

Town of Niskayuna New York

Natural Resource Inventory



Photo: Blatnick Park landfill

Prepared by Town of Niskayuna
Conservation Advisory Council

July, 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Natural Resources Inventory working group has made the following findings based on community input, previous studies and field investigations:

COMMUNITY CENTER:

The Town's Community Center's forest with large white pine, oak and hemlock trees protects the steep slopes above Aqueduct Road and protects scenic views from the Mohawk River, from Aqueduct Road and from the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail and should be protected.

Three large developments have been or are being built within walking distance to the Community Center's forest and walking trails that can be developed here can provide recreation for these residents. This trail can create a loop around the outer edges of the Community Center complex and extend east to the old railroad easement that runs north to the rotary at Aqueduct and Balltown Roads where it joins the Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail. This would meet a goal of the Town's Comprehensive Plan of 2013 to "identify continuity gaps that would connect park recreational lands to the existing Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and acquire/develop public land to resolve this"¹.

BLATNICK PARK:

The Town's 188 acre Blatnick Park has five meadows, some of which have habitat for declining grassland bird species including bobolink and meadowlark, both observed there in June, 2021. These birds need unmowed grassland and delaying mowing until mid-summer has the support of the Town Supervisor, the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club and the Schenectady County Soil and Water Conservation District. ² Paths can be mowed so that residents can hike to the top of the capped landfill and take in views of the Mohawk River (see cover photo).

¹ Town of Niskayuna Comprehensive Development Plan, 2013, p. 45

² Daily Gazette, Feb 25, 2022

The ten acre driving range field includes a five acre portion along the western half of the field designated as 'Low Mow Pollinator Habitat Initiative' that should continue to be only mowed at the end of the season.

The three acre Bird Sanctuary field provides additional habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife and should be undisturbed.

A large, forty-four acre forest that lies in the Park's southeastern section along the banks of the Mohawk River is designated an Endangered Species Critical Area due bald eagles nesting there and should be undisturbed.

The pond at the Park's entrance has a large number of Canada geese. By mowing only a portion of the pond's shoreline the taller grass can discourage Canada geese, filter pollution and shade and cool the pond's water while providing habitat for insects, birds and other wildlife.

To the north of Blatnick Park are two large fields at the Knolls Atomic Power Lab which appear to be mowed regularly. The fields at General Electric just to the north are managed as meadows with less frequent mowing. By cutting their fields less frequently, the Knolls Atomic Power Lab could add to the mosaic of fields growing from Blatnick Park all the way to General Electric. This would have a positive impact on wildlife, including insect pollinators, birds and other species while adding to the scenic experience of residents passing by on the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail.

STANFORD PARK:

The Town's 24 acre Stanford Park is adjacent to the 135-acre Woodlawn Preserve and connecting trails to the existing trail system in the Woodlawn Preserve should be a priority."³ This can be done by crossing through the paper roads located between the small vacant parcels just to the south of the Park and with permission from Northern Nurseries, to Woodlawn Preserve where habitat for the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly is being restored and to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, where Karner blue butterflies live and breed.

Creating this connection can add momentum to the NY State Open Space Conservation Plan to protect habitat between Stanford Park, Woodlawn Preserve and the Albany Pine Barrens.

MOHAWK-HUDSON BIKE-HIKE TRAIL::

Over a quarter of a million people use the Niskayuna portion of the Trail each year but the lands surrounding the MHBHT are vulnerable to development⁴. Protecting lands adjacent to the MHBHT can buffer the Trail, allowing hikers and bikers to continue to experience the wonder and beauty of nature along the Trail, and also allow new trailhead connections to the MHBHT.

Three large, wooded properties surround the northeastern section of the MHBHT : the 522-acre GE property on both sides of the Trail, the 81-acre SI Group property that lies on the west side of the Trail and the 19-acre Popolizio property that lies on the east side of the Trail. Efforts should be made to protect all or part of these properties.

This section of the Trail is surrounded by mature forest of both sides with streams flowing into large wetlands before entering the Mohawk River. The western side of the Trail has steep slopes that have created dramatic ravines and waterfalls where streams meet the Mohawk River. These waterfalls are on private property but if opened to the public and properly signed with warnings

³ Comprehensive Development Plan, Town of Niskayuna, 2013, p. 41

⁴ Capital District Trail User Counts, 2016. Capital District Transportation Committee.

and fencing, they could be attractive destinations for people hiking and biking on the Trail.

The forest along the Trail has a remarkable variety of native plants, birds and amphibians due to the fact that it has been undisturbed for many years.

Situated as it is among other contiguous blocks of undeveloped land to the north and south along the Mohawk River including Mohawk River State Park to the south, this forest provides critical wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors while protecting the scenic views from the Mohawk River and from the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail and should be protected.

INTRODUCTION:

New York State law gives town's the authority to create a Conservation Advisory Council (CAC) "...to advise in the development, management, and protection of its natural resources."

The law also states that CACs are to create an inventory of open areas and wetlands within the municipality. The open areas inventory is defined as having each area "identified, described, and listed according to priority of acquisition or preservation." Before priorities can be determined, a basic inventory of natural resources is needed.⁵

The Town of Niskayuna's Comprehensive Development Plan also lists as objectives:

- To survey remaining undeveloped land parcels, determine their value as open space and develop a prioritized open space list of significant and high value undeveloped parcels;
- To target appropriate land acquisitions and improvements to meet identified recreation program and open space needs;
- To establish a greenway system that permits the connection of parks and open space, allows pedestrian and bicycle access, and conserves remaining natural habitats within the Town.⁶

To complete this NRI, The Town of Niskayuna's CAC has formed a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) working group. In addition to holding public meetings to gather community feedback on natural resources important to the Town's residents and reviewing previous studies, the group has also conducted site walks at the Town's Community Center, Blatnick Park, Stanford Park and portions of the Mohawk Hudson Bike Hike Trail.

⁵ Creating a Natural Resources Inventory, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation, Hudson River Estuary Program. Haeckel, Ingrid and L. Heady, 2014.

⁶ Town of Niskayuna Comprehensive Plan of Development, 2013, pages 53-54.

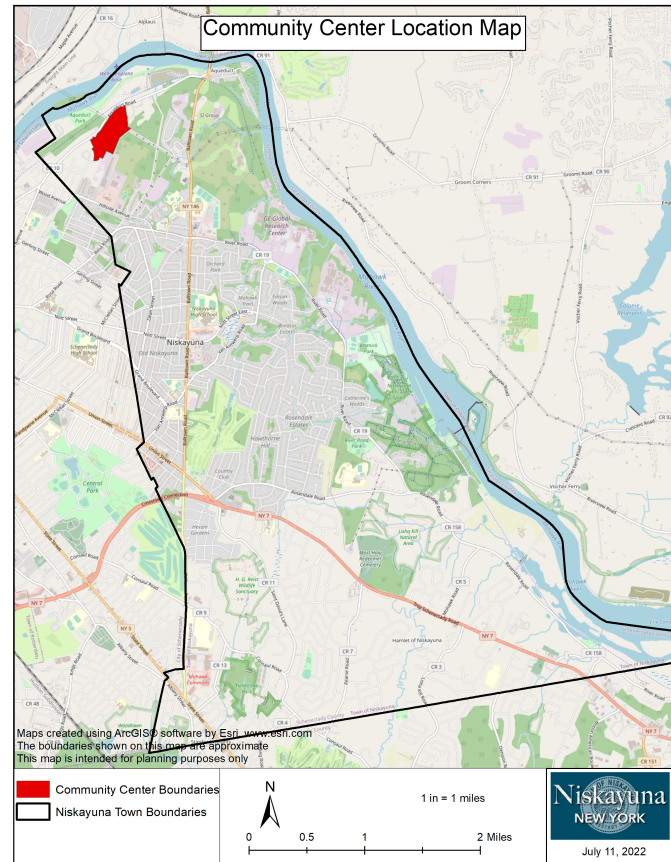
COMMUNITY CENTER FOREST INVENTORY:

May 14, 2022 Site Walk

REGIONAL SETTING:

The Community Center-Recreation Center lies in the extreme northwestern section of Niskayuna (see Community Center Location Map to right and page 15). The Community Center complex includes ball fields, pavilions, playgrounds, a swimming pool, the Community/Senior Center building and other wooded areas. The 2016 Town Parks Master Plan recommends selling the building and pool and relocating the pool and building to Blatnick Park. The complex itself is part of a larger, approximately 53-acre area consisting of five Town-owned parcels. Approximately 31 of these 53 acres, or 60%, are wooded and undeveloped (see Community Center Tax Parcel Map to right and page 16).

The Center is bounded to the east, north and west by at least seven large, privately owned and undeveloped wooded parcels totaling approximately 187 acres (see Community Center Surrounding Open Space Map below and page 20). Aqueduct Road runs along the Center's west boundary and beyond that further to the north and west is the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and approximately 20 acres of land owned by the



NY State Canal Corporation along the Mohawk River. Along the Center's southwest boundary is a 23-home subdivision on land formerly belonging to the Town that was recently sold to a developer.



PHYSICAL & NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The 11-acre Community Center forest at the north end of the Center is flat, sloping gently from 370 feet above sea level at the east boundary to a low point of 330 feet at the west boundary. From there it slopes sharply to 290 feet at Aqueduct Road (see Community Center Forest Environmental Features Map below and page 18 and Community Center Forest Topographic Map below and page 19). The center of the forest has wetland soils and field investigations reveal a narrow wetland with what may be a vernal pool surrounded by elm trees and silky dogwood shrubs (see Community Center Forest Environmental Features Map below and page 18).



ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES:

The 11-acre forest is entirely wooded with medium to large sized deciduous and evergreen trees (see Community Center Forest Satellite Photograph Map at right and page 17).

The center of the forest has a white pine grove with some very large white pines that measure two feet in diameter. A hemlock grove grows along the steep slope at the far western side of the forest. The rest of the forest can be classified as an oak-hickory forest with red, chestnut and white oak trees--some large at 30 inches in diameter--along with some bitternut hickory trees. A few invasive buckthorn, burning bush and multi-flora rose shrubs grow near the power line along the southern

boundary of the forest but beyond that, the forest is mature and quite diverse with very few invasive plants. Hophornbeam grows in the understory in drier areas. Native shrubs growing throughout the forest include maple leaf viburnum, low bush blueberry and silky dogwood. The ground layer consists of many native seedlings and saplings along with Pennsylvania sedge, groves of may apple, seersucker and many-flowered sedge, wood rush, rue anemone, bedstraw and wild geraniums (see Wildflowers of the Community Center photographs, page 14). In sum, this is a mature, healthy and diverse forest with few invasive plants and with adequate forest regeneration provided by the numerous native seedlings and saplings growing there now and should be protected.



CONSERVATION VALUES:

This mature and undisturbed forest and its wetlands provide a myriad of ecosystem services including: water filtration, groundwater recharge, stormwater regulation, drought moderation, flood control, erosion prevention on the steep slopes above Aqueduct Road, air pollutant and greenhouse gas absorption, oxygen production, carbon sequestration, temperature modulation through shading and cooling and nutrient cycling. This forest also provides habitat for other plants, insects and pollinators and wildlife including food, cover, roosting, nesting and stop-over sites for migratory birds and other wildlife. Situated as it is among other contiguous blocks of undeveloped land, this forest provides wildlife corridors allowing wildlife, and plants, to move freely in a relatively developed area. The plants themselves allow the forest to regenerate in the future by providing seeds and shelter for native forest regeneration.

This forest has other conservation values for Niskayuna's residents and visitors including protecting the scenic views from the Mohawk River, from Aqueduct Road, from the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail and the views for those using the Community Center's pool and athletic fields.

This forest also provides educational and recreational values. Three large developments have been or are being built in the last few years within a half mile and walking distance to the Community Center's forest. These 160 apartments and 60 single family homes are expected to create additional demand for hiking trails in the area. To meet this demand, a loop trail can be blazed through the Community Center's forest and around the Community Center complex (see Community Center Future Hiking-Biking Trails Map on following page and page 21). An existing trail now runs from the Loehr Excavation facility along the forest's east boundary into the center of the forest (it appears that some construction equipment and retaining walls from the neighboring property have extended onto the Town's property). This can be the basis of trail that begins at the Community Center and heads north and, with permission from Niagara

Community Center Future Hiking-Biking Trails Map

State of NY
Deane-34a
Jackson Denotation 168
Loehr Excavating 304
Bucko-13a
Bucko-96a
Amescon-30a
Buhmester-2a
Buhmester-12a
Community Center Park
Community Center Park
Community Center Park
Community Center Park

Sources: Tax Parcels: Niskayuna, Dept. of Planning
Trails: AllTrails.com, trails.com

Maps created using ArcView, Esri software by Esri, www.esri.com

The boundaries shown on this map are approximate
This map is intended for planning purposes only

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, IGN, Aerotech, AeroGRID, IGN, Esri, DeLorme, Community

Legend:

- Town Boundaries
- Town & State Land
- Unprotected Properties
- Existing Hiking-Biking Trails
- Possible Hiking-Biking Trails
- Railroad Easement

Scale: 0 250 500 1,000 Feet

North Arrow

Niskayuna NEW YORK

July 11, 2022

⁷ Town of Niskayuna Comprehensive Development Plan, 2013, p. 45

WILDFLOWERS OF THE COMMUNITY CENTER FOREST:

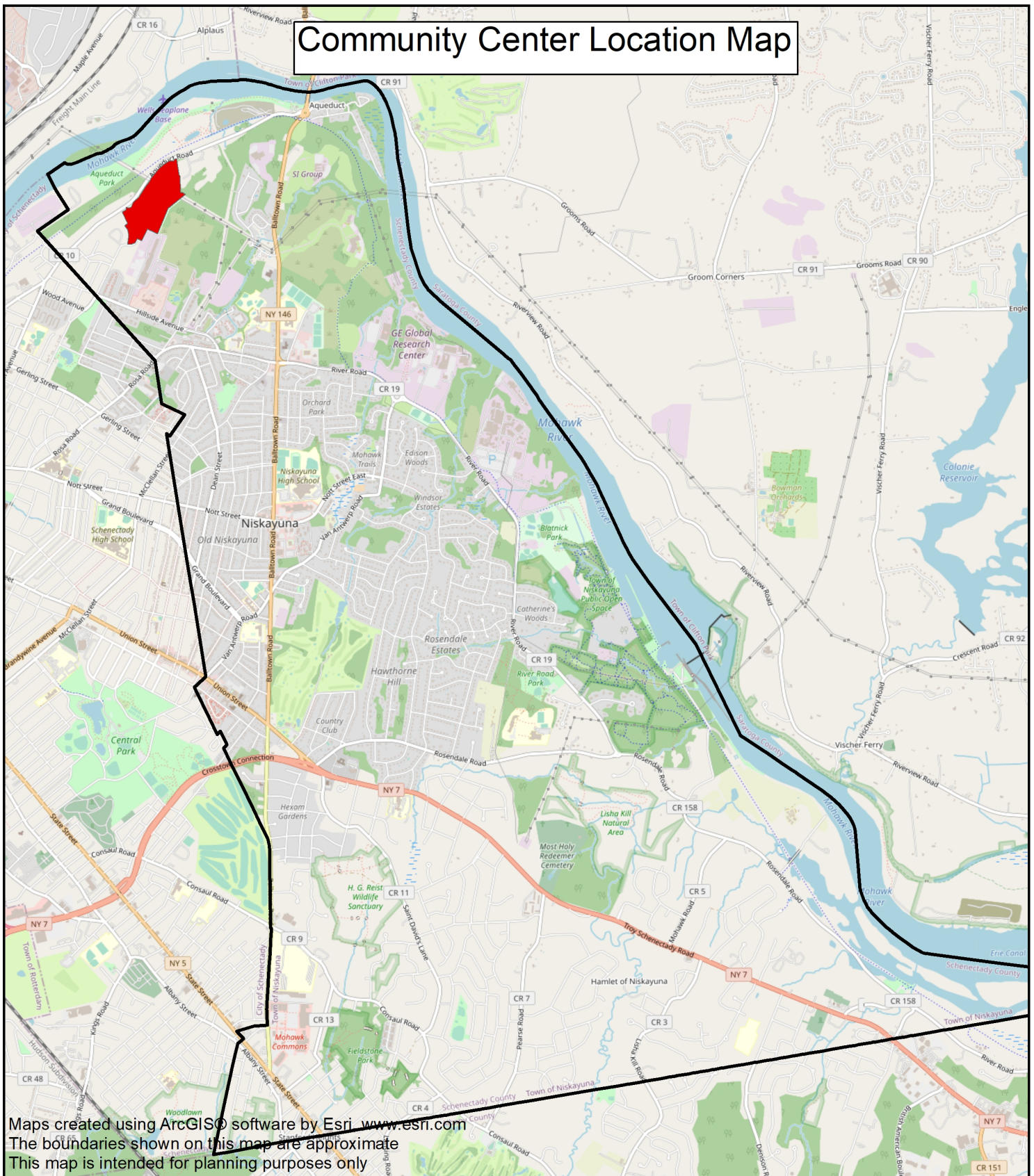


May apples on Community Center forest floor

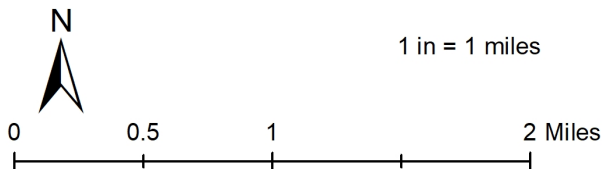


Rue anemone, a spring ephemeral wildflower

Community Center Location Map



- Community Center Boundaries
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries



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Community Center Tax Parcel Map



Town Land-52 Acres

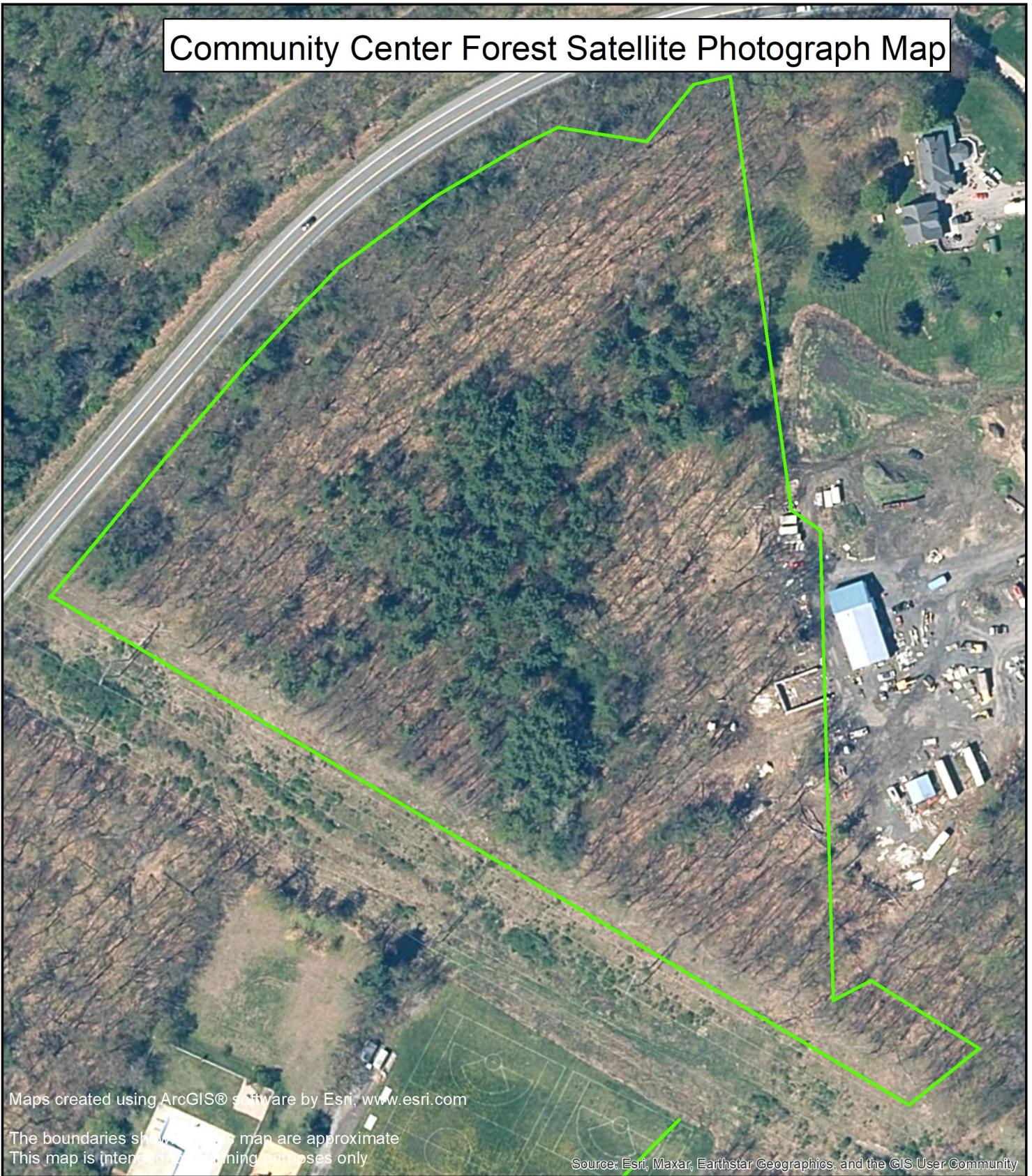



0 250 500 1,000 Feet



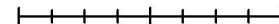
July 11, 2022

Community Center Forest Satellite Photograph Map



 Community Center Forest

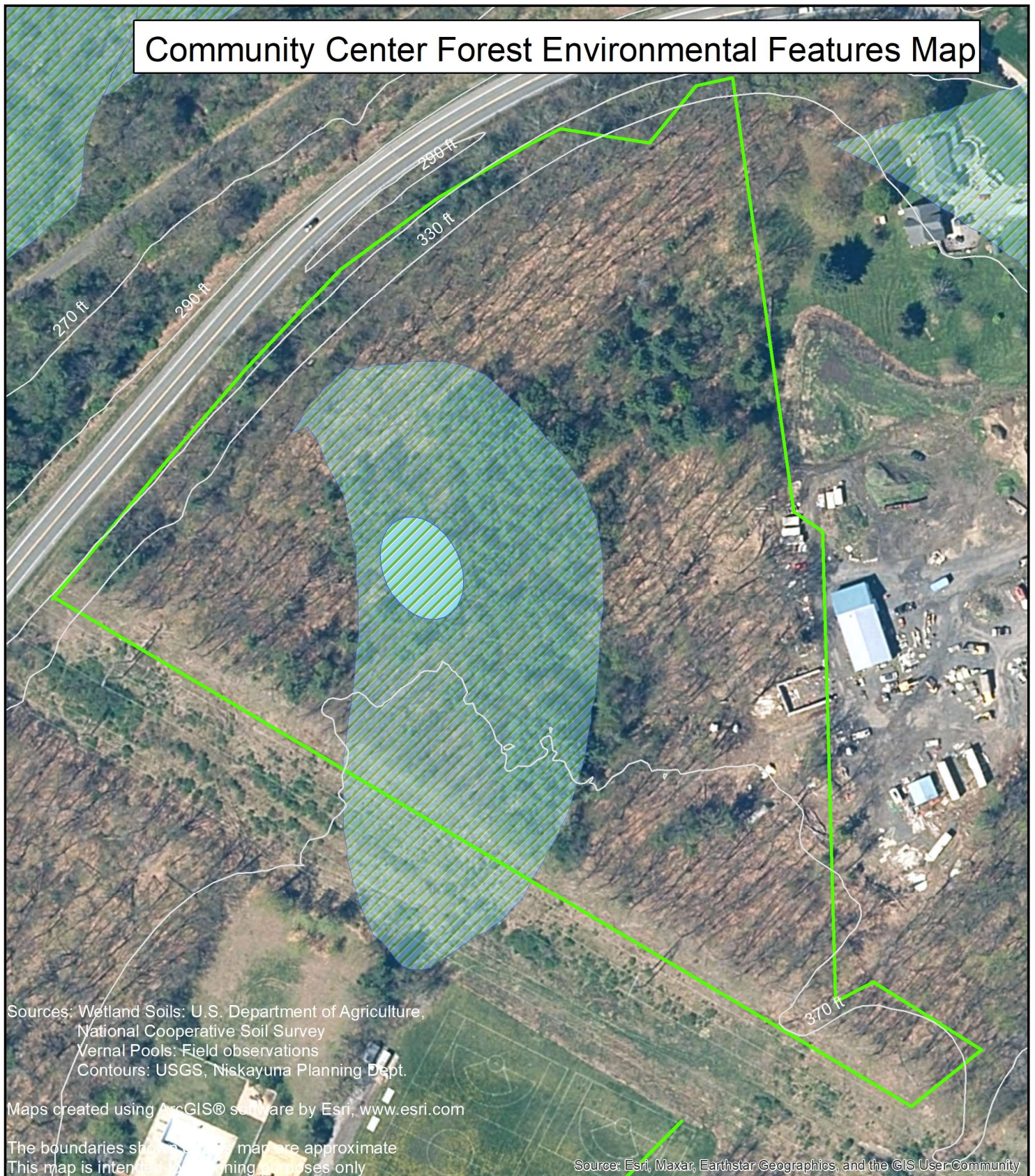


0 50 100 200 Feet




July 11, 2022

Community Center Forest Environmental Features Map



- Community Center Forest
- Wetland Soils
- Wetland/Vernal Pool
- Contours-40 ft



0 50 100 200 Feet



July 11, 2022


Community Center Forest Topographic Map

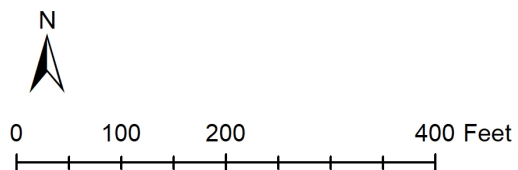


Maps created using ArcGIS® software by Esri, www.esri.com

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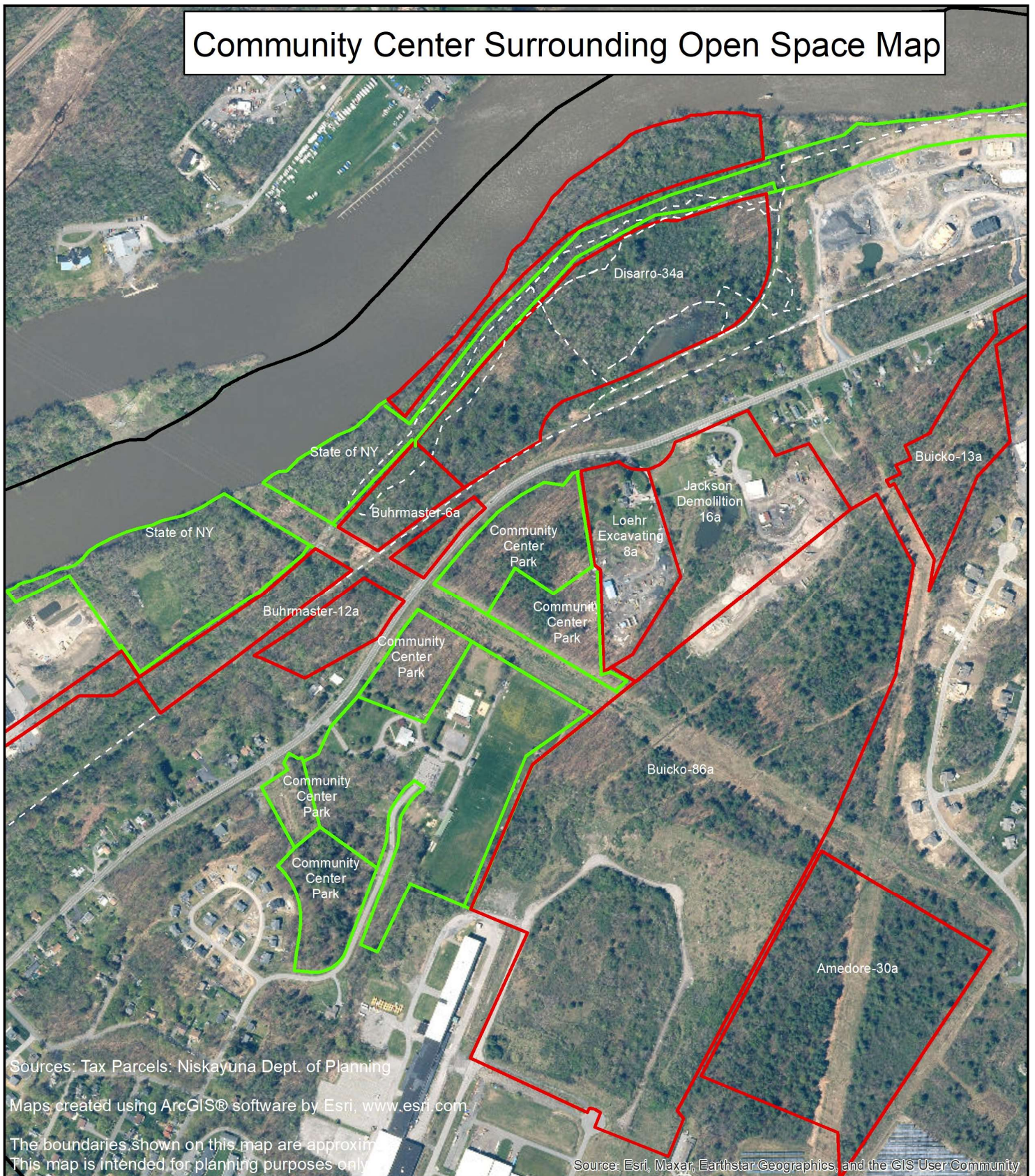
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 Community Center Forest

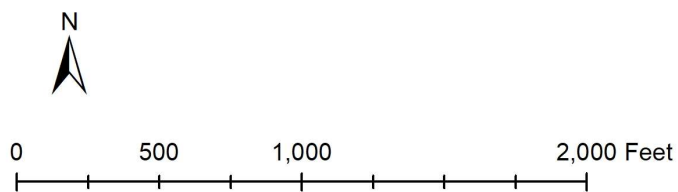


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Community Center Surrounding Open Space Map



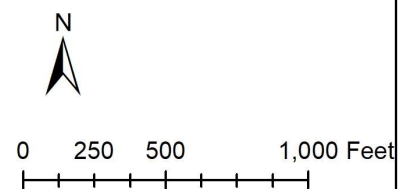
- Town Boundaries
- Town & State Land
- Unprotected Properties
- Existing Hiking-Biking Trails



Community Center Future Hiking-Biking Trails Map



- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Town Boundaries | Existing Hiking-Biking Trails |
| Town & State Land | Possible Hiking-Biking Trails |
| Unprotected Properties | Railroad Easement |



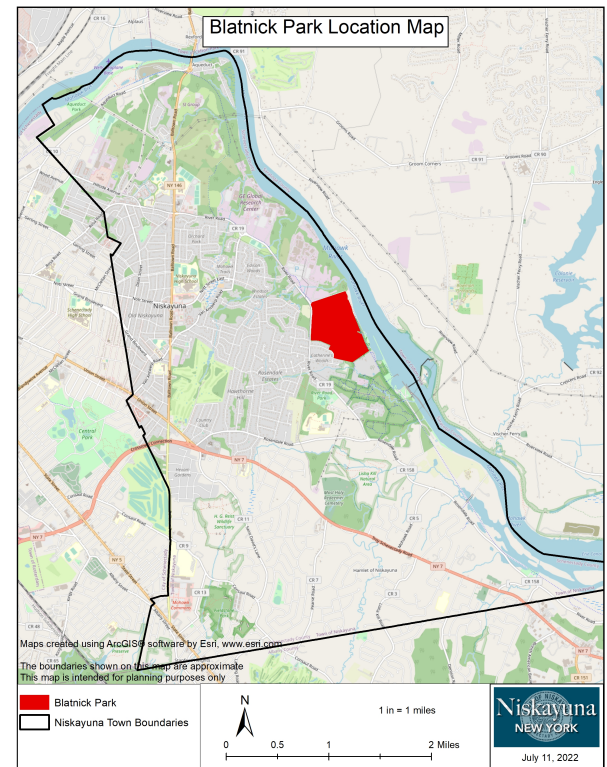
July 11, 2022

BLATNICK PARK INVENTORY

May 14, 2022, June 19, 2021 Site Walks

REGIONAL SETTING:

The 188-acre Blatnick Park lies in the eastern section of Niskayuna along the Mohawk River (see Blatnick Park Location Map to right and page 33). The Park is bounded to the east by the Mohawk River, to the north by Knolls Atomic Power Lab and the Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, to the west by River Road and to the south by several properties including: the 9-acre Town-owned Catherine Woods; a large, 28-acre privately owned parcel; the Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and another 6-acre parcel owned by the Town that runs to the Mohawk River. These southern parcels all connect to Mohawk River State Park and include hiking and biking trails connecting to the Park (see Blatnick Park Surrounding Open Space Map below and page 38).



PHYSICAL & NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS:

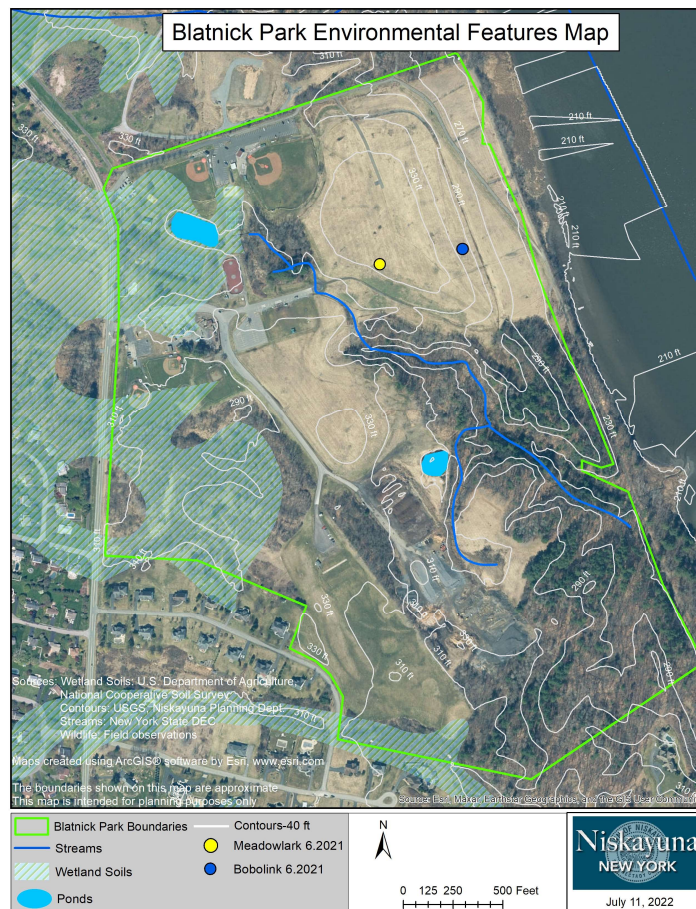
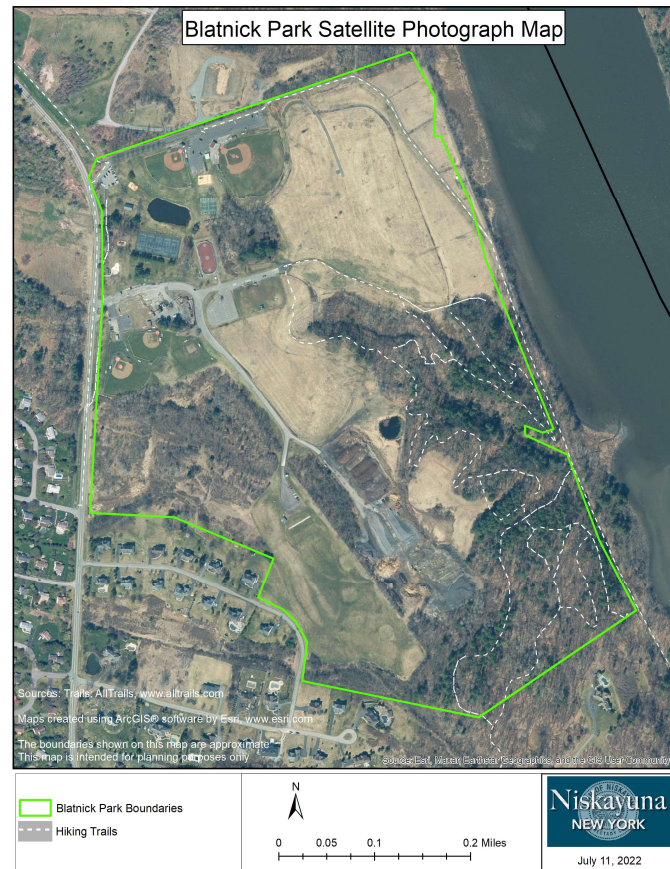
Blatnick Park's active recreational facilities include ball fields, basketball, volleyball and tennis courts, a driving range, a disk golf course, a dog park and restrooms. The 2016 Town Parks Master Plan recommends constructing a new community pool and community center where the disk golf field is located at a cost in 2016 of \$5.4 million. The Park also has a recycling and transfer station, storage for the Town Highway Department, a large compost area and an approximately twenty-eight-acre capped and mounded landfill (see Blatnick Park Existing Features Map below and page 39).

The Park has nearly three miles of hiking trails that are part of the John Brown Hiking Trail system which runs through the Park and south to the Town's Catherine Woods property and to trails at Mohawk River State Park. The Mohawk Hudson Bike -Hike Trail also runs for approximately one mile through the Park and then continuing both north and south (see Blatnick Park Satellite Photograph Map next page and page 34).

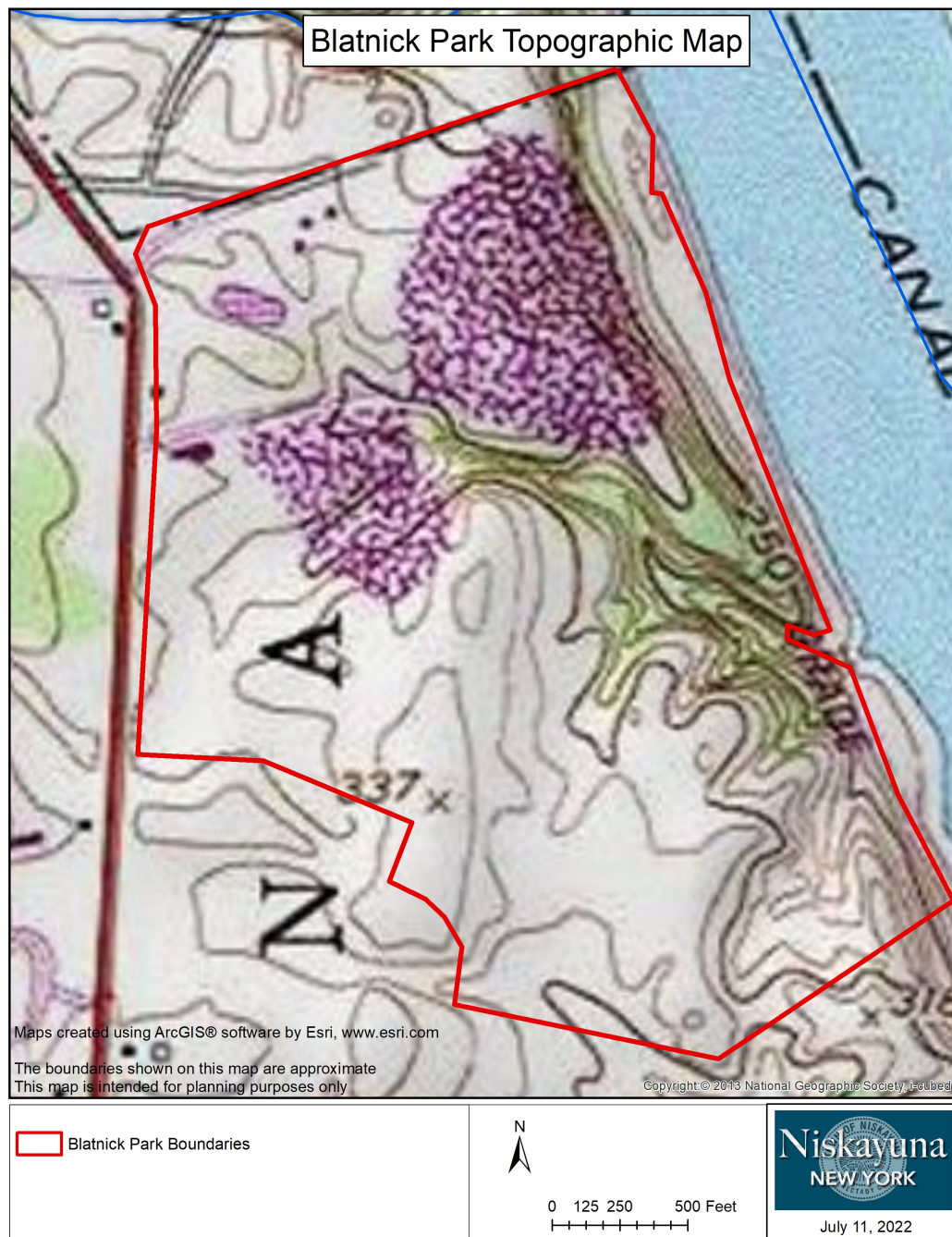
Blatnick Park Existing Features Map



Approximately 30% or sixty acres of the Park are wooded (see Blatnick Park Satellite Photograph Map to right and page 34). Approximately 15% of the Park's 188 acres have wetland soils, all lying in the western third of the Park where the bulk of recreational fields and courts are located (see Blatnick Park Environmental Features Map below and page 35 and Blatnick Park Environmental Features Pond Close-Up Map page 36). The 2016 Town Parks Master Plan recommends correcting drainage problems at several of the baseball fields built in these wetland soils. An unnamed stream runs through the Park from the northwest entrance southeast for approximately two-thirds of a mile through Shaker Gorge to the Mohawk River (see Blatnick Park Environmental Features Map below and page 35).



Ponds include a man-made half-acre pond at the northwest section of the Park and a smaller 0.4 acre pond in the center of the Park. The Park's elevations slope eastward to the Mohawk River from a height of 315 feet above sea level at the Park's western boundary to a low point of 210 feet at the River (see Blatnick Park Environmental Features Map previous page and page 35 and Blatnick Park Topographic Map below and page 37).



ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES:

FIELDS:

The Park has five meadows totaling approximately fifty acres or 25% of the Park. Fields include: the approximately twenty-eight acre large, capped landfill; the approximately ten acre field at the driving range; the approximately ten acre field at the disk golf course; an approximately three acre field labeled 'Bird Sanctuary' in the 2016 Town Parks Master Plan and an approximately one acre field surrounding a small pond in the center of the Park (see Blatnick Park Satellite Photograph Map page 34).

The capped landfill is unique because of its habitat for declining grassland bird species including bobolink and meadowlark, both observed there in June, 2021. The New York State Breeding Bird Atlas 2000-2005 does not include any observations of these two species in Niskayuna, meaning that



Views of Mohawk River from trails on capped landfill

their return is because of the decision to not mow the top of the landfill and instead allowing grasses to grow up until at least mid-summer after these birds have successfully nested. Keeping the landfill's grassland unmowed until mid-summer has the support of the Town Supervisor, the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club and the Schenectady County Soil and Water Conservation District.⁸ Plants growing on the capped landfill include birds foot trefoil, red clover, yellow sweet

⁸ Daily Gazette, Feb 25, 2022

clover, common milkweed, ox-eye daisy, bedstraw and pasture grasses. Plants growing around the perimeter of the landfill include elderberry, gray-stemmed dogwood, common milkweed and whorled loosestrife--all beneficial plants.

The ten acre driving range field includes a five acre portion along the western half of the field designated as 'Low Mow Pollinator Habitat Initiative', part of the Conservation Advisory Council's Niskayuna Biodiversity Initiative begun in 2020 (see Low-Mow Pollinator Habitat Initiative Map below and page 40). The Niskayuna Highway Department will continue to mow a walking path for residents through this area but the remaining area should be allowed to grow and only be mowed once a year in late fall to allow native plants, pollinators, birds and other wildlife to survive there.



The disk golf course originally only included the ten acres shown in the 2016 Town Parks Master Plan (see Blatnick Park Existing Features Map page 35). The disk golf course has expanded since then.

The three acre Bird Sanctuary field and smaller field surrounding the pond in the center of the Park provide additional habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife and should be left undisturbed.

FORESTS:

Approximately 60 acres, one third of the Park, consists of mature mixed deciduous and evergreen trees (see Blatnick Park Satellite Photograph Map page 34). A sixteen acre wooded block lies along the Park's western boundary and a larger, forty-four acre forest lies in the Park's southeastern section that continues to the banks of the Mohawk River, designated as Endangered Species Critical Area due bald eagles nesting there and should be undisturbed. Bald eagles are listed as 'threatened' in New York State.



Bald eagle nesting area along Mohawk River

BLATNICK POND AND STREAM:

The half-acre pond at the Park's entrance is man-made. The pond is surrounded by tightly mown grass. While this allows residents to view and have access to the pond, it also has resulted in a large number of Canada geese whose droppings have contributed to the pond's eutrophication (excess growth of algae due to an overabundance of nitrogen and phosphorous acting as fertilizer).

Mowing also sends grass clippings which are high in nutrients into the pond, causing more algae growth. A solution to the pond's eutrophication that still allows residents to enjoy and experience the pond would be to only mow half or less of the pond's shoreline and mow walking paths among the higher vegetation. The resulting taller grass around the pond can discourage Canada geese, filter pollution and shade and cool the pond's water while providing habitat for insects, birds and other wildlife.

The pond's southern shoreline already has some natural vegetation including native cattails and Indian hemp (dogbane) which should be allowed to grow. At least sixteen native birch trees, each approximately six feet tall, have been planted along the pond's north shore on a steep embankment. Native plantings like this can be continued around other sections of the pond. A very large, thirty inch in diameter sycamore tree grows just west of the pond, along with a magnificent, triple-trunk silver maple, both providing cooling and shade for visitors.



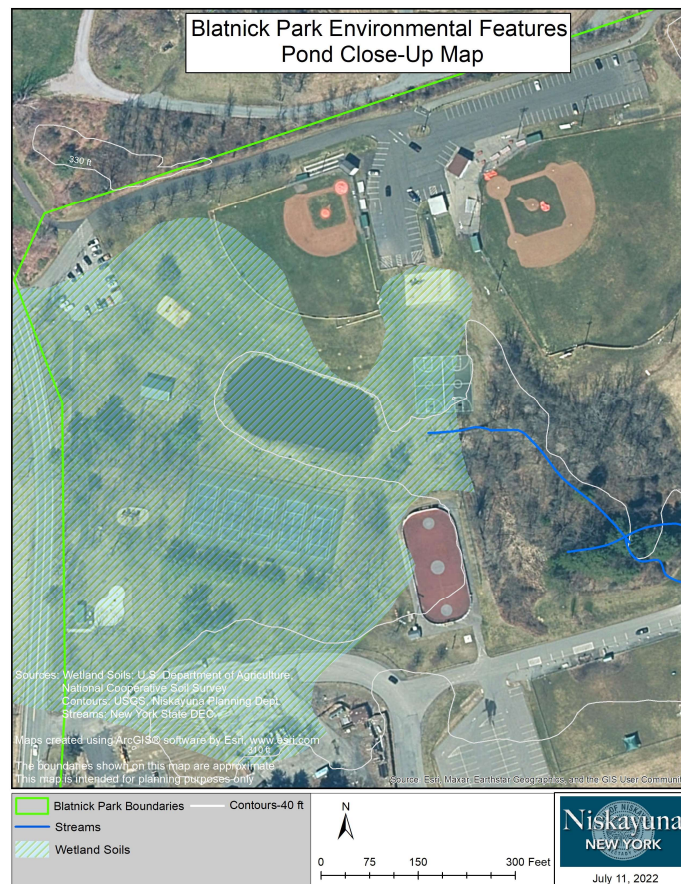
Pond with algae

A steep embankment along the pond's north shoreline is not being cut--probably because it is too steep to be mowed. The result is positive with wintercress, grasses and gill-over-the-ground growing naturally and providing habitat, some pollution abatement and attractive color and structure for visitors.

The outlet of the pond at the eastern edge is a wooded ravine (see Blatnick Park Environmental Features Pond Close-Up Map below and page 36). Trees growing here include medium sized black walnut, box elder and quacking aspen along with large cottonwood trees, a few large elm trees, a white pine tree and an understory of native sumac shrubs. This somewhat neglected portion of the Park provides wildlife habitat while preventing erosion and silt and sediment from flowing into the stream which flows into the nearby Mohawk River.



Unmowed embankment by pond



CONSERVATION VALUES:

The Park's mature forests, streams and wetlands provide a myriad of ecosystem services including: water filtration, groundwater recharge, stormwater regulation, drought moderation, flood control, erosion prevention on the steep slopes along the Mohawk River, air pollutant and greenhouse gas absorption, oxygen production, carbon sequestration, temperature modulation through shading and cooling and nutrient cycling. The forests also provide habitat for other plants, insects and pollinators and wildlife including food, cover, roosting, nesting and stop-over sites for migratory birds and other wildlife. Situated as it is among other contiguous blocks of undeveloped land to the north and south along the Mohawk River including woods at Knolls Atomic Power Lab to the north and Mohawk River State Park to the south, this forest provides wildlife corridors allowing wildlife and plants, to move freely in a relatively developed area. The plants themselves allow the forest to regenerate in the future by providing seeds and shelter for native forest regeneration.

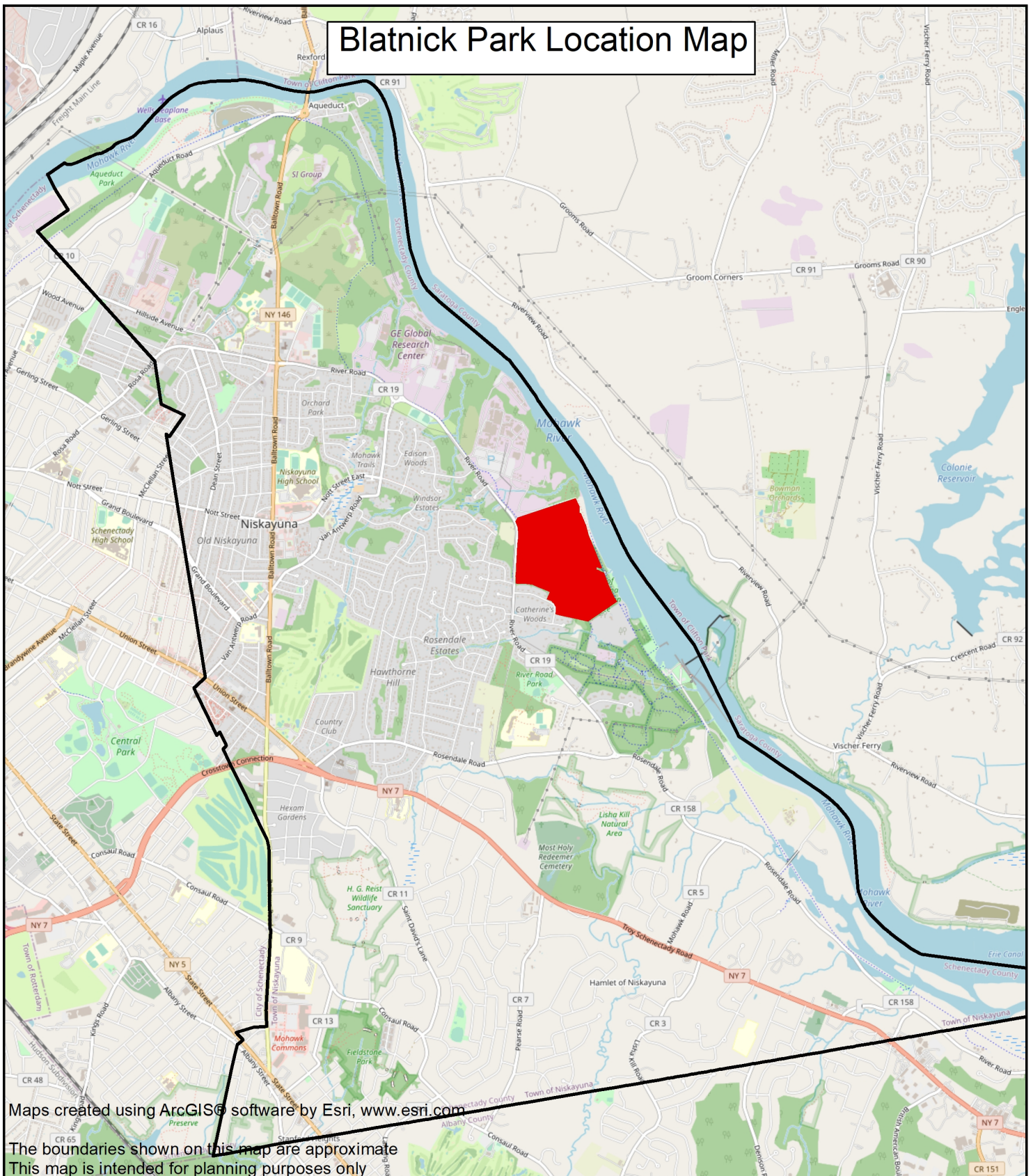
These forests have other conservation values for Niskayuna's residents and visitors including protecting the scenic views from the Mohawk River, from River Road and from the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail. The Park's forests also provide educational and recreational values.

Due to the loss of farmland, reforestation and development, fields are increasingly rare and many of the species that depend on this habitat are in steep decline. The Park's five fields provide critical habitat to these species of insects, birds, small mammals and other wildlife including bobolink and meadowlark mentioned above. The fields and trails also provide scenic vistas and recreational benefits for residents.

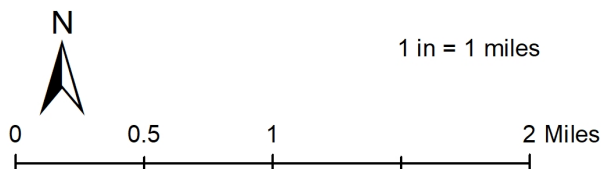
Just to the north of Blatnick Park is the Knolls Atomic Power Lab which has two large fields totaling approximately twenty-five acres in size. Currently these fields appear to be mowed regularly while the fields at General Electric just to the north are managed as meadows with less frequent mowing. Bird houses

have also been put up in the fields along River Road at General Electric. By cutting their fields less frequently, the Knolls Atomic Power Lab could add to the mosaic of fields growing from Blatnick Park all the way to General Electric. This would have a positive impact on wildlife, including insect pollinators, birds and other species while adding to the scenic experience of residents passing by on the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail.

Blatnick Park Location Map



- Blatnick Park
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries

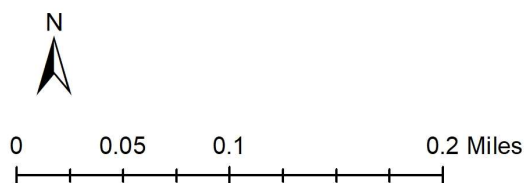


July 11, 2022

Blatnick Park Satellite Photograph Map










- Blatnick Park Boundaries
- Hiking Trails



July 11, 2022


Blatnick Park Environmental Features Map



- | | |
|---|--|
|  Blatnick Park Boundaries |  Contours-40 ft |
|  Streams |  Meadowlark 6.20.21 |
|  Wetland Soils |  Bobolink 6.20.21 |
|  Ponds | |

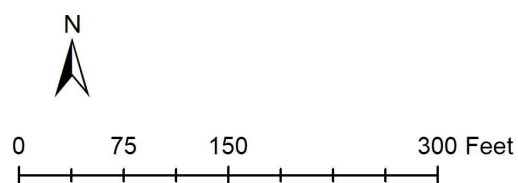
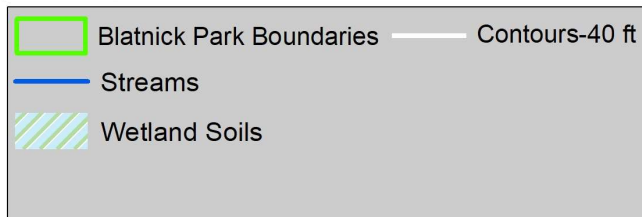
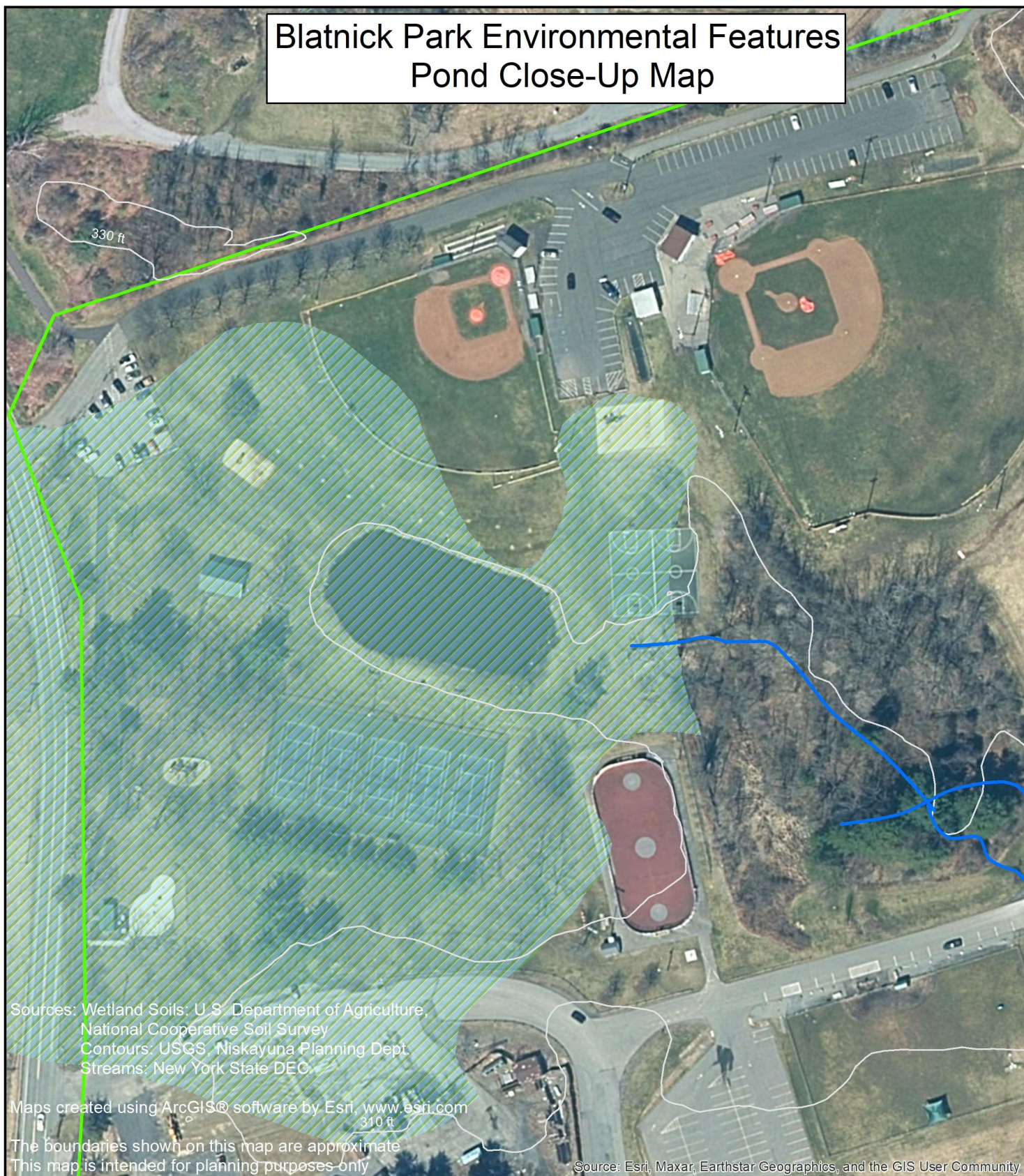


0 125 250 500 Feet




July 11, 2022

Blatnick Park Environmental Features Pond Close-Up Map



Blatnick Park Topographic Map



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 Blatnick Park Boundaries



0 125 250 500 Feet

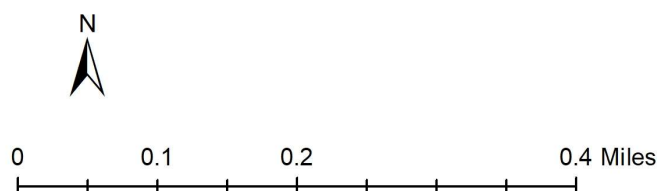


July 11, 2022

Blatnick Park Surrounding Open Space Map



- Protected Open Space
- Unprotected Properties
- Hike/Bike Trails



[illegible]

Low Mow - Pollinator Habitat Initiative - Blatnick Park



STANFORD PARK INVENTORY

May 14, 2022 Site Walk

REGIONAL SETTING:

The 24-acre Stanford Park lies in the extreme southwestern section of Niskayuna (see Stanford Park Location Map to right and page 48). Access and parking is at the south end of Stanford Avenue. The Park is surrounded by single family homes to the north, east and west. The Park is bordered at the south in the Town of Colonie by several small vacant residential lots, most of which are in a New York State DEC wetland and most likely will never be built (see Stanford Park Surrounding Open Space & Future Trails Map to right and page 52).

The Park is adjacent at the southwest corner to 48 acres owned and operated by Northern Nurseries. To the west in the Town of Schenectady and separated by a row of single family homes is the 135-acre Woodlawn Preserve (see Stanford Park Surrounding Open Space & Future Trails Map to right and page 52).

In 2009 Schenectady County deeded these 24 acres adjacent to the 170-acre Woodlawn Pine Barrens-Wetlands Complex to the Town of Niskayuna. According to the Town of Niskayuna Comprehensive Plan, "This land transfer was considered an important step in linking the Woodlawn Preserve and the



Albany Pine Bush Preserve. It provides a potential passive intermunicipal recreation opportunity. Currently there is limited access to this property and Niskayuna should consider the installation of a small parking lot and entrance kiosk at the end of Stanford Avenue. In addition, connecting trails from this location to the existing trail system in the Woodlawn Preserve should be a priority."⁹

The Woodlawn Pine Barrens-Wetland Complex is identified as a Priority Conservation Project in the 2016 NY State Open Space Conservation Plan. According to the Plan, "The area also supports several important wetlands forming a unique complex of pine barrens and wetland habitats. Its attributes have been recognized as complementary to the Pine Bush Preserve and protection worthy. Owners of public lands in this area are encouraged to cooperate with state and other agencies to protect this habitat. Recent local efforts have included creation of the 135-acre Woodlawn Preserve and 24 acres of parkland (Stanford Park) in the Town of Niskayuna"¹⁰.

Stanford Park is currently isolated from other nearby protected land. The Management Plan for Albany Pine Bush Preserve, 2017, recommends 'Full Protection' for the unprotected lands north of Cordell Road-adjacent to Stanford Park-which total approximately 87 acres.¹¹ (see Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan Map next page and page 54 and Stanford Park Surrounding Open Space & Future Trails Map page 52). The Plan recommends acquiring lands from willing sellers using, but not limited to, funds from the Environmental Protection Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies and programs (Land and Water Conservation Fund, Conservation and Reinvestment Act, and transportation funds), local governments, private foundations, individuals, corporations, and mitigation fees.¹² Protection of this

⁹ Comprehensive Development Plan, Town of Niskayuna, 2013, p. 41

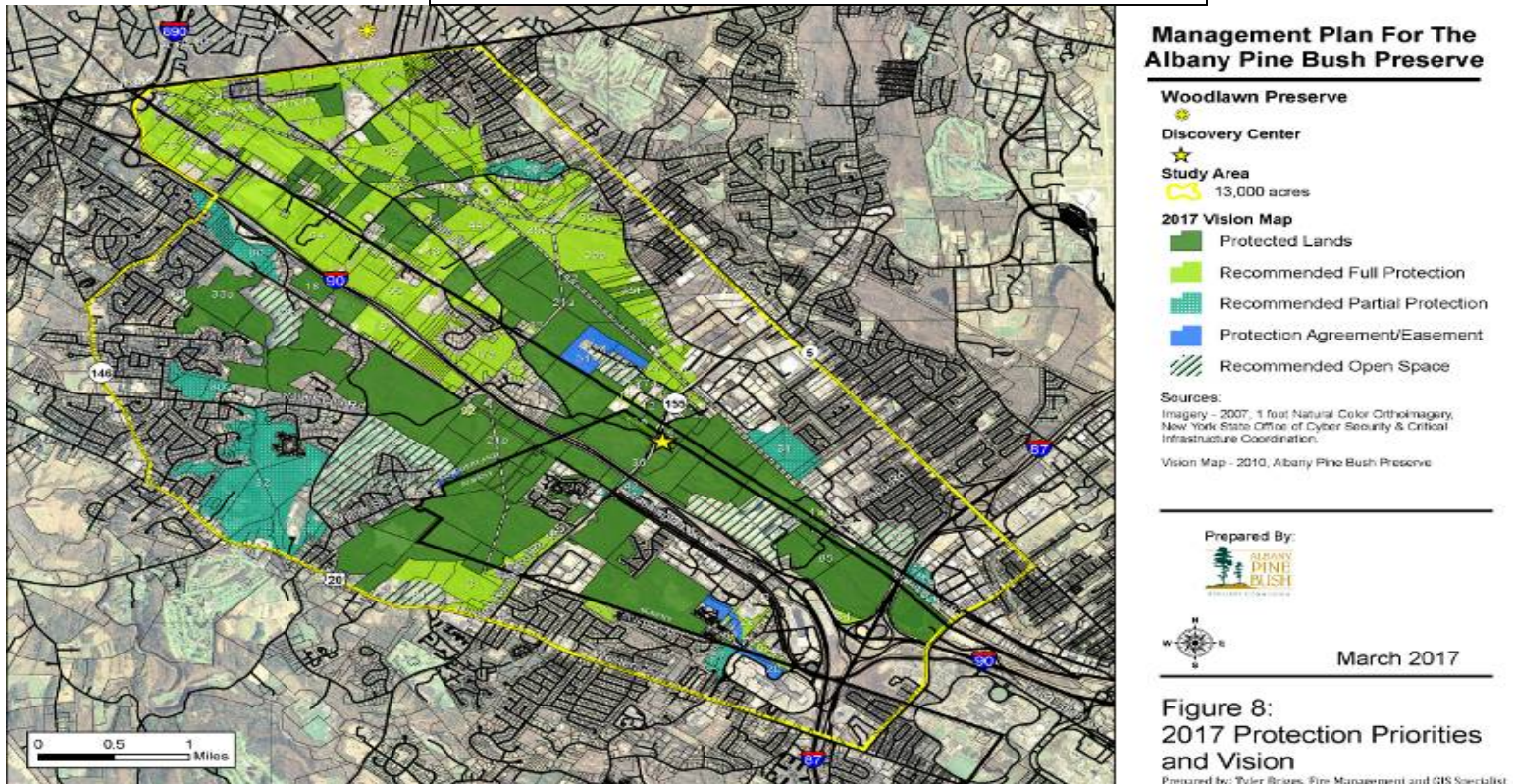
¹⁰ 2016 NYS Open Space Conservation Plan, p. 123

¹¹ Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan Update, 2017, p. 56, 57.

¹² Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan Update, 2017, p. 68

land would facilitate trails and wildlife and plant corridors and connections from Stanford Park to the Woodlawn Preserve and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve.

Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan Map



PHYSICAL & NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The majority of the Park is classified as a DEC wetland, part of a larger 76-acre DEC wetland that extends into the Woodlawn Preserve just to the west (see Stanford Park Environmental Features Map below and page 10 and Stanford Park Topographic Map below and page 51). The Park's wetlands contain tributaries that are the headwaters of the Lisha Kill stream which flows northeast for over five miles into the Mohawk River. The Park is flat, sloping gently from 360 feet above sea level at the north boundary to a low point of 340 feet at the south boundary.



ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES:

The Park is entirely wooded (see Stanford Park Satellite Photograph Map to right and page 49). Higher, drier areas of the park are dominated by medium to large oak and white pine trees. Swamp white oaks, red oaks and black oaks are 12 inches to 18 inches in diameter and approximately 75 years old. Some red oaks are much larger with diameters of up to three feet. White pine grow in several groves across the Park with some as large as 30 inches in diameter. Other trees include medium sized red maples and smaller elms in wet areas along with quacking aspen and a few large hemlock trees in drier areas. The understory has flowering dogwoods, gray birch and serviceberry in sunlit openings and ironwood and hophornbeam in shadier areas. Shrubs include invasive buckthorn near the Park's entrance and native blueberry, winterberry, witch hazel and maple leaf viburnum further into the Park. Sensitive fern dominates the ground layer in the wet areas of the Park along with tussock and brome sedges, skunk cabbage, horsetail, jewelweed and marsh marigold. Drier areas have sweet vernal grass, partridgeberry, wood rush, New York and intermediate fern, wild geranium, Canada mayflower, trillium, lion's foot and cinquefoil.



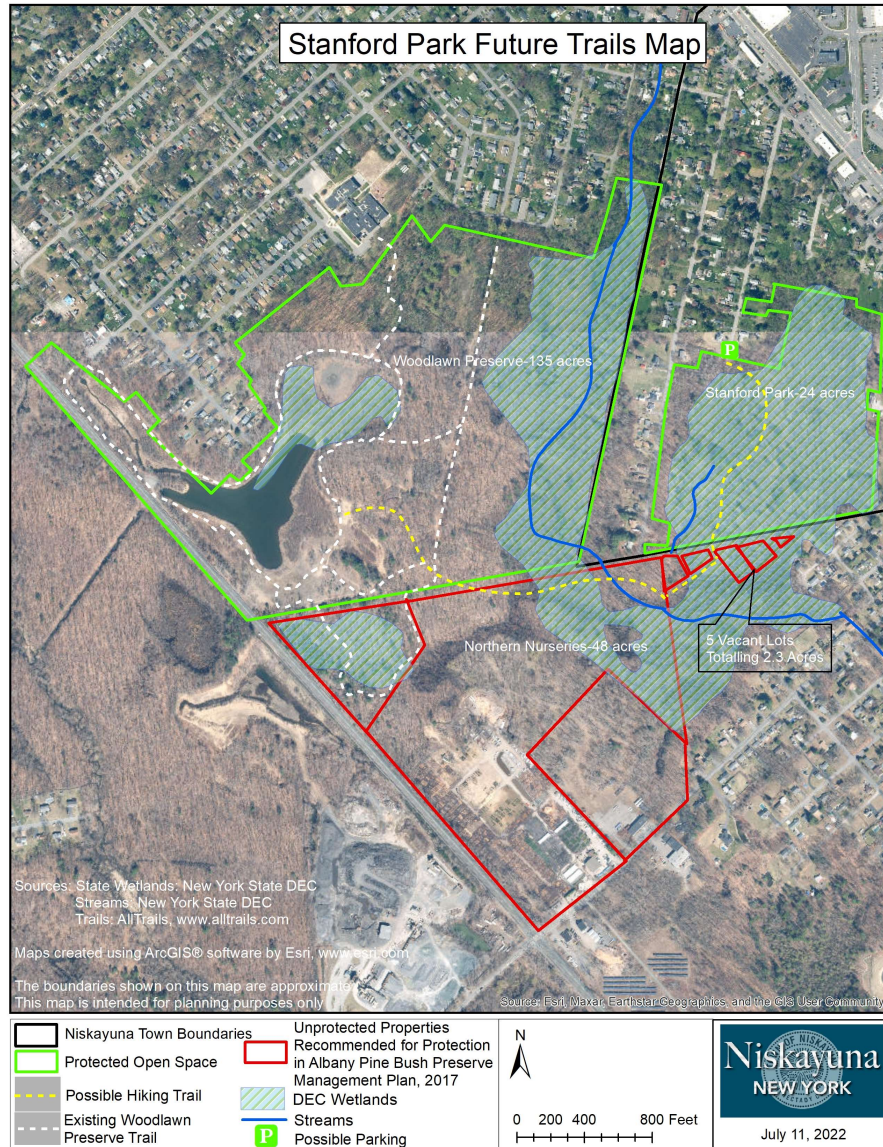
CONSERVATION VALUES:

This mature and undisturbed forest and its extensive wetlands provide a myriad of ecosystem services including: water filtration, groundwater recharge, stormwater regulation, drought moderation, flood control, erosion prevention, air pollutant and greenhouse gas absorption, oxygen production, carbon sequestration, temperature modulation through shading and cooling and nutrient cycling. The plants themselves allow the forest to regenerate in the future by providing seeds and shelter for native forest regeneration.

The Park and the surrounding woods and wetlands provide habitat for other plants, insects and pollinators and wildlife including migratory and nesting birds including food, cover, roosting, nesting and stop-over sites for migratory birds and other wildlife. Birds observed on May 14 2022 include wood thrush, great crested flycatcher, common yellowthroat and rose breasted grosbeak. Reports of bear in nearby Woodlawn Preserve indicate that bear use this Park as well. Observations of bobcat a bit further to the north indicate that bobcat also use this area, along with other types of wildlife. As buffer land to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, this area serves to protect the habitat for the rare and federally endangered Karner blue butterfly.

The Park has recreational and educational values for Niskayuna residents and other visitors as well. Informal trails, perhaps deer trails, run from the north entrance into the wetlands. It may be possible to establish hiking trails in the Park, as recommended in the Town's Comprehensive Plan and mentioned above, that then connect to the four miles of hiking trails just to the west at Woodlawn Park. This can be done by crossing through the paper roads located between the small vacant parcels just to the south of the Park. From there, with permission from Northern Nurseries, a trail can run west to Woodlawn Preserve (see Stanford Park Future Trails Map on following page and page 53). If the private parcels located just to the south are protected, as recommended in the New York State Conservation Plan and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan

and as discussed above, then more extensive trails can be established connecting Stanford Park to the Woodlawn Preserve--where habitat for the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly is being restored--and to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, where Karner blue butterflies live and breed.

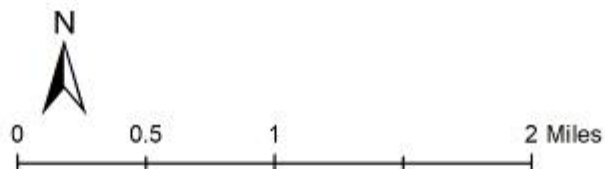


A detailed map of the Niskayuna area, showing the location of Stanford Park. The map includes major roads like NY 146, NY 7, NY 5, and NY 158, as well as local roads like CR 91, CR 19, CR 11, CR 13, CR 7, CR 3, CR 5, CR 4, CR 158, CR 92, CR 151, and CR 48. It also shows the Niskayuna River, Aqueduct Park, and various residential and commercial areas. A black outline highlights the Stanford Park area, and a red outline highlights the Niskayuna area. The map is titled "Stanford Park Location Map" in a black box at the top.

Maps created using ArcGIS® software by Esri, www.esri.com

The boundaries shown on this map are approximate
This map is intended for planning purposes only

The boundaries shown on this map are approximate
This map is intended for planning purposes only





Stanford Park Satellite Photograph Map

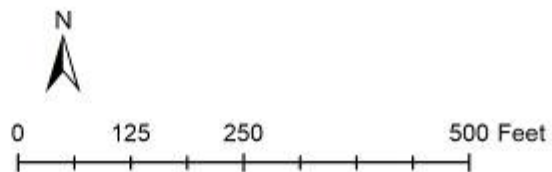


Maps created using ArcGIS® software by Esri, www.esri.com

The boundaries shown on this map are approximate.
This map is intended for planning purposes only.

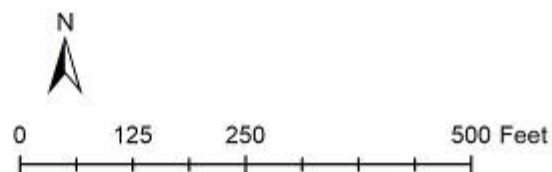
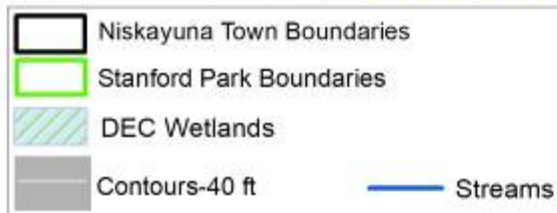
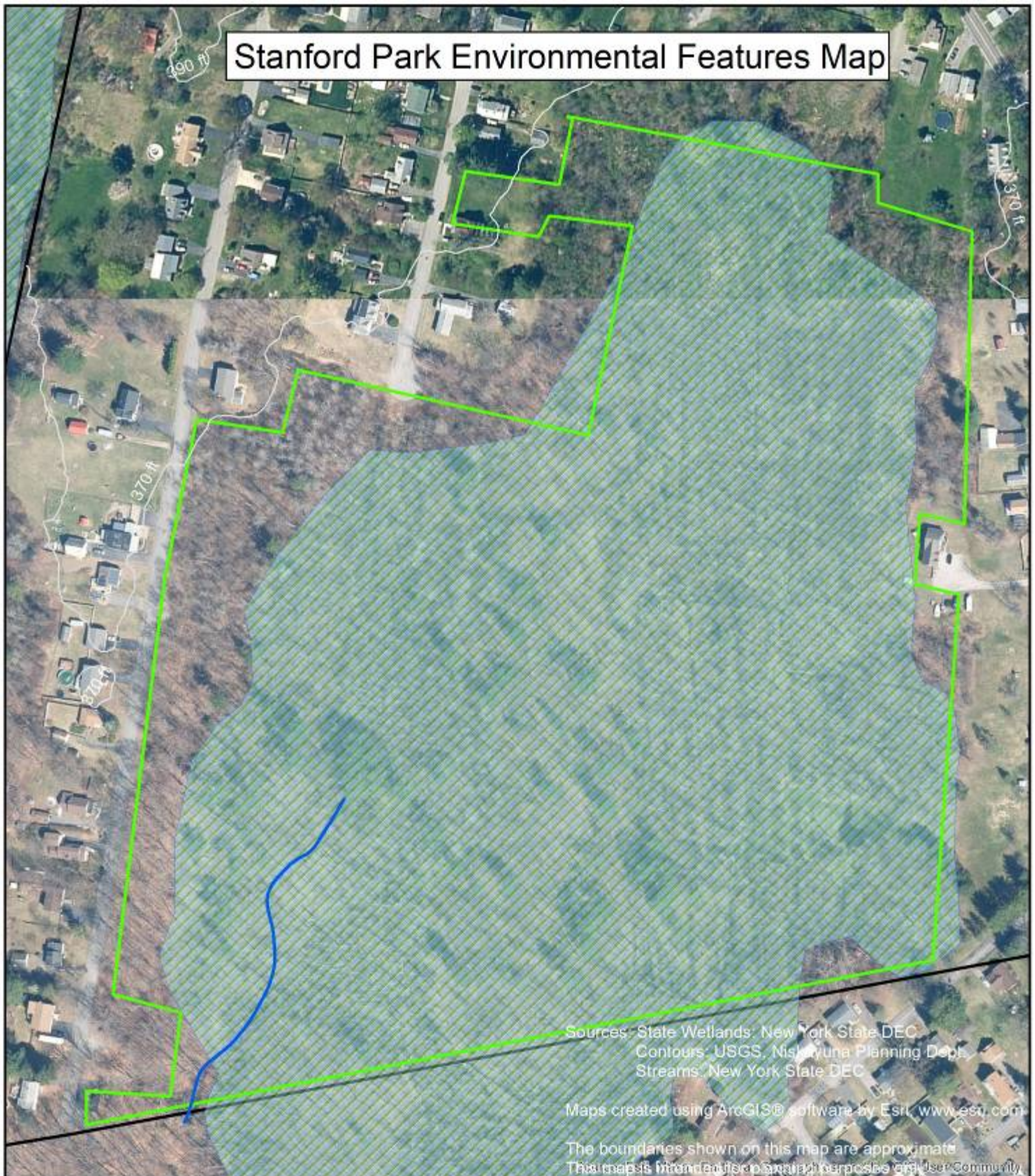
Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community

-  Niskayuna Town Boundaries
-  Stanford Park Boundaries



July 11, 2022

Stanford Park Environmental Features Map



July 11, 2022



Stanford Park Topographic Map

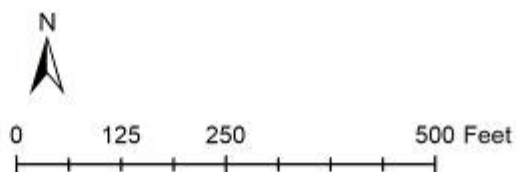


Maps created using ArcGIS® software by Esri, www.esri.com

The boundaries shown on this map are approximate
This map is intended for planning purposes only

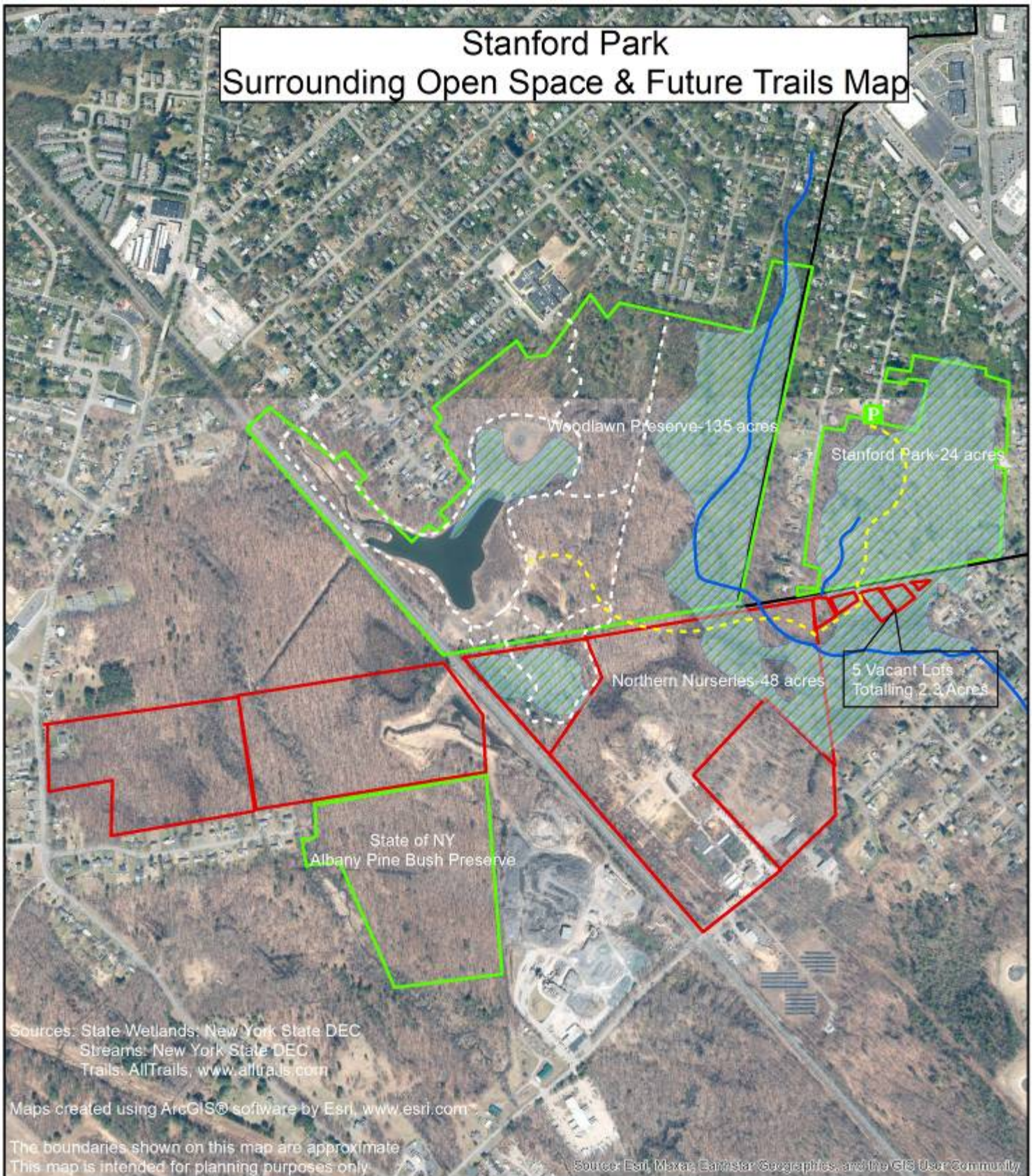
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-  Niskayuna Town Boundaries
-  Stanford Park Boundaries



July 11, 2022

Stanford Park Surrounding Open Space & Future Trails Map



- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Niskayuna Town Boundaries | Unprotected Properties Recommended for Protection in Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan, 2017 |
| Protected Open Space | DEC Wetlands |
| Possible Hiking Trail | Streams |
| Existing Woodlawn Preserve Trail | Possible Parking |

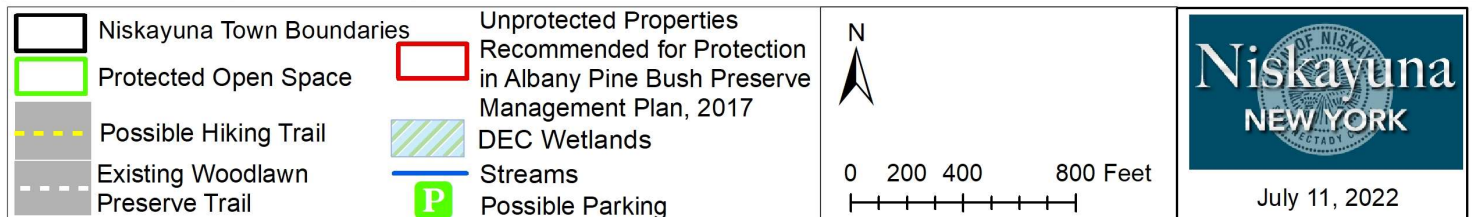
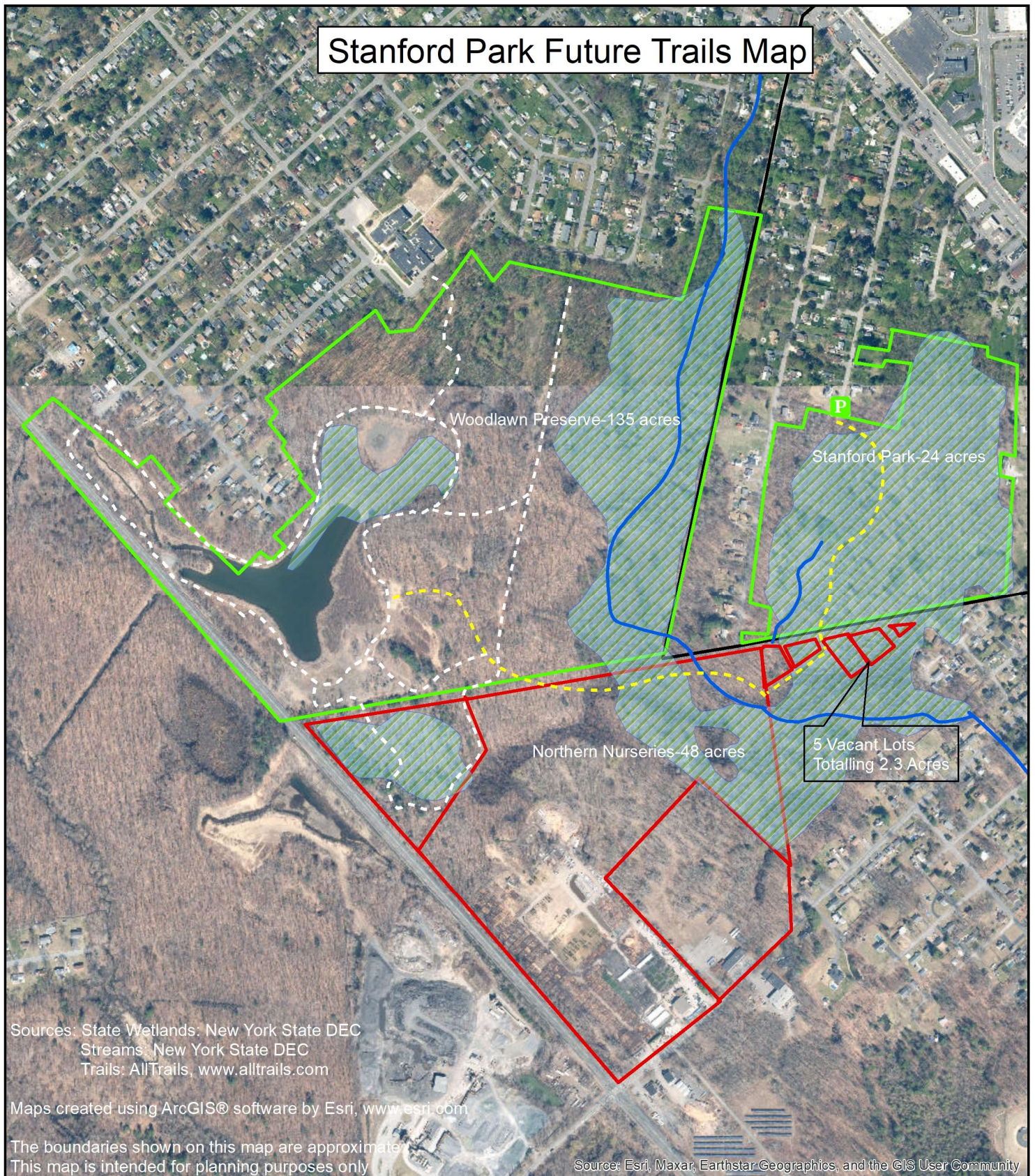


0 250 500 1,000 Feet

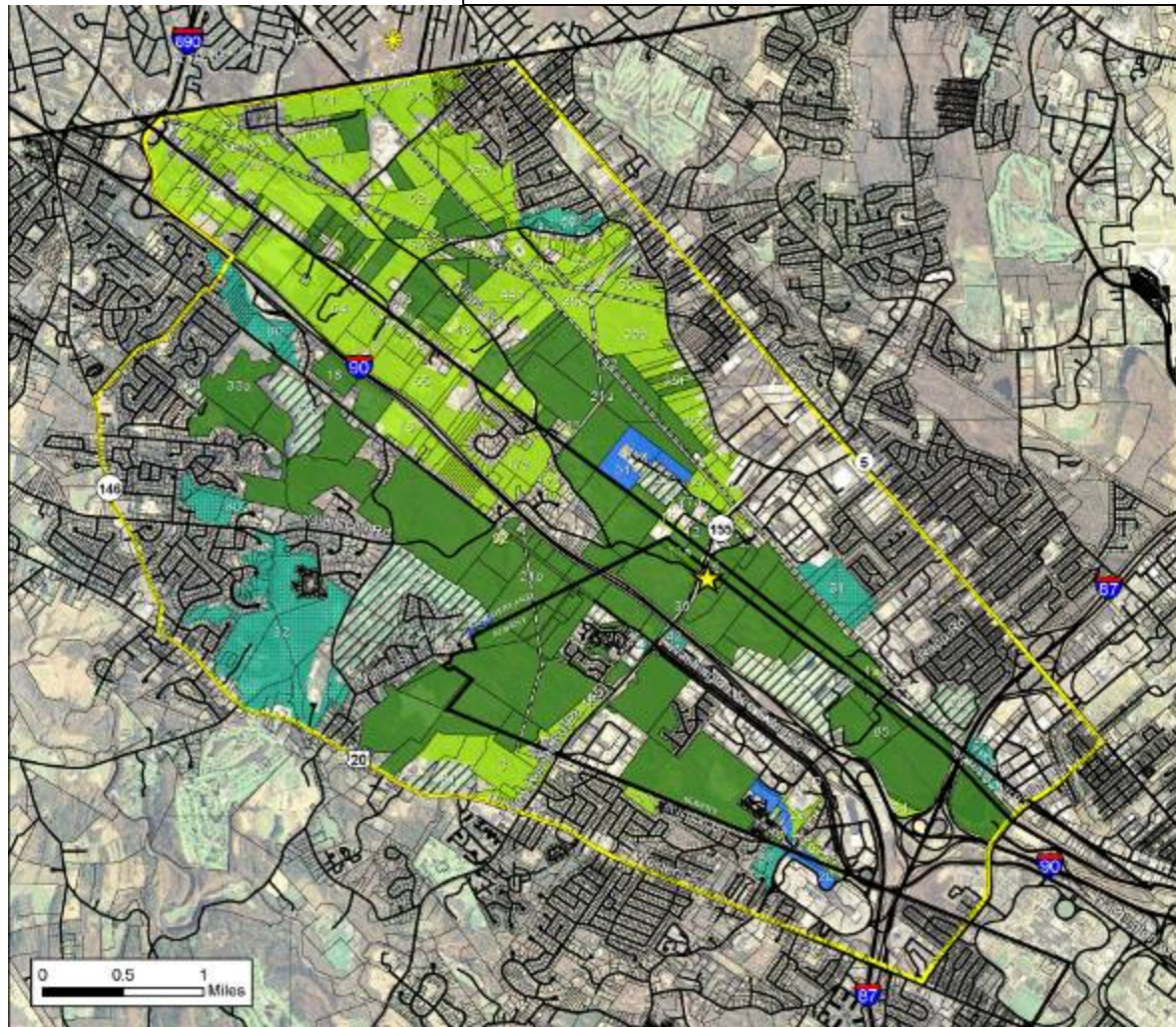


July 11, 2022

Stanford Park Future Trails Map



Albany Pine Bush Preserve Management Plan Map



Management Plan For The Albany Pine Bush Preserve

Woodlawn Preserve

Discovery Center

Study Area
13,000 acres

2017 Vision Map

- Protected Lands
- Recommended Full Protection
- Recommended Partial Protection
- Protection Agreement/Easement
- Recommended Open Space

Sources:

Imagery - 2007, 1 foot Natural Color Orthoimagery,
New York State Office of Cyber Security & Critical
Infrastructure Coordination

Vision Map - 2010, Albany Pine Bush Preserve

Prepared By:



March 2017

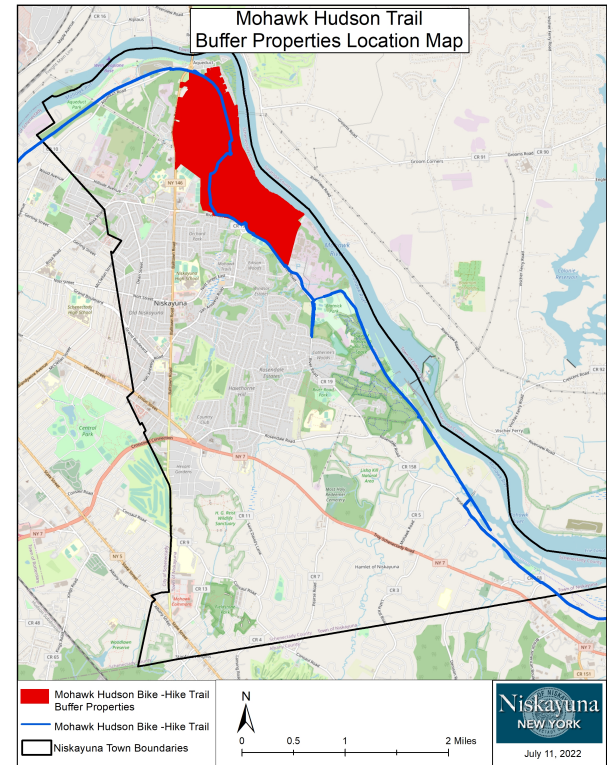
Figure 8:
**2017 Protection Priorities
and Vision**

Prepared by: Tyler Briggs, Fire Management and GIS Specialist

MOHAWK HUDSON BIKE-HIKE TRAIL CORRIDOR INVENTORY

May 14, 2022 Site Walk along MHBHT

The northeastern section of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike Hike Trail (MHBHT) runs between three large, wooded properties that are vulnerable to development (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Location Map to right and page 62 and Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Surrounding Open Space Map below and page 66). Protecting lands adjacent to the MHBHT can buffer the Trail, allowing hikers and bikers to continue to experience the wonder and beauty of nature along the Trail, including mature woods, wetlands, streams and waterfalls as well as views of the Mohawk River. Protecting adjacent land can also allow new trailhead connections to the MHBHT, increasing pedestrian and bicycle access while conserving natural habitats within the Town.



The Appalachian Trail Conservancy works to protect land and views surrounding the Appalachian Trail (AT), recognizing that over-development along the AT jeopardizes the trail. Similarly, **lands adjacent to the MHBHT should be considered for protection to maintain and augment the MHBHT experience for visitors.** It is worth noting that the Lisha Kill Preserve is heavily over-used and shows signs of wear. **The need for additional wooded open space is strong in Niskayuna.**

REGIONAL SETTING:

The Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail (MHBHT) is 97-miles long and connects the Erie Canalway and Empire State Trails. Over a quarter of a million people use the Niskayuna portion of the Trail each year.¹³ The Trail runs along the eastern and northern edges of Niskayuna on the rails of the former Troy & Schenectady Railroad (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Location Map previous page and page 62). The northeastern section of the MHBHT runs between three large, wooded properties: the 522-acre GE property on both sides of the Trail, the 81-acre SI Group property that lies on the west side of the Trail and the 19-acre Popolizio property that lies on the east side of the Trail (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Surrounding Open Space Map previous page and page 66). The SI Group has over thirty acres of forest abutting the Trail, GE has over 150 acres of forest and fields abutting the trail and the Mohawk River and



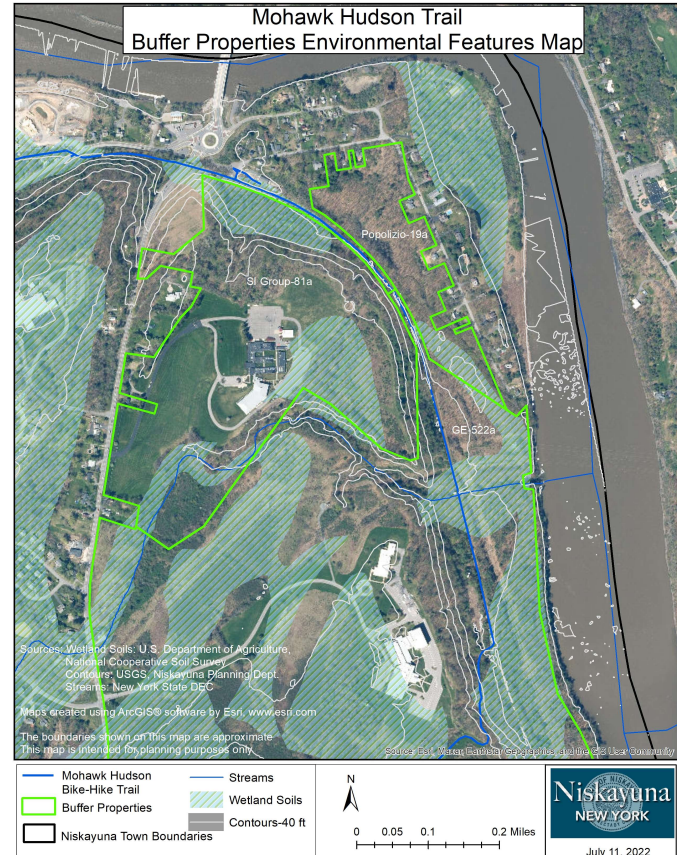
¹³ Capital District Trail User Counts, 2016. Capital District Transportation Committee.

the Popolizio property has nineteen acres of forest, streams and wetlands abutting the trail (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Satellite Photograph Map previous page and page 63).

Many companies across the country are shifting their operations from 'corporate campus' locations that were popular in the late 20th century and moving offices back to more urban areas. As this is occurring, vacant corporate campuses are finding new uses as mixed-use commercial-residential complexes, as educational institutions, as affordable housing and other uses. Niskayuna has several such corporate campuses and the Town may want to consider options in the future for such properties if ownership shifts. **The campuses have some of the largest remaining natural, wooded areas in Niskayuna and protecting these natural resources should be considered and is consistent with the Town's Comprehensive Plan.**

PHYSICAL & NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The Trail is surrounded by mature forest of both sides (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Satellite Photograph Map previous page and page 63). Two streams flow from the steep slopes on the western side of the Trail, another stream flows along the Trail's eastern edge. The streams flow into large wetlands on the eastern side of the Trail before entering the Mohawk River (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Environmental Features Map to right and page 64). The western side of the Trail has steep slopes that drop from a height of 330 feet above sea level to 270 feet at the Trail itself. The eastern portion of the Trail is



flatter and slopes another 30 feet to 230 feet above sea level at the Mohawk River (see Mohawk Trail Buffer Properties Environmental Features Map previous page and page 64).

The Trail is located in a geographic region known as the Schenectady Formation. Bedrock along the Trail consists of shale rock. Shale is exposed in several places along the Trail and where the streams have eroded it, **the shale has created dramatic ravines and waterfalls where these streams meet the Mohawk River. These waterfalls are on private property but if opened to the public and properly signed with warnings and fencing, they could be attractive destinations for people hiking and biking on the Trail.**



Shale-lined ravine

ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES:

FORESTS:

The forest along the Trail is mature with large white oaks, red oaks and hickories. The understory has bladdernut, serviceberry, hophornbeam and striped maple trees while the shrub layer has witch hazel and low bush blueberry shrubs. The ground layer includes a remarkable variety of native plants including: yellow stem violet, wood sedge, moonseed vine, anise root, miterwort, trout lily, trillium, Canada mayflower, sarsaparilla, golden Alexander, May apple, coltsfoot, Virginia waterleaf, Christmas fern and polypody. The great variety of plant species found here is due in part to the spoils which, judging by the plant species, are high pH, low acidity soils which are not typical of northeastern forests. High pH soils are also more hospitable to a range of insects, amphibians and other wildlife. The Trail's high biodiversity is also due to the fact that it has been undisturbed for many years and has very invasive plants.

Birds were abundant in terms of numbers and species and include red start, scarlet tanager, pee-wee and red eyed vireo in wooded areas and great crested flycatcher and chestnut sided warblers along the power lines.

Amphibian egg masses, probably green frog eggs, along with tadpoles and river dace were found in the streams and ditches alongside the Trail.



Amphibian egg masses and tadpoles

MHBHT WILDFLOWERS:



Virginia waterleaf



Golden Alexander



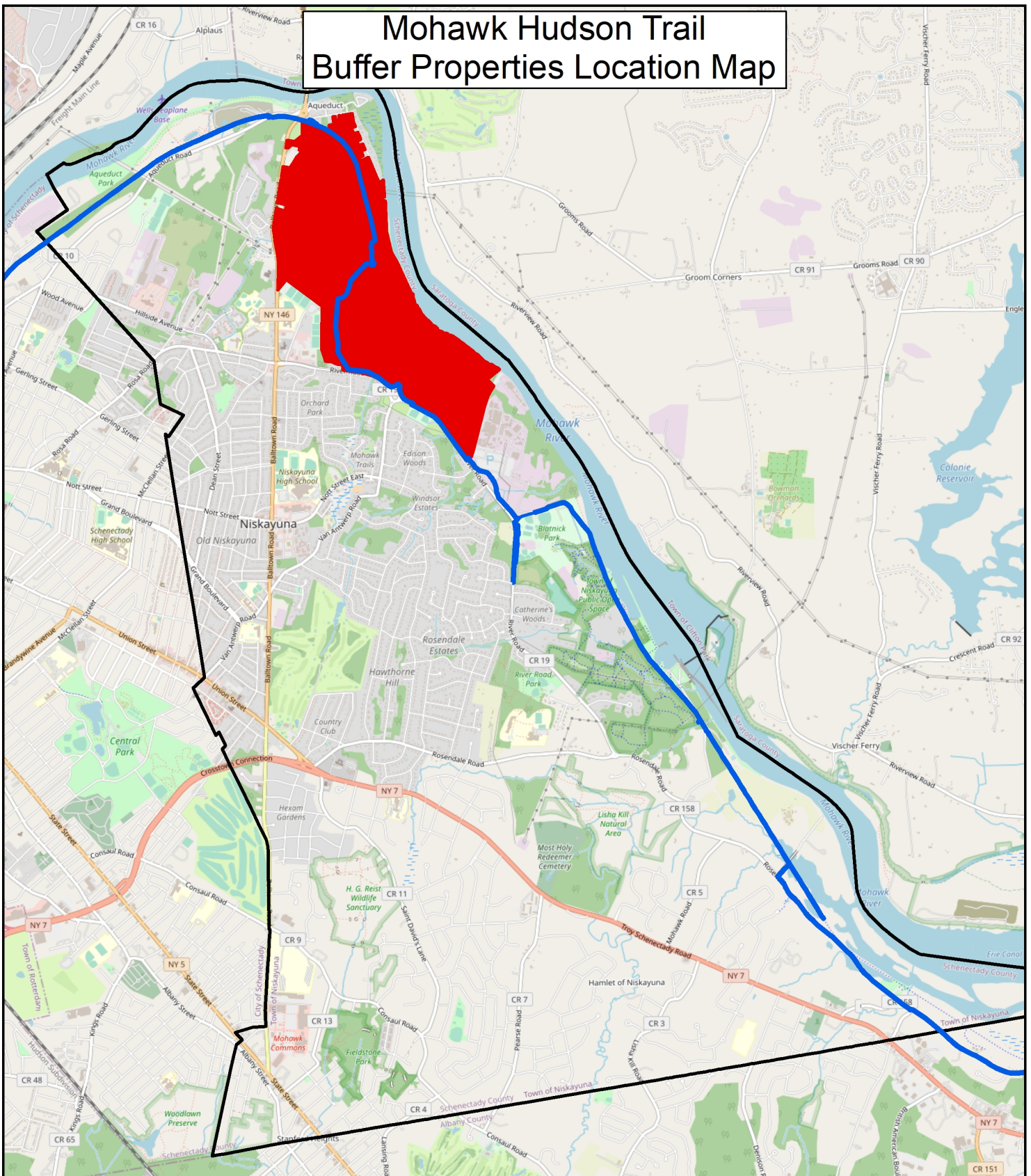
Miterwort

CONSERVATION VALUES:

The Trail's mature forests, streams and wetlands provide a myriad of ecosystem services including: water filtration, groundwater recharge, stormwater regulation, drought moderation, flood control, erosion prevention on the steep slopes along the Mohawk River, air pollutant and greenhouse gas absorption, oxygen production, carbon sequestration, temperature modulation through shading and cooling and nutrient cycling. The forests also provide habitat for other plants, insects and pollinators and wildlife including food, cover, roosting, nesting and stop-over sites for migratory birds and other wildlife. Situated as it is among other contiguous blocks of undeveloped land to the north and south along the Mohawk River including Mohawk River State Park to the south, this forest provides wildlife corridors allowing wildlife and plants, to move freely in a relatively developed area. The plants themselves allow the forest to regenerate in the future by providing seeds and shelter for native forest regeneration.

These forests have other conservation values for Niskayuna's residents and visitors including protecting the scenic views from the Mohawk River and from the Mohawk River Bike-Hike Trail. The Trail's forests also provide educational and recreational values and should be protected.

Mohawk Hudson Trail Buffer Properties Location Map



- Mohawk Hudson Bike -Hike Trail Buffer Properties
- Mohawk Hudson Bike -Hike Trail
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries



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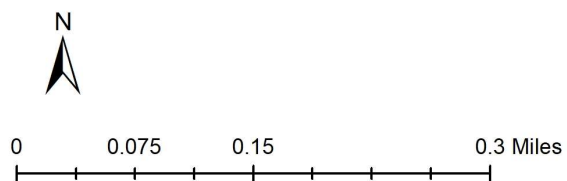


July 11, 2022

Mohawk Hudson Trail Buffer Properties Satellite Photograph Map

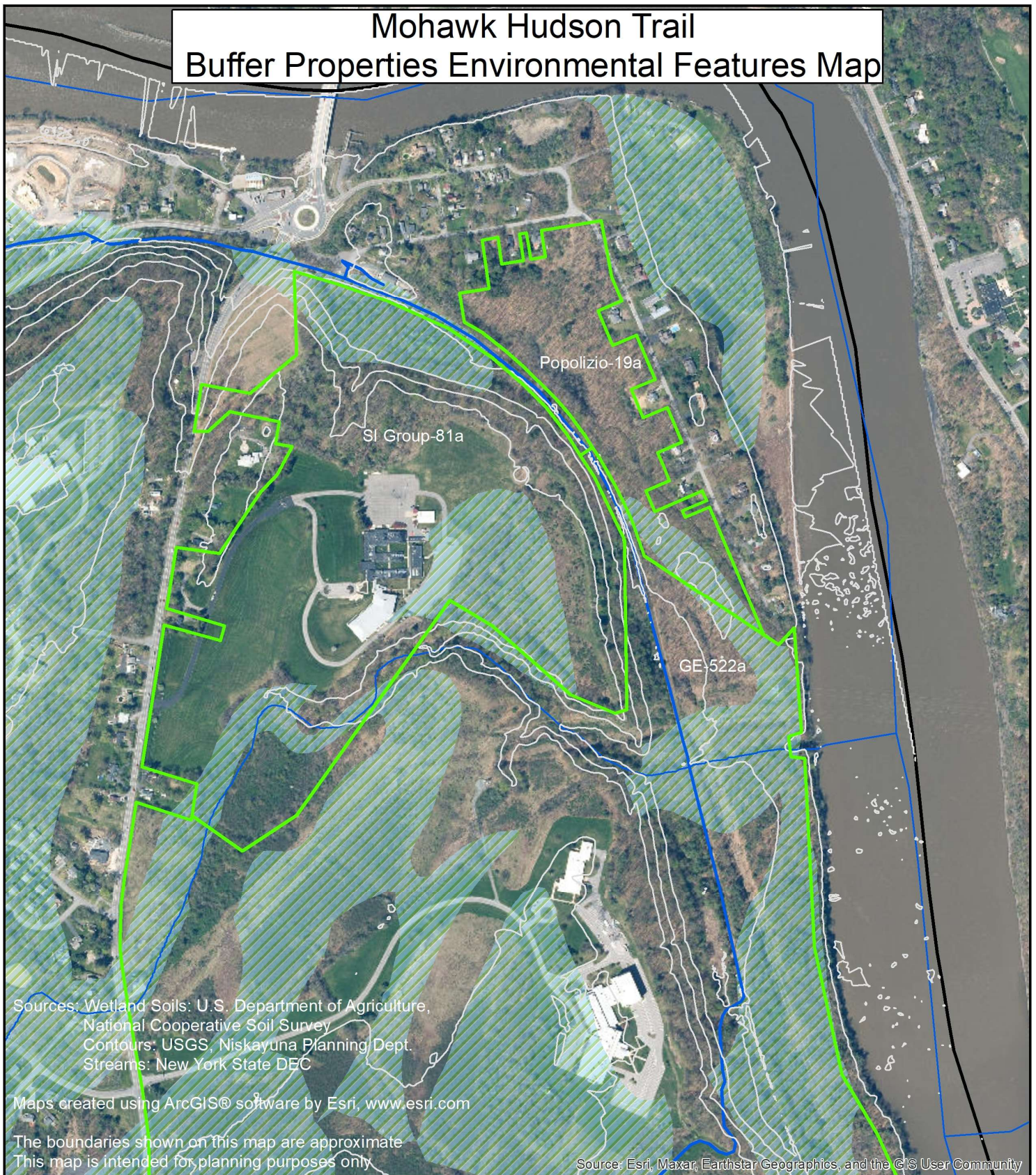


- Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail
- Buffer Properties
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries



July 11, 2022

Mohawk Hudson Trail Buffer Properties Environmental Features Map



- Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail
- Buffer Properties
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries
- Streams
- Wetland Soils
- Contours-40 ft

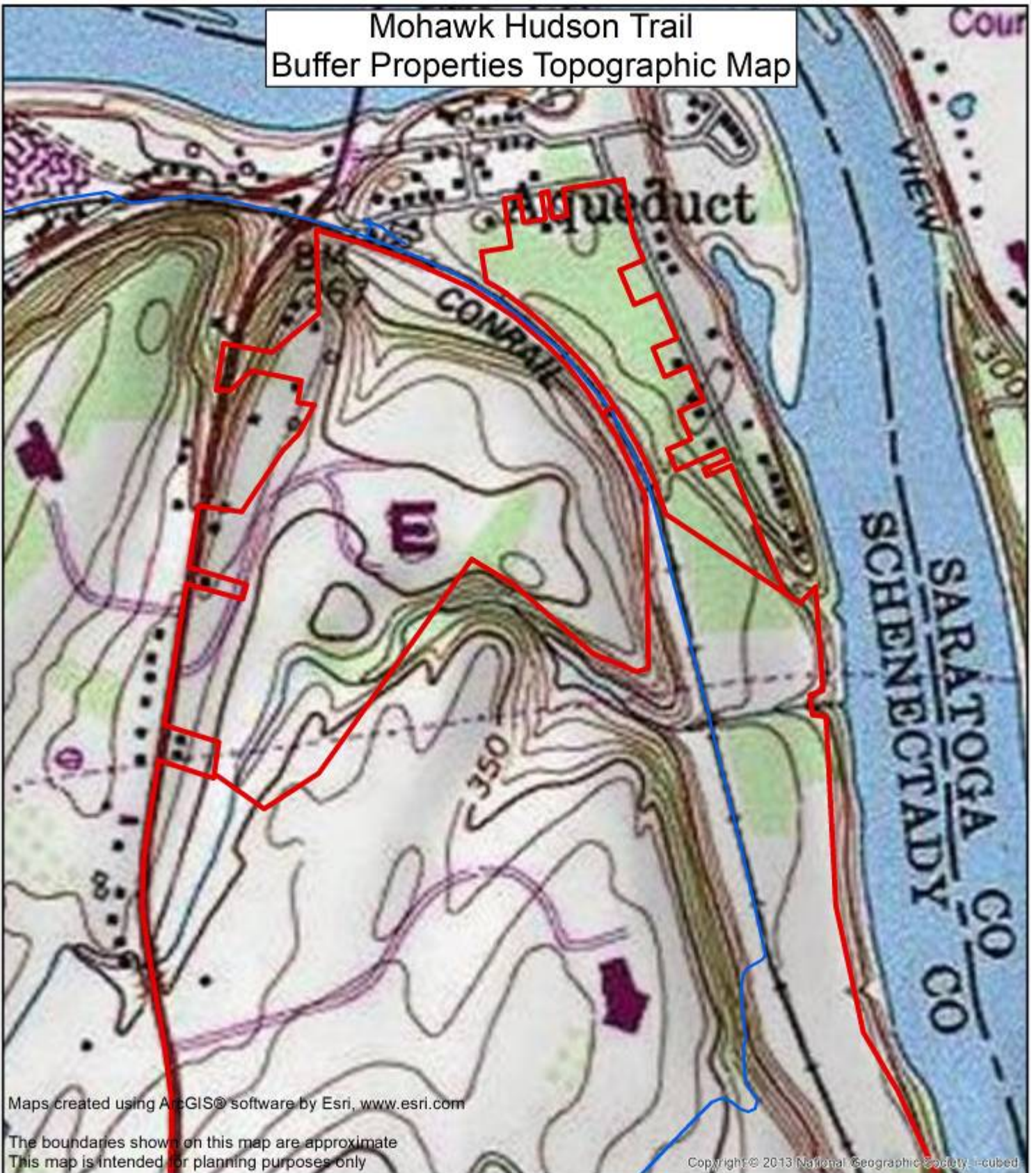


0 0.05 0.1 0.2 Miles

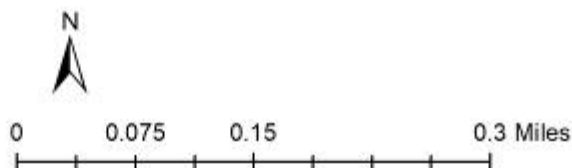


July 11, 2022

Mohawk Hudson Trail Buffer Properties Topographic Map



- Mohawk Hudson Bike Hike Trail
- Buffer Properties
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries

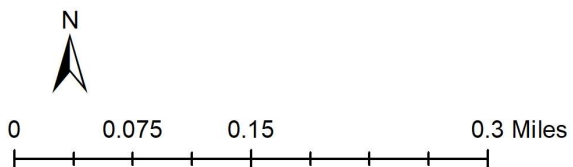


July 11, 2022

Mohawk Hudson Trail Buffer Properties Surrounding Open Space Map



- Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail
- Buffer Properties
- Open Space-State of NY
- Niskayuna Town Boundaries



July 11, 2022

