

# **Forests in Your Municipal Plan**

**Addison County  
Regional  
Planning  
Commission  
17 November  
2021**





# Some Brief Introductions

Please let us know,

- Your Name
- What Town you're from
- What Position you hold



# Your Municipal Plan



**“the focus of your plan should be on the future and how to get there”**

- Approved for 8 years (Plan for 20!)
- Updates usually start with Planning Commission, go to SelectBoard, town vote to approve.
- Regional Approval

# Act 171- Forest Block requirements

(2) A land use plan, which shall consist of a **map** and **statement of present and prospective land uses**, that:

- (A) Indicates those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture (using the agricultural lands identification process established in 6 V.S.A. § 8), residence, commerce, industry, public and semi-public uses, and open spaces, areas reserved for flood plain, and areas identified by the State, the regional planning commission, or the municipality that require special consideration for aquifer protection; for wetland protection; **for the maintenance of forest blocks, wildlife habitat, and habitat connectors**; or for other conservation purposes.

The Vermont Statutes Online

Title 24 : Municipal And County Government

Chapter 117 : Municipal And Regional Planning And Development

Subchapter 005 : Municipal Development Plan

§ 4382. The plan for a municipality

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24/117/04382>



# Act 171- Forest Block requirements

(2) A land use plan, which shall consist of a map and statement of present and prospective land uses, that:

- (D) Indicates those areas that are **important as forest blocks and habitat connectors** and plans for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of forests.

A plan may include specific policies to encourage the active management of those areas for wildlife habitat, water quality, timber production, recreation, or other values or functions identified by the municipality.

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# Forest Block & Corridor plans in Addison County

## **Recently Finalized and Approved (2021):**

- Bristol,
- Salisbury,

## **In-Progress sections:**

- Cornwall,
- Orwell,

## **Early Drafts:**

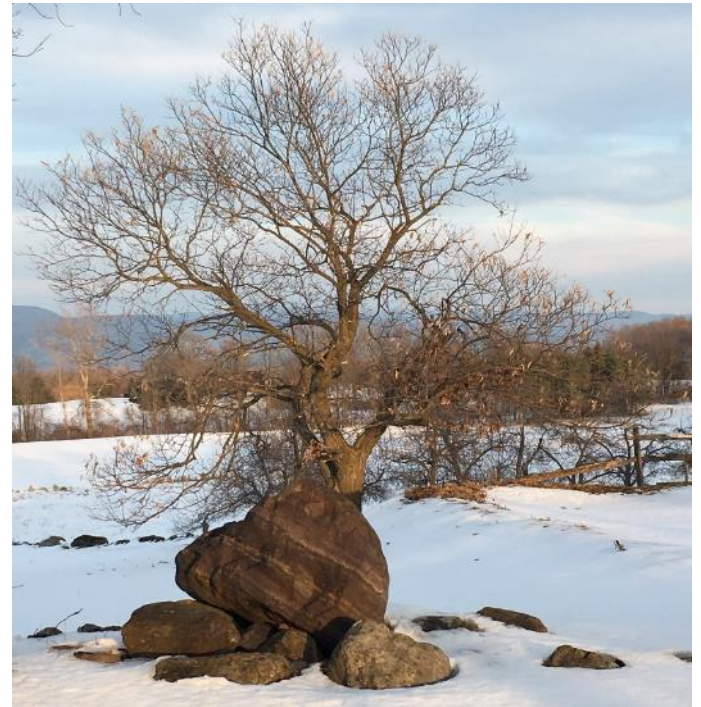
- Ferrisburgh,
- Ripton,
- Weybridge.



# Steps for Forest Block Planning

## Steps:

1. **Identify** Forests Blocks, Habitat Connectors, Wildlife Habitat.
2. **Describe** the features.
3. **Create maps** illustrating this information.
4. **Develop Goals, Policies and Implementation Actions.**
5. **Update Land-Use section.**

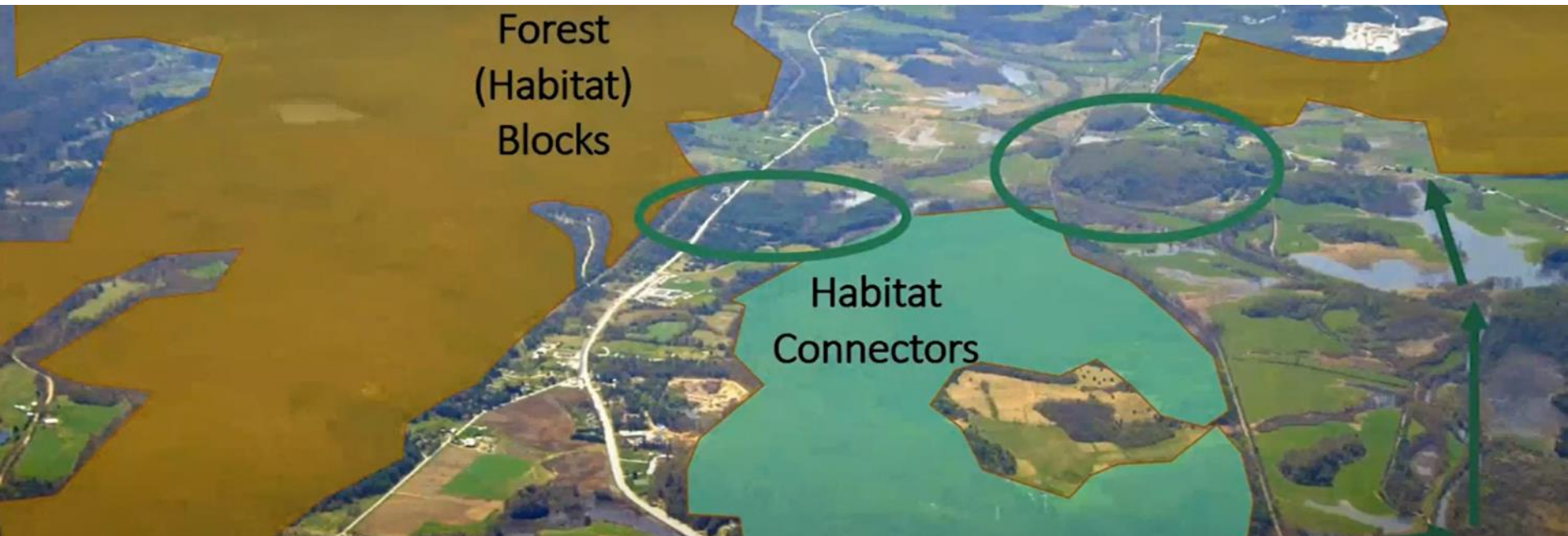




# Definitions

**“Forest Block”** - a contiguous area of forest in any stage of succession, not currently developed for other uses.

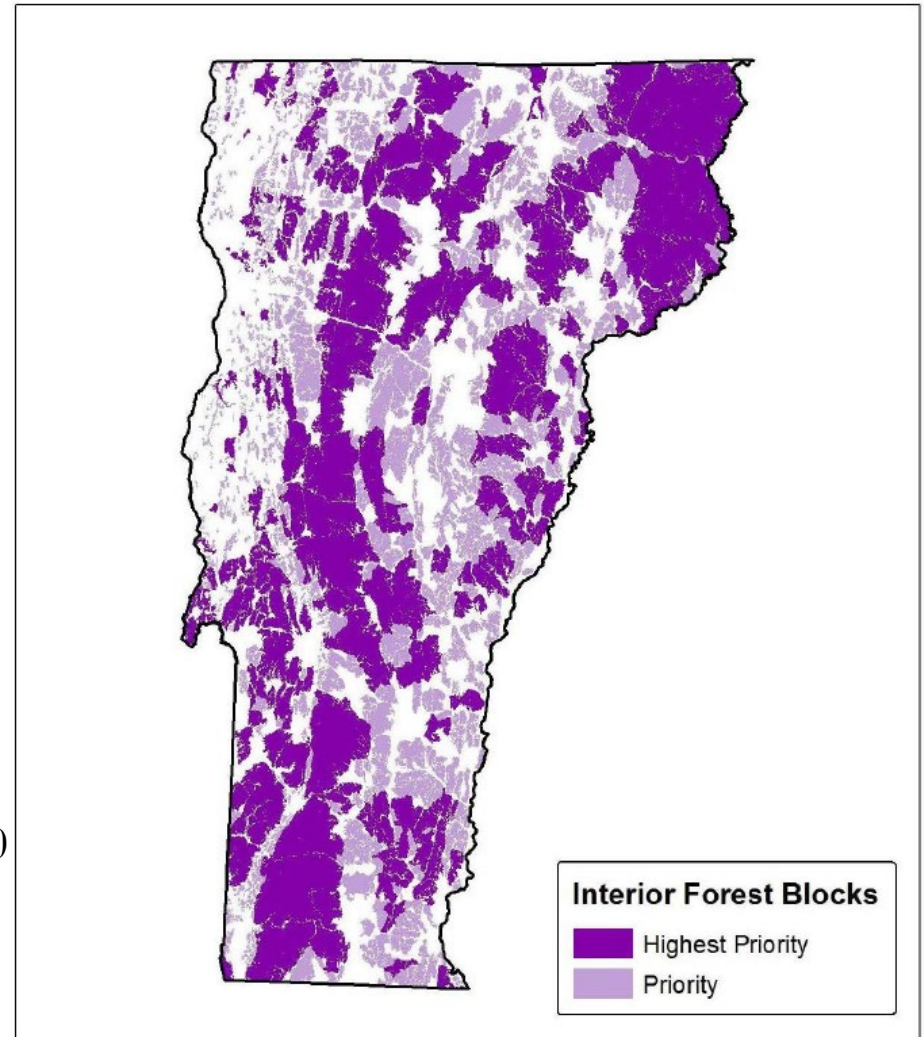
**“Habitat Connector”** - land or water that links wildlife habitat within a landscape, allowing the movement and migration of animals and plants and the functioning of ecological processes.



# Step 1: Identify Forest Blocks

- **Highest Priority Forest Blocks** are the largest and/or highest ranked forest blocks that provide the foundation for interior forest habitat and associated ecological functions.
- **Priority Forest Blocks** are highly ranked forest blocks that provide important interior forest habitat and provide ecological support to the Highest Priority Forest Interior Blocks.

(In Champlain Valley—all blocks larger than 250 acres and all blocks with priority ranks 6-10)

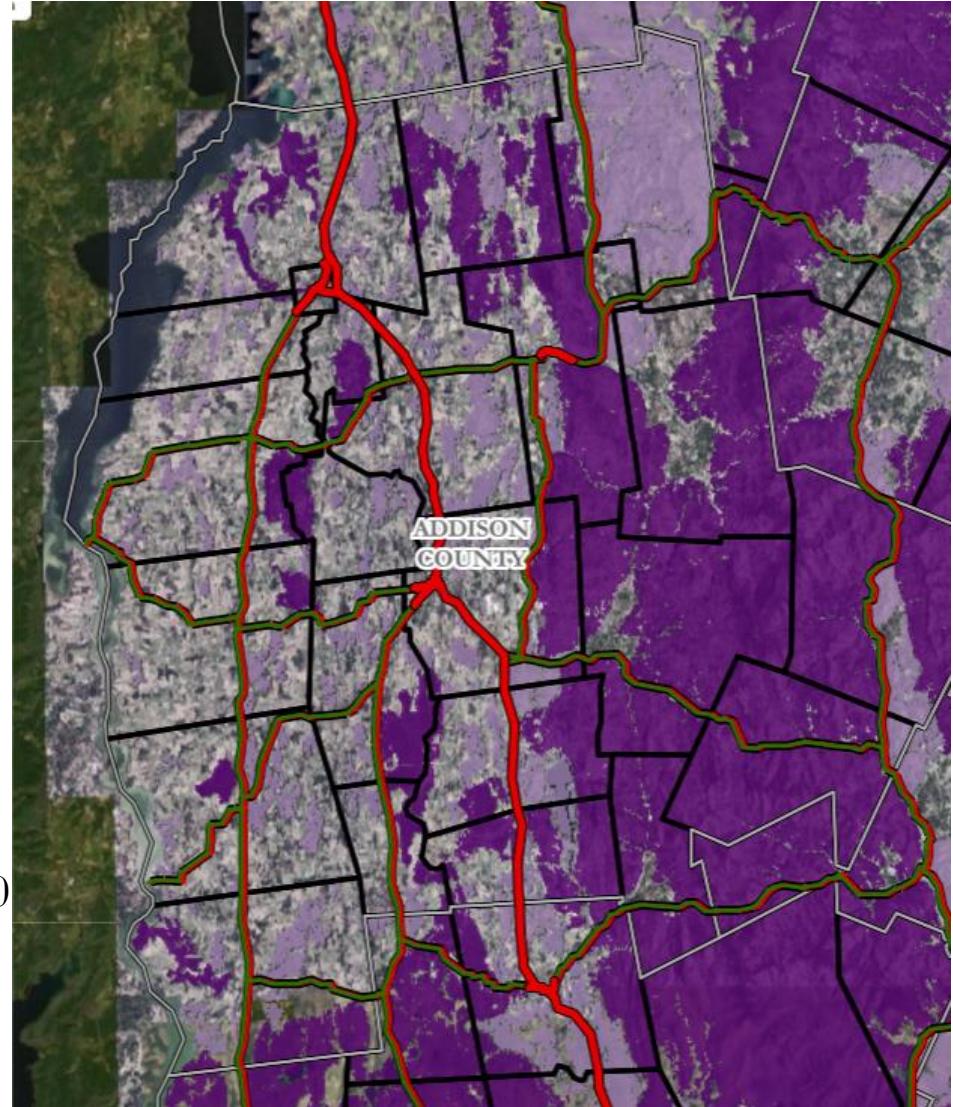




# Identifying: Forest Blocks

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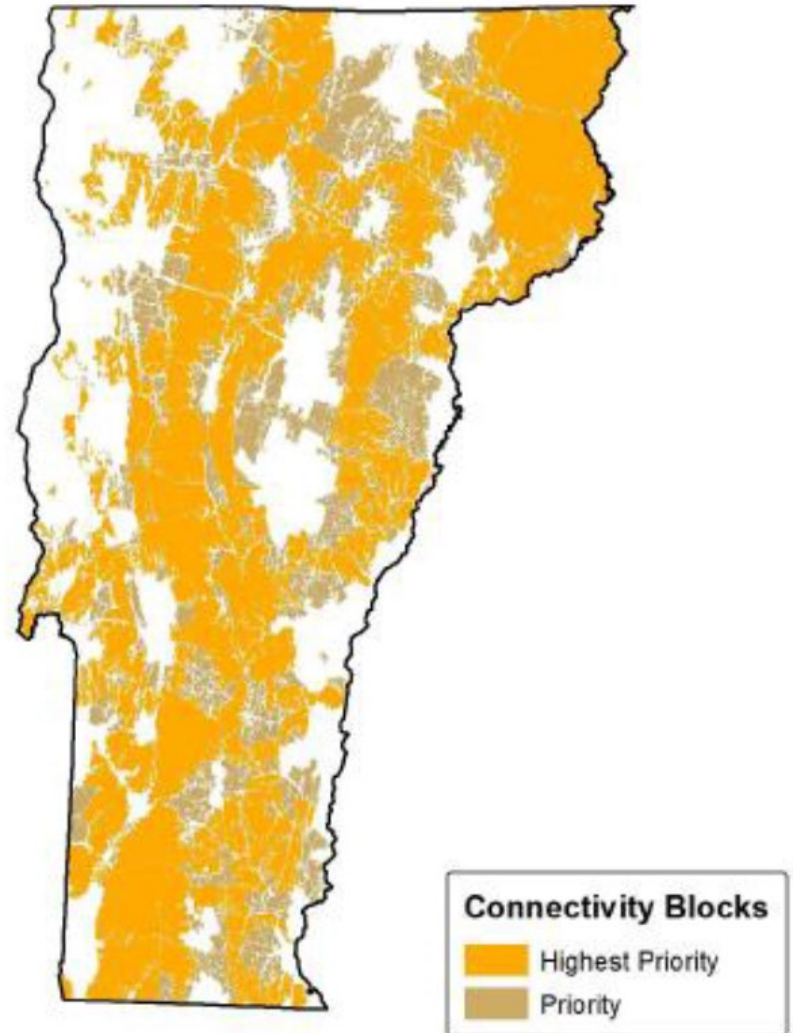




# Step 1: Identify Habitat Connectors

- **Highest Priority-** Habitat blocks that are of the greatest importance for wildlife movement and genetic exchange
- **Priority-** Habitat blocks that support connectivity but were somewhat “exchangeable” with other blocks for wildlife movement and genetic exchange

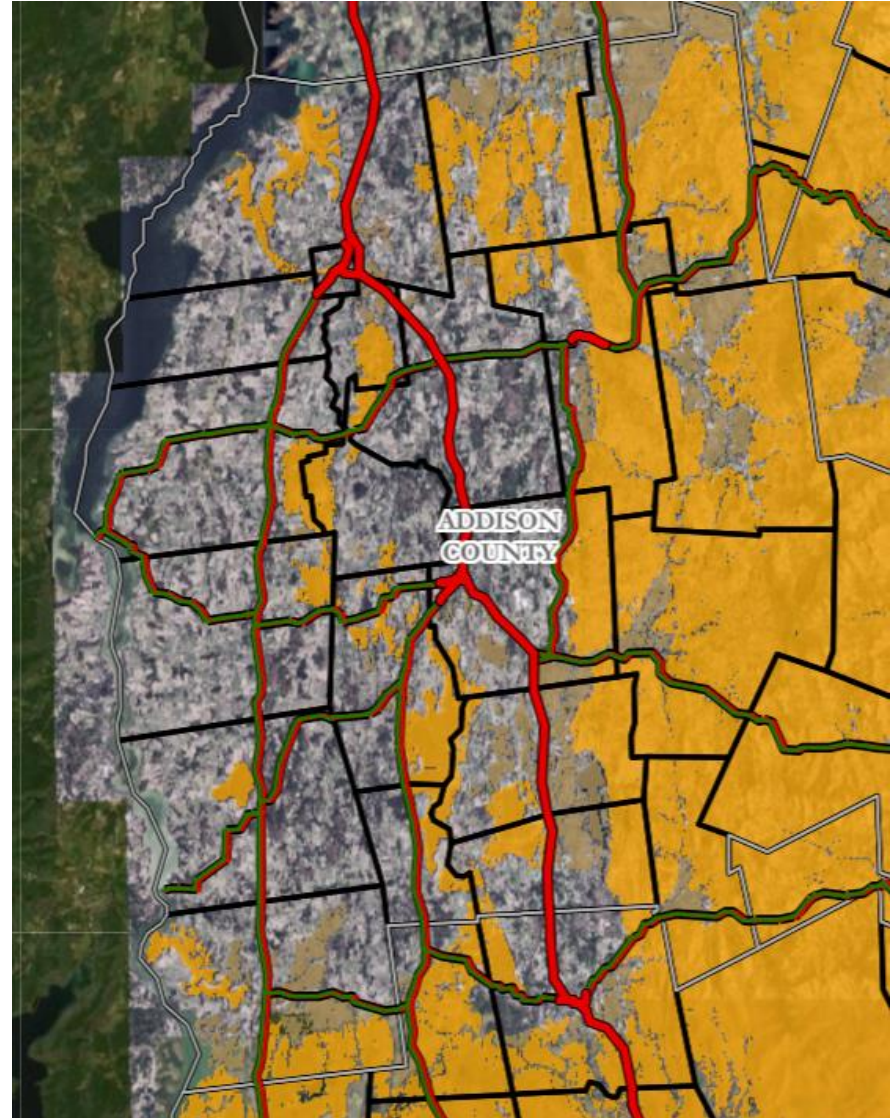
(All >20-acres)



# Identifying: Habitat Connectors

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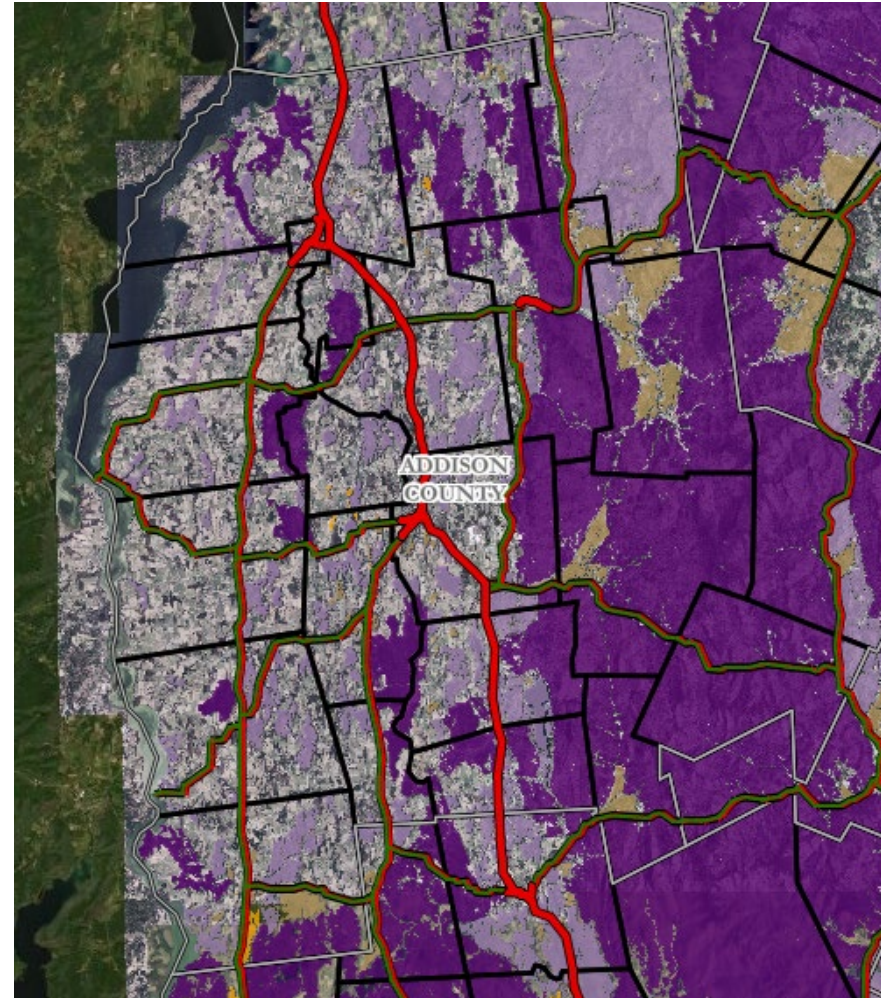
(All >20-acres)





# Step 1: Identify Forest Blocks & Habitat Connectors

- **Mostly Overlap**  
(i.e. most Habitat Connectors  
are Forest Blocks)



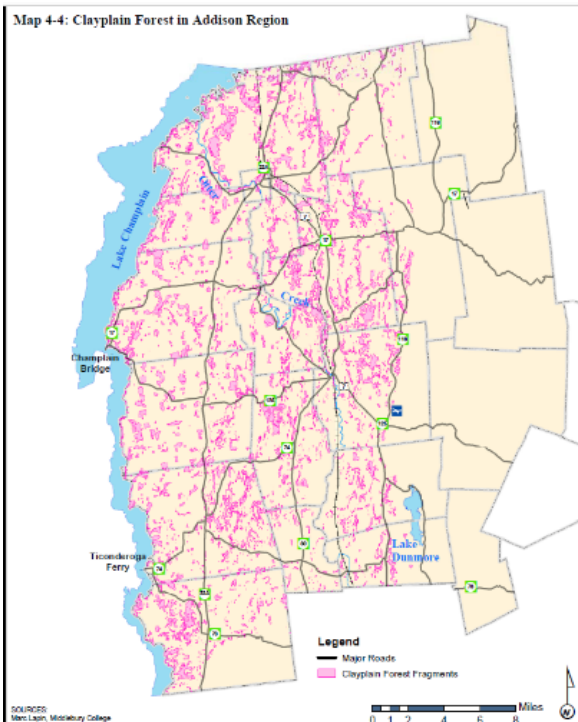


# Other Important Forested Areas

## Clayplain Forests

Forest community that dominated the Champlain Valley before European Settlement, but cleared extensively for agriculture.

These areas are important habitat and “stepping stones” for wildlife and are a regional priority for protection and enhancement.



## Champlain Valley Clayplain Forest

Natural History and Stewardship



## *Champlain Valley* Clayplain Forest Restoration: A Landowner's Guide



Middlebury College  
Environmental Studies Senior Seminar  
Spring 2003

# Other Important Forested Areas

## Riparian Areas

Ecosystems extending up and down rivers, streams and along lakeshores, in which natural vegetation occurs, providing natural cover for wildlife movement and plant migration.



# Other Important Forested Areas

## Mature Forests

- Sites that have remained forested tend to have greater natural integrity and few invasive species.
- In some areas can be identified from early aerial photographs.

1942



1962



2018



(Cornwall between Cider Mill Road and Route 30)



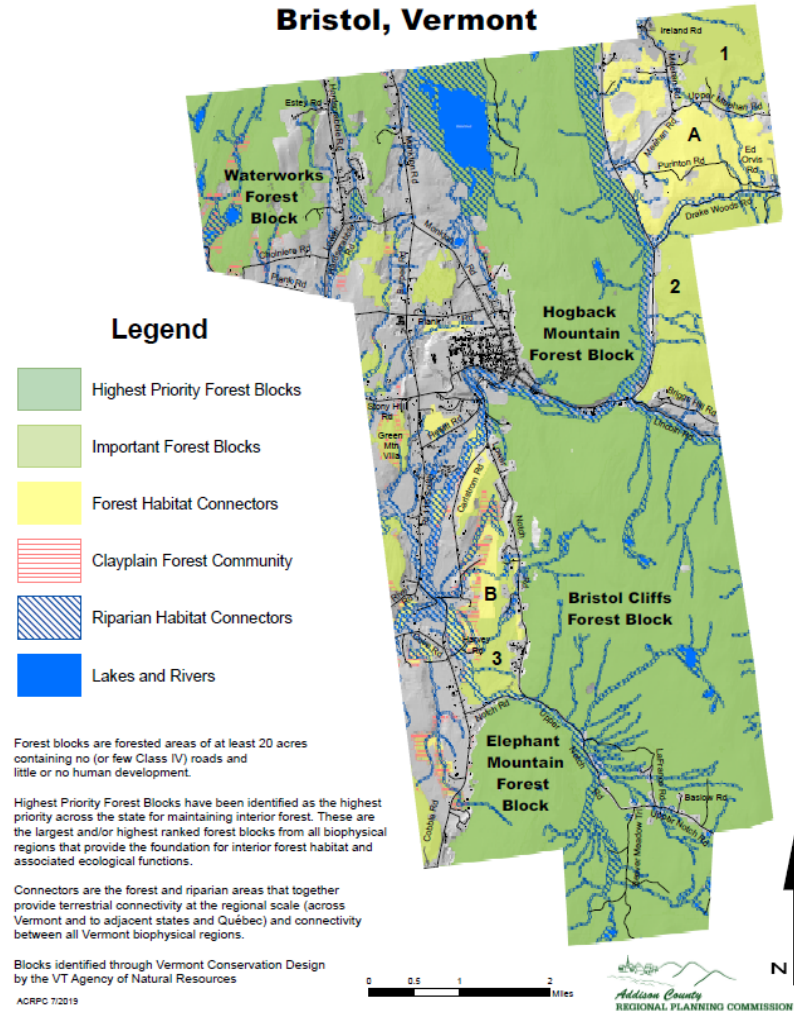
# Step 2: Describe the Features

Bristol (2020)

Highest Priority

- Hogback Mountain
- Waterworks
- Bristol Cliffs
- Elephant Mountain

## Priority Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors Bristol, Vermont



# Step 2: Describe the Features

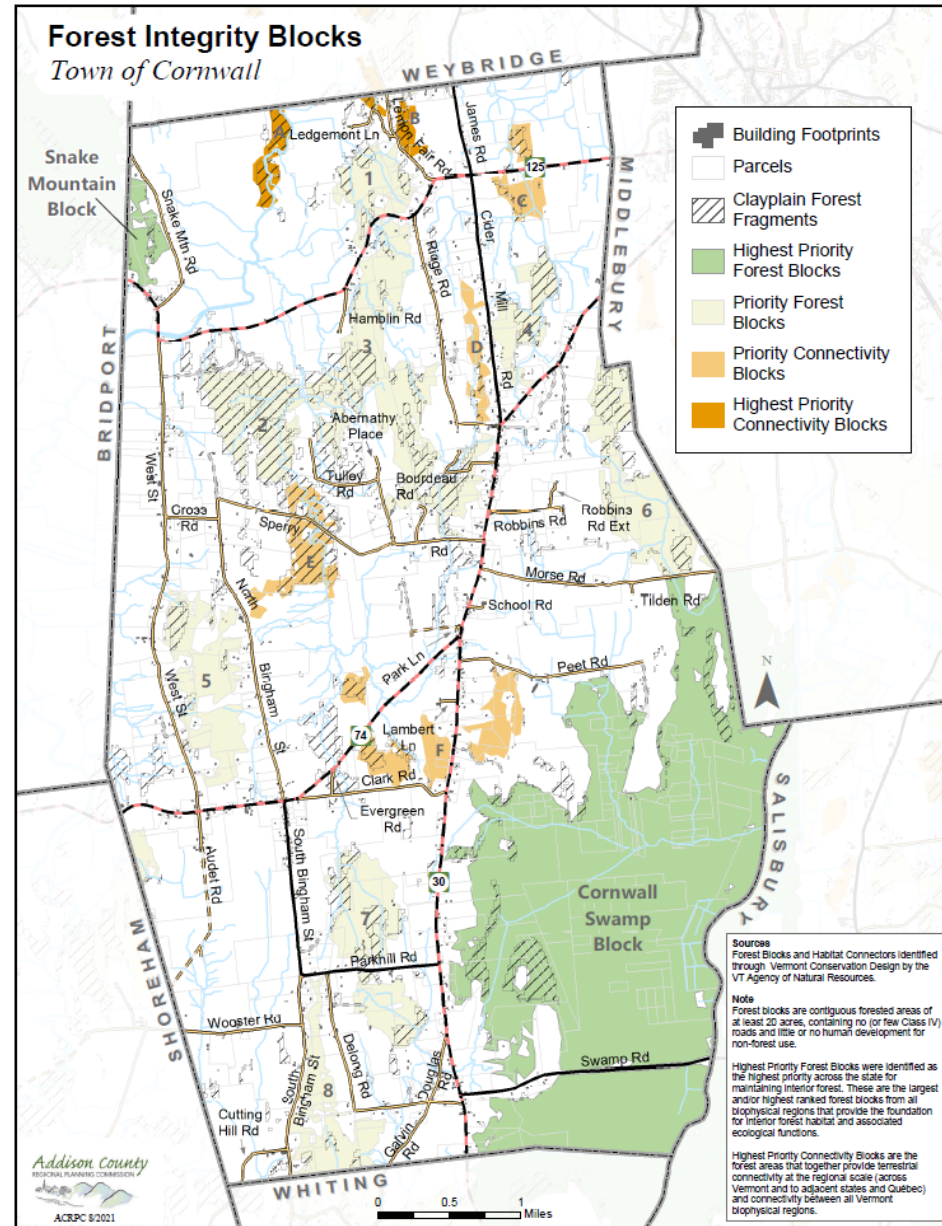
## Cornwall (in-progress)

### Highest Priority

- Cornwall Swamp
- Snake Mountain South

### Priority

- The Ledges- north (1)
- The Ledges- south (3)
- Beaver Brook (2)
- DeLong Hill (8)
- West Cornwall Ridge (5)
- Cider Mill Ridge-Ledge Creek (4)
- Otter Creek Swamp north (6)
- Parkhill (7)



# Wildlife Connectors and Connectivity

Which species does your town already have?

Large Mammals: Bear, Moose, Deer,  
Bobcats, Coyotes, Porcupines!



**Great projects for Conservation Commissions, Citizen Scientists,  
Students, and people with Wildlife Cameras!**



# Wildlife Connectors and Connectivity

## Species and Habitat Specific

Bats, Amphibians, Grassland and Forest Interior Birds,



Salamander Crossing in Salisbury



Culvert near Amphibian-Road Crossing Monkton

# Wildlife Connectors and Connectivity

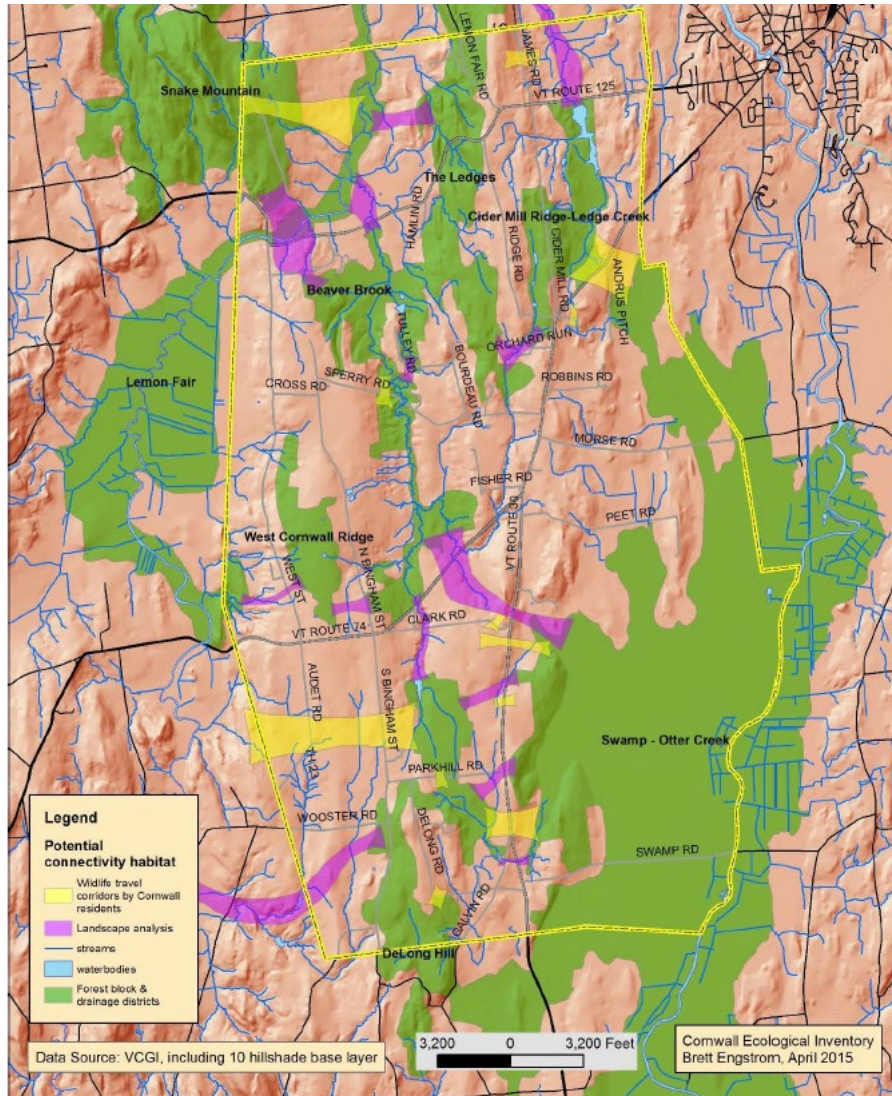
- Talk with your Conservation Commission and local groups (Otter Creek Audubon Society, VT Herp Atlas, Midd College Environmental Studies program, etc.)
- Undertake a new project!
  - Natural Resource Inventory,
  - Community Values Mapping,
  - A Conservation Plan.



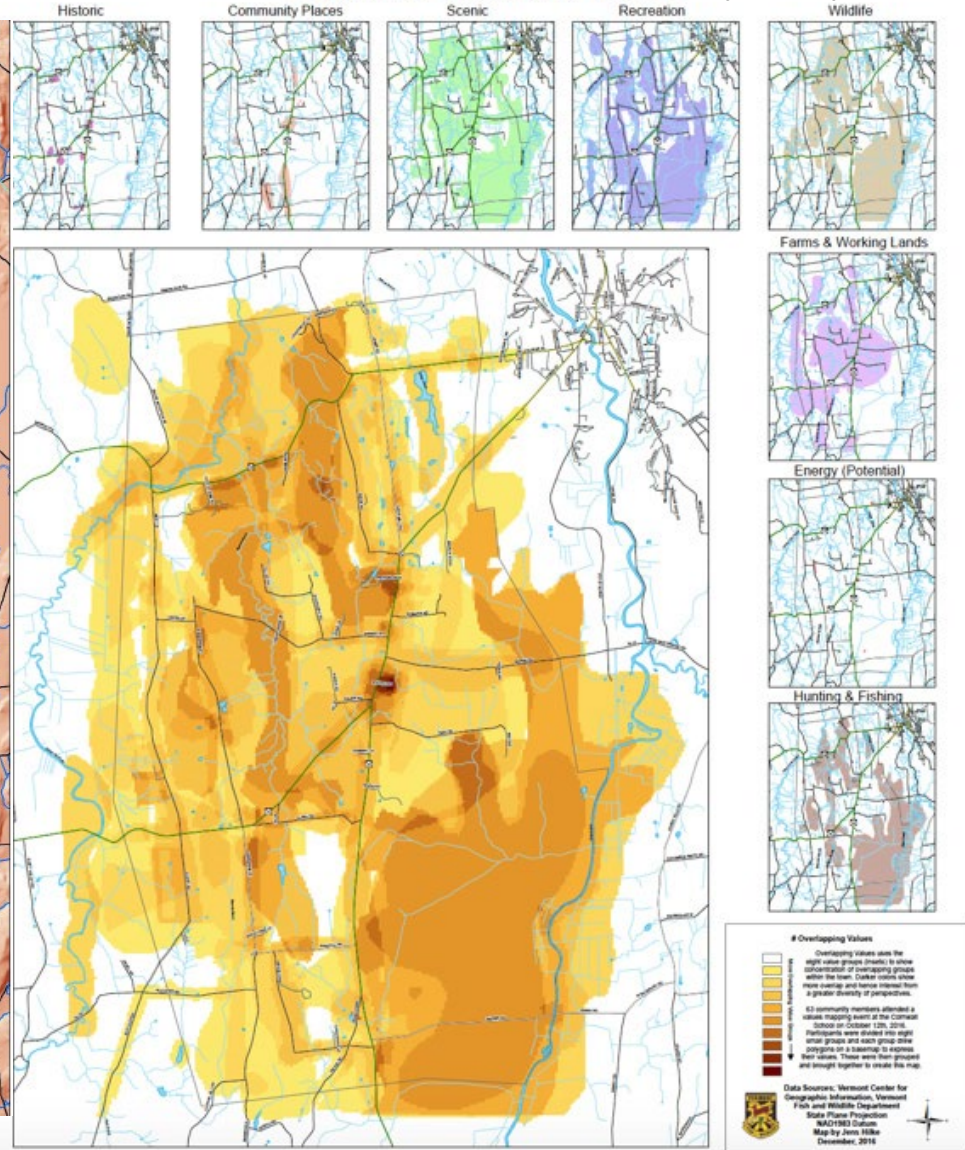


# Use Past Projects

## Cornwall Wildlife Connectivity



## Cornwall Community Values (2016)



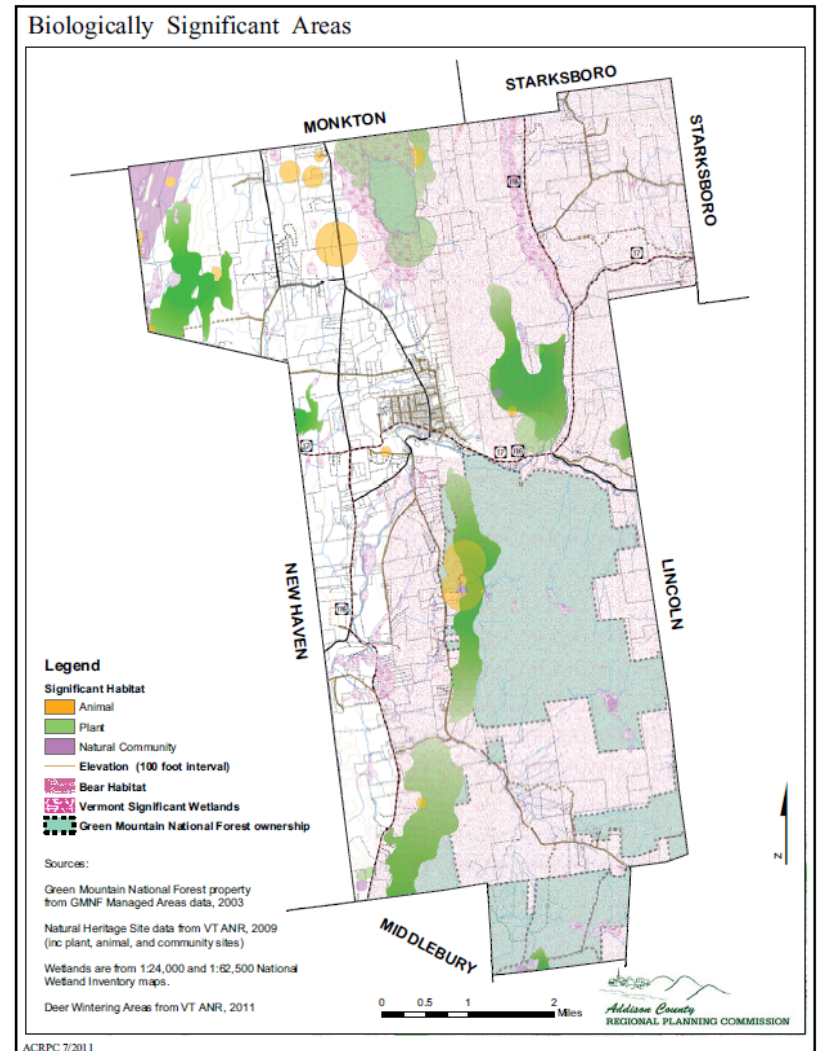
## 2015 Cornwall Ecological Inventory



# Step 3: Update Planning Maps

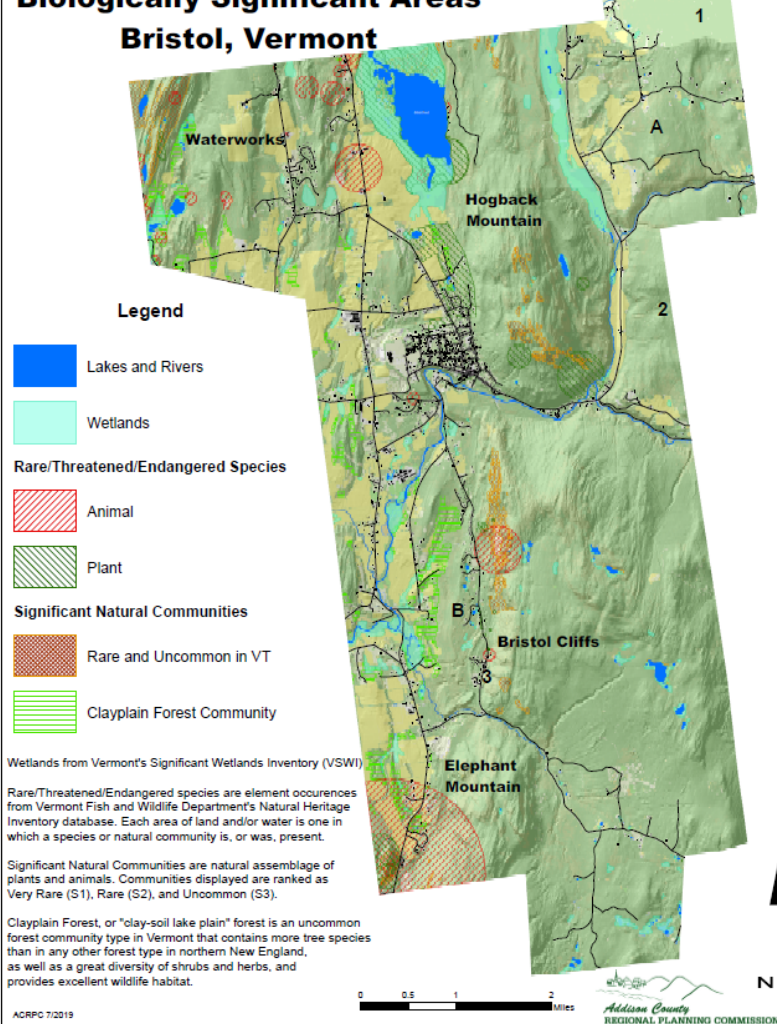
Appendix S

- Bristol Plan Map, 2011:  
(Single Map)

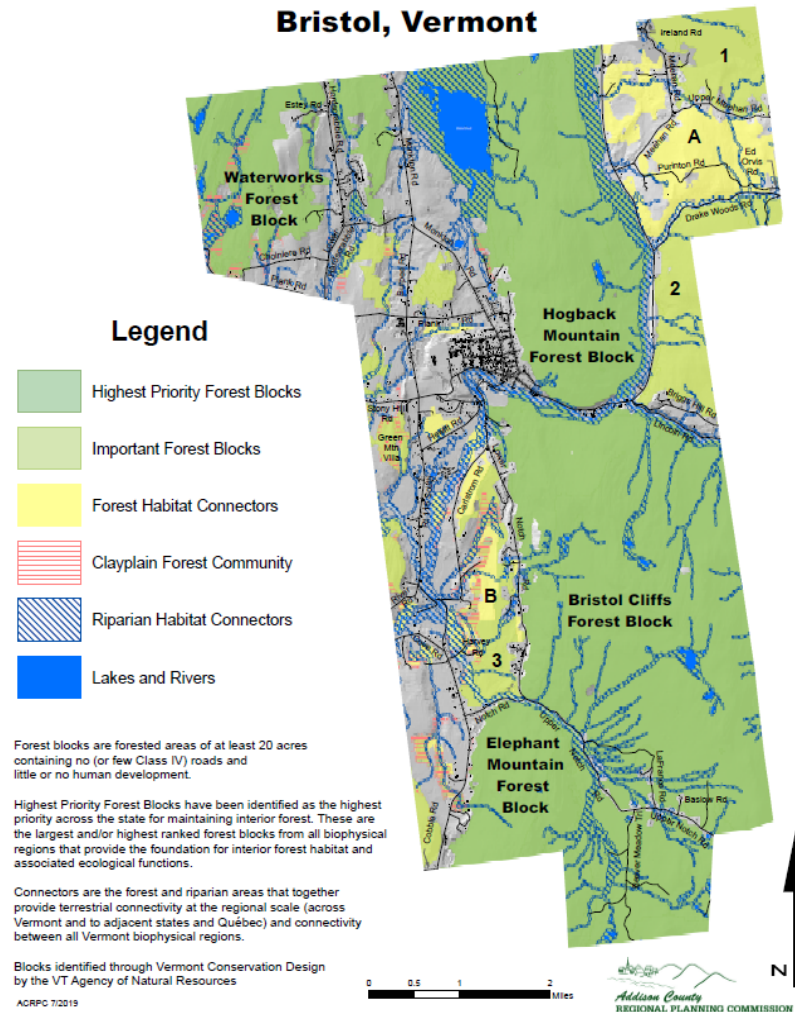


# Bristol Plan Maps- 2020

## Biologically Significant Areas Bristol, Vermont

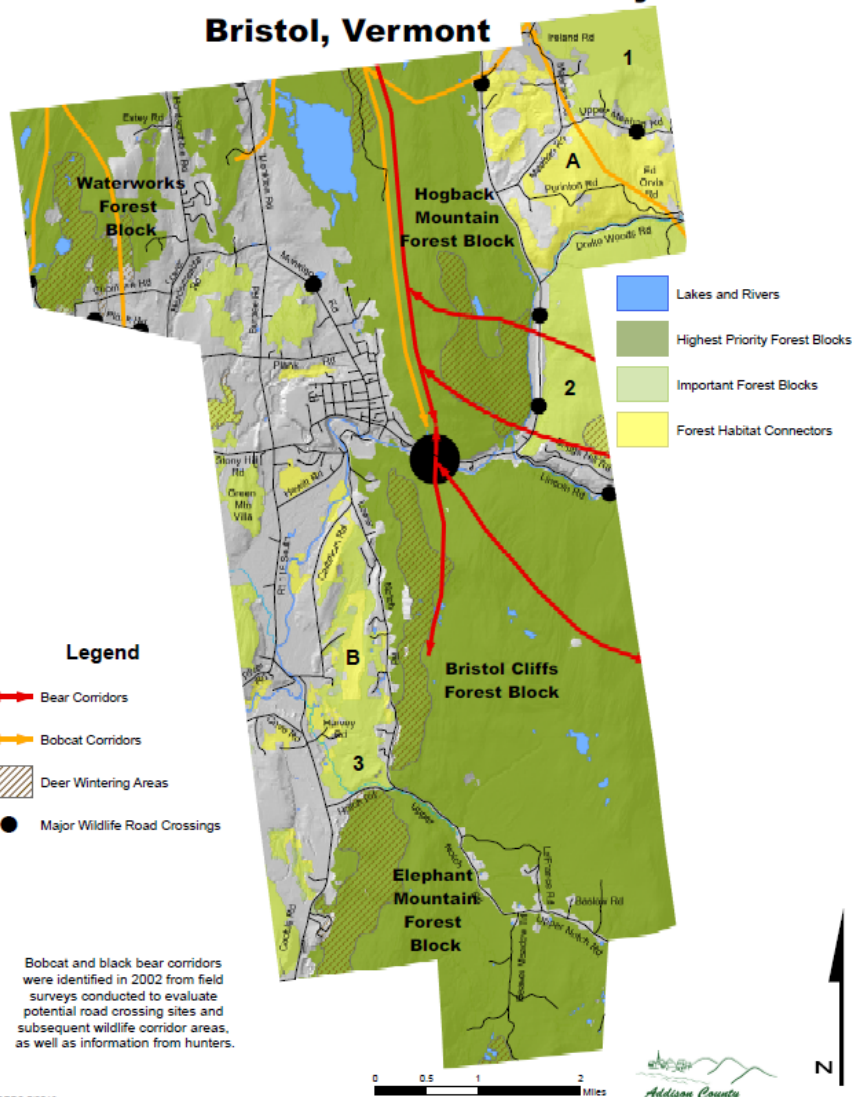


## Priority Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors Bristol, Vermont

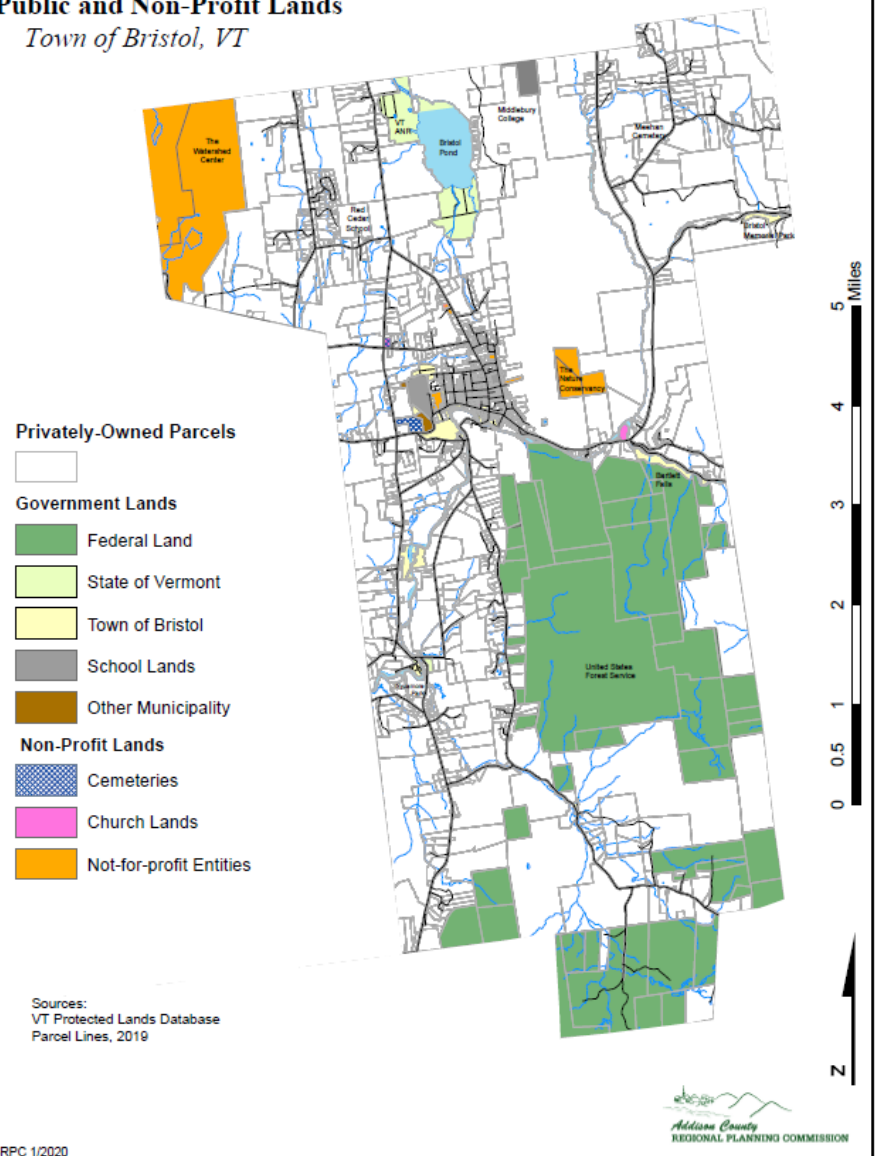


# Bristol Plan Maps- 2020

## Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity Bristol, Vermont

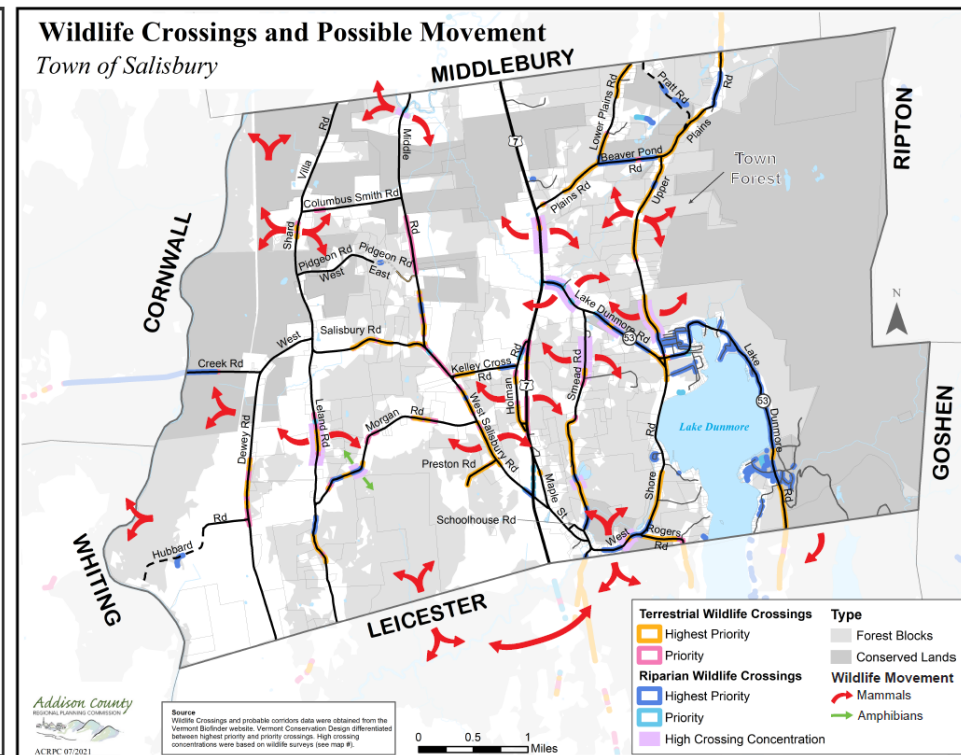
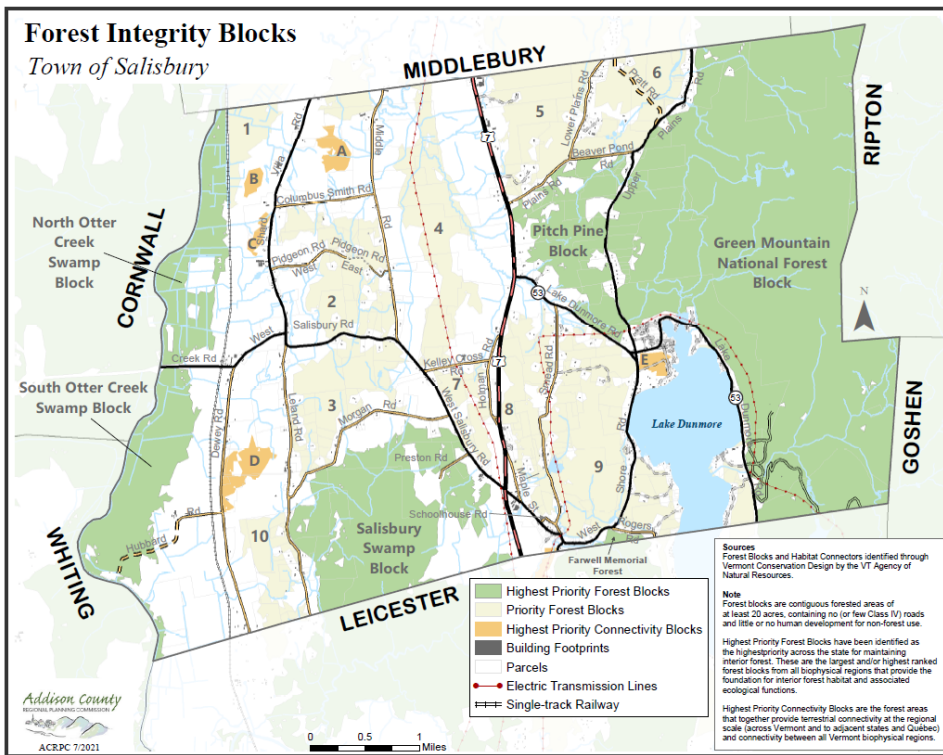


## Public and Non-Profit Lands Town of Bristol, VT





# Salisbury Plan draft Maps- 2021



- Very active Conservation Commission

# Step 4: Develop Goals, Policies & Implementation Actions

## Review Existing Goals & Policies

- Often in Natural Resources or Nature and the Environment section
  - Many already reference forests and reducing forest loss
- Also in Land Use section

# Consider new Goals and Policies

## Potential Goals:

- Maintain and improve the ecological integrity of intact forest blocks.
- Maintain and improve forest blocks that are large enough to support sustainable forest harvesting.
- Maintain and improve the ecological integrity and functionality of habitat connectors.
- Maintain and improve sustainable land use patterns that protect large forest integrity blocks.
- Minimize forest fragmentation and promote the health, viability, and ecological function of existing Forest Blocks and Wildlife Corridors
- Conserve 30% of forests and open lands by 2030, with at least 10% put under “strict protection” [Convention on Biological Diversity, 30 by 2030 goal]

(Full list available from ACRPC and <https://acrpc.org/regional-programs/natural-resources/forest-resources/>)



# Consider new Policies

## Potential Policies

- Promote conservation easements on ecologically important sites within forest blocks and adjacent parcels.
- Protect the town's highest priority and priority forest blocks by discouraging development that fragments or requires significant clearing of these identified areas.
- Revise Zoning/Unified Development Regulations to support Forest Integrity within the town.
- Collaborate with neighboring towns in identifying and maintaining forest blocks and wildlife corridors that cross town boundaries.

(Full list available from ACRPC and <https://acrpc.org/regional-programs/natural-resources/forest-resources/>)

## Step 5: Update your Land-Use section

This informs your Zoning, Development Regulations, Act 250 permits

**e.g. in Cornwall:**

## Cornwall Swamp

“Open space and limited forestry, will continue to be the primary land uses within this area.”

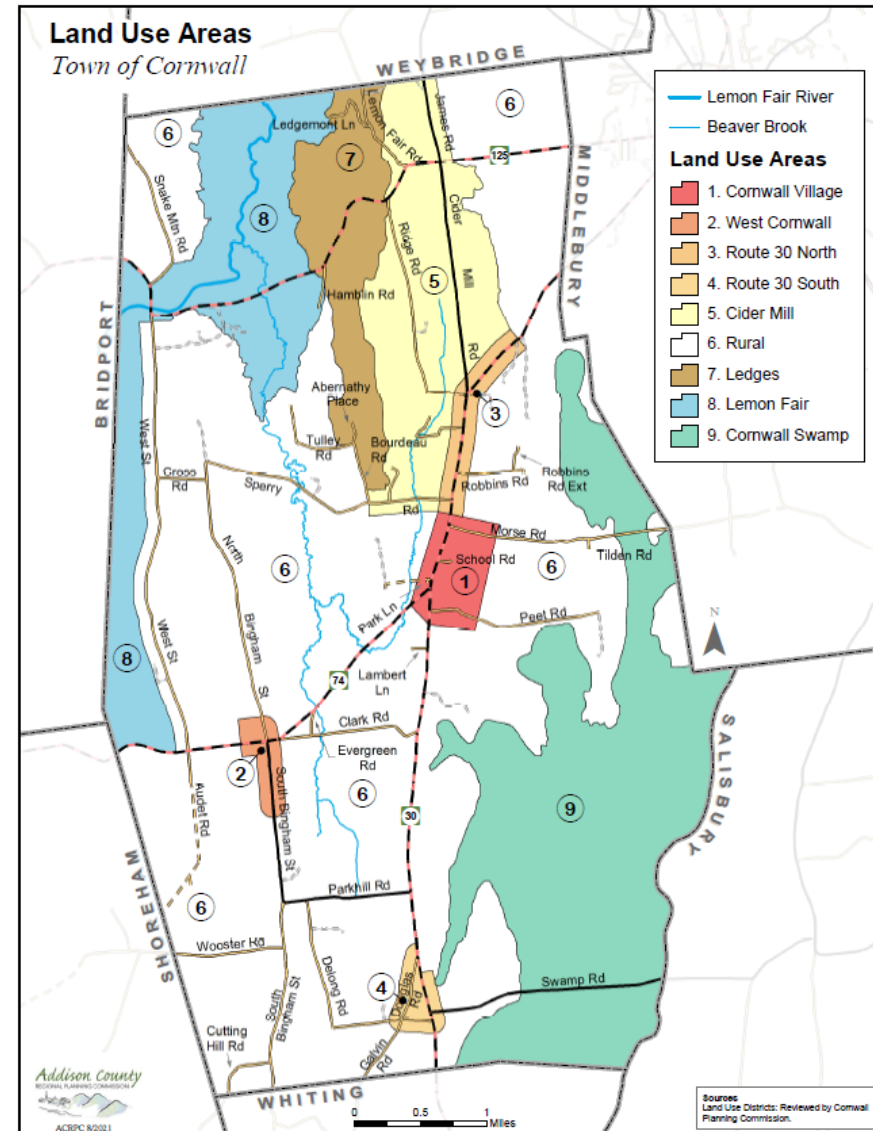
“additional residential development should be prevented on environmentally sensitive land.”

“Commercial uses should not be allowed”

## Ledges

“Care should be taken to retain this natural area, and minimize impacts from development.”

“Consideration should be given to maintaining forest cover in this area and residential development should be encouraged to locate on existing non-wooded land if possible.”



# Going Forward

- ACRPC provides mapping support and forest-planning resources at:  
<https://acrpc.org/regional-programs/natural-resources/forest-resources/>
- We will work with Planning Commissions to update Town Plans- reach out if yours is approaching expiration!
- ACRPC will update the Natural Resources chapter of the Addison County Regional Plan in 2022.



# Take-Away Lessons

There is a lot of information to start with!

Work with a Conservation Commission  
(or get one started!) and local groups  
for more detailed information

Don't forget your Goals and Policies,  
and Land Use Section!

**“Plan for the town you want in 20 years”**

A winter landscape with snow-covered ground, bare trees, and a sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The foreground is filled with snow and the silhouettes of trees. A stone wall is visible in the middle ground.

# Thanks!

Contact Andrew L'Roe, [alroe@acrpc.org](mailto:alroe@acrpc.org)

<https://acrpc.org/regional-programs/natural-resources/forest-resources/>