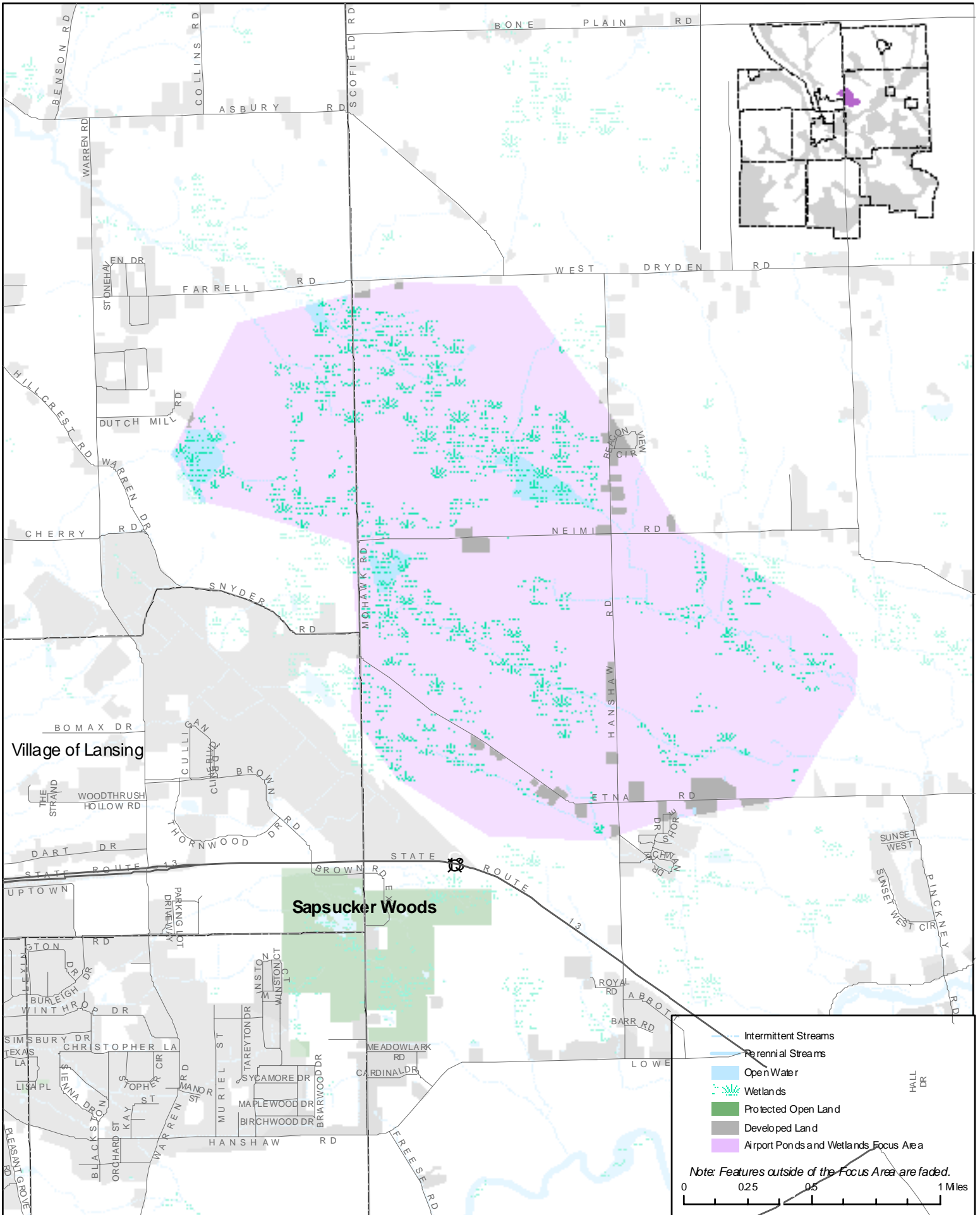


Airport Ponds and Wetlands





Description of Focus Area

The Airport Ponds and Wetlands Focus Area is located in the Towns of Lansing and Dryden. A series of wetlands define this area, and provide good bird watching opportunities. The nearby Sapsucker Woods and Lab of Ornithology, across Route 13 in the Fall Creek Focus Area, offer additional bird watching opportunities and information.

Summary of Key Benefits

Given the number and size of wetlands and large amount of Cornell land, water quality and education and research are the two major benefits provided by this Focus Area. The wetlands contribute significantly to the quality of water in Fall Creek, which is a drinking water supply for thousands of residents and a vital component of the habitat for several important plant and animal species that require unpolluted water to thrive. Wetlands in the Focus Area may also play an important role in mitigating floodwater entering Fall Creek during major storm events. The land owned by Cornell University, which includes many of these wetlands, provides important opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to conduct research and study a variety of plant and animal species. In addition, the area also provides good readily accessible bird watching opportunities.

Water Quality

Streams that flow through this Area are either headwaters streams or designated as Class A protected streams, and are tributaries to Fall Creek, which is a drinking water source for Cornell University and the surrounding areas. Much of the land area in this Focus Area is identified as wetland, including the Dryden-Lansing Swamp Unique Natural Area that is part of a particularly large wetlands complex (approximately 450 acres in size). These wetlands and riparian areas support high quality water and abundant habitat for several amphibians of Greatest Conservation Need, including the Four-toed Salamander, Eastern Ribbonsnake, and Jefferson Salamander. An hemlock-hardwood peat swamp is also located in the western portion of the Focus Area.



Wetlands in the Focus Area play an important role in mitigating flooding and protecting water quality.

Education and Research

The majority of land in this Focus Area is owned by Cornell University. The combination of wetlands and grassland habitat here and the proximity of the renowned Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology provide excellent opportunities for students, researchers and members of the community to study and observe a variety of bird species. Wetlands in this area also host populations of locally rare fringed gentians, which have an affinity for open and undeveloped lands.

Protection and Management Issues

Water Quality

- n Pollutants in the waters (such as sediment, pesticides and herbicides, fecal contamination and other inputs) can negatively impact human health and increase the costs of treating drinking water. Vegetated buffers along permanent and intermittently flowing watercourses, wetlands, and associated floodplains help filter pollutants from water, and are critical for sustaining water quality. Although specific buffer needs vary from site to site based on topography, vegetation, soils, and land uses, in general a 100-foot vegetated buffer is the minimum needed to provide nutrient and pollutant removal. A wider buffer width may be required for bank stabilization or additional water filtration, depending on local site characteristics.
- n Wetlands and ponds are sometimes filled or degraded, negatively impacting the ability of those systems to support wetland and pond species. Large wetlands (>5 acres) provide critical habitat, and smaller wetlands serve as “stepping stones” to provide habitat connections. Wetlands and pond areas that are isolated and small in size cannot support certain wetland and pond species of Greatest Conservation Need. Many wetland bird communities depend on their local habitat, as well as the wetlands within a two-mile radius.
- n Species that live in and around wetlands and ponds require clean water to thrive. Poorly managed wetlands, ponds, and upland areas have a negative impact on water quality and reduce the viability of these habitat areas.
- n Development in or adjacent to riparian areas and wetlands can infringe on key habitat and introduce non-native species, herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers that inhibit growth of native plants critical to biodiversity. The Jefferson Salamander is particularly sensitive to habitat disturbances resulting from residential development.
- n As water runs off the landscape and into streams below, it accumulates pollutants (such as sediment, bacteria, pesticides, and herbicides) that can negatively impact water quality. Shallow soils in some portions of this Focus Area reduce the ability of the landscape to absorb rainwater, and therefore increase the potential for runoff. Land management practices designed to minimize the amount of

pollutants entering runoff are particularly critical in these areas.

- n When areas are developed, precipitation and runoff flowing across developed areas accumulate pollutants, such as sediment and oil and gas products.
- n Although key water resources are found within this Focus Area, these resources are affected by activities that occur throughout the watershed. As a result, water resource management efforts must address issues that extend beyond the boundaries of the Focus Area.

Education and Research

- n School groups, as well as conservation volunteers and members of the public, frequently use publicly owned natural areas as outdoor classrooms. Additional access to lands that represent a broad range of natural environments would enhance learning opportunities and facilitate greater use of nature as an educational resource.
- n Public use of education and research lands is usually restricted in some way, in some cases because unauthorized visitors to these properties may inadvertently trample sensitive species used for research purposes or interfere with specialized management practices in use. Where restricted, these lands should not be visited without permission from the owner or manager of the property.
- n Some education and research lands are generally open to the public for personal enjoyment and relaxation. For these areas, staying on the trail is important, especially where off-trail use may cause damage to the site or trampling of sensitive species. Certain sites are very sensitive, and may not be appropriate for large groups or children.
- n The spread of invasive species, herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers from adjacent lands can compromise the integrity of the ecological, plant and animal communities being studied.
- n Overgrazing by whitetail deer negatively impacts the quality and regeneration of ecological, plant and animal communities being studied.

Priority Actions for Airport Ponds and Wetlands

The Natural Features Focus Area Project has identified 35 priority action items to be initiated over the next five years. The action items have been established to bolster and coordinate the region's many existing conservation efforts. They are not intended to replace or replicate those efforts. The action items reflect the broad range of unique uses in the identified Focus Areas. Below is a list of actions that are particularly relevant to the Airport Ponds and Wetlands Focus Area. For a complete list of actions and designation of principal agencies that will lead implementation efforts please see the *Implementation of Priority Actions* section of the complete county-wide

Water Quality

- è Encourage semi-pervious paving, bioretention, and infiltration practices.
- è Provide education about and access to hydrologically sensitive area data through the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) on-line interactive mapping tool.

Invasive Species

- è Inventory and identify high priority areas for the control of invasive species.
- è Establish a coordinated approach for distributing invasive species information to landowners throughout identified high priority areas.
- è Develop and distribute a list of popular landscaping plants and appropriate native species substitutions.
- è Conduct a comprehensive "natural lawns and gardens" campaign to limit the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer, and increase the use of native plants in landscaping.

Rural Landowner Outreach and Education

- è Enhance existing rural landowner education efforts with an emphasis on sustainable forestry practices, impacts of ATV use, invasive species, wetlands management, grassland habitat, and targeted outreach to new rural landowners.
- è Identify and coordinate the dissemination of information about grants available to private landowners for habitat management and enhancement.

Technical Assistance for Municipalities

- è Provide technical assistance to municipalities working on projects that implement the recommendations of the plan.
- è Provide training and information to municipalities on the full-range of conservation tools available, the Plan and the Natural Resources Inventory, flood plain management strategies, and vernal pool and small wetland habitat conservation.

Coordination

- è Convene a group of partners (Tompkins County Conservation Partners) involved in local conservation efforts twice a year. Meetings will facilitate regular information sharing as well as coordinated educational efforts such as periodic field trips for municipal officials to key sites in the Focus Areas.

Land Protection in Priority Areas

- è Protect priority protection areas through partnerships with area agencies and municipalities by purchasing land and acquiring conservation easements.
- è Educate landowners about tax incentives available for conservation efforts through various formats including town/village newsletters with special emphasis on landowners within the open space system.
- è Develop or identify a model conservation zoning ordinance for use in key portions of the Focus Areas.
- è Engage key land protection stakeholders to assess the financial resources available for land conservation and work to establish additional funding as needed.