

8. FUTURE LAND USE

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8.1 Introduction

The Future Land Use element establishes overall land use policy for the Region. It is composed of a narrative describing ACRPC's plan philosophy, existing conditions and proposed future conditions supported by Goals and Recommended Actions and illustrated in four planning maps.

The future land use narrative discusses the Plan's philosophical underpinnings, general and desired use categories and limitations within each type of land use region. It divides the region into six types of use areas and contains goals and recommendations to maintain or improve future conditions in each type of region.

Four maps illustrate and support The Future Land Use Section narrative. The first map shows generalized land use regions. This composite map stems from each of the land use maps from local town plans. The Future Land Use Map is updated annually to reflect changes made in municipal plans to honor local land use designations as the basis for the generalized future land use regions depicted in this map.

The second map, which is divided into Map A depicting land based resources and Map B, depicting water based resources, provides an overlay of regionally significant resources. Regionally significant resources have a physical or service continuum beyond one town. They are of regional, statewide or national importance, or are publicly owned natural resources and are designated of regional significance in this plan. The third map depicts towns with adopted and regionally approved town plans, generally depicting the level of planning occurring in the Region. The fourth map depicts State designated downtowns, villages and growth centers.

8.2 Future Land Use

The Commission intends to annually update this Future Land Use section to reflect Town Plans adopted during the prior year.

A. Land Uses

ACRPC believes that the best plans stem from the people with the greatest stake in the outcome of the plan developed. In this case, those people constitute the citizens of each of the Region's respective municipalities. Therefore, ACRPC has based its Regional Land Use Plan upon the foundation of the adopted planning areas of its member municipalities. The Regional Future Land Use Plan constitutes a composite of the municipal land use maps from every municipality in the Region. Because the land use regions identified in municipal plans are described in many different ways, the discussion below amalgamates the various planning areas in all municipalities into six generalized land use regions, clustered together based upon density and functional uses proposed. ACRPC strongly believes that tying its regional plan to the plans of its local municipalities constitutes the best way to successfully plan for and implement the Region's vision. It reduces potentially confusing or duplicative processes and significantly reduces the potential for conflicting jurisdictional visions.

1. Regional Centers with Mixed Residential and Commercial Uses

The Addison Region includes three municipalities that serve as its regional centers: the Town of Middlebury, the shire town of the County; the City of Vergennes and the Town of Bristol. These three regional centers constitute the historic industrial areas of the Region, starting with the mills that sprang up along the rivers and falls within each community. Those mills drove densely constructed villages to house their workforces. The development pattern created survives to this day and explains the characteristics that set these regional centers apart from the Region's other municipalities. These include:

- Generally larger population bases;
- Denser population development;
- Downtowns with retail, service and manufacturing businesses that draw and support consumers from each of the municipalities that surround them;
- Infrastructure to support denser population and commercial development; and
- Qualification for the state designated downtown program.

Because of the availability of infrastructure to support and promote existing settlement patterns, this plan encourages major commercial or industrial development to locate in appropriately designated areas of Middlebury, Vergennes and Bristol. It also encourages the creative reuse or redevelopment of "brownfields" or other existing commercial or industrial facilities or infrastructure. This plan supports cluster development within the regional centers that perpetuate their historic development patterns.

2. Villages, With Mixed Commercial and Residential Uses

Nearly every town in the region has designated a village or mixed-use planning region in their future land use plans. This plan consistently encourages supporting and revitalizing the region's villages with a mix of uses by adopting and incorporating these locally designated downtowns and villages. To a significant degree, the downtowns and villages identified in local plans and incorporated herein coincide with areas of existing commercial development and the historic village centers. These areas typically have a mix of development and the highest density of residential development within each municipality. Support of these existing village areas re-enforces the land use pattern of denser villages surrounded by the rural working landscape and countryside, thus reinforcing the State's planning goals. This plan supports further development of these village areas. It also supports investment in key infrastructure necessary to support development in these village areas. In the Addison Region, water and/or wastewater systems are the most important infrastructure elements necessary to encourage future growth within the region's villages. High-speed digital communications infrastructure and energy infrastructure should also be deployed strategically to support economic development within the region's locally designated villages and downtowns. Although most of the region's towns do not have the infrastructure necessary for large industrial development, this plan supports smaller scale mixed residential, commercial and industrial growth in the areas designated by each town. Another tool available for the Region's villages constitutes the State's village center designation. The State Village Center designation aims to revitalize historic centers by providing tax credits that can be used to restore historic commercial structures. Those structures then serve as a catalyst for additional local economic development. Village center designation also gives the municipality an advantage in other state grant programs. Any municipality with a village or hamlet containing at least one commercial building may apply.

3. Industrial Regions

The Addison Region hosts two types of industrial areas that it has separated out from its Regional and Village Centers. These consist of:

- a. Areas specifically designated for industrial uses, adjacent to regional centers; and
- b. Industrial areas based upon the natural resources that spurred their development.

Middlebury and Vergennes/Ferrisburgh have reserved planning areas on the outskirts of their village as areas for industrial uses. Proximity to the Vermont Railway line constituted one of the major factors driving these locations. While certain light industrial uses are compatible with mixed use downtown areas, other heavier industrial uses are not. These industrial areas constitute ways to provide for those, still important, economic development opportunities.

The second type of industrial area stems from the resources extracted within that area. These types of more rural industrial areas generally follow the veins of gravel or limestone available for commercial extraction in the Region. This plan supports the continued reasonable and appropriate use of these mineral resources as discussed in more detail in the Natural Resources Section of this plan.

4. Residential Use Regions

This region includes areas designated for residential uses on lots two-acres or less in size. Residential uses are permitted uses in most towns, subject to the requirements of locating on-site sewage disposal facilities. Most towns have identified some area of higher density residential use (characterized for the purposes of this plan as two-acres or less). Many areas planned for higher density development lie in the village regions and are depicted in the regional center or village areas for the purposes of this map. Many others are defined by some other variable, ranging from pre-existing development patterns, especially along the shores of Lake Champlain and Lake Dunmore, to available soils with easy access to major roadways. ACRPC chose the two acre density as a defining point for distinguishing its residential regions. Without centralized water or wastewater systems, multiple residences clustered together will typically require approximately two acres to provide sufficient setbacks to allow for the siting of individual wells and septic systems on each lot.

Residential Regions are most likely to allow or encourage Planned Unit Developments. The Regional Plan supports residential use as permitted in town bylaws. It encourages the use of cluster/PUD developments particularly to preserve agricultural and forest lands, and/or to protect regionally significant resources. As the Regional Commission works with towns in updating plans, zoning bylaws, and subdivision regulations, the Commission will encourage towns to adopt policies which encourage cluster/PUD development to protect these same resources, other locally significant resources and to educate towns about the benefits of steering more development into their village and/or regional centers.

Home occupations, home-based businesses and cottage industries are permitted uses in most municipal planning regions that allow for higher and lower density residential development. This is consistent with this plan's economic base policies that encourage smaller, community-based businesses. However, the Commission is aware of problems with administering home occupation/home-based businesses/cottage industry bylaws. It will continue to work with towns to balance the benefits of these uses (bolstering local economies by providing business opportunities) against the burdens they can place on neighboring properties (i.e. large or inappropriate activities).

As noted above, several towns have shoreland districts that fall within this use region. The Regional Commission will continue to work with towns to encourage updating of existing districts to provide for reasonable uses in these areas acknowledging the pre-existing settlement patterns, but also with the intent of focusing on mitigating stormwater or lakeshore habitat impacts.

5. Rural and Agricultural Planning Regions

Agriculture constitutes the primary land use in this region. The region also allows for the density of housing generally less than two units per acre. This plan adopts and incorporates the vision contained in most municipal plans encouraging the continuation of agriculture as a primary land use within this region. Agriculture and forestry are exempt from local bylaws (after filing a notice of activity and demonstrating that they constitute a legitimate agricultural use as defined by the Secretary of the Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets) and as such, are permitted throughout the region. This is consistent with Regional Plan policy's supporting continuation of local resource based business and encouraging both land uses. The Regional Plan specifically encourages the use of Required Management Practices ("RMPs"), Required Agricultural Practices ("RAPs") and Best Management Practices ("BMPs"). This plan also supports the work of land trusts to conserve large usable blocks of prime farmland. To date, many of the Region's towns lying closest to Lake Champlain boast some of the highest percentages of conserved farmland in the state, including up to 20% of the total acreage within the town.

Single-family residences are usually permitted uses on larger lot sizes in this region. Increasingly municipalities are switching to density based zoning to control housing density in rural areas. Density based zones, as opposed to zones requiring large lots, provide more flexibility in design and encourage open space protecting the functionality of natural resources. Towns are moving away from zoning that encourages a string of development along a road by encouraging the use of PUDs with clusters of housing units to provide housing in rural areas and to limit the impacts of that housing on natural areas. ACRPC will continue to work with its member municipalities to explain PUD and density based zoning concepts and to encourage their use on appropriate sites.

Some towns include outdoor recreation as either a permitted or conditional use in their rural and agricultural planning regions and in Forestry, Conservation regions discussed below. This plan also encourages agricultural and forestry related service businesses and appropriately scaled valued added manufacturing business to locate near the resources they need and support. The Utilities, Facilities and Services section of the plan addresses recreation and includes appropriate recreational policies and data.

Several towns also have mineral extraction bylaws. This plan's policies reflect the intent of these bylaws and reinforce the importance of the wise use of these resources (sand, gravel and limestone), given their uneven distribution in the Region and the economic ramifications of continuing mineral resource extraction in the Region. Many of the larger extraction operations are included as industrial areas. However, smaller operations exist throughout the Region.

6. Forestry, Conservation and Floodplain Regions

This constitutes the last composite of land uses within most plans in the Region. Forestry is recognized, with agriculture, as one of the most important resources in the Region. Many municipalities have set up districts to preserve and support it. In addition, maps created based upon work by the Soil Conservation Service located in the agricultural and forestry lands sections of this plan show those lands which are of prime importance under Criterion 9B and those lands rated as secondary agricultural and forest soils under Criteria 9C of Act 250.

Conservation areas are distributed throughout the Region. Much of the higher elevation land on the eastern border of the Region is located in the Green Mountain National Forest and permanently conserved. Other land in this area is designated in 25-acre conservation districts. Land along many rivers and abutting several major wetlands and marshes is also designated conservation. Because of the abundance of rural landscape, the public and quasi-public opportunities for outdoor recreation and the proximity of the Green Mountains National Forest, most towns generally utilize these lands to promote the working landscape and rural economy driven by farming and forestry or for open space to promote recreational opportunities and/or preserve significant natural features.

As noted above, many towns have planning regions that protect floodplains or other significant wetlands (Class I and II wetlands). The best examples of this are in the vicinity of the both the Otter Creek and the Dead Creek, which are identified as regionally significant resources on Map 8-2 of this plan and which play a major role in providing habitat, improving water quality and protecting many other areas of the Region from flooding.

Aquifer areas are shown in the water resources section of this plan. Most aquifers are within the town that they serve and so are of local concern. The Addison County Regional Planning Commission will provide towns with examples of aquifer protection districts from other regions and encourage their adoption here.

B. Goals and Recommended Actions

Goal A. To Plan Development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact villages and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

Implementation regional centers and villages:

1. Work with the Region's municipalities to structure their land use areas and regulations implementing them to clearly define and articulate village areas surrounded by rural areas.
2. Encourage residential development primarily in community centers and villages;
3. Work with Addison County Economic Development Corporation to provide incentives encouraging businesses to locate in downtowns and village centers;
4. Promote, plan for and construct public infrastructure like water and wastewater systems, sidewalks, bike lanes, stormwater, energy and communication systems that make locating in a regional center or village desirable; and
5. Support value added agricultural/wood products manufacturing in villages and downtowns to provide markets for products from the working landscape.

Implementation working lands and conservation areas:

1. Support the efforts of the Vermont Land Trust to conserve appropriately located agricultural and forestry lands;
2. Support the delineation boundary of the Green Mountain National Forest;
3. Work with the Region's municipalities to structure their land use areas and regulations implementing them to clearly define and articulate regulations protecting rural and conservation areas;
4. Promote Freedom to Farm policies within this plan and municipal plans in the Region;
5. Support taxation and other state policies that provide incentives to preserve working blocks of agricultural and forestry land; and
6. Work with Addison County Economic Development Corporation to encourage value added farm and forest product production in areas close to production.

C. Maps

1. Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map for the Addison Region consists of a composite of all municipally adopted municipal plans as of the effective date of this plan. The map included herein depicts the Land Use regions adopted by each municipality in six broad categories:

1. Regional Centers with Mixed Residential Commercial development;
2. Villages with mixed residential and commercial development;
3. Industrial Areas;
4. Residential Regions of 2 acres or less;
5. Rural and Agricultural Regions of greater than 2 acre density; and
6. Forestry, Conservation and Floodplain Regions.

Planning areas from expired municipal plans are also included in the Future Land Use Map. While expired plans have no standing, they constitute the best indication of the regulations governing the area, since zoning cannot be changed without an adopted town plan. ACRPC's future land use map constitutes one of the major pieces of information ACRPC's Commission will review should it decide to file testimony in a land use case.

2. Regionally Significant Resources Map

The Regionally Significant Resources Map serves as an overlay to the Regional Future Land Use Map. It identifies regionally significant resources or facilities to which the Regional Plan policies should apply. The Commission should use the largest scale map available to review the actual boundaries of the significant regional resource should the Commission choose to participate in a regulatory proceeding to respond to impacts on, or benefits to, the significant regional resources depicted on the map. Should a conflict arise between municipal land use plans and the regional plan, it will stem from land use impacts on an identified significant regional resource. Should that occur, ACRPC will look to work with the applicant and affected municipality and determine whether the project can be changed to eliminate or reasonably mitigate the impact on the significant regional resource.

3. Map of Approved Municipal Plans

This map shows those municipalities that have current locally adopted plans approved by the Addison County Regional Planning Commission under the directives of 24 V.S.A. § 4350. The map also includes the date of the plans local adoption and regional approval. The map illustrates that generally Addison County's municipalities support the work of their planning commissions and keep their plans and supporting regulations up to date.

4. Map of State Designated Growth Centers, Downtowns and Villages

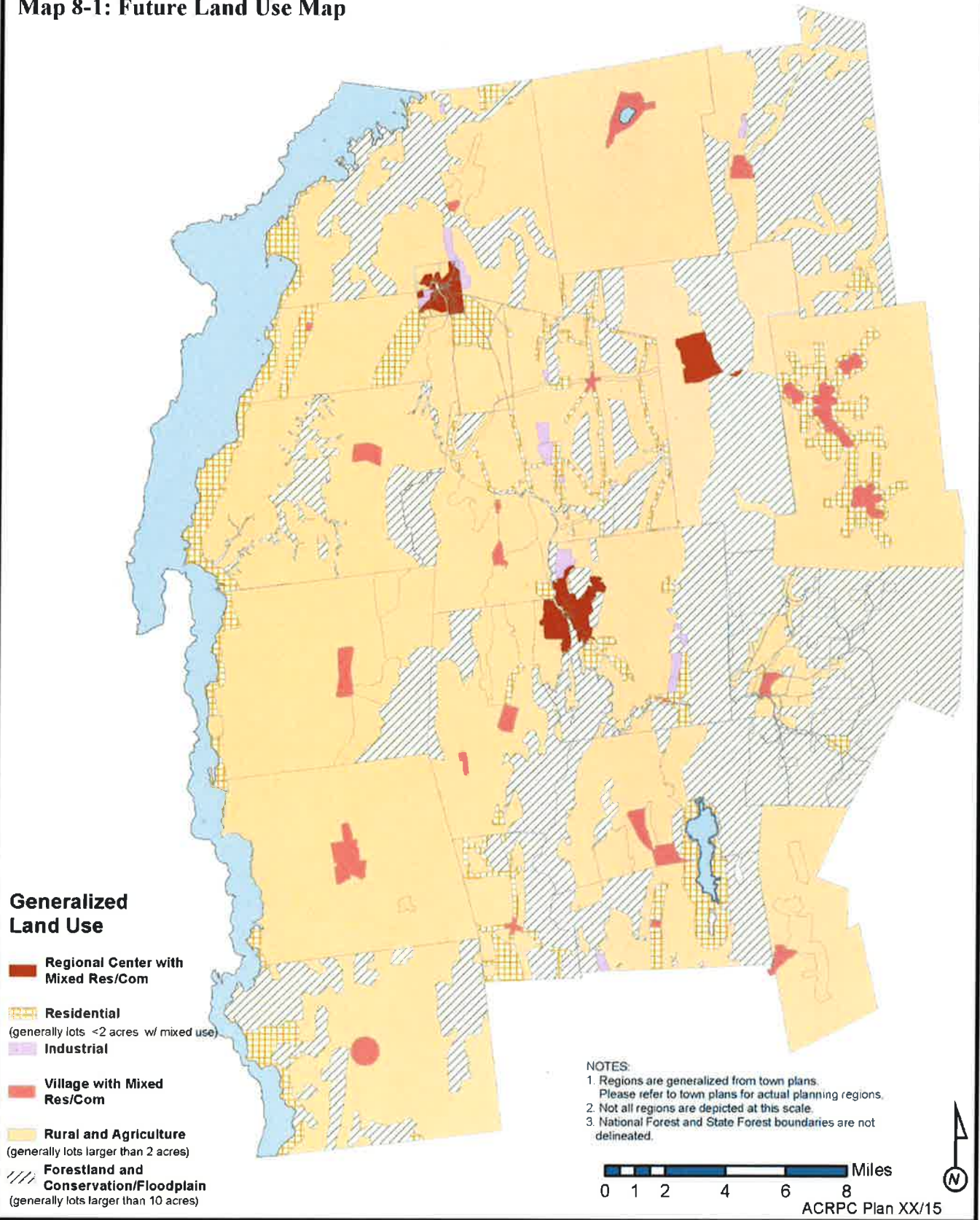
In addition to the village or mixed-use districts created by each municipality, the State also has several programs intended to revitalize historic centers and encourage downtown, village or "growth-center" development. Map 8-4 depicts the state designated downtowns and village centers in the Region.



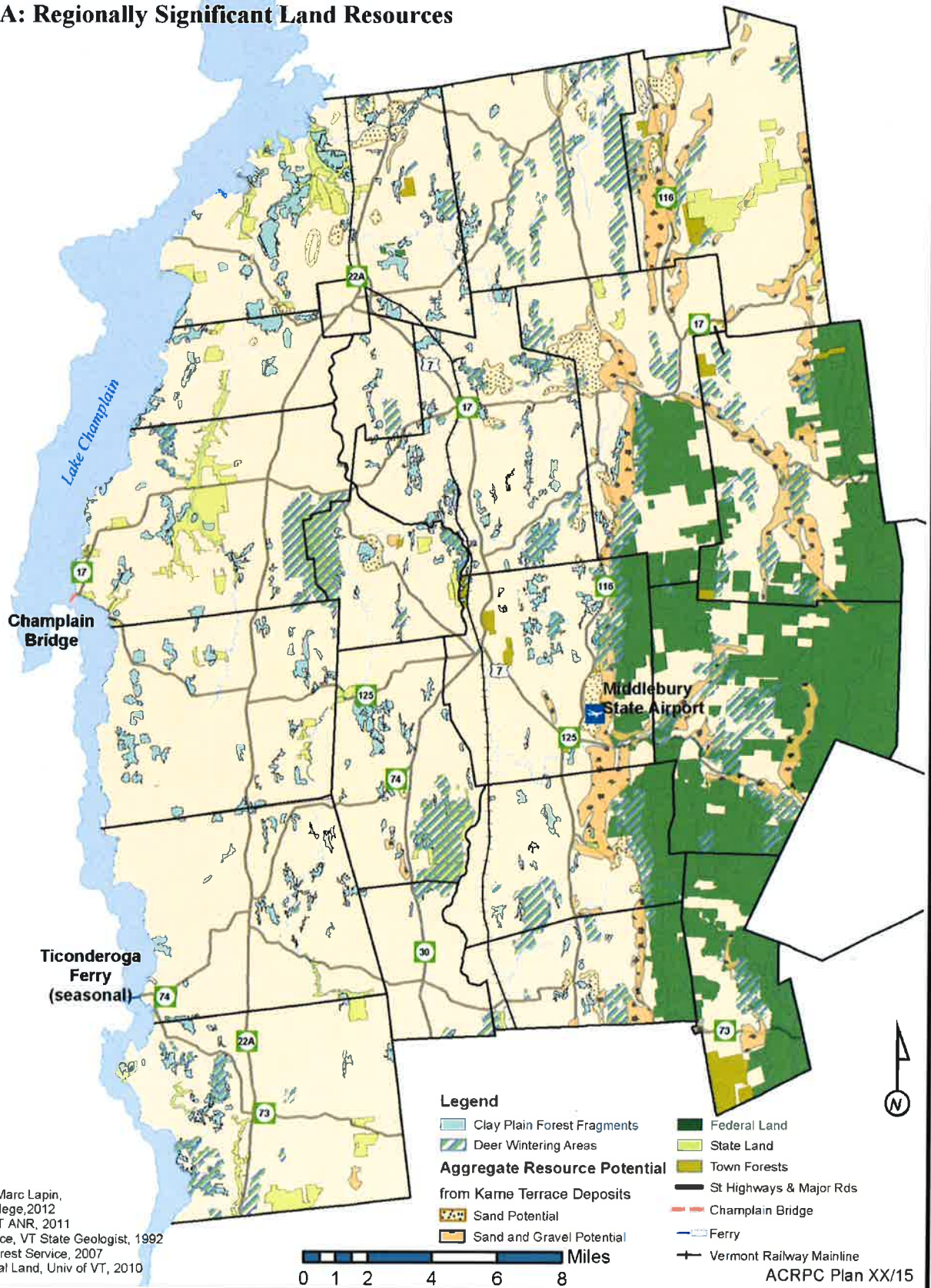
(March 9, 2016) ACRPC

Future Land Use

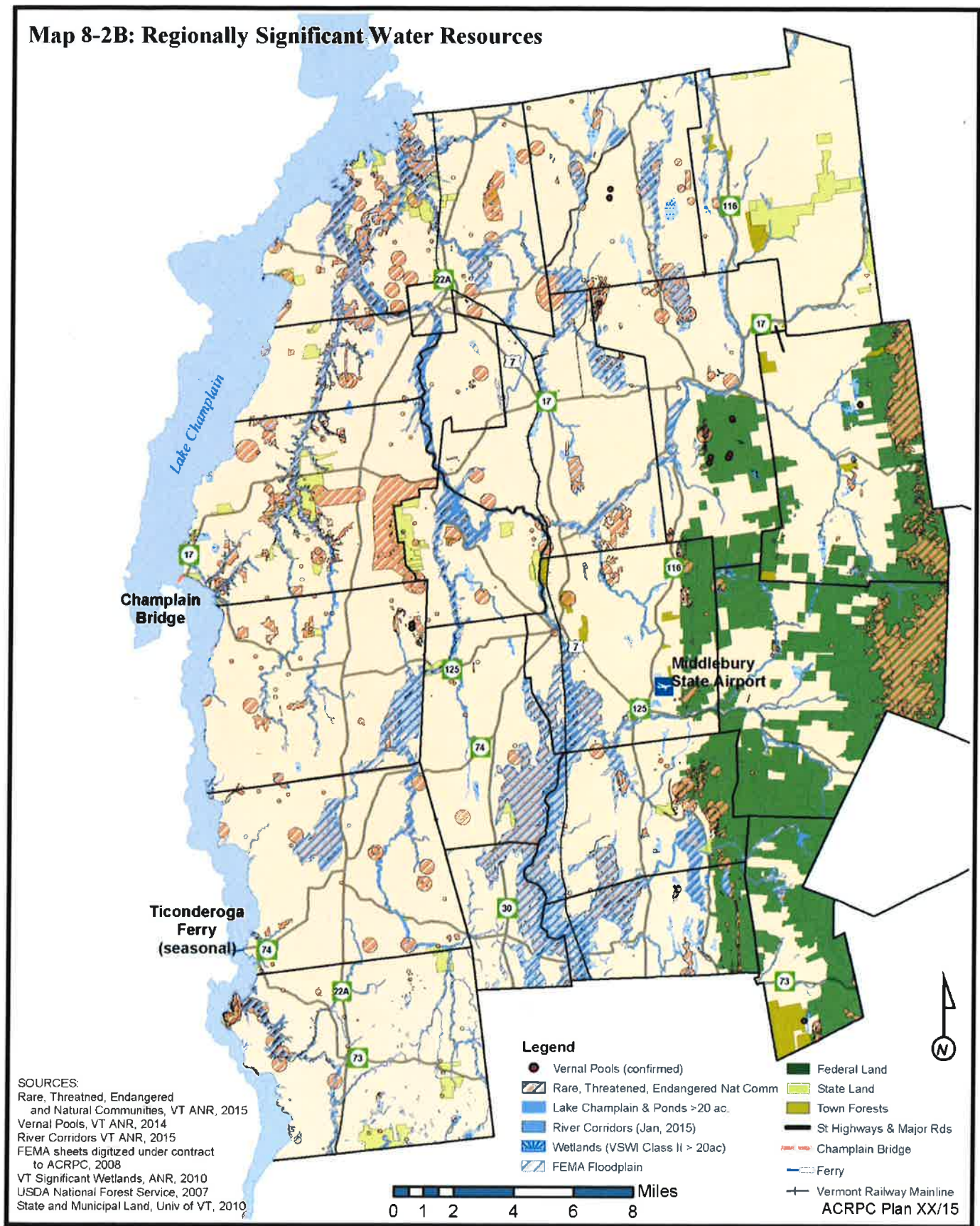
Map 8-1: Future Land Use Map



Map 8-2A: Regionally Significant Land Resources



Map 8-2B: Regionally Significant Water Resources

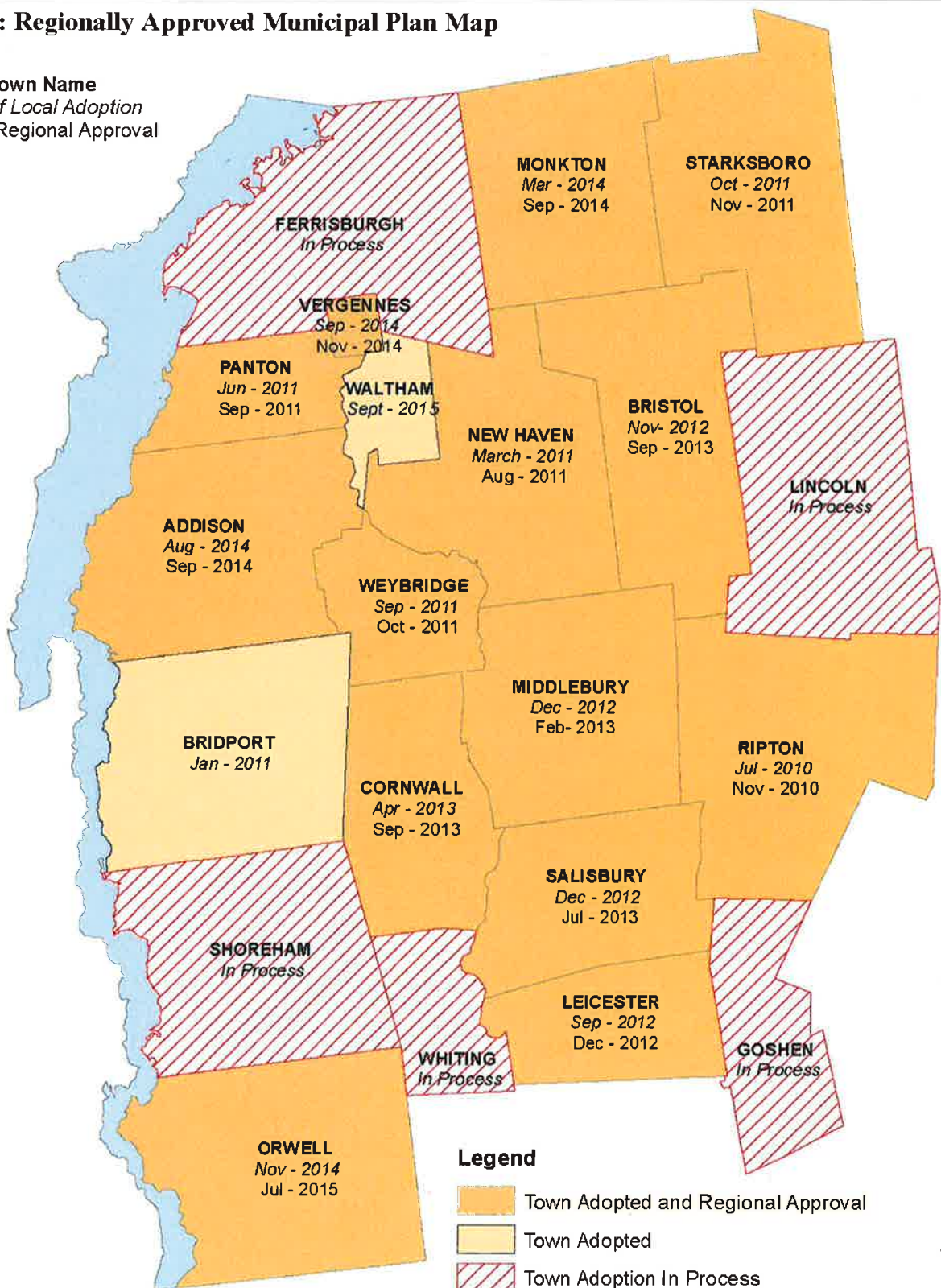


ACRPC (March 9, 2016)

Future Land Use

Map 8-3: Regionally Approved Municipal Plan Map

Town Name
Date of Local Adoption
Date of Regional Approval



NOTES:

1. Adopted town plans are in effect for 5 years.
2. Town plans are approved by regional planning commissions according to Title 24 Chapter 117 Paragraph 4350(c) of the Vermont Statutes.



Legend

- Town Adopted and Regional Approval
- Town Adopted
- Town Adoption In Process

ACRPC Plan XX/15



Map 8-4: Designated Growth Centers, Downtowns and Villages

**Bristol
Downtown**



1 inch = 0.5 miles

**Vergennes
Downtown**



1 inch = 6.2 miles

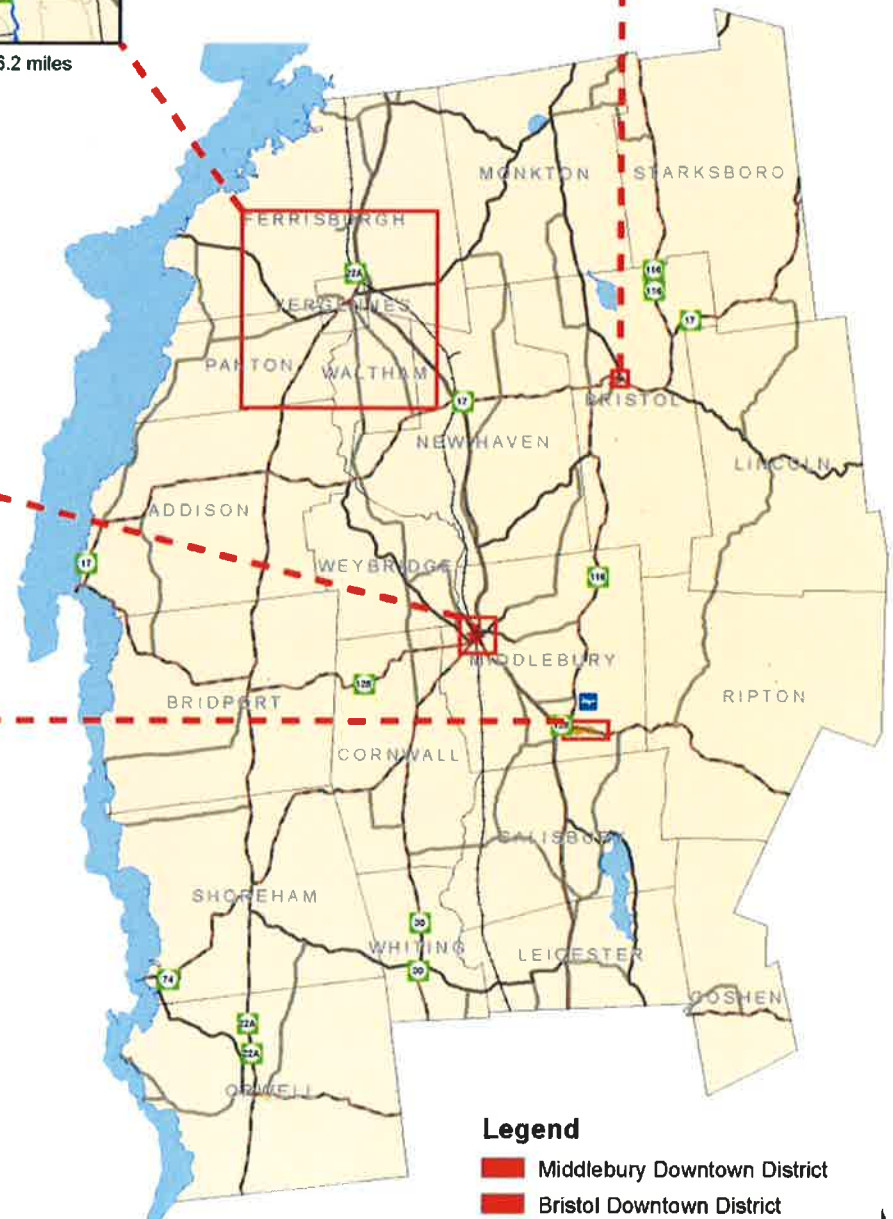
**Middlebury Downtown and
East Middlebury Village**



1 inch = 0.75 miles



1 inch = 0.75 miles



Legend

- Middlebury Downtown District
- Bristol Downtown District
- Vergennes Downtown District
- East Middlebury Village District