



Town of Ashford



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Community Resilience Building Workshop

Summary of Findings

July 2019

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Overview

The need for municipalities, academic institutions, regional planning organizations, states and federal agencies to increase resilience and adapt to extreme weather events and a changing climate is strikingly evident amongst the communities of the state of Connecticut. Recent events such as Tropical Storm Irene and Sandy have reinforced this urgency and compelled leading communities like the Town of Ashford to proactively collaborate on planning and mitigating risks. Ultimately, this type of leadership is to be commended because it will reduce the vulnerability of municipal residents, infrastructure, and ecosystems and serve as a model for other communities in Connecticut, New England, and the Nation.

In the spring of 2019, the Town of Ashford embarked on certification via Sustainable CT. As part of that certification, Sustainable CT and the Nature Conservancy provided the Town with a voluntary process to conduct an assessment of climate change impacts. In June 2019, a municipal-based core team organized a Community Resilience Building Workshop facilitated by the Nature Conservancy in partnership with Sustainable CT. The core directive of this effort was the engagement with and between community stakeholders to facilitate the assessment of climate vulnerabilities and the education, planning and ultimately implementation of priority adaptation actions for Ashford. The Workshop's central objectives were to:

- Define top local natural and climate-related hazards of concern;
- Identify existing and future vulnerabilities and strengths;
- Develop prioritized actions for the Town of Ashford;
- Identify opportunities to collaboratively advance actions to increase resilience.



For the Workshop, the Town of Ashford employed a unique “anywhere at any scale”, community-driven process known as Community Resilience Building (CRB) (www.CommunityResilienceBuilding.org). The CRB’s Risk Matrix and various data and maps were integrated into the CRB Workshop process to provide both decision-support and risk visualization around shared values and priorities across Ashford. Using this CRB process, rich with information, experience and dialogue, the participants produced findings which are outlined in this summary report. The following report provides an overview of the top hazards, current concerns and challenges, current strengths, and proposed actions to improve Ashford’s resilience to natural and climate-related hazards today, and in the future.

The summary of findings transcribed in this report, like any that concern the evolving nature of risk assessment and associated action, are proffered for comments, corrections and updates from workshop attendees and additional stakeholders alike. The leadership displayed by the Town of Ashford on community resilience building will benefit from the continuous and expanding participation of all those concerned.

Summary of Findings

Top Hazards and Vulnerable Areas for the Community

During the CRB Workshop, community members were asked to identify the top hazards for the Town of Ashford. The hazard of greatest concern to the participants was intense wind associated with winter storms and Nor’easters. The other hazards discussed included precipitation-driven flooding from rivers and streams and extreme temperatures or heatwaves. These hazards have direct and increasing impacts on Ashford’s residents and resources such as its neighborhoods, natural areas (river corridors, wetlands, watersheds, parks), farms, roads, bridges, places of employment, drinking and wastewater systems, health care facilities, social support service to vulnerable populations, and other critical infrastructure and community assets.



Top Hazards and Areas of Concern for the Community

Top Hazards

- Wind (associated with Nor'easters and winter storms)
- Nor'easters and winter snow storms

Additional Hazards discussed:

- Flooding (precipitation-driven inland and river)
- Extreme Temperatures and/or Heatwaves

Areas of Concern in Ashford*

Ecosystems: Hazardous Trees (along transportation corridors and municipal-owned property), Gypsy Moth and drought stress on Trees across municipality, Mount Hope River (water quality issues), Lyme Disease (vectors and proximity to people).

Transportation: Route 44, Route 74, Route 89.

Infrastructure: Senior Housing, Birch Hill, August Hill, Ashford Hill, Perry Hill, Woodlawn, 3 Large Dams (along Route 74, Route 44, Ashford Lake), Apartment Complexes, Knowlton Hall (needs back-up generator), Lakeview Drive, Axe Factory Road Bridge.

Vulnerable Populations: Renters or Transient Students, Homebound Elderly, Developmentally Disabled, Non-English Speaking, Low Income, Farmers (people and livestock), Volunteers (decline over time), Ashford Lake and Lake Chaffee (high density population).

*Information above from workshop participants as well as from the NECCOG Multi-Jurisdictional NHMP Update (2016).



Current Concerns and Challenges Presented by Hazards

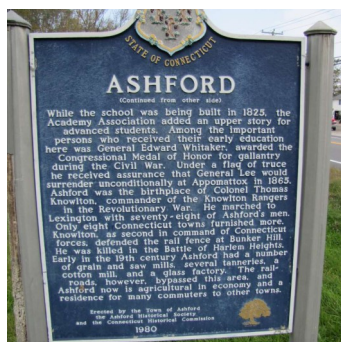
The Town of Ashford has several concerns and faces multiple challenges related to the impacts of natural hazards and climate change. In recent years, Ashford has experienced a series of highly disruptive and damaging weather events including Tropical Storm Irene (August 2011), Tropical Storm Sandy, (October 2012), winter Nor'easter Nemo (February 2013), and other impactful events in the last five years. Impacts from Irene included heavy rain-induced inland flooding and wind damage. Sandy caused extended power outages across portions of Ashford. Winter storms drop excessive snow on the Town knocking out power and isolating residents and neighborhoods. The magnitude and intensity of these events and others across Connecticut has increased awareness of natural hazards and climatic change, while motivating communities like Ashford to comprehensively improve resilience.

This series of extreme weather events highlights that for Ashford the impacts from hazards are diverse; they range from limited flooding of roads and low-lying areas near rivers and wetlands during intense storms and heavy precipitation events to property damage from trees, wind, snow, and ice. Longer periods of elevated heat, particularly in July and August, have raised concerns about vulnerable segments of the population including the elderly and disabled. The combination of these issues presents a challenge to preparedness, response and mitigation priorities and requires comprehensive yet tailored actions for particular locations and/or areas across Ashford.

The workshop participants were generally in agreement that Ashford is experiencing more intense and frequent storm events and heat waves. The impacts have affected the daily activities of most residents. Additionally, there was a general concern about the challenges of being prepared with contingency plans for worst case scenarios during different times of the year (i.e. major disasters, storms, major hurricanes (Cat-3 or above)) particularly in the fall/winter due to more intense storms.



(Credit: ctfirephoto.org)



(Credit: Town of Ashford)



(Credit: ctwoodlands.org)



Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges

Road and Transportation Network

As evident during Winter Storm Nemo (2011), the state-owned major transportation corridors through Ashford including Route 44, 74, and 89 are highly vulnerable to major snowstorms that result in downed trees and power lines. These major state roads are a strength in terms of the capacity to move people in and out of town but can also be a vulnerability if roads are obstructed. Ongoing engagement with state DOT and electric utility remain critical actions for Ashford to maintain access and resilience of the road network across the municipality.

Tree Hazards and Management

The concern of tree condition and placement in proximity to transportation corridors and structures is a principal challenge for municipal staff and residents across Ashford. In many locations standing trees that have been weakened by gypsy moths become susceptible to falling due to rain-soaked soils and wind during summer months as well as ice and snow during winter months. While a great deal of tree management has occurred lately across the municipality within the public right-of-way, there are many situations with potential tree hazards located outside and adjoining transportation corridors. Currently, there is no process in place to remedy the potential hazards presented by privately-owned trees other than property owners self-identifying the risk and seeking solutions independently.

Rural Character

The rural character and nature of Ashford results in residents and supporting facilities being extremely dispersed across the municipality. This dispersement can make it challenging to respond in times of disasters and emergencies. The challenge of access is often reduced due to the strong informal system or network of residents looking out for neighbors that check-in with each other. As new members move in and join the Ashford community there is a need to connect them with the informal network and the tradition of self-reliance.



Current Strengths and Assets

Because of the recent experiences with extreme weather, the Town of Ashford is well acquainted with existing and shared strengths. Reinforcing best practices and enhancing available assets will generate greater benefits to the Town and adjoining communities through increased resiliency to more frequent and intense storms, as well as to long term impacts from the ongoing increases in air temperature, precipitation, and drought.

- Clearly, the responsive and committed leadership exhibited by officials and staff is a very appreciated strength within the Town of Ashford. Ongoing collaboration between the Town, adjoining municipalities, Northeastern Connecticut Regional Council of Government, DEMS Region 4, business community, faith-based organization, and NGOs among others on the priorities identified below will help to advance comprehensive, cost-effective approaches to community resilience building.
- The Town has solid, highly experienced, staff with access to adequate resources for most emergency situations. The coordination amongst various departments including leadership, Police, Fire, and EMS was cited as an ongoing, and highly valued community strength despite the need to maintain a flow of volunteers over time (i.e. Community Emergency Response team, Medical Reserve Corps).
- Community-based communications between the municipality and residents via the monthly Ashford Citizen.
- Relatively intact forested watershed surrounding ponds and wetlands across Ashford coupled with riparian corridors along waterways which provide flood storage, enhance public amenities for recreation and gathering, and increase ecological function and biodiversity.
- Recent replacement and resizing of critical bridges and culverts to accommodate additional water and fish passage that model resilience approaches for other communities to replicate.
- Several farms and supportive residents that help to increase availability of locally produced food.
- Ashford Housing Authority with emergency operations plan, emergency supplies onsite, generator, medication refrigeration, and close proximity to senior center as a back-up.



Top Recommendations to Improve Resilience

A common thread throughout the workshop discussions was the recognition that Ashford needs to be better prepared through longer term community-based, contingency planning across all areas of concern. This need and additional core highlights surfaced by the Workshop participants are addressed below.

Higher Priority

- Establish a housing commission to consider assisting with short and long-term issues and education (i.e. increasing senior population, need for affordable and low-income housing, having adequate heating/cooling, resilience, energy efficiency, maintenance, etc.) related to housing affordability and access, advocacy for residents, housing standards, and elderly housing needs.
- Assess vulnerabilities of electrical supply and distribution systems across Ashford and work with utilities to seek longer-term solutions. Town to continue to seek ways to diversify electric supply via renewable energy sources.
- Continue to conduct energy efficiency audits in publicly-owned buildings and evaluate opportunities to expand audits to privately-owned businesses and residents with an eye towards making Ashford more energy resilient.
- Work closely with utilities in Ashford to put into place solutions that reduce the extent and duration of power outages (i.e. tree wire replacement, underground powerlines, etc.).
- Help educate Ashford citizens regarding the condition and characteristics of trees on privately-owned property that pose potential risk due to falling or loss of limbs near roadways and suggest potential recommended steps (i.e. securing professional evaluation from tree company) to reduce the risk via the Ashford Citizen.

Moderate Priority

- Look to expand the coordination capacity of the Our Town, Our Future committee to ensure intersections between and across other committees are effectively and efficiently directed for the greatest good to the community.



Community Resilience Building Workshop Recommendations

Moderate Priority (cont'd)

- Continue to track water quality issues for the Mount Hope River being monitored and evaluated via CT DEEP and the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District.
- Ensure that the immediate chain of command related to response and recovery from a major disaster as well as a longer-term succession plan is made more readily available to all interested parties (i.e. residents, commissions, and municipal employees) to increase clarity and deeper understanding of roles and responsibilities through time.
- Engage and train younger residents including youth, young professionals, and young family members from the community to become CERT or Medical Reserve Corps volunteers. Ensure interested individuals find alternative volunteer opportunities as needed.
- Look to continue the town-wide questionnaire to ensure all those willing residents identify individuals within the community with disabilities and medical needs get added to the Special Needs Citizens list maintained by the municipalities in conjunction with the electrical utility for prioritization of power restoration purposes.
- Increase volunteers for the Senior Bus by encouraging potential candidates to get Public Service Licenses.
- Coordinate with adjoining towns on volunteerism to ensure residents of surrounding towns have cooperative access to opportunities that meet the greatest need.
- Install evacuation signage across municipality to reduce confusion and reinforce preparedness of residents.
- Look to strengthen the local farming community to ensure a regular source of locally produced goods for Ashford residents.
- Continue providing education (i.e. Forest Legacy Program) to help land owners identify ways to keep their land undeveloped in a manageable way (PA 490).



(Credit: Torin Radicioni/SustainableCT)



Community Resilience Building Workshop Recommendations

Moderate Priority (cont'd)

- Run stories on emergency preparedness activities and checklists for residents, households, and renters in Ashford Citizen. Continue targeting times at the beginning of hurricane season and before winter.
- Provide educational opportunities and potentially workshops to increase awareness about the vulnerability of the community to Lyme Disease. This should include looking at examples of actions other communities have taken or could be recommended for Ashford residents as well as municipal operations and procedures to help reduce the presence of the disease and its vectors.

Lower Priority

- While not a large concern, continue to increase awareness about minimizing wildfires through outdoor campfires and other potentially careless behavior.
- Continue to evaluate which trees need to be trimmed during work by utility in collaboration with tree warden and Department of Public Works.
- Seek to fill vacancies on various commissions to ensure continuity of leadership in critical roles.
- Continue tax abatement program for dairy farms and orchards to help incentive farmers to not sell lands for development and help preserve the rural character of the community.
- Bridge with Ashford Business Association to discuss opportunities and interest to assist local businesses with contingency/emergency planning to increase continuity and viability post disaster.



CRB Workshop Participants: Department/Organization

Town of Ashford - Board of Selectmen

Town of Ashford - Planning and Zoning

Town of Ashford - Sustainability

Town of Ashford - Land Use

Town of Ashford - Out Town Our Future

Town of Ashford - Residents

Ashford Housing Authority

Northeastern Connecticut Regional Council of Governments

CRB Workshop Project Team: Organization and Role

Ashford Liaison

Christine Abikoff - Town of Ashford

Loretta Wrobel - Town of Ashford

Workshop Team

The Nature Conservancy – Adam Whelchel, Ph.D. (Lead Facilitator)

Sustainable CT - Jessica LeClair (Support Lead)

Institute for Sustainable Energy Intern - Torin Radicioni (Scribe)

Sustainable CT Fellows - Alexis Meehan (Scribe)

Municipal Support Liaison - Sustainable CT - Colleen Dollard (Scribe)

Recommended Citation

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Town of Ashford, Sustainable CT, The Nature Conservancy. Ashford, Connecticut.

Acknowledgements

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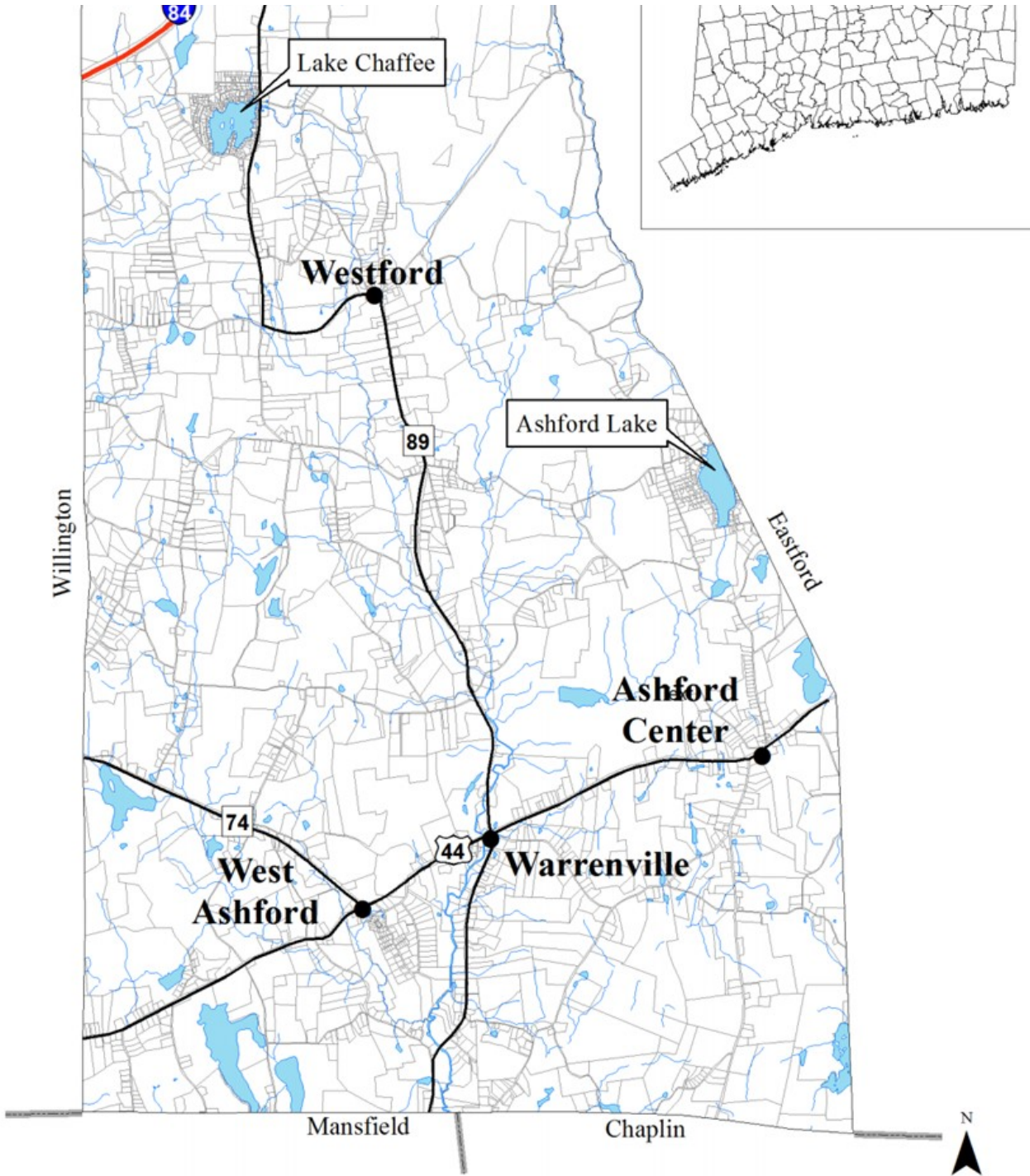
This project was made possible in part through the generous contribution of the Workshop team by The Nature Conservancy and Sustainable CT to conduct Ashford’s Community Resilience Building Workshop in close partnership with the Town’s Core Team.



Appendix

Base Map

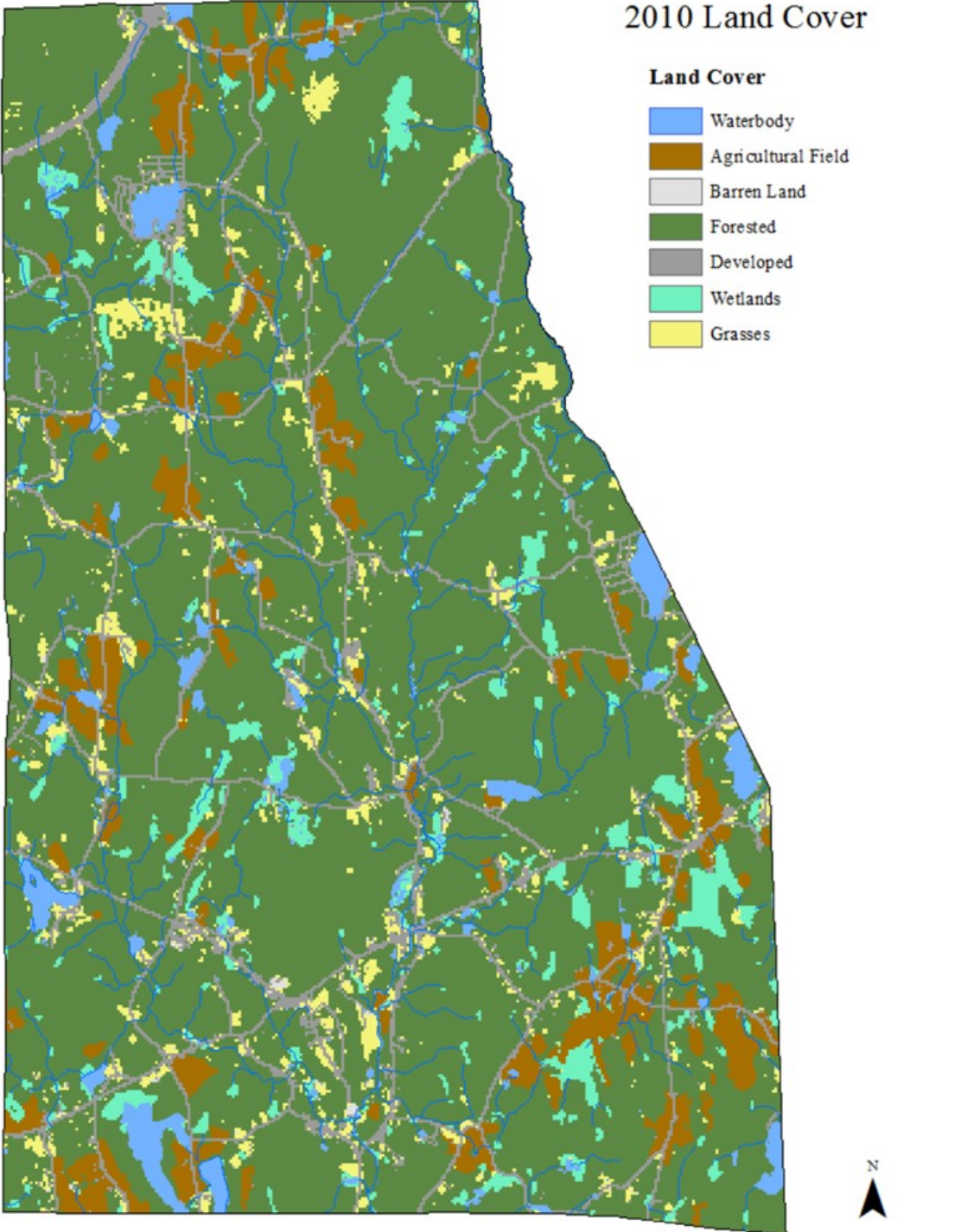




Resources and Maps Used During Workshop

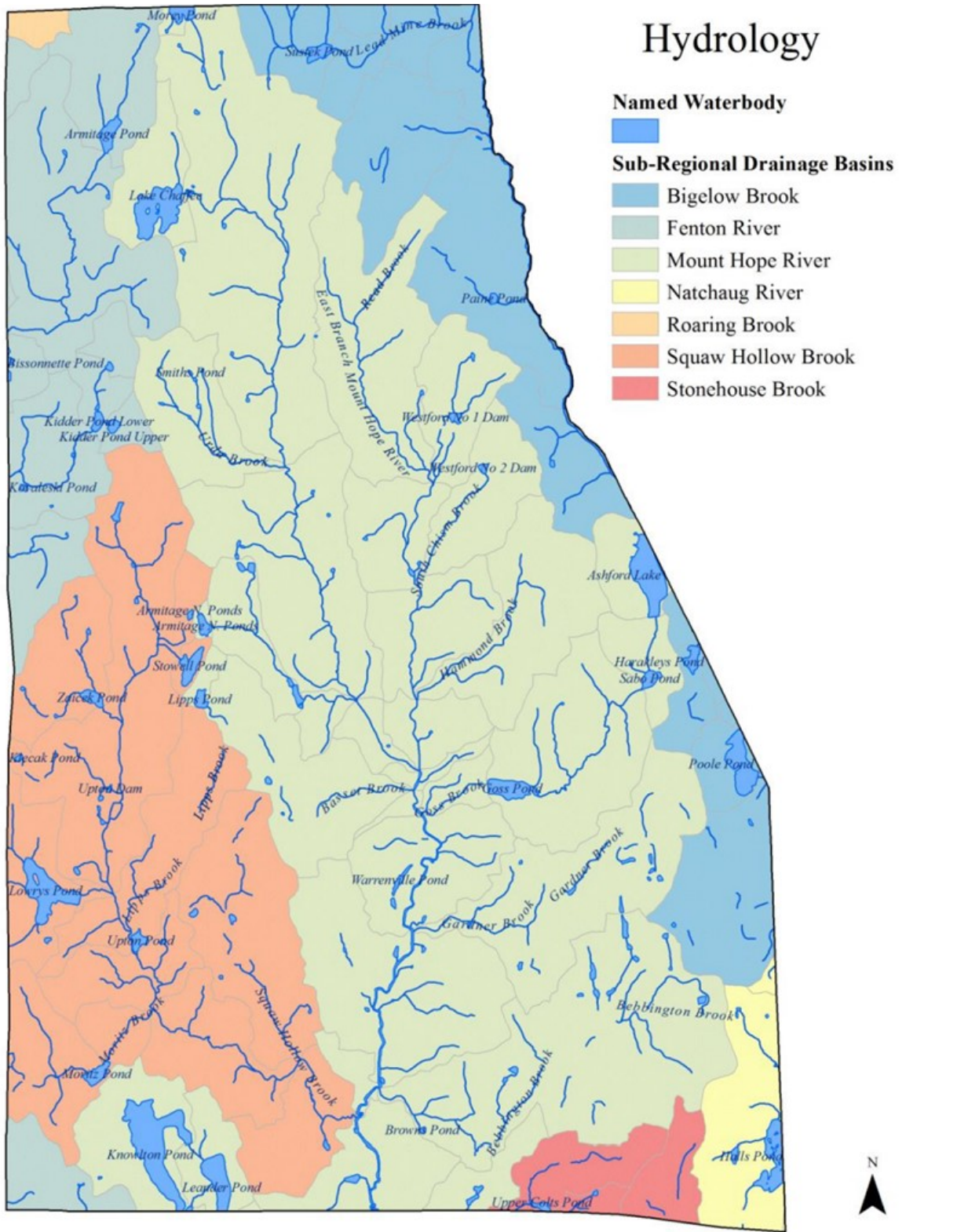


2010 Land Cover



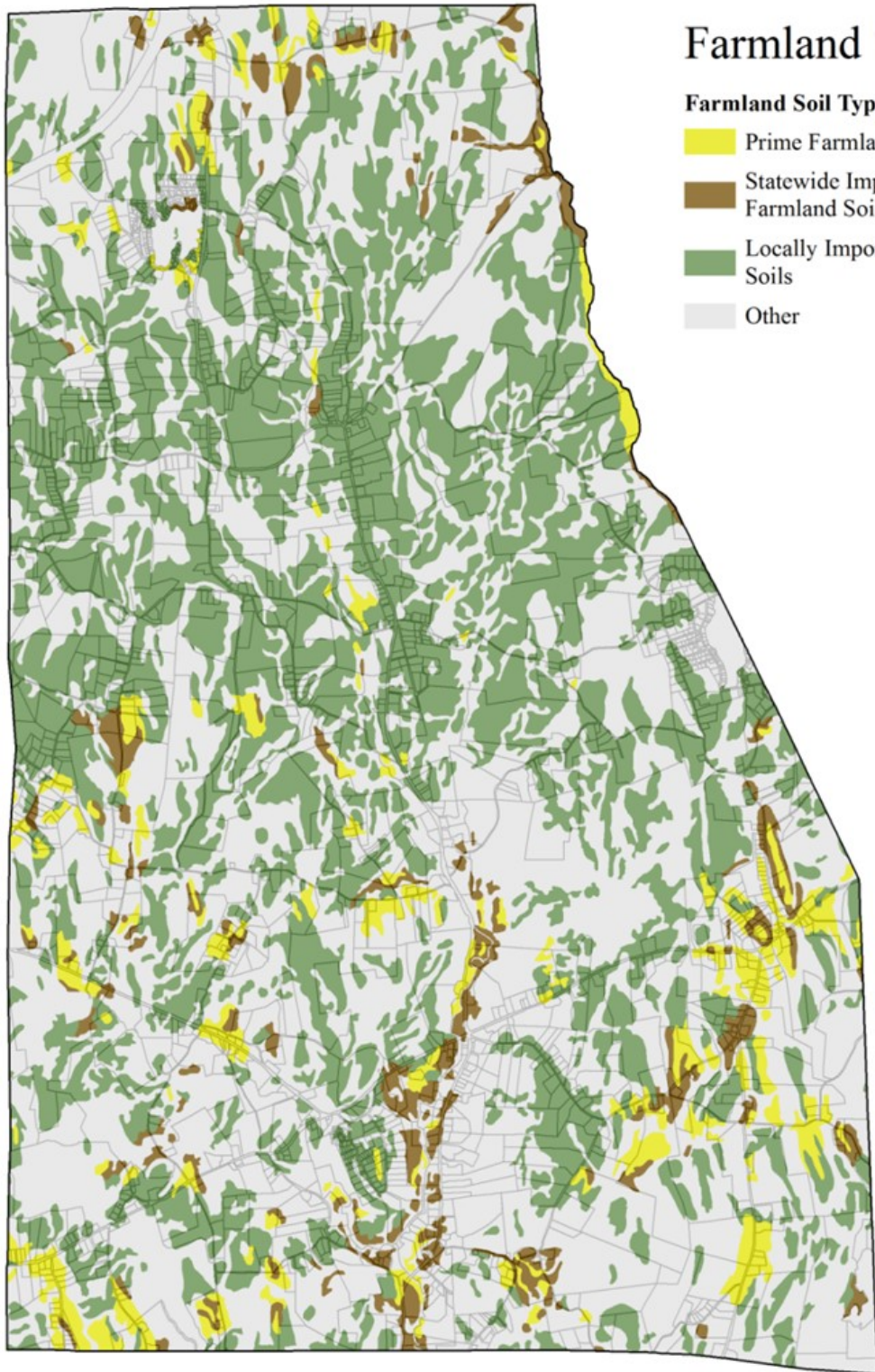
Source: University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research
This map should be used for general planning purposes only. Data is not authoritative.





Sources: Town of Ashford; Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
 This map should be used for general planning purposes only. Data is not authoritative.



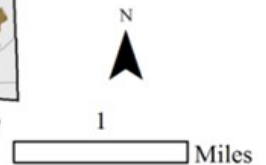


Farmland Soils

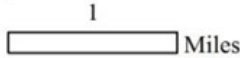
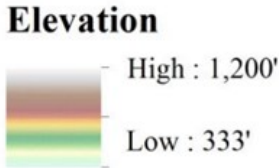
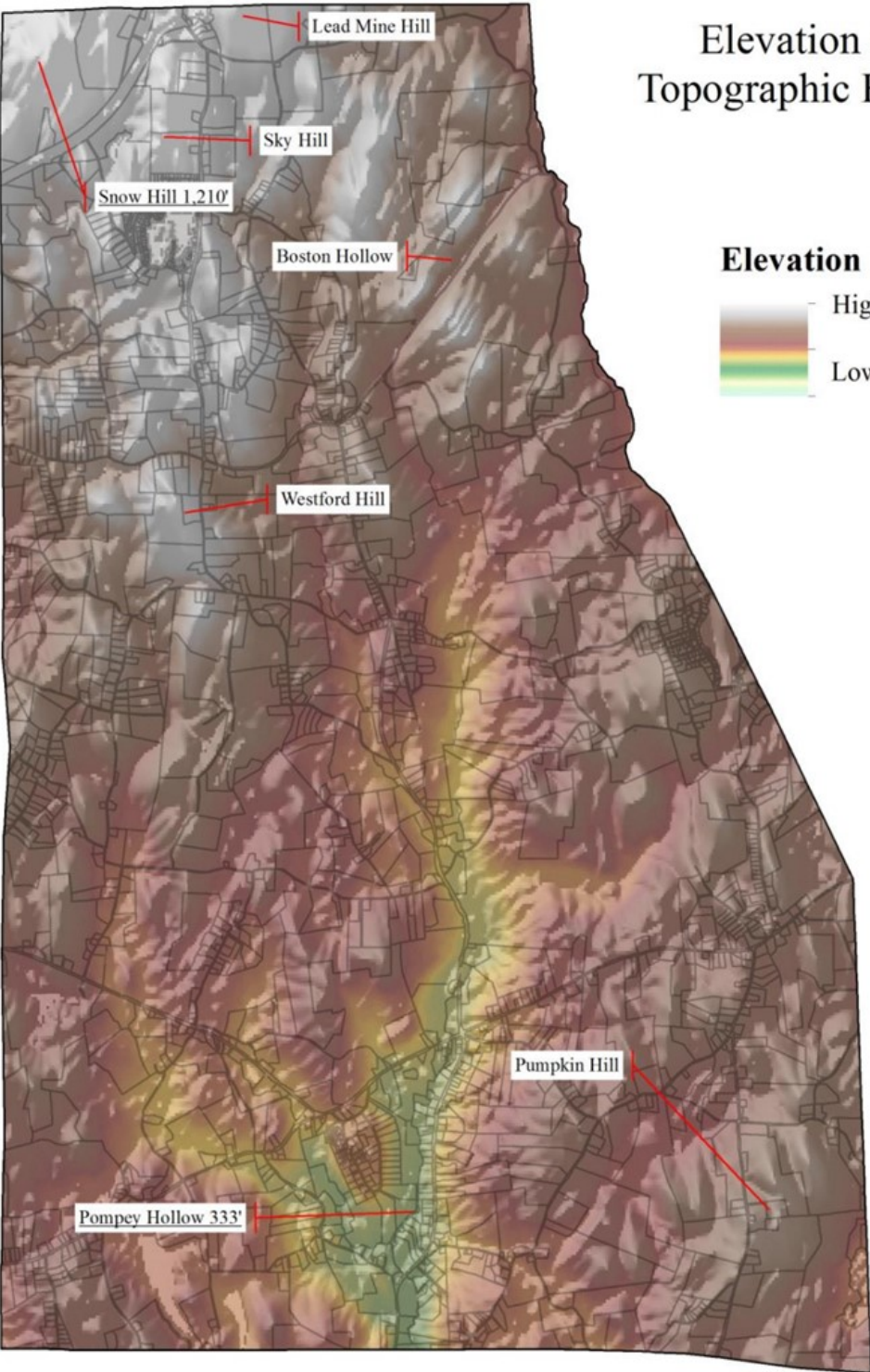
Farmland Soil Type

- Prime Farmland Soils
- Statewide Important Farmland Soils
- Locally Important Farmland Soils
- Other

Sources: Town of Ashford; Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
 This map should be used for general planning purposes only. Data is not authoritative.



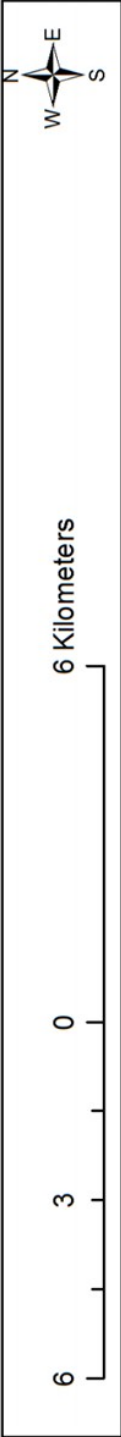
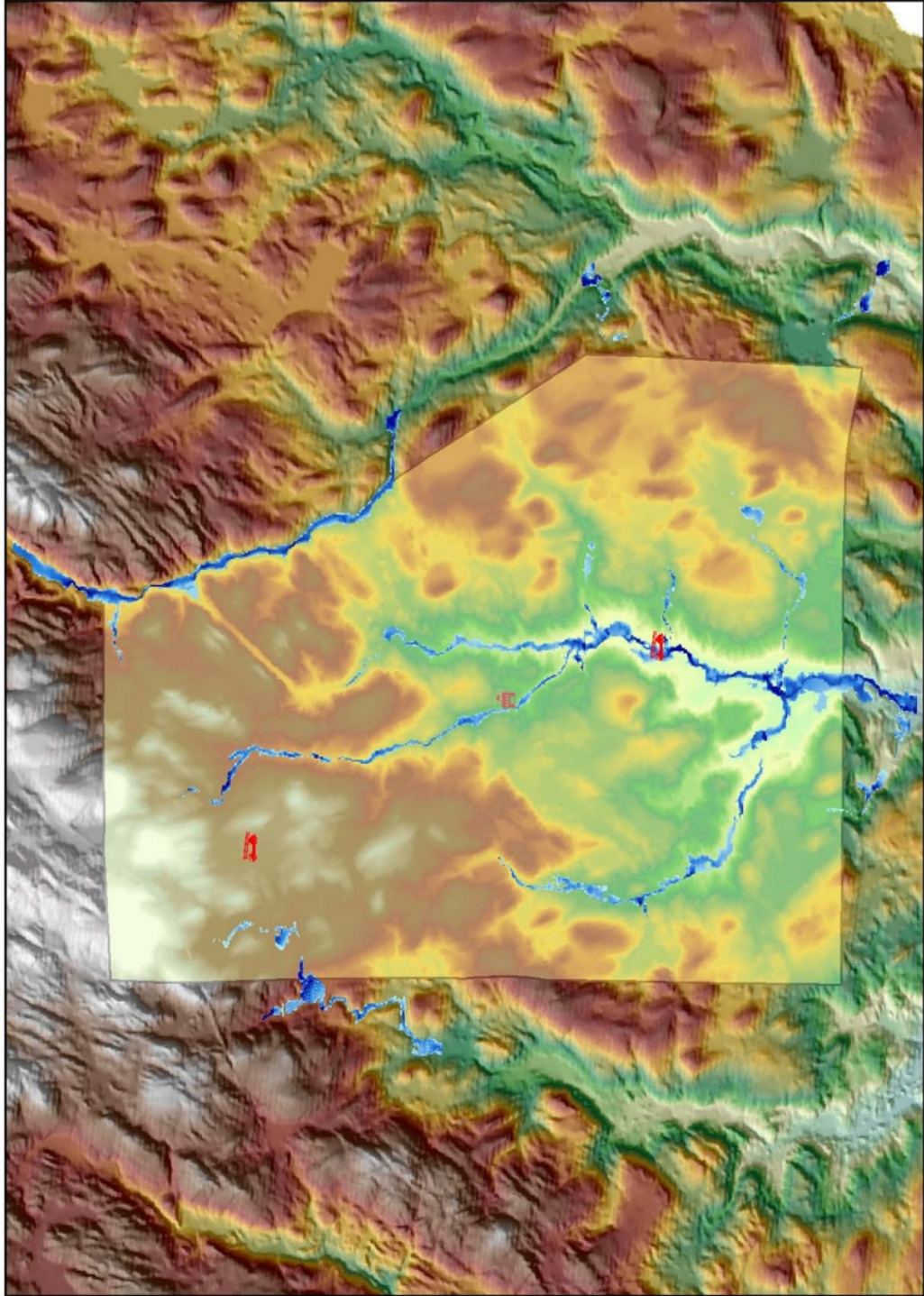
Elevation and Topographic Features



Source: United States Geological Survey
This map should be used for general planning purposes only. Data is not authoritative.



Study Region: Ashford_Flooding
 Scenario: 100-year flood in Ashford, CT



Legend

School

FireStation

FireStation

RPD100_r

High : 42.3874

Low : 0.000183105

RegionDEM

High : 1309.97

Low : 172.804

Census Tracts

Census Tracts

Hillshade

High : 254

Low : 0

Study Region Boundary

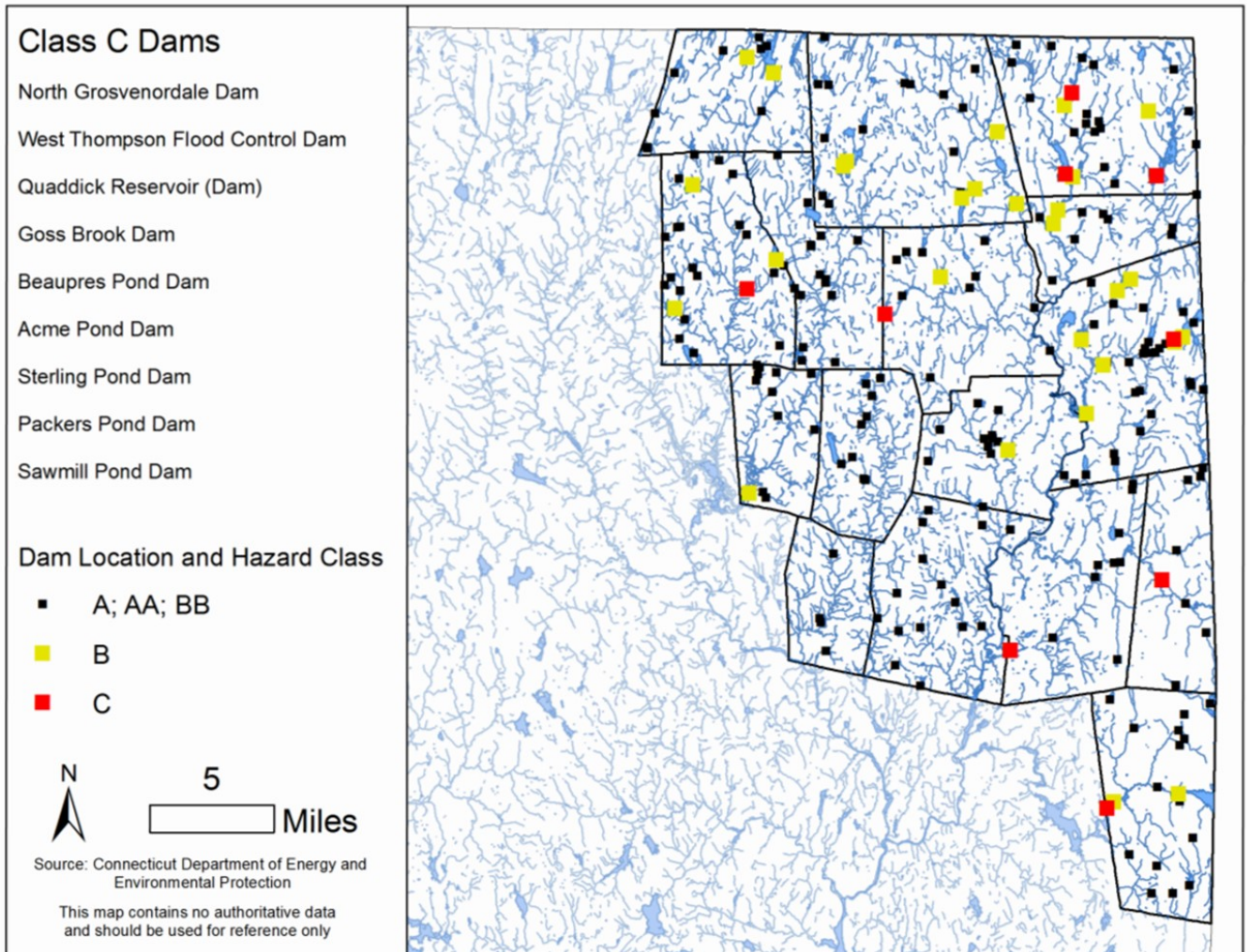
Study Region Boundary

Any coastal surge estimates produced by Hazus do not represent official NOAA forecasts or estimates.

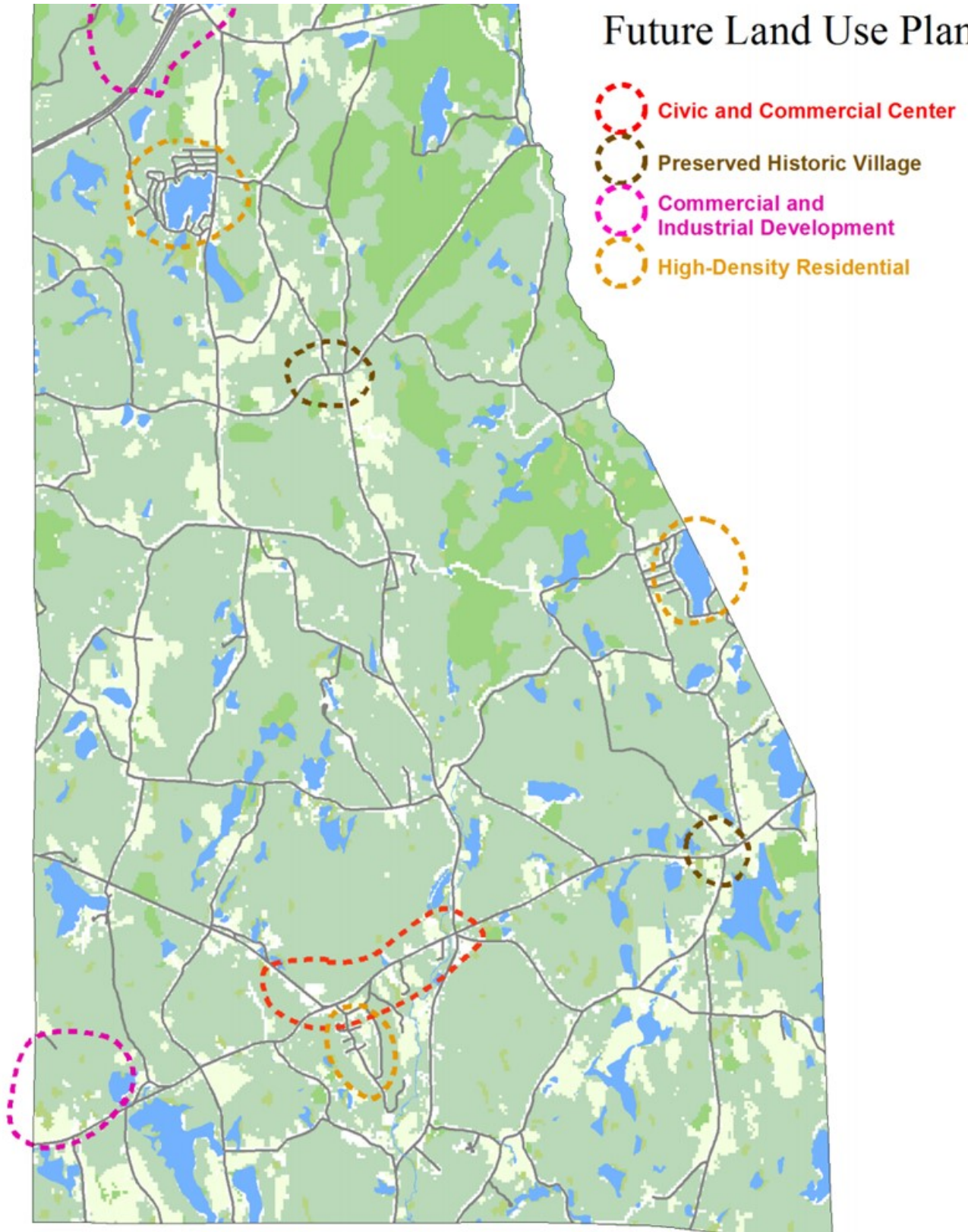
(c) 1997-2011 FEMA



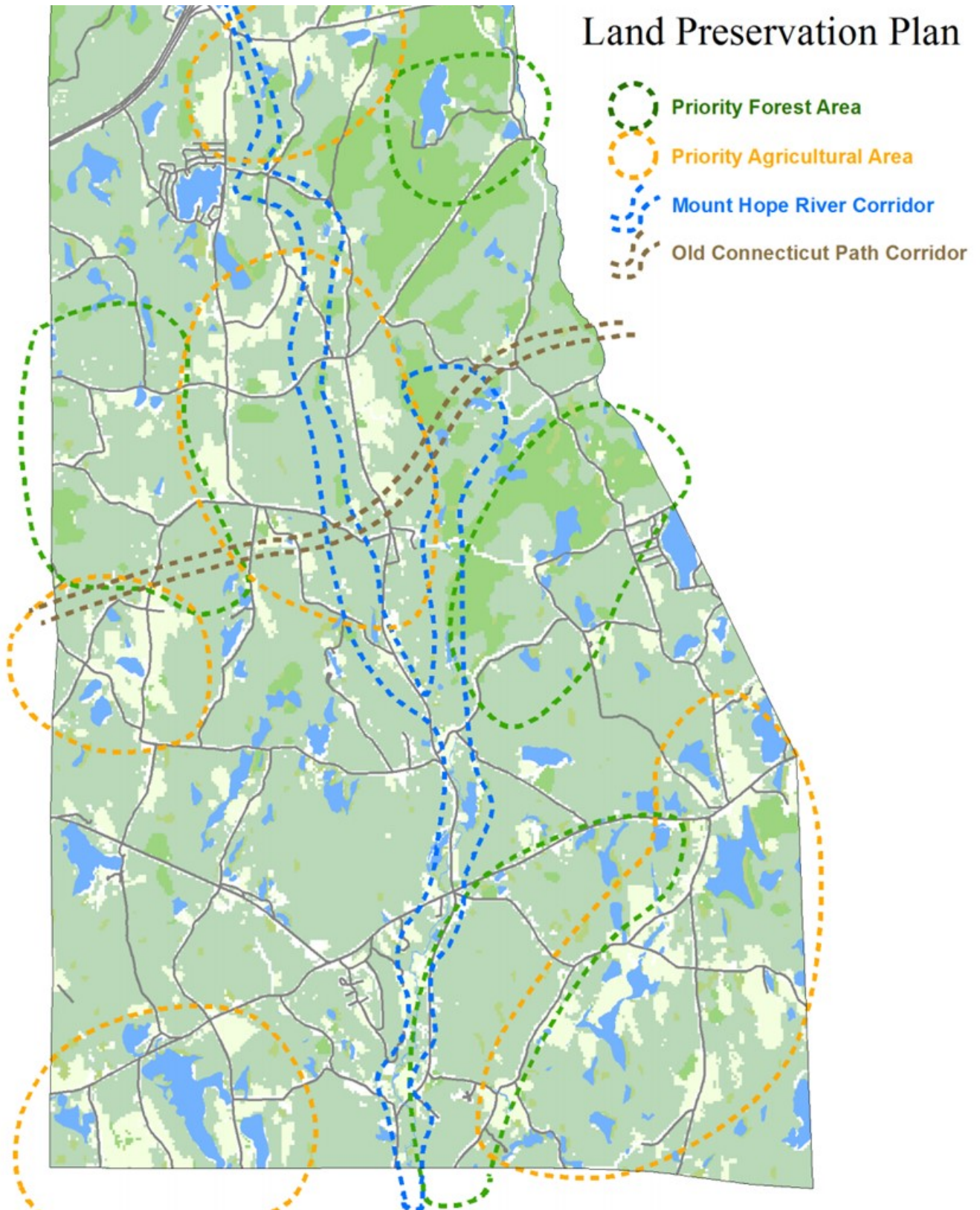
Figure 2-2: Regional Watercourses and Class B and C Dams



Future Land Use Plan



Land Preservation Plan



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