

## **Agriculture & Forest Resources**

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

### **Conditions & Trends**

One of the most strongly held values held by Windham residents based on how often comments were made in the Community Survey and the Visioning Forums was that open fields, forested land and working farms are important to Windham residents. These places are important for their scenic, recreational and quality of life values, but also for the connections they provide to Windham's rural roots and heritage. Protecting the most important of these places should be high on the list of priorities that come out of this planning effort.

### **Employment in Agriculture and Forestry Sectors**

It is difficult to get an exact number of people employed in the Agriculture and Forestry sectors for several reasons, including the fact that there are many different scales of agricultural or forestry operations. According to the 2011 numbers from the Maine Labor Statistics there are 14 residents employed in the agricultural and forestry sector.

### **State of Maine "Current Use" Property Tax Laws**

State law allows for property tax breaks based on the current use of a property rather than looking at the potential fully maximized valuation of a property based on its potential for development. These programs exist to assist and incentivize property owners to keep their land open and productive.

### **Farms & Farmland**

There are 2,100 acres enrolled in the Farmland Tax program as of the 2014 tax report for Windham. Of this number, there are 811 acres of pasture and 241 acres of cropland. The remaining 1,014 acres are farm Woodland.

### **Tree Growth**

The Tree Growth Tax program provides tax breaks for working woodlots. These properties are managed for timber production and as such are required to have a forestry management plan. As of 2014, there were a total of 2,940 acres enrolled in this program.

### **Open Space**

Open Space tax programs are available for anyone who is not involved in farming or interested in managing an active woodlot. Property tax breaks could be reduced as much as 95% of the standard tax rate, depending on the level of protection and the amount of development on the property. There are 402 acres of land enrolled in the open space tax program in Windham.

## **Community Activities**

### ***Farm Stands***

There are two well-known farm stands in the community. The first is the Hawkes Farm Stand on Route 302 near Nash Road and the second is Windy Hill Farm Stand on River Road.

The Hawkes Farm Stand has been in operation since 1932 and has provided a location for residents and visitors to purchase fresh local produce, especially sweet corn, since then. The Lakes Region Weekly ran a feature on the farm stand in 2011 – [click here](#) for the story.

Windy Hill Farm Stand is owned and operated by the Winships, a family of farmers on the River Road going back generations. This farm stand sells a variety of produce in season, but also features beef right from the farm.

### ***Farmers Market***

The Town of Windham hosted the Lakes Region Farmers Market from 20XX – 20XX. There has been no farmers market in Town since that time. Staff at Saint Joseph's College in Standish began looking at what it would take to reestablish a market in Windham that would not only provide access to local, fresh and healthy foods, but would serve as another venue for building a stronger sense of community.

### ***Community Garden***

The Windham Community Garden is located on Gray Road, on the Town owned property that is also host to the Public Safety Building and the Skate Park. The garden was established in 2010. A small greenhouse was built in 2014, and a second garden shed was added when the garden expanded in 2015. For a small annual fee, members of the garden rent 10-foot by 20-foot plots for their own gardens, but also participate in growing food in the community plots. Food from the community plots and “extra” food from individual plots are donated to the Windham Food Pantry.

### ***Community Supported Agriculture***

There are thirty (30) Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations in Cumberland County, but none of these are located in the Town of Windham. CSAs are operations where members buy a share of the farm's production over the course of a year. This model for small local agriculture works because shares are purchased in the winter and early spring when the farmers need funding for the upcoming growing season and shareholders are pre-paying for an assortment of produce that is received as it is ready throughout the summer and fall. CSAs may include “pick your own” fruit or vegetable options. In addition to having a guaranteed source of income on the front end of each growing season, the farmer benefits from sharing the risks of farming with the shareholders. Shareholders understand that there will be good years when they receive a lot of many types of vegetables, along with years where some of the crops don't do as well.

The Maine Association of Organic Farmers (MOFGA) maintains a website listing CSAs by county. To view this website, [click here](#). In addition to the farms on that list, St. Joseph's College runs a CSA out of the College farm on Whites Bridge Road in Standish.

### ***Community Forestry – Lowell Preserve***

The Town of Windham has been working with a local forester on forestry operations for the Lowell Preserve property on the Falmouth Road in East Windham. This 308-acre property is almost completely forested, and a forestry plan dated July 1, 2011, was adopted by the Town Council that year. The Plan suggested cutting annually for 4-5 years, in order to meet several goals, including:

- Maintaining the land as a recreational trail property
  - preservation of aesthetics and natural qualities of the property
- Maintaining deer habitat including
  - patches of deer forage and fruit and nut trees
  - dense softwood cover for winter habitat
- Grow and harvest high quality large diameter trees

Cutting operations were carried out in accordance with that plan in the winter of 2013. It should be noted that this is the first known commercial-scale cut of a municipal property. As such it was somewhat controversial with neighbors and users of the Preserve property. A follow-up cutting operation in a second part of the Preserve was not carried out in the winter of 2014 as recommended by the Plan.

### ***Analysis***

Though small in number, the impact of Windham's farms on the quality of life in Windham is large. Working farms are not only a connection to Windham's rural past, but are high on the list of what makes Windham an attractive place to live. Residents identified "rural character and open space" among the top advantages to living in Windham, as part of the community survey conducted in October and November 2014. This advantage was just behind "favorable quality of life." There is no doubt that working farms and the associated open farmland contribute significantly to Windham's rural character and quality of life, which are valuable to current and future residents and visitors.

As part of the visioning and public input process for this comprehensive plan update, the Review Team reached out to members of the agricultural community. This group of community members identified several areas where the Town could assist farmers in their efforts to earn a living and keep farmland productive. See the Policies and Strategies section below.

### ***Current Steps to protect Farming and Forestry in Windham***

#### ***Regulatory***

Through the Town's Subdivision Review ordinance, landowners may opt to develop a cluster subdivision in any area in Town zoned for residential use. In exchange for lower infrastructure costs and potential density bonuses, developers agree to set aside 50% of the developable land on the property as common open space. In higher density zoning districts, this may provide space for smaller open spaces that might provide for local playgrounds, open spaces, or community gardening. In the more rural parts of Town, land set aside as part of cluster developments can serve as a recreational asset for the community, preserve wildlife habitat, and preserve rural characteristics of that portion of town.

Note that the provision of open space through the cluster subdivision standards is predicated on development that goes through the subdivision process, and it is up to the discretion of the property owner or developer to follow the regular subdivision standards or the clusters subdivision standards. Additionally, there is no guarantee as to the size or suitability of the land for agricultural or forestry purposes.

### *Non-regulatory*

There are no non-regulatory approaches to protecting productive agricultural or forestry lands. This is similar to the issue identified with the lack of proactive identification and protection of lands that are suitable for future parks, recreation areas, or playing field facilities.

### **Community Support for Local Agriculture and Forestry**

As noted above in this chapter and in several other places in this Plan, working farms and forested lands, as well as open spaces, are one of the hallmarks of how Windham residents see their Town, and are highly valued throughout all sectors of the community. These components of the landscape have been identified as deserving of protection since Windham's 1985 Comprehensive Plan thirty years ago. The 1985 plan did also recognize the counterpoint that these farms and forests and open spaces are almost entirely private properties, and owned by people who have their own needs, ideas and visions for the future of their lands. The need for balancing private ownership rights with public values is as relevant now as it was then. What has changed, perhaps, is the increasing public value on these lands that have remained undeveloped over the years.

As development pressure continues to build on the owners of large undeveloped tracts of land in the community and it becomes more difficult to pass farms down from generation to generation, Windham will continue to see housing appear where there were once open pasture lands or working forest lands. As noted in the Recreation, Parks & Open Space Chapter, the Town should take a more proactive approach to identifying and permanently protecting the most important farms and woodlands. The Town has long relied on market forces or generous gifts on the behalf of landowners to preserve scenic vistas and open space for the community. The reality is that unless measures are put in place for the permanent protection of individual properties, that land is just waiting to be developed.

### **The Clark Farm Story**

The Clark Farm, located on Swett Road, is a prime example of an iconic property that continues to face development pressures. Larry and Ann Clark owned over 550 acres of land that had been in the family for generations. Over the course of several years starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Clarks began selling house lots around the edges of their properties with frontage on existing roads. In 2008, a framework for a deal that would conserve the entire property as open space and working farmland was assembled in partnership with Maine Farmland Trust, the Trust for Public Land, the Land for Maine's Future program and the Windham Land Trust. This coalition of groups, along with the Clarks approached the Town with a request for \$1 million dollars in matching funds that went to referendum. The request was narrowly defeated by the voters that November. A conservation project went forward for a large portion of the property, but the Clark home and about 250 acres on Swett Road were not part of that deal. The Clark home and 10 acres are under contract as of the drafting of this chapter, with

an additional 170 acres going on the market soon. Residential development of this property is likely to result in the loss of a scenic farmstead in the heart of rural Windham that would have ranked high on almost any measure of prioritization of farm and forest land.

## **Goals and Suggested Strategies to Implement Goals**

### **Policy: To safeguard lands identified as prime farmland or capable of supporting commercial forestry.**

*Strategy 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.

*Strategy 2.* Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.

*Strategy 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.

*Strategy 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.

*Strategy 5.* Create an Open Space Plan for the Town that identifies the most important working farms forest lands in Windham. Properties identified should be targeted for preservation of productive capacity.

### **Policy: To support farming and forestry and encourage their economic viability.**

*Strategy 5.* 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.

*Strategy 6.* Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation that supports them in local or regional economic development plans.

### **Policy: To establish programs that incentivize keeping farms and forest lands in production.**

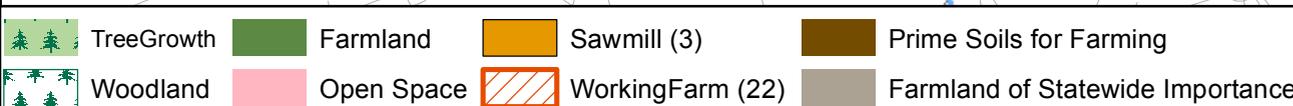
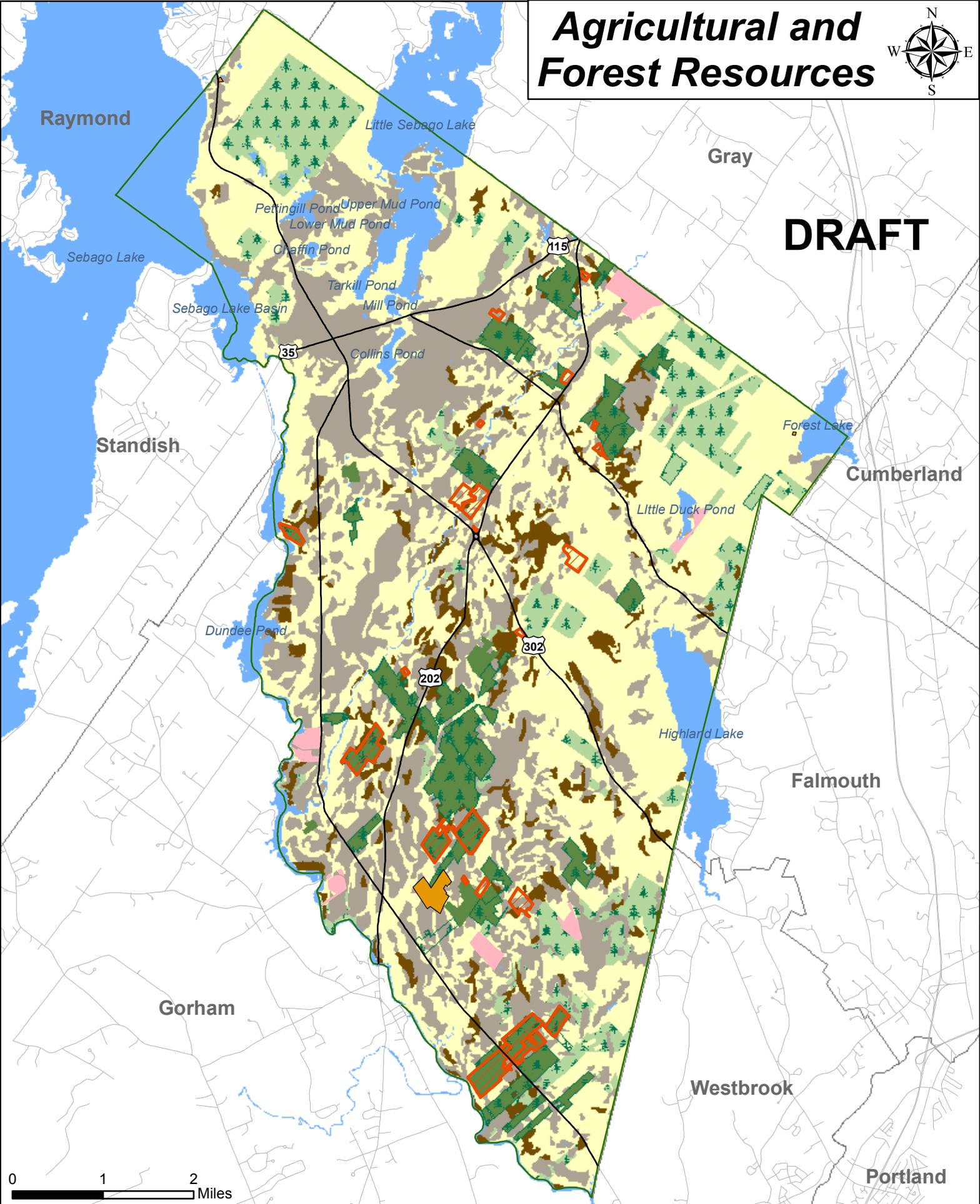
*Strategy 7.* Create a program that is funded annually to create and build-up a source of funding for the purchase of development rights or of land as opportunities present themselves to the community. This fund could be used as matching funds when working grant money or funding sources from other organizations.

*Strategy 8.*

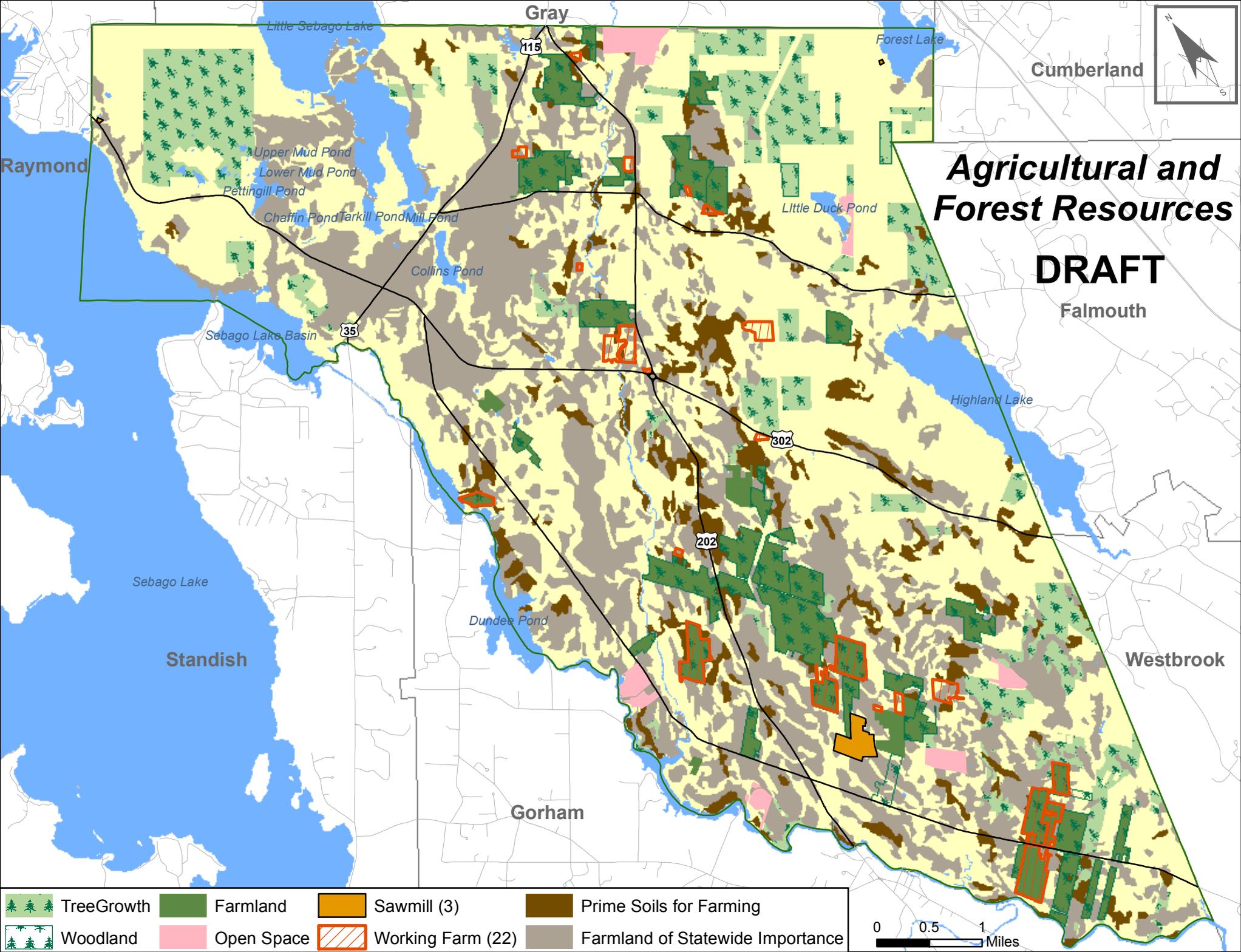
# Agricultural and Forest Resources



**DRAFT**



Sources: Maine Office of GIS  
 Windham Assessor's Database  
 Prepared by: Windham GIS  
 Department  
 May 22, 2015



# Agricultural and Forest Resources

**DRAFT**

Falmouth

Raymond

Standish

Gorham

Westbrook

Cumberland

Gray

Little Sebago Lake  
Upper Mud Pond  
Lower Mud Pond  
Pettingill Pond  
Chaffin Pond  
Tarkill Pond  
Mill Pond

Collins Pond

Sebago Lake Basin

Little Duck Pond

Forest Lake

Highland Lake

Dundee Pond

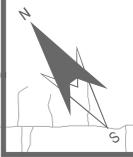
Sebago Lake

115

35

202

302



- Tree Growth
- Farmland
- Sawmill (3)
- Prime Soils for Farming
- Woodland
- Open Space
- Working Farm (22)
- Farmland of Statewide Importance

0 0.5 1 Miles