

AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

Introduction

Union has an agricultural base. Many farms have returned to forests, fallow fields or have been developed over the years. However, several farms are active currently growing blueberries, hay, vegetables, raising poultry, sheep and ---. The higher value of organic, heirloom and similar niche farming could increase future agricultural activities in the Town. Modest timber harvesting occurs on a regular basis and is likely to continue. This chapter outlines existing resources and offers strategies to enhance agriculture and suitable forestry activities.

Goal

To safeguard the State's agricultural and forest resources from development which threatens those resources.

Analyses

1. How important is agriculture and/or forestry and are these activities growing, stable, or declining?

The Town recognizes the benefits of its forests and farmland although some farms have become inactive over recent decades. Fields and forests provide open spaces, scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, and recreation. They can also improve surrounding residential property values.

There are many areas in the Town with farmland soils as shown on the state-prepared map titled Farmland Soils: Prime and of Statewide Importance. Prime farmland is the land that is best suited to producing food and feed crops. It has the soil quality and moisture supply needed to produce a sustained high yield of crops. Prime farmland is a limited natural resource as no more of it is being created.

Most of the land that is not developed within the Town is forested or wetlands. Some former farm fields have returned to forests. Forested areas assist in the recharging of groundwater and should be viewed as resources to be protected. They also have significant wildlife habitat. See the map titled Land Cover for areas of forests (about 13,379.9 acres), wetlands/wetland forests (about 1,028.9 acres), grasslands (about 307.8 acres), and cultivated lands (about 4,467.6 acres) among other categories. The cultivated lands figure includes cultivated crops and pasture/hay fields. See the Water Resources Chapter for information on wetlands. See the Natural Resources Chapter for information on natural habitats. Small-scale farming activities have increased in recent years, which has --- somewhat offset longer-term declines. More information is provided in the sections that follow.

2. *Is the community currently taking regulatory and/or non-regulatory steps to protect productive farming and forestry lands? Are there local or regional land trusts actively working to protect farms or forest lands in the community?*

Agricultural and forestry uses are regulated in the Union Land Use Ordinance. Farming activities, including crop and dairy farming, animal husbandry, and outdoor storage of agricultural products are allowed town wide with no permit required outside of shoreland zones. There are some limitations based upon resource protection near waterbodies as regulated through shoreland zoning. Agricultural products storage and distribution are allowed in the Rural District with no permit required and in the Commercial and Industrial Districts with planning board review. Agricultural and related heavy equipment sales and associated services are allowed in the Commercial District with planning board review. Forest management and timber harvesting are allowed town wide with some limitations based upon resource protection near waterbodies as regulated through shoreland zoning. Site Plan Review provisions do not apply to agricultural and forest management practices.

Land trusts have been active with Union farms in the recent period including the Georges River Land Trust, which holds a conservation easement for farmlands on Come Spring Lane, North Union Rd and Route 235.

3. *Are farm and commercial forest landowners taking advantage of the State's current tax law?*

Farmland is eligible for the Farmland Current Use Tax Program (Title 36, M.R.S.A., Section 1101, et seq.) if that farm consists of at least five contiguous acres, is utilized for the production of farming, agriculture or horticulture activities, which can include woodland and wasteland in its calculation. The tract must contribute gross earnings from farming activities of at least \$2,000 (which may include the value of commodities produced for consumption by the farm household) during one of the last two years or three of the last five years. Union has about 3,312 acres of land enrolled in the Farmland Program as of 2015. Since 2005, a net of 461 acres have been added to the Farmland Program.

The Maine legislature enacted changes to the Tree Growth and Open Space Property tax programs which took effect August 1, 2012 as Public Law Chapter 618 (LD 1138) which provides for tax advantages as under the old statute 36 M.R.S.A. Section 574. Union has 1,301 acres of land enrolled in the Tree Growth Program as of 2015, consisting of 28 parcels.

The Open Space Current Use Tax Program has no minimum lot size requirements and the parcel must be preserved or restricted in use to provide a public benefit by conserving scenic resources; enhancing public recreational opportunities; promoting game management or preserving wildlife habitat. Union has about 610 acres enrolled in the Open Space Program, consisting of 12 parcels. This statute was revised in August 2012 to also include areas in forest management. Since 2003, one parcel was added in the Open Space Program; two parcels were withdrawn.

4. Has proximity of new homes or other incompatible uses affected normal operations of farms or woodlot owners?

This is not --- apparent, as there is --- activity.

5. Are there large tracts of industrial forest land that have been or may be sold for development in the foreseeable future; if so, what impact would that have on the community?

Union does --- not have large tracts of industrial forestland, but large-scale development inland would have an impact on forestland wildlife habitat; and, although regulated by land use ordinances, might also have an impact on groundwater.

Care should be taken in any application for a subdivision to maintain as much forestland as possible for both groundwater recharge and for the preservation of habitat. Proper forest management should be encouraged. Loss of forestland can be attributed to development and to irresponsible harvesting techniques. When forestland is fragmented, both public and wildlife access become more restricted. Fragmentation occurs with the construction of new roadways and development in areas with large blocks of forests. Accordingly, in these areas road construction and development proposals should be reviewed very carefully and where appropriate redirected to areas better suited for such development. The Town should take special care in these forested: ---.

6. Does the community support community forestry or agriculture (i.e. small woodlots, community forests, tree farms, community gardens, farmers' markets, or community-supported agriculture)? If so, how?

The Town has been supportive of the agricultural activity occurring and --- woodlot management. The Union Farmers Market is held on Fridays from late May to early October, from 3pm to 6pm, on the Union Common. In 2015, they had 13 vendors from area farms. Union also has a --- few farm stands. Several local farms engage in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in which consumers buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer through a membership or subscription arrangement. The Union Fair is held in late August and features agricultural exhibits, shows and sales of agricultural related products. There is sufficient area for home gardening and small-scale, niche farming, so there is no --- immediate need for community gardens.

7. Does the community have Town or public woodlands under management, or that would benefit from forest management?

The community has --- municipal or public woodlands under management. At present, --- of the Town-owned --- parcels totaling --- acres would benefit from forest management.

Conditions and Trends

1. The community’s Comprehensive Planning Agriculture and Forestry Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Department of Agriculture, the Maine Forest Service, and the Office, or their designees.

The data set has been incorporated into this chapter and the maps titled Farmland Soils: Prime and of Statewide Importance, and Land Cover. See the next table for timber harvest data.

Summary of Timber Harvest Information for Union						
Year	Selection harvest, acres	Shelterwood harvest, acres	Clearcut harvest, acres	Total Harvest, acres	Change of land use, acres	Number of active Notifications
1991	196	0	1	197	0	6
1992	284	5	51	340	3	15
1993	102	0	39	141	5	10
1994	164	0	0	164	0	9
1995	99	0	10	109	10	8
1996	205	0	8	213	0	11
1997	188	0	0	188	0	14
1998	256	0	6	262	0	17
1999	362	120	5	487	19	25
2000	177	24	0	201	32	35
2001	250	0	0	250	1	25
2002	143	20	0	163	50	21
2003	222	0	0	222	43	18
2004	352	15	0	367	33	26
2005	233	0	0	233	82	23
2006	158	50	0	208	21	24
2007	399	10	0	409	40	29
2008	204	74	0	278	0	21
2009	62	0	12	74	39	23
2010	251	60	20	331	0	22
2011	412	20	75	507	0	26
2012	215	64	5	284	8	22
2013	186.9	110	0	296.9	8	22
2014	309.5	0	1	310.5	0	24
Total	5,430.4	572	233	6,235.4	394	476
Yearly Average	226	24	10	260	16	20

Source: Maine DACF - Maine Forest Service, provided in 2015

Note: To protect confidential landowner information, data is reported only where three or more landowners reported harvesting in the Town.

Town level agricultural data is not available from the USDA Census of Agriculture. County level data is shown in the next table. The number of farms and acreage has increased modestly. By acreage, the top products include forage (hay) and vegetables. In Union, blueberries and --- are notable crops.

Knox County Farm Stats			
Category	1997	2007	2012
Number of farms	275	304	314
Total land in farms (acres)	28,581	30,100	29,407
Average size of farms (acres)	104	99	94
Median size of farms (acres)	70	40	44
Estimated market value of land & buildings:			
Average per farm	278,992	382,856	355,739
Average per acre	2,833	3,867	3,798
Total cropland (acres)	12,164	12,050	7,510
Market value of crops, including nursery and greenhouse crops	\$5,046,000	\$6,175,000	\$5,431,000
Forage - land used for all hay & all haylage, grass silage, and greenchop (acres)	6,405	7,580	4,205
Vegetables harvested for sale (acres)	329	282	312

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 1997, 2002 and 2012 (Issued May 2014)

2. A map and/or description of the community's farms, farmland, and managed forest lands and a brief description of any that are under threat.

The Town has several private commercial agricultural operations. Most forests are not --- managed for timber harvesting. See the map titled Land Cover for areas of forests (about 13,379.9 acres), wetlands/wetland forests (about 1,028.9 acres), grasslands (about 307.8 acres), and cultivated lands (about 4,467.6 acres) among other categories. The cultivated lands figure includes cultivated crops and pasture/hay fields, among other categories.

The next table shows farms and related operations in Union.

Agriculture and Agriculture-Related Businesses in Union		
Name	Address	Products
Brae Maple Farm	233 N Union Rd	certified organic produce
Come Spring Farm	187 Come Spring Lane	
Freyenhagen's Family Farm	51 Wotton's Mill Rd	maple syrup, produce
Frostfire Farm	314 Collinstown Road	vegetables, blueberries, wool
Guini Ridge Farm	1353 N Union Road	lamb, yarn, vegetables
Herbal Revolution Farm and Apothecary	410 N. Union Rd	certified organic produce

Agriculture and Agriculture-Related Businesses in Union		
Name	Address	Products
Hunter Hill Farm / Hunter Hill Equestrian Center	1073 S Union Rd	horse boarding facility
Morgan's Mills	168 Payson Rd	
Rowan Tree Farm Bed and Breakfast	1018 Depot St	inn, blueberries
Savage Oakes Vineyard and Winery	175 Barrett Hill Rd	vineyard/winery
Sweetgrass Wine and Distillery	347 Carroll Rd	vineyard/winery
The Stand On Common Road	437 Common Rd	market
Union Farm Equipment, Inc.	1893 Heald Hwy	tractors
Allen's Union Farms		
Agricola Farms		
Coastal Blueberries		

[PURPLE TEXT IS FROM THE 2005 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. REMOVE OR REVISE AS APPROPRIATE]

As noted, several local farms engage in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in which consumers buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer. In this arrangement, the farmer offers a certain number of "shares" to the public. Typically, the share consists of a box of vegetables, but other farm products may be included. Interested consumers purchase a share (membership or a subscription) and in return receive a box (bag, basket) of seasonal produce each week throughout the farming season.

Threats to non-shoreland areas that are suitable for farming and forestlands are --- given the amount of development seen in the recent period in rural portions of the Town. Some local concerns include ---. Shorelands are regulated by shoreland zoning provisions that seek to protect vegetation near waterbodies thereby limiting pollution/runoff from development and agricultural activities.

3. Information on the number of parcels and acres of farmland, tree growth, and open space enrolled in the state's farm, tree growth, and open space law taxation programs, including changes in enrollment over the past 10 years.

Union has about 3,312 acres of land enrolled in the Farmland Program as of 2015. Since 2005, a net of about 461 acres has been added to the Farmland Program.

Summary of Farmland Program Information for Union							
Year	# of Parcels	Acres		Cropland Valuation	Woodland Valuation	Acres Withdraw	Penalties Assessed
		Cropland	Woodland				
2013	62	1,742	1,413	\$650,280	\$358,822	0	\$0
2015	65	1,781	1,531	\$654,188	\$394,659	6.5	\$450

Sources: Maine Revenue Services, Union Assessor

Notes: Cropland includes cropland, orchard, pasture, blueberry fields, and horticultural land.
Woodland includes softwood, mixed wood, and hardwood.

Figures rounded.

Union has about 1,301 acres of land enrolled in the Tree Growth Program as of 2015, consisting of 28 parcels. Since 2005, 121 acres were added to the Tree Growth Program; 72 acres were withdrawn and placed in the Farmland Program.

Summary of Tree Growth Information for Union								
Year	# of Parcels	Acres				Tree Growth Total Value	Acres Withdraw	Penalties Assessed
		Soft Wood	Mixed Wood	Hard Wood	Total			
2013	27	267	423	582	1,272	\$301,797	0	\$0
2015	28	246	465	589	1,301	--	72	NA-Moved to Farmland Program

Sources: Maine Revenue Services, Union Assessor

Notes: Figures rounded.

Union has about 610 acres enrolled in the Open Space Program, consisting of 13 parcels. This statute was revised in August 2012 to also include areas in forest management. Since 2005, almost 380 acres were added to the Open Space Program and no parcels were withdrawn.

Summary of Open Space Program Information for Union					
Year	# of Parcels	Enrolled Acres	Total Valuation	Acres Withdraw	Penalties Assessed
2015	12	610	\$304,990	0	\$0

Source: Union Assessor

Notes: Figures rounded.

4. A description of any community farming and forestry activities (e.g. community garden, farmer's market, or community forest).

The Union Farmers Market is held on Fridays from late May to early October from 3pm to 6pm, on the Union Common. In 2015, they had 13 vendors from area farms. For more information, see: <http://www.unionfarmersmarket.org>.

The Union Fair is held in late August and features agricultural exhibits, shows and sales of agricultural related products. For more information, see <http://www.unionfair.org/>. See also, the Economy Chapter and Recreation Chapter.

There are also about --- private farm stands seasonally. The Town has --- community gardens. The Town has --- community forests.

Policies

1. To safeguard lands identified as prime farmland or capable of supporting commercial forestry.
2. To support farming and forestry and encourage their economic viability.
3. To promote the use of best management practices for timber harvesting and agricultural production.

Strategies

Agricultural and Forestry Resources: Strategies	Responsible Parties	Timeframe
<i>(1) Consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices as required by 12 M.R.S.A. §8869.</i>	Code Enforcement Officer, Planning Board, and Ordinance Review Committee	Immediate and Ongoing
<i>(2) Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.</i>	Code Enforcement Officer, Planning Board, and Ordinance Review Committee	Immediate and Ongoing
<i>(3) Amend land use ordinances to require commercial or subdivision developments in critical rural areas, if applicable, maintain areas with prime farmland soils as open space to the greatest extent practicable.</i>	Select Board, Ordinance Review Committee, Planning Board, Code Enforcement Officer, Town Voters	Immediate
<i>(4) Limit non-residential development in critical rural areas (if the Town designates critical rural areas) to natural resource-based businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farmers' markets, and home occupations.</i>	Select Board, Ordinance Review Committee, Planning Board, Code Enforcement Officer, Town Voters	Midterm
<i>(5) Encourage owners of productive farm and forest land to enroll in the current use taxation programs.</i>	Select Board, Town Manager, Planning Board, and Code Enforcement Officer	Immediate and Ongoing
<i>(6) Permit land use activities that support productive agriculture and forestry operations, such as roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, sawmills, log buying yards, and pick-your own operations.</i>	Select Board, Planning Board, Code Enforcement Officer, Town Voters	Midterm
<i>(7) Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation that supports them in local or regional economic development plans.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage local businesses that produce or sell local and regional agricultural and forestry products. 	Town Manager, Chamber of Commerce	Long Term

Note: Strategies proposed in this Comprehensive Plan are assigned responsible parties and a timeframe in which to be addressed. Immediate is assigned for strategies to be addressed within two years after the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, Midterm for strategies to be addressed within five years, and Long Term for strategies to be addressed within ten years. In addition, Ongoing is used for regularly recurring activities.

THE TEXT BELOW IS FROM THE 2005 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. RELEVANT PORTIONS COULD BE RETAINED OR REVISED AND INCLUDED IN THE UPDATED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. NOTE: THERE IS OVERLAP WITH THE STATE-REQUIRED STRATEGIES ABOVE.

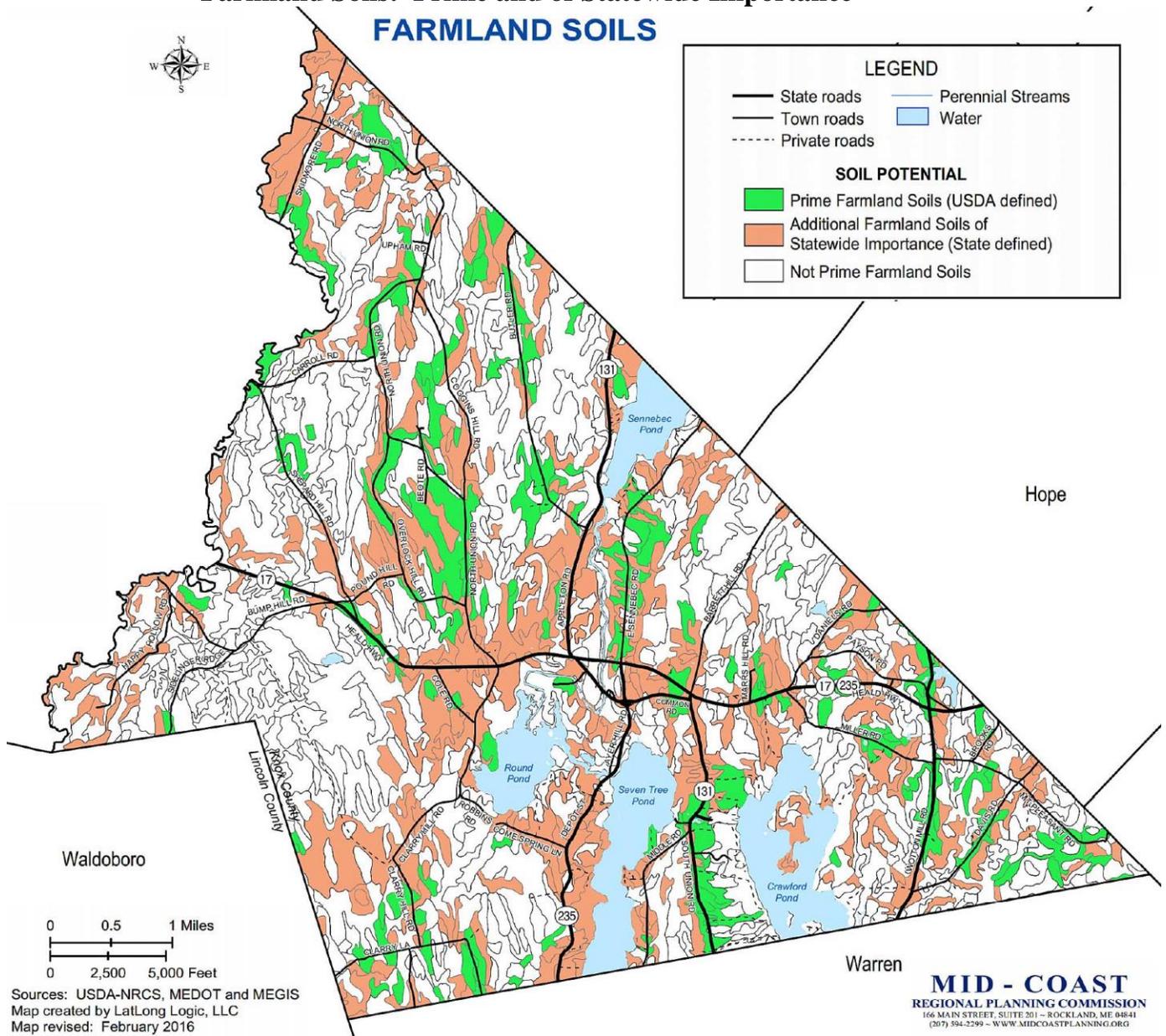
Recommendations

1. Work with local farmers to form an agricultural protection task force or committee. Review model programs in other areas, consider options and design a package of conservation techniques to protect farmland and sustain agriculture. Conduct a survey in the community to identify and assess socio-economic impact of farms. Link farmers to the Department of Agriculture's FarmLink program intended to connect people looking to farm with farmers who are searching for options for their farms.
2. Pass an ordinance to supplement the Maine state Right-to-Farm law (designed to strengthen legal protection to farmers when neighbors sue them for private nuisance and to protect farmers from anti-nuisance ordinances and unreasonable control on farming operations).
3. Explore options available to states, though currently not used in Maine such as agricultural districts being tested in Auburn (which are authorized by state legislature and enacted locally, provide incentives for farmer participation and are voluntary), agricultural protection zoning, and transfer of development rights (used to shift development from agricultural areas to designated growth zones).
4. Encourage the use of the agricultural tax program available to farmers in Maine; Farm and Open Space Program which taxes land in agriculture differently than other real property. Local officials assess farmland at its agricultural use value rather than its fair market value. Ensure all protected lands qualify. Encourage assessor to properly assess agricultural structures (which depreciate significantly over time – silos, barns). Share results of cost of community service studies that show the net fiscal contribution of conserved land to residentially developed land to local budgets.
5. Create incentives for landowners to keep land in agriculture. Set up a purchase of development rights/agricultural easements program. Encourage the donation of development rights. Support the work of local land trusts.
6. Discourage land uses that put pressure on nearby agricultural operations. Require buffer strips as part of any non-agricultural development in or near existing farms. Confine development to uses that will not infringe upon agriculture.

7. Allow for creative development plans that economize on the amount of land used for buildings while leaving land open for future agricultural use.
8. Review planning and zoning ordinances. Use the “Is your town farm-friendly?” checklist as a guide. Make adjustments and pass reforms that address the needs of agriculture. Establish farmland protection zones with sufficiently low residential density to support viable farmland operations.
9. Support farming and encourage its economic viability. Offer technical assistance in marketing and promotion. Permit roadside stands, greenhouses and pick-your-own operations. Allow seasonal operations to use off-site signs to attract customers. Use local produce for community events/meals. Encourage sale of local produce in grocery store. Consider using local food supplies for school lunches.
10. Include agriculture in local economic development plans. Grant low interest loans or economic development grants for farm improvements and expansions. Refer farmers to economic development programs of the Department of Agriculture (Farms for the Future, Debt for Nature Program). Extend economic incentives to improve agricultural support industries and encourage new ones.

Farmland Soils: Prime and of Statewide Importance

FARMLAND SOILS



Sources: USDA-NRCS, MEDOT and MEGIS
 Map created by LatLong Logic, LLC
 Map revised: February 2016

Sources: USDA-NRCS, Maine DOT and MeGIS

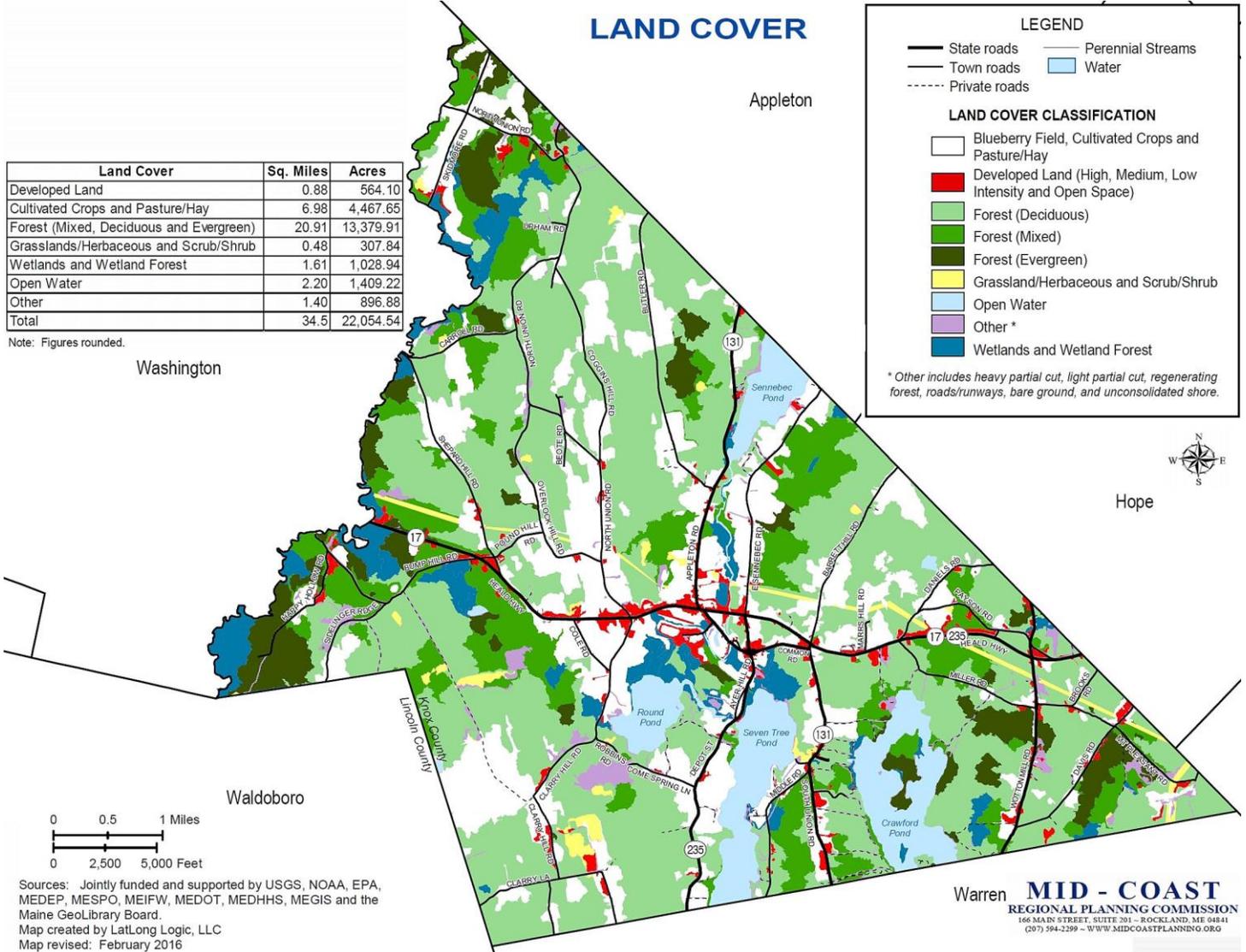
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Land Cover

LAND COVER

Land Cover	Sq. Miles	Acres
Developed Land	0.88	564.10
Cultivated Crops and Pasture/Hay	6.98	4,467.65
Forest (Mixed, Deciduous and Evergreen)	20.91	13,379.91
Grasslands/Herbaceous and Scrub/Shrub	0.48	307.84
Wetlands and Wetland Forest	1.61	1,028.94
Open Water	2.20	1,409.22
Other	1.40	896.88
Total	34.5	22,054.54

Note: Figures rounded.



LEGEND

- State roads
- Town roads
- Private roads
- Perennial Streams
- Water

LAND COVER CLASSIFICATION

- Blueberry Field, Cultivated Crops and Pasture/Hay
- Developed Land (High, Medium, Low Intensity and Open Space)
- Forest (Deciduous)
- Forest (Mixed)
- Forest (Evergreen)
- Grassland/Herbaceous and Scrub/Shrub
- Open Water
- Other *
- Wetlands and Wetland Forest

* Other includes heavy partial cut, light partial cut, regenerating forest, roads/runways, bare ground, and unconsolidated shore.

Sources: Jointly funded and supported by USGS, NOAA, EPA, MEDEP, MESPO, MEIFW, MEDOT, MEDHHS, MEGIS and the Maine GeoLibrary Board.
 Map created by LatLong Logic, LLC
 Map revised: February 2016

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Sources: USGS, NOAA, EPA, Maine State Agencies