource components that make it so are of utmost importance.” (Section 8, p30)

The first two Recommended Goals of the 2003 Westmoreland Master Plan refer to the town’s rural character:

Goal 1: “Retain the rural character of the town by limiting and closely controlling development.” (p5 of Master Plan)

Goal 2: “Retain the rural character of the town by preserving the major elements that make this town’s rural character. These include wildlife habitat, farms, wetlands and river shore land.”(p6 of Master Plan))

Goal 1 is the purview of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment. The purpose of the Conservation Plan is to assist in their efforts through identification of natural and cultural resources of special concern. Goal 2 would be addressed through voluntary efforts of landowners with the assistance from various town boards as needed.

Specifically this plan provides the following:

- A summary of natural and cultural resources.
- A set of conservation priorities based on community values and an analysis of natural and cultural resources
- Suggested implementation strategies to further conservation objectives

This plan presents the results of community lead efforts to identify and analyze cultural and natural resources located in the Town of Westmoreland as the basis for prioritizing land areas that should receive town encouragement and support for conservation. The strategies outlined in the plan seek to:

- Broaden the community base of understanding about land conservation, what it is, how it works, and how it can benefit the community.
- Further the town’s conservation objectives by providing information and guidance to interested landowners to encourage conservation.

Overview of the Planning Process

In March 2008, the planning process was initiated by the Westmoreland Conservation Commission to help the town plan for and implement the conservation related goals, objectives and recommendations set forth in the 2003 Master Plan.

Members of the Westmoreland Conservation Commission started the process in collaboration with the Monadnock Community Conservation Partnership. The first step was to identify the various stakeholder groups in Westmoreland and invite their representation and participation. A task force was formed to scope out the planning approach.

The task force decided to begin by hosting a town-wide forum to find out what citizens value most about the town. Invitations were mailed to all Westmoreland households. The Forum was held on May 18, 2008. The 76 residents who attended were asked these questions: “What makes Westmoreland Special?” and “What characteristics do you want to make sure are not lost in the next 20 years?” Participants were also asked to draw circles on aerial photographs of the town to identify places that support the values identified during the forum.

At the forum’s conclusion, participants were invited to join a work group that would further identify and analyze the town’s cultural and natural resources and draft conservation priorities for the community.

Natural and Cultural Resource Summary

Over a four month period, the work group met to review the results of the first forum and identify community values to guide the prioritizing process. They reviewed natural resource inventory data available through the State of NH (GIS) “GRANIT” database. This review helped participants understand what natural resources exist in the town, where they are located, and why they are important to the community.

With the assistance of the Community Conservation Partnership team, the work group completed an analysis, called a co-occurrence analysis, which determines where each resource type overlaps with other resource types. This process forms a basis for identifying high priority land areas for conservation. The analysis is further refined by considering those individual resource types that should be considered as high priority in their own right, regardless of a geographic overlap with other resources. From this analysis, a simplified conservation priorities map was prepared, as were descriptions of land types and geographic areas in town.

All Westmoreland households were invited to a second forum that was held on November 18, 2008. The purpose of this meeting was to share the natural and cultural resource information that had been analyzed, and to gather input regarding the conclusions and implementation strategies that were being considered by the work group. Forty six Westmoreland citizens attended the forum and contributed to the discussion.

The forum provided an opportunity for participants to validate the work that had been done and to contribute new ideas about how to further conservation objectives. The community input from the second forum was then used as a basis for creating this conservation plan.

FINDINGS

Themes identified during the Community Forum

During the first town-wide forum held in May 2008, residents were asked “What makes Westmoreland Special?” and “What do they want to make sure is still present in town in 20 years?” The overriding general desire was to minimize changes to the landscape of the town.

Specific community values identified during the Forum were summarized into the following themes and sub-themes:

Theme 1: Recreational Activities

- A) Hiking and walking trails
- B) Recreation areas
- C) School and town recreation facilities
- D) Water based recreation

Theme 2: Agriculture

- A) Prime agricultural soils
- B) Active working farms

Theme 3: Water

- A) Water uses
- B) Wells
- C) Water quality in streams/rivers/brooks/ponds

Theme 4: Natural Areas and Wildlife

- A) Natural areas and forest land
- B) Wildlife habitat and biodiversity

Theme 5: Economic Vitality

- A) Small business

Theme 6: Cultural/Historical/Village Identity

- A) Historic homes and village district
- B) Scenic vistas and rural character

Summary of Natural and Cultural Resources

The analysis of natural and cultural resources demonstrated that the town of Westmoreland is rich with topographic, biological, and cultural resource diversity. The town has over nine miles of shoreline along the Connecticut River that serves as an ecological, agricultural and recreational gem for the community and the region. Some of the best agricultural soils in the east (UNH Cooperative Extension) are found along the river environs and relatively rare floodplain habitats are found along the entire extent through Westmoreland.

In addition to the Connecticut River, water resources abound in the form of streams that flow to the Connecticut River. Along these are found beaver impoundments along flatter stream channels and a variety of wetlands scattered throughout the hillsides. Stratified drift aquifers underlay the lowlands along the entire length of the Connecticut River in Westmoreland. Several small aquifers can be found in the Mill Brook and Partridge Brook watersheds including an area that extends from the village center south along the east side of Route 63 and an area where commercial development occurs in East Westmoreland along Route 12. Several public wells tap into these areas including wells for the town offices and the Westmoreland School on Glebe Road, as well as a restaurant, a convenience store and a private school in East Westmoreland.

The combined Partridge and Glebe Brook watersheds fan out into the southeastern part of Westmoreland. The lower portions of these watersheds incorporate a significant percentage of the flatter lands in town, much of which is characterized by prime agricultural soils and agricultural soils of statewide importance. The Mill Brook watershed extends across the northern part of town, and though somewhat smaller, has similar topographic and soils characteristics to the greater Partridge Brook watershed.

All three streams are considered to have relatively high water quality and the NH Fish and Game website indicates that both have been stocked with brook trout in the past. The lower elevation parts of these watersheds along the stream channels are characterized by a mosaic of agricultural fields, hedgerows and wood lots, providing additional habitat diversity, as well as important working lands that contribute to both the rural economy and the rural character of the community.

The forested hillsides that rise up from these streams contain a diversity of vegetation communities that provide excellent wildlife habitat. Westmoreland contains a significant land area classified as Appalachian Oak Pine in the NH Wildlife Action Plan, a community type that is more abundant in the southeastern part of the state, but has its greatest presence of the Monadnock region along the lands near the Connecticut River. There are also several small pockets classified as Northern Hardwood Conifer in the higher elevations of Hyland Hill and in the northeast corner of town.

Wildlife habitat in Westmoreland is further enhanced by a lack of significant fragmentation. According to the NH Wildlife Action Plan, there are two sections of town that are part of large forested blocks in excess of 5000 acres, the Hyland Hill block and the forested block north of Route 12. The southwest corner of town is also part of a forest block that is greater than 3800 acres, although Poocham Road, a relatively narrow

and low traffic volume road, separates this block from another forested block that together would total over 5000 acres.

Cutting through the north end of town, Route 12 presents the most significant barrier to habitat connectivity, primarily because of the road's width and high traffic volume. Running north-south through town, Route 63 also fragments habitat, but does not pose as significant a barrier because it is narrower and has less traffic. South Village Road, River Road, and Glebe Road also present wildlife habitat fragmentation for some species, although these and other town roads have significantly lower traffic volumes and provide areas where wildlife can cross with only limited exposure.

The cultural resource data collected during the town forum and other community events indicate that cultural resources can be found throughout the community. Scenic vistas were identified along the entire length of River Road, from Hyland Hill, around the village center, along South Village Road and the area that encompasses the Adams farm. A vast network of trails that include snowmobile trails maintained by a local snowmobile group, and the Town's class VI roads and trails are frequently used for recreation.

Publically owned or conserved land also provides ample opportunity for diverse activities. Over 600 acres of land owned by Cheshire County is also used extensively for recreation. Citizens reported using many of the large blocks of forested hillsides for hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, and enjoying the serenity of nature. Citizens also reported that historic buildings throughout town and the many old farms and fields contribute greatly to the rural character of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Conservation Priorities

Conservation priorities were identified by evaluating the type and location of various resources relating to the identified community values to determine where multiple resources overlap. Individual resource values that were deemed important in their own right were included as high priorities. The general location of areas with important conservation values is illustrated by the "Lands with Important Conservation Values" map..

The conservation priorities are:

- **Working farm lands and agricultural soils**
- **Connecticut River corridor**
- **Hillside fields, forests and ridge tops**
- **The greater Mill Brook and Partridge Brook corridors**

Implementation Strategies

The actual conservation of any parcel of land is a voluntary action by a willing landowner. Hence the recommended implementation strategies address building community and landowner understanding and support for conservation efforts. The strategies are:

- **Initiate education and outreach to build understanding of and support for land conservation.**
- **Generate awareness about conservation options and benefits for landowners.**
- **Be a resource for landowners who want to protect their land.**

CONCLUSION

From the granting of its charter in 1752, two constants have prevailed in Westmoreland: an industrious people who have nurtured the rural character of their town together and an unwavering philosophy to preserve the abundant natural resources and historic places as a legacy for their progeny. The original printing of “The History and Genealogy of Westmoreland, New Hampshire” signifies this overarching concern for those who come next: “This book is further dedicated to the children of Westmoreland, now and in the future...”

Westmoreland residents turning out for the May 21, 2008 and November 18, 2008 forums which provided the basis for this report were quick to identify the cherished resources in this 258 year old town. From the favorite swimming hole at Sheep Rock, fishing at Partridge Brook, snowmobiling the old railroad line, hiking Cass and Hyland Hills, bicycling along the cornfields of River Road, or visiting historic Park Hill, Westmoreland provides a scenic wealth of nature, farming and historic places.

Residents were also mindful that a vision statement alone will not accomplish their preservation goals for Westmoreland. It will not ensure the promised transfer of clean drinking water, forested hillsides and open farmlands to the next generation.

Decisive action and effective stewardship will be required on an ongoing basis to implement this plan and preserve Westmoreland’s rural character. This entails firm commitment by town officials and broad support by town residents of the conservation priorities addressed in this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the Westmoreland residents who participated in the two town forums that form a basis of this conservation plan, and to the citizens that participated on the Community Conservation Partnership work group. They spent many hours analyzing the information gathered during the town forums and all the available natural and cultural resource data. It is their level of commitment to our community that makes Westmoreland an outstanding place to live. Participants in the workgroup were Jan Carpenter, Bill Fletcher, Selena Gallen, Frank Hunter, Russ Martens, Pam Martens, Marshall Patmos, Dick Schmidt, Ken Wright.

Thanks also to the Community Conservation Partnership for the information and overall guidance provided by its members.

Monadnock Community Conservation Partnership is a coalition of planning, conservation and community education organizations, seeking to help towns throughout the Monadnock region build their capacity to identify and protect important natural resources and special places that contribute to the character and quality of life of each town. Specific goals of this partnership include:

- Train conservation volunteers to be able to serve as a local resource to landowners interested in conserving their land and to town boards and commissions in the execution of their duties;
- Identify land conservation priorities and develop implementation strategies to further land conservation goals and objectives;
- Build community understanding and consensus about the importance of land conservation to protecting and enhancing important natural resources, special places, and community quality of life.

The Community Conservation Partnership includes the following organizations:

- The Monadnock Conservancy
- Southwest Region Planning Commission
- Antioch New England Institute
- Center for Land Conservation Assistance
- UNH Cooperative Extension
- Harris Center for Conservation Education

Westmoreland Conservation Plan Resource Maps- July 2012

A. Water Resources

B. Steep Slopes

C. Habitat Cover Types

D. Unfragmented Forest Blocks

E. Agricultural Soils

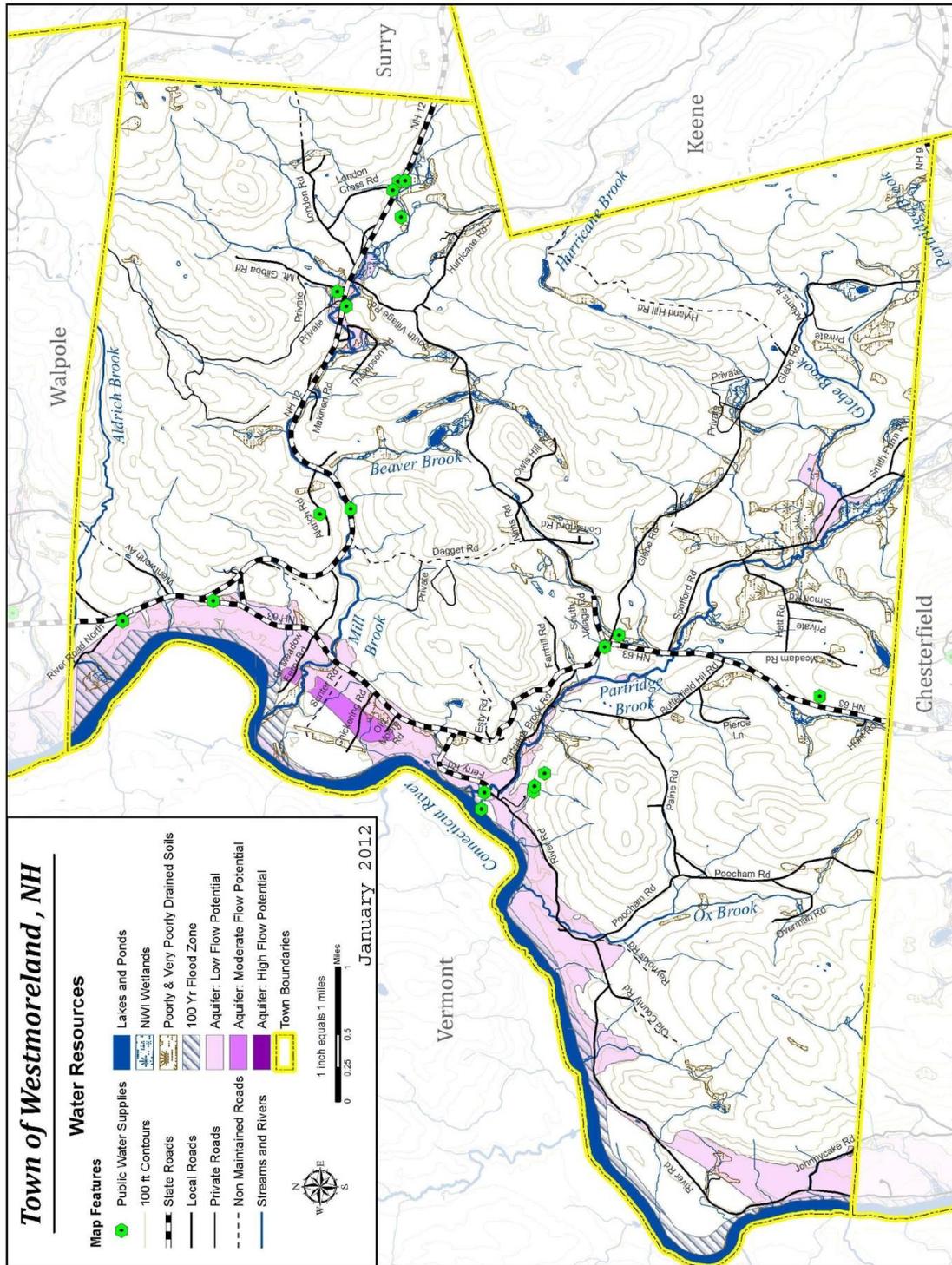
F. Forest Soils

G. Open Fields and Farmland

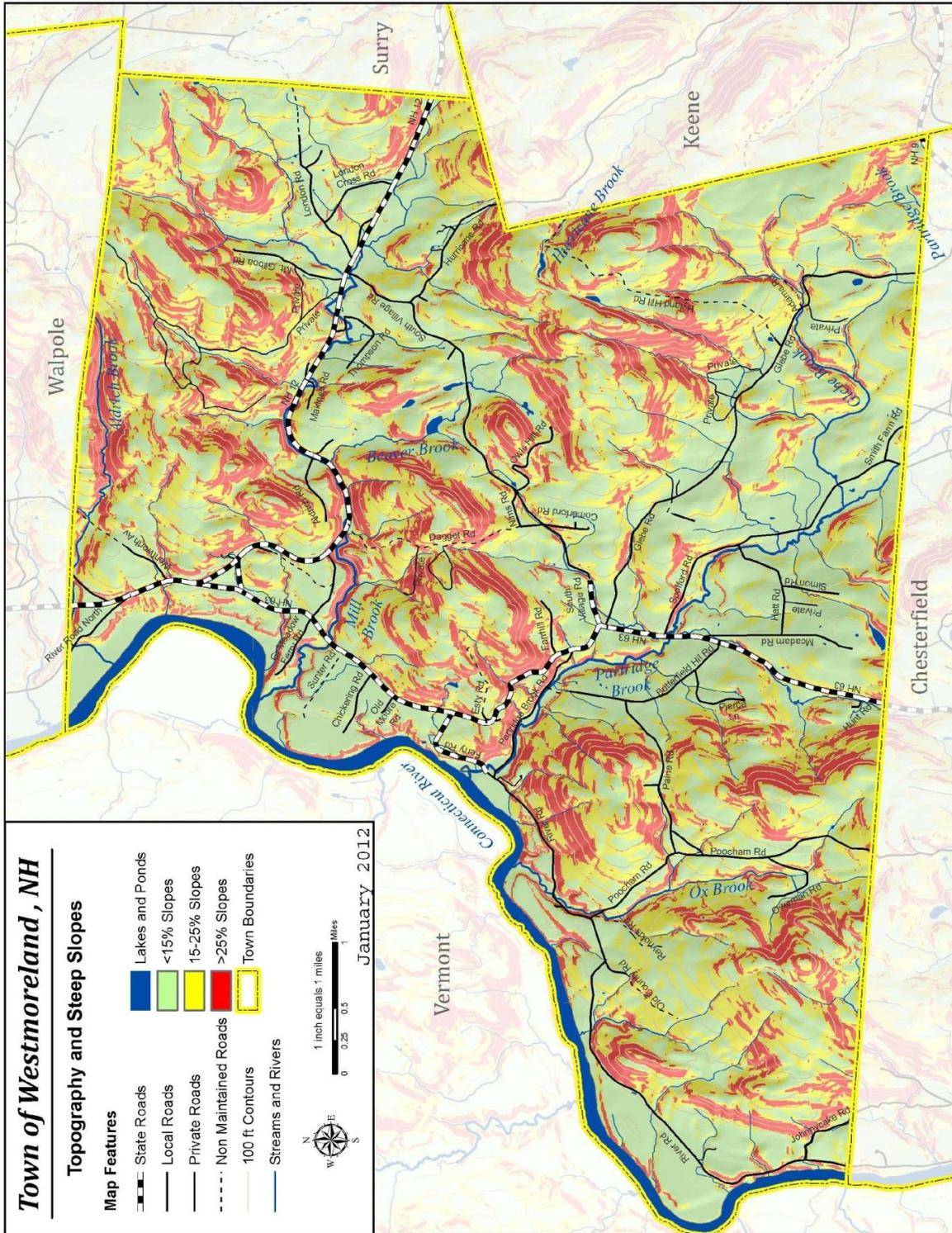
H. NH Wildlife Action Plan Priorities

I. Land With Important Conservation Values

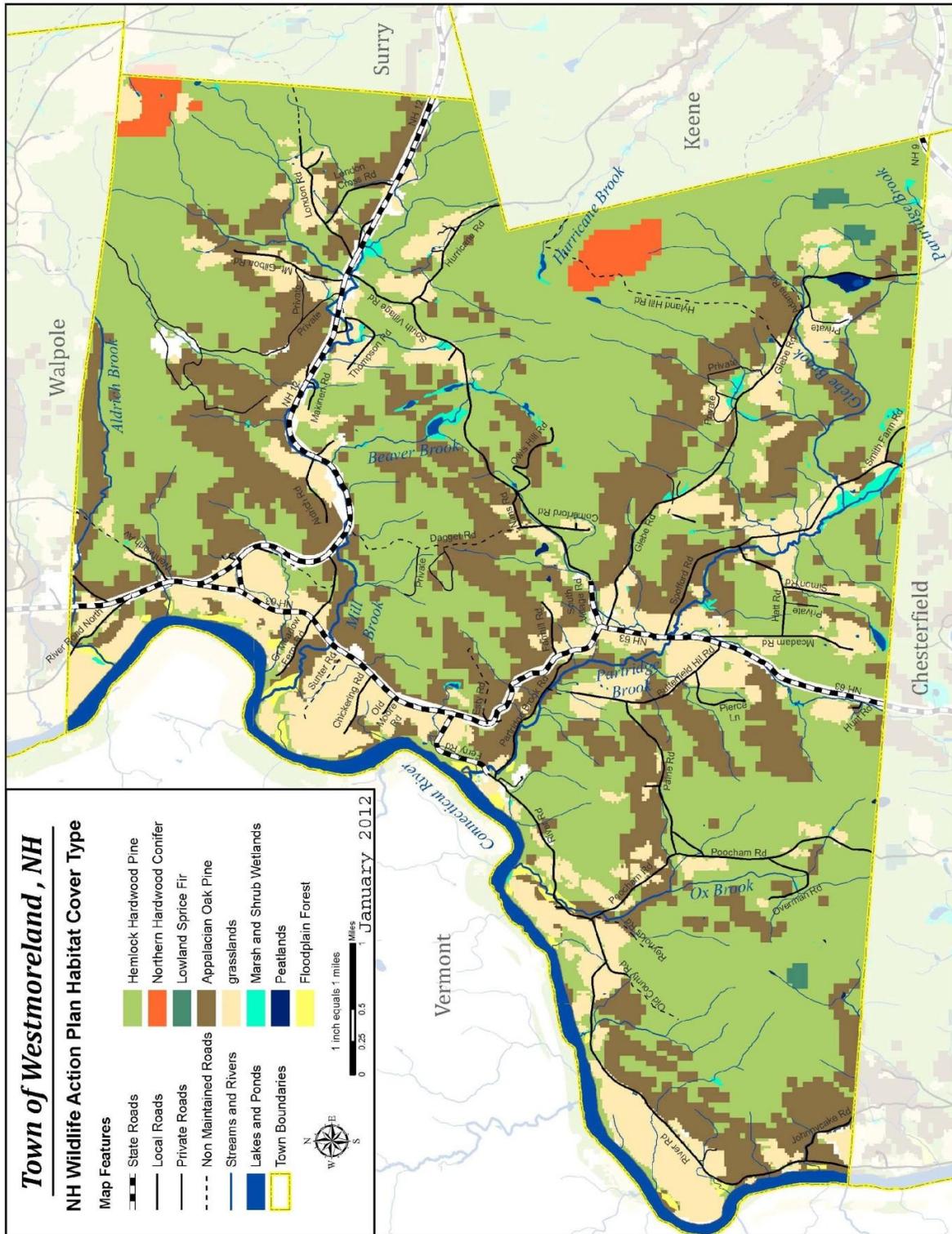
A. WATER RESOURCES



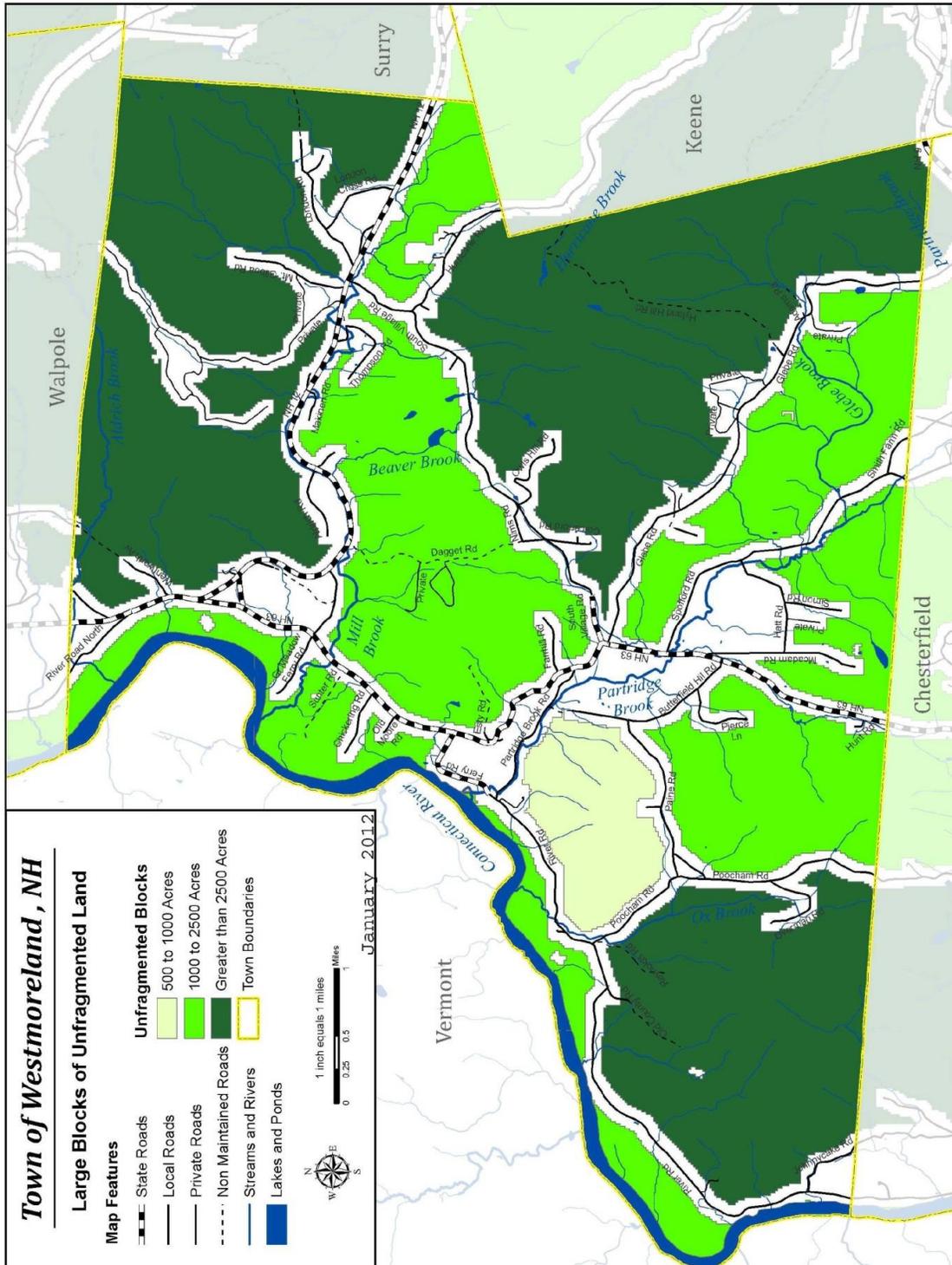
B. STEEP SLOPES



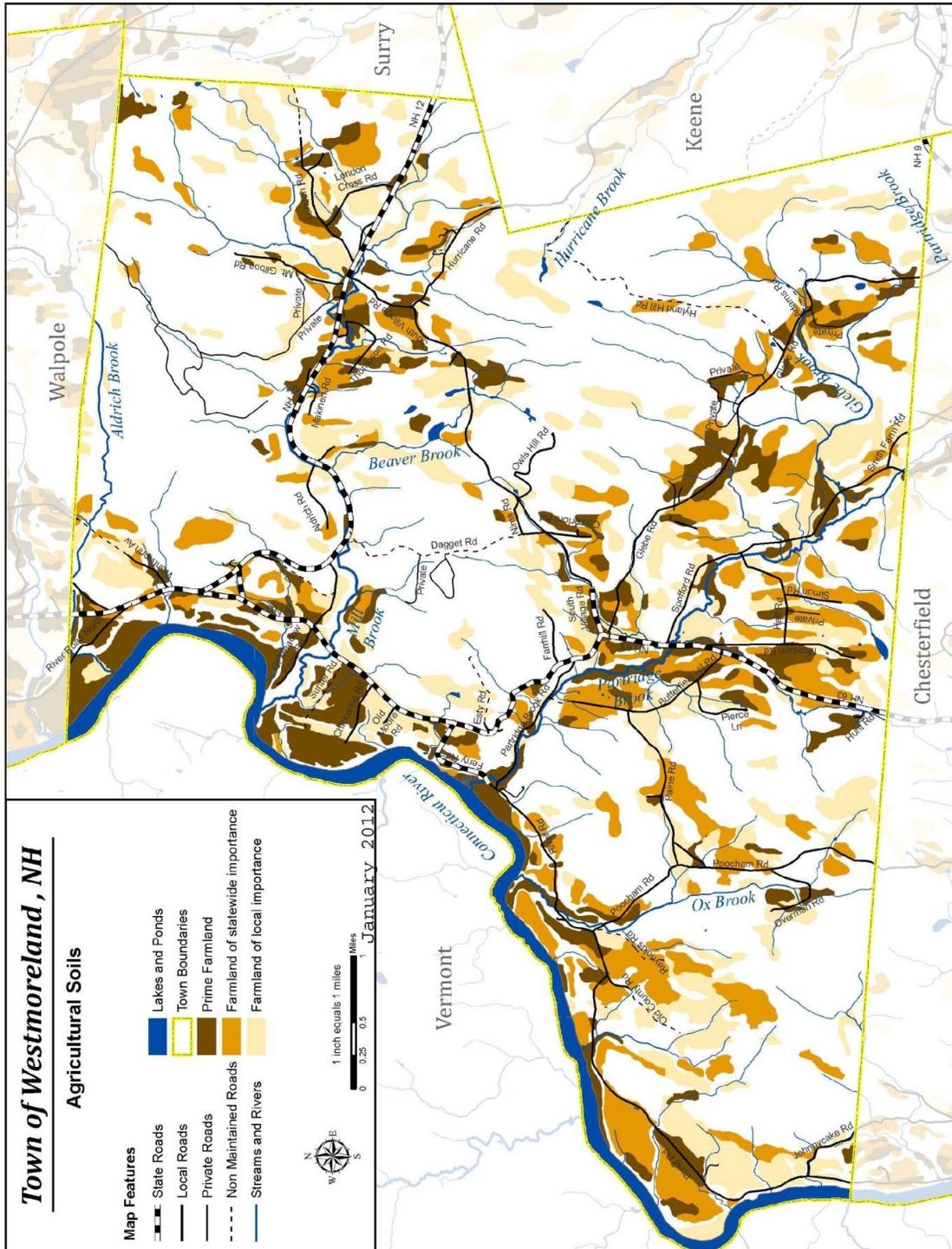
C. HABITAT COVER TYPES



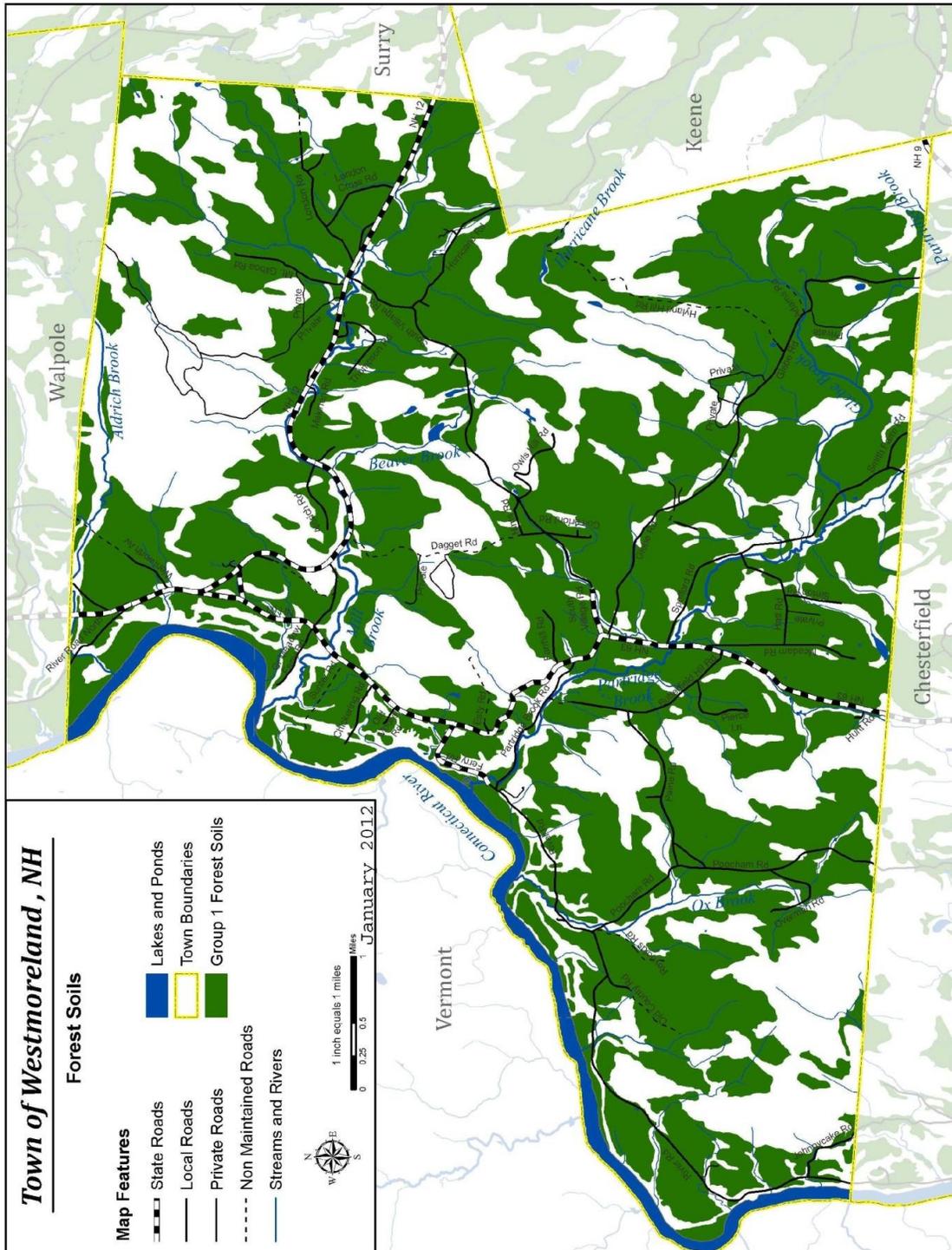
D. UNFRAGMENTED FOREST BLOCKS



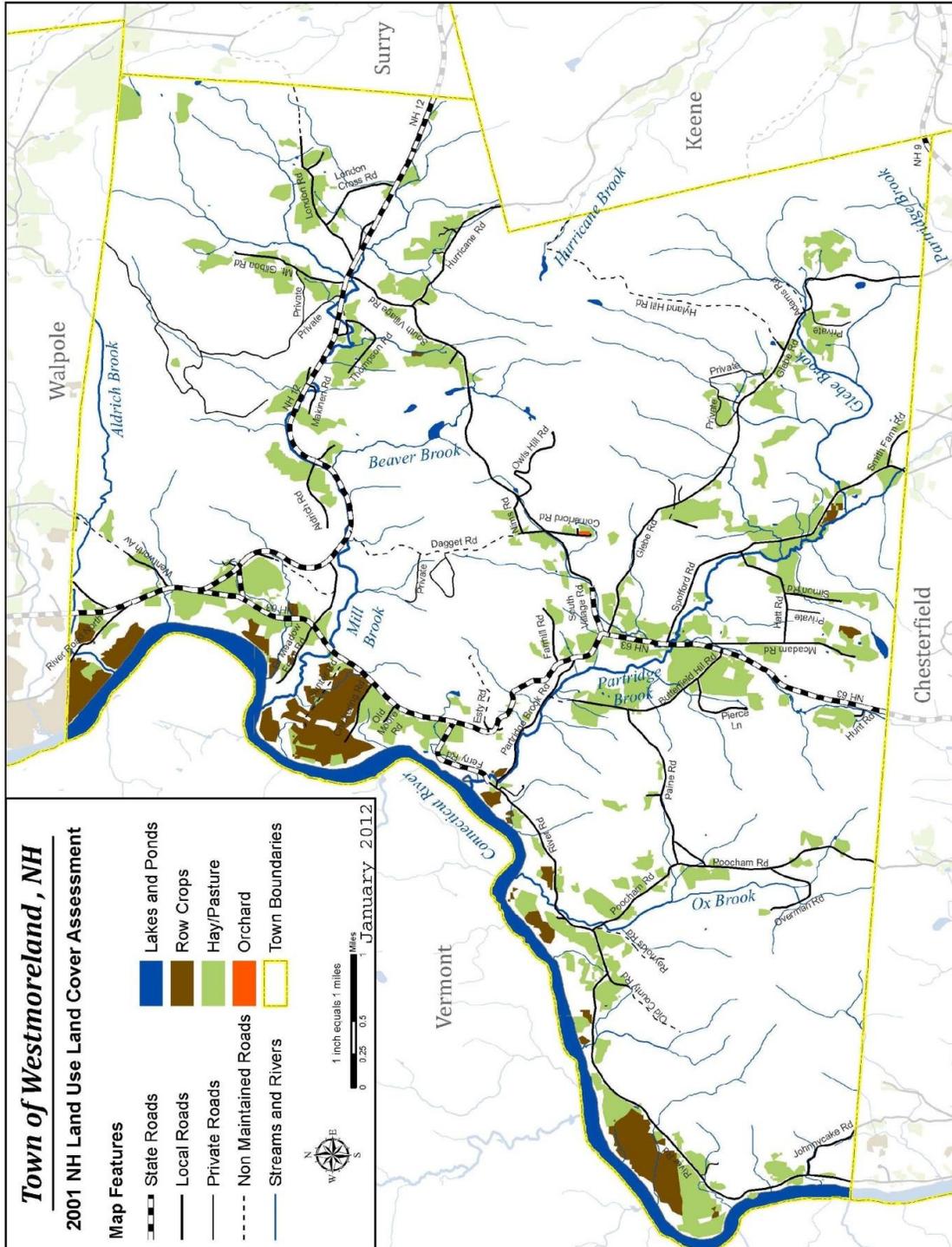
E. AGRICULTURAL SOILS



F. FOREST SOILS



G. OPEN FIELDS AND FARMLAND



H. NH WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES

