
Town of
MONTAGUE
Plan

ADOPTED BY TOWN BOARD RESOLUTION JULY 9, 2024

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Introduction

PURPOSE of the Plan

The purpose of the plan is to provide guidance for the physical development of the Town of Montague for the future. It is based on and reflects the planning ideals laid out in the Planning Accord for Tug Hill and the Tug Hill Reserve Act. The plan is intended to provide a framework for land development and land subdivision controls. It will also help assure that the growth of the area will be in concert with plans for infrastructure and road development, and will not negatively impact natural resources and rural character. Finally, it is hoped that other governments (state, county, and other local governments) will find the plan useful in shaping their future development activities. It is the purpose of this plan to create a vision for the community's future that is a shared vision of the citizens of Town of Montague.

PERIODIC REVIEW and Update of the Plan

It is recommended that this plan be reviewed and updated every five to eight years by the Town Board and others, as designated by the Town Board. A periodic review will refresh the Board's perspective on the longer range issues affecting Montague, and help to reinforce the link between day-to-day development decisions and longer range town policies. In addition, a periodic update will keep the plan current with the ever-changing conditions of the town without the need for large-scale planning efforts.

Town of Montague History

The Town of Montague is well-known today for its recreational opportunities. Mile after mile of beautiful ATV and snowmobile trails wind through desolate, seemingly endless forests. Fishermen and hunters know they'd better come prepared with a GPS or compass to be secure in the wilderness that is Tug Hill. However, Montague wasn't always the wilderness it seems to be today. Montague has gone through many changes since its inception. Ironically, today's Montague would be more recognizable to its earliest settlers than it would be to its residents of 100 years ago!

Montague was created from the larger town of West Turin on November 14, 1850. The town was named for Mary Montague Pierpont, daughter of the former owner of the land. No information has yet come to light regarding how Miss Pierpont felt about this honor. Early settlers included Samuel Holden, who arrived in 1846; Samuel P. Sears, who built a sawmill at the corner of what is now Sears Pond Road and Salmon River Road in 1848; Joseph M. Gardner, who settled on the corner of present-day Sears Pond and Gardner Road in 1848; Alvin Stafford, who built a cabin in the woods on Liberty Road near the town line with Pinckney in 1848, George Moffatt, who started a farm on the Sears Pond Road between Pitcher and Salmon River Roads in 1850; and Norman Howe, who came to what is now the Olin Road to start a farm in 1851.

During its first thirty years, the town grew rapidly. By 1880, there were 975 residents! Some settlers saw the cheap land in Montague as a chance to finally have a homestead all their own. Others saw gold in the virgin stands of spruce and hardwood trees just waiting to be harvested. Montague's peak came in the years between 1880 and 1900. In these two decades, Montague was a bustling, self-sufficient boomtown that would be almost completely unfamiliar to today's inhabitants.

In 1896, there were six sawmills in Montague. Aside from the aforementioned mill at Sears' Pond, there were two sawmills in Hooker, a now-vanished hamlet far down on today's Salmon River Road. Near the corner of what is now Sears Pond Road and Rector Road stood a sawmill that also manufactured cheese boxes. The Marcellus Saw Mill stood on the western side of Liberty Road, about one-half mile north of Sears Pond Road. The biggest of them all was the Parker Saw Mill, at the intersection of what is now Parker Road and Flat Rock Road. According to the Lewis County Directory of 1895-96, this mill, owned by Lester B. Parker, produced between 1 and 2 million board feet of spruce and hardwood a year and supplied employment for 30-50 people. (On a side note- Lester B. Parker also had the first phone in Montague, in 1890.)

The sawmill industry had two great natural enemies. The first was the gradual depletion of mature timber that occurred in and around Montague as a result of the sawmills' constant activity. By 1910, the majority of Montague's land was treeless farm fields. The need to range farther and farther away for worthwhile timber slowly decreased the cost-effectiveness of mill operations. The second great natural enemy was fire. One of the mills at Hooker burnt to the ground on Feb 24, 1891. In July 1898, all of Lester Parker's mills and equipment burned in a devastating fire. He rebuilt, and a year later, his operation was running again. However, in 1906, fire once again destroyed Parker's mills. He rebuilt once more, but the mills never regained complete financial stability, and he ceased operations in 1915. The other mills gradually declined until the 1940's, when the last of them closed its doors. The second most important industry in Montague during its boom years was the manufacture and sale of cheese. Farmers realized that

selling their milk to a cheese factory was the most cost effective way of handling their surplus. Daniel Dening built the first cheese factory on today's Olin Road in 1882. John E. Murphy erected the Forks Cheese Factory on the Factory Road in the mid-1880s. The Gardner's Corners Cheese Factory and the Rector Cheese Factory were both operating by 1887. These four factories took milk from over 1,000 cows and turned it into cheese.

Aside from sawmills and cheese factories, Montague had 153 farms ranging from 20 to 500 acres during its most prosperous time. It also had nine schools, three blacksmiths, two grocers, six post offices, a Grange Hall, four hotels, and two churches- a Methodist Episcopal Church at the corner of Liberty and Gardner Road, and a Methodist Protestant Church at the corner of Rector and Sears Pond Road.

After 1900, Montague began a long, steady period of decline. There were many reasons for this. The winters in Montague are longer, colder, and snowier than anywhere else in the region. The late spring and early autumn frosts on Tug Hill made many crops impractical for farmers. Sometimes the ground yielded a bigger crop of slate, sandstone, and limestone than anything else. The many random piles of stones that can be found in the woods all over Montague attest to farmers' efforts to keep their fields stone-free. Farmers' children grew up and decided they could have an easier life elsewhere. People were "burned out" of their houses and decided to rebuild in a less remote location. In 1945, the last cheese factory shut down. By 1950, the population had decreased from its high of 975 in 1880 to 139. In 1952, the four Montague schoolhouses still open were closed due to school centralization, and the remaining students began taking the long bus ride to Lowville Academy and Central School each day. Buildings were torn down, burned down, or simply left to rot. The forest gradually reclaimed what had been taken from it.

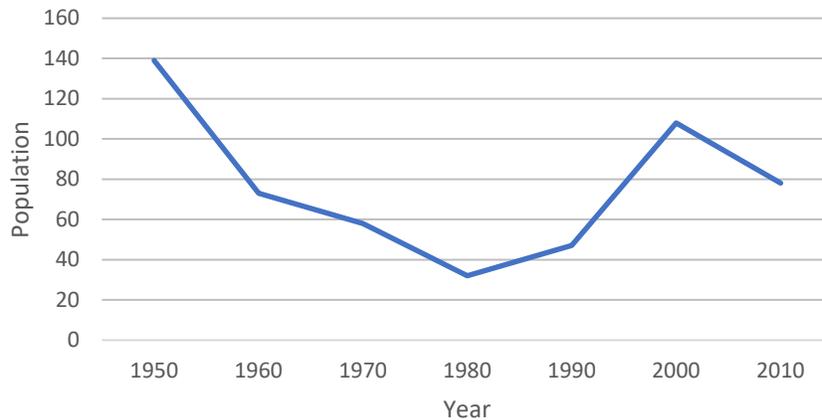
In the 1970's, a rebirth of sorts began in Montague. People discovered that the deserted roads in Montague, combined with the extreme snowfall the area receives, were perfect for riding their snowmobiles each winter. Gradually, word spread about this "sledder's paradise." The cheap land available in Montague encouraged snowmobile enthusiasts to buy land and erect camps to pursue their sport. New businesses opened to cater to these consumers. The Montague Inn, located at the corner of Sears Pond Road and Rector Road, opened its doors on October 19, 1972. The Tug Hill Inn on Salmon River Road opened in 1980, and the Spruces Bed and Breakfast on the Sears Pond Road opened in 1991. All-terrain-vehicles ("four wheelers") soon realized that what was good in the winter was good in the summer, and they began frequenting the area as well.

Currently the wilds of Montague are a premier destination year-round for off-road vehicles. Montague is the centerpiece of a vast trail system that encompasses 5 counties. In 1996, the National Weather Service installed a Doppler Radar System in Montague to get a better handle on the heavy lake-effect snows. Now anyone can check the weather in Montague via the internet. Montague's population will probably never rebound to previous levels. According to the US Census of 2000, Montague is the second smallest town in the state, population-wise. However, Montague's fame as an outdoor destination continues to spread. Montague's future is looking bright!

By David Andalora

Town of Montague Demographics Profile

POPULATION TREND



POPULATION characteristics

Montague’s population stopped falling in 1980 and nearly tripled by 2000, but by 2010, fell by 30 people (-27%), a much larger proportional decrease than the county or state saw. The number of households fell with the population 38%, but the average household size increased by a larger proportion than usual for the region. Montague is one of the few places where the average household size increased between 2000 and 2010.

In the same time period, the median age of residents fell, which is very unusual for the region. The number of housing units decreased by eight, which was not atypical for Lewis County.

	2000	2010	Change	Change in Lewis Cty.	Change in NYS
Population	108	78	-27.8%	+0.5%	+2.1%
Number of Households	45	28	-37.8%	+4.7%	+3.7%
Average Household Size	2.40	2.79	+16.3%	-4.1%	-1.5%
Median Age	40.0	39.5	-0.5 years	+3.4 years	+0.4 years
Housing Units	267	259	-3.0%	-0.1%	+5.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Full Census)

EMPLOYMENT/INCOME

characteristics

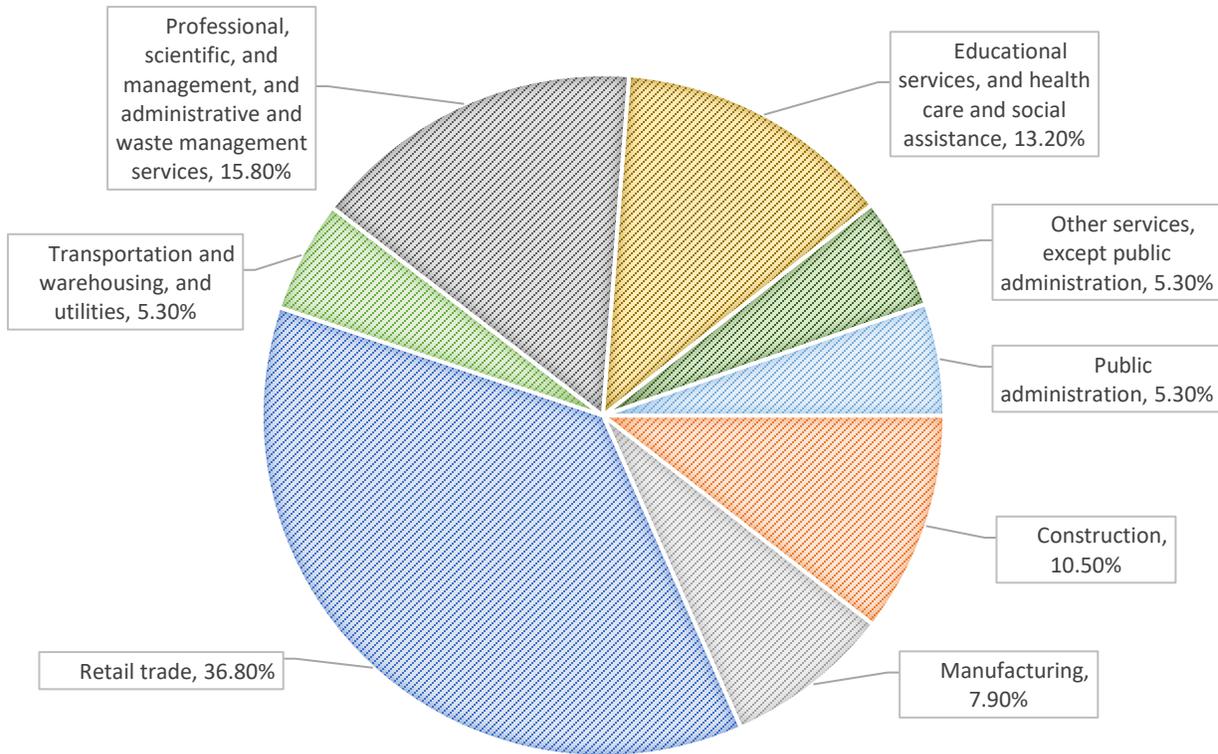
Montague’s median income was under half its median housing value in 2015, which means home affordability may not be good. However, only 2.2% of the population is below the poverty line, a very small amount.

2015 Median Household Income	\$63,438
2015 % of Population Below Poverty Line	2.2%
2015 Median Housing Value	\$181,300
2015 Mean Travel Time to Work	40.5 min.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (American Community Survey)

The average travel time to work in 2015 was estimated to be about 41 minutes. About 48.7% of residents worked outside Lewis County (Montague borders both Jefferson and Oswego Counties). Residents of Montague were employed in a variety of fields, retail trade (36.8%) and professional services (15.8%).

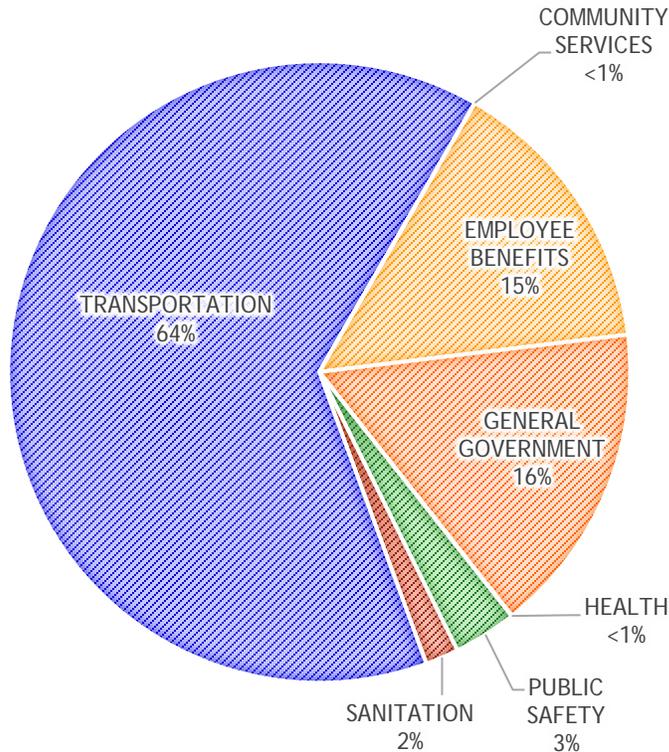
EMPLOYMENT



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (American Community Survey)

Note: Data from the American Community Survey is subject to a variable margin of error, and is not exact.

EXPENDITURES



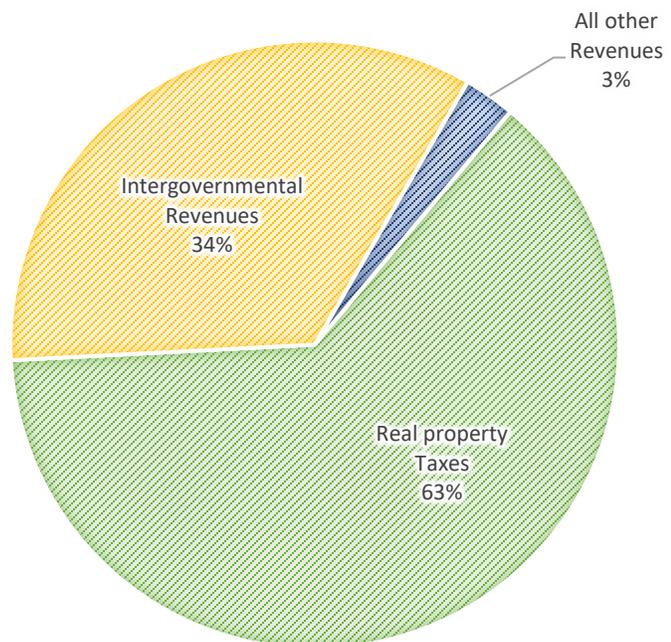
Expenditures (\$)	Montague
Community Services	33
Culture and Recreation	0
Debt Service	0
Economic Developments	0
Employee Benefits	34591
General Government	38217
Health	50
Public Safety	7722
Sanitation	4070
Transportation	150085
Utilities	0
Total by Town	234768

TOWN BUDGET characteristics

In 2015, Montague's total revenue (\$284,707) exceeded total expenditures by \$49,939. Most revenues came from property taxes, accounting for \$179,566. Intergovernmental revenues (\$97,395) also contributed.

The greatest expenditures were Transportation (\$150,085), General Government (\$38,217) and Employee Benefits (\$34,591), together accounting for 95% of total expenditures.

REVENUES



ROAD MILEAGE

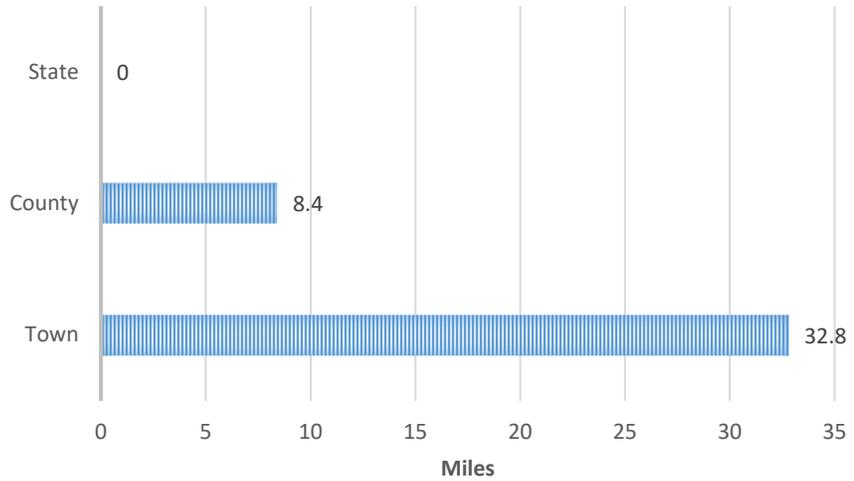
LAND USE

characteristics

As of 2017, 79.6% of Montague's roads are owned by the Town, 20.4% by Lewis County, and none by New York State. Montague has a total of 41.2 miles of roadway.

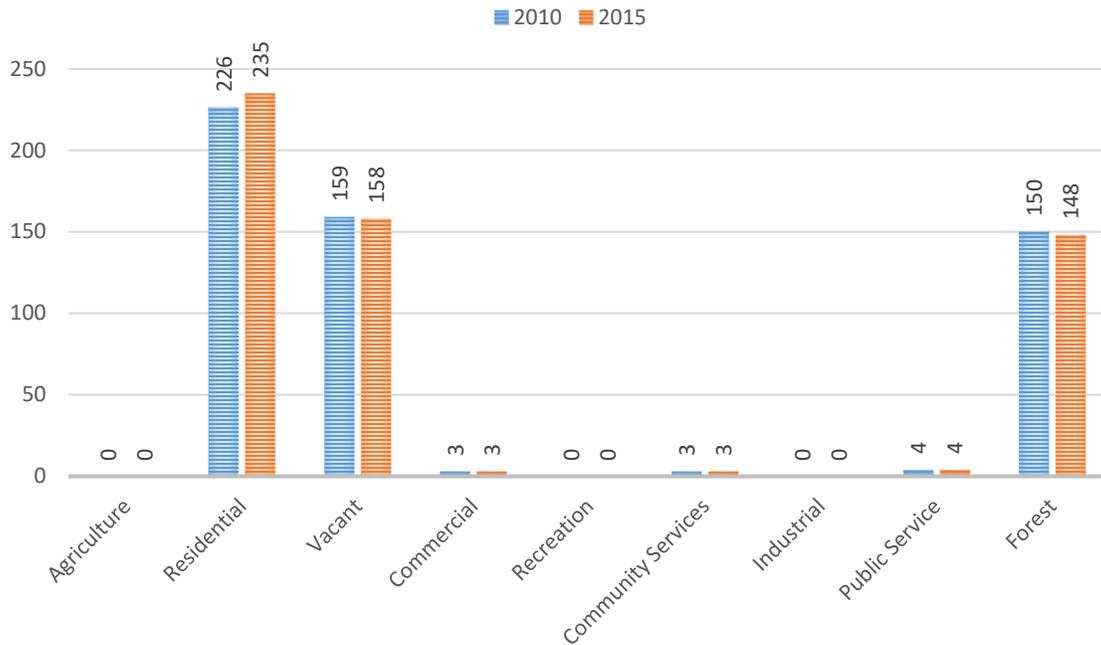
Overall, Montague's properties are mostly residential (42.6%), vacant (28.7%), or forest (26.9%). During the five years from 2010 and 2015, there was

an increase of nine residential properties (+4%) and a decrease of one vacant and two forest properties. Bear in mind that this data only captures the number of tax parcels in Montague, not the acreage.



Source: NYS Dept. of Transportation, 2017

TAX PARCELS BY PROPERTY CLASS



Source: NYS Office of Real Property Tax Svcs.

Town of Montague Community Resources Profile

Montague is on the western side of Lewis County, touching both Jefferson and Oswego Counties. It is bordered by the towns of Pinckney and Harrisburg to the north, Martinsburg and West Turin to the east, Osceola to the south, and Redfield and Worth to the west. As stated before, there are no state-owned roads in Montague, it is a generally low-traffic area. The town contains portions of Lewis County Agricultural District #212.08-04-13.100.

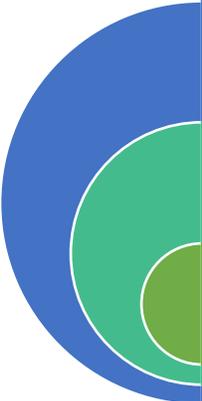
COMMUNITY BUILDINGS

Montague Town	About 5,850 sq. ft.
Garage	6353 Salmon River Rd, Lowville, NY 13367

Montague's primary municipal building is the Town Garage (about 5,850 sq. ft.), two buildings on Salmon River Road facing east, next to Sears Pond State Forest.

PUBLIC LANDS

Montague is among the most central towns to the Tug Hill. It is entirely off the main roads and has a large proportion of wooded wilderness and allocated public lands.



Grant Powell Memorial State Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8,077 acres• County Rte 28, Sears Pond Rd.
Sears Pond State Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5,648 acres• Salmon River Rd.
Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5,100 acres• Flat Rock Rd.

Montague contains the majority of Grant Powell Memorial State Forest (Rector Road), a popular snowmobiling and cross-country skiing location named for the first state district forester of Lewis and Jefferson Counties. It also attracts trout fishing enthusiasts.

Sears Pond State Forest is entirely within Montague. Once the location of a prosperous sawmill operation and a wooden dam, now the area offers hiking, fishing, hunting and snowmobiling opportunities.

Also entirely within Montague, the Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area protects core forests and wetlands, and offers hunting, trapping, and hiking experiences.

Goals for the Future

1.0 Retain the quality of our area's surface and groundwater. These waters are essential to providing individual and municipal water supplies. They are essential to many industries of our area. They are important to the retention of fishing opportunities and wildlife habitat.

- 1.1 Discourage adverse development near major wetlands and concentrations of wetlands.
- 1.2 Discourage adverse development near major stream corridors.
- 1.3 Discourage adverse development near significant springs, wellhead areas of water supply systems, and aquifers.
- 1.4 Continue to identify and map major wetlands, concentrations of wetlands, major stream corridors, significant springs, water supply well head areas, and aquifers.
- 1.5 Raise awareness of the importance of Tug Hill waters.

2.0 Retain major forested areas most important to forest industry, hunting, fishing, and other types of recreation. Major blocks of forest land on Tug Hill are not only important for retaining the area's economy and recreation opportunities, they are also important in providing wildlife habitat and the very character of the area. In addition, Tug Hill's vast reaches of forest are key to maintaining the purity of its waters and to controlling rates of runoff.

- 2.0 Continue to identify major forested areas.
- 2.1 Discourage subdivision and development that would take major forested lands out of productive use for forest industry, hunting, fishing and other types of recreation.
- 2.2 Discourage unreasonable restrictions on forestry activities that adversely affect businesses.
- 2.3 Encourage forestry-related businesses as a means of maintaining a healthy economy, and as a means of retaining large parcels of forestland.
- 2.4 Encourage educational programs that show the importance of forested lands to the area's environment, economy and recreational opportunities.
- 2.5 Promote sound forestry practices for all commercial and private harvesting through the establishment of minimum forest management standards.

3.0 Retain the area's most important wildlife habitat and unique areas to conserve hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities, and to help retain the character and biological richness of our area. Important wildlife habitat areas and unique areas such as our gulfs are a significant part of the character of our heritage, and can provide important recreational opportunities. They also are of great importance to our economy because of the economic contributions hunting and fishing make to the area, and the economic benefit that comes from the viewing of wildlife and scenery by snowmobilers, skiers, hikers, motorists, and others.

3.1 Discourage adverse development in important wildlife and plant habitat areas, and in and near gulfs.

3.2 Support town-by-town identification of important wildlife habitat and unique areas. Encourage further research to identify such areas.

3.3 Encourage educational programs regarding the importance and benefit of habitat and unique areas for use in schools and with civic and adult groups.

4.0 Retain area's existing farms and best farm soils for farm production. Local action alone cannot retain our farms. This depends on the individual actions of our farmers, the natural economy and state and national farm policy. Locally, we can take actions that help keep good farm land from inappropriate development and help farm diversification.

4.1 Support identification of important farm lands, and updates of existing farm land inventories.

4.2 Update land use controls that would limit farm lands being taken out of production.

4.3 Support voluntary actions taken by individual farmers to keep their farms in production, through tools such as ag districts, and ag land assessments.

4.4 Support programs to help strengthen dairy farming and to help farmers that wish to diversify their operations.

4.5 Encourage educational programs that demonstrate to school students and adults the importance of farming to our area.

4.6 Discourage development which would tend to disrupt agricultural practices.

4.7 Encourage only those land uses which lend support to the agricultural industry.

5.0 Retain private and public hunting and fishing opportunities, and other outdoor recreational activities, in our area.

- 5.1 Support voluntary actions, of private landowners to improve hunting, fishing and other recreational access to public lands designated for these uses, such as the sale of access easements, or involvement in fish and wildlife cooperator programs.
- 5.2 Discourage actions that would lead to the subdivision of lands important to hunting, fishing and other recreation where that subdivision would remove lands from such use.
- 5.3 Identify areas important to recreation. These might include designated public motorized and nonmotorized recreation trails, public roads opened for recreational trail use, and parking areas.
- 5.4 Encourage educational programs that demonstrate the importance of hunting, fishing and recreation to our way of life and our area's economy. Also encourage educational programs and appropriate law enforcement to protect private property rights and to provide safe hunting, fishing and other recreational opportunities.
- 5.5 Direct the development of active recreation facilities and programs to areas near population concentrations where services can be provided more economically.
- 5.6 Encourage the proper design and management of passive recreation activities in the more remote areas in order to conserve the water and forest resources and to minimize change to the area's character.

6.0 Retain historic sites and structures that are important to the character of our area.

- 6.1 Identify historic sites and structures.
- 6.2 Discourage development that would diminish the quality of historic sites and structures through town planning and land use controls.

7.0 Control the costs of public road maintenance.

- 7.1 Discourage new public roads into or across remote areas not now served by public roads, especially in the core forest of our area, in areas that would lead to the breakup of lands important to forest management, wildlife, farming, hunting, fishing and other recreation.
- 7.2 Identify portions of roads that might be appropriate for some form of abandonment, minimum maintenance designation, or seasonal use designation.
- 7.3 Support state legislation that would limit town responsibilities for maintenance on designated remote roads.
- 7.4 Discourage development of year-round residences along seasonal roads.

8.0 Help keep villages and hamlets good places to live.

- 8.1 Plan for village and hamlet improvement projects, and apply for grants to assist in such work.
- 8.2 Direct development, through regulation and other means, into and around already existing hamlets and communities away from those portions of the region where significant physical and economic limitations to growth exist.

Town of Montague Development Laws

The Town of Montague Land Use Law was adopted in 1987, and was amended and revised by local laws in 1996, 2001, and 2005. The town also has a subdivision law adopted in 1986.

The town has also adopted a law “Waiving Local Responsibility for [...] Enforcement of the NYS Fire Prevention and building Code” (1983) and the “Town of Montague Mobile Home Park and Campground Law” (1996).

LAND USE & ZONING laws

The Town of Montague Land Use Law has been tweaked over the last 30 years. It establishes two districts:

- **Rural Residential** – Sparsely settled, but generally accessible by highway. Some forest and agricultural use may be present.
- **Forest** – Predominantly covered by dense vegetation and contains many wet areas and stream courses. Relatively inaccessible by automobile and contains few permanent residences and some seasonal residences.

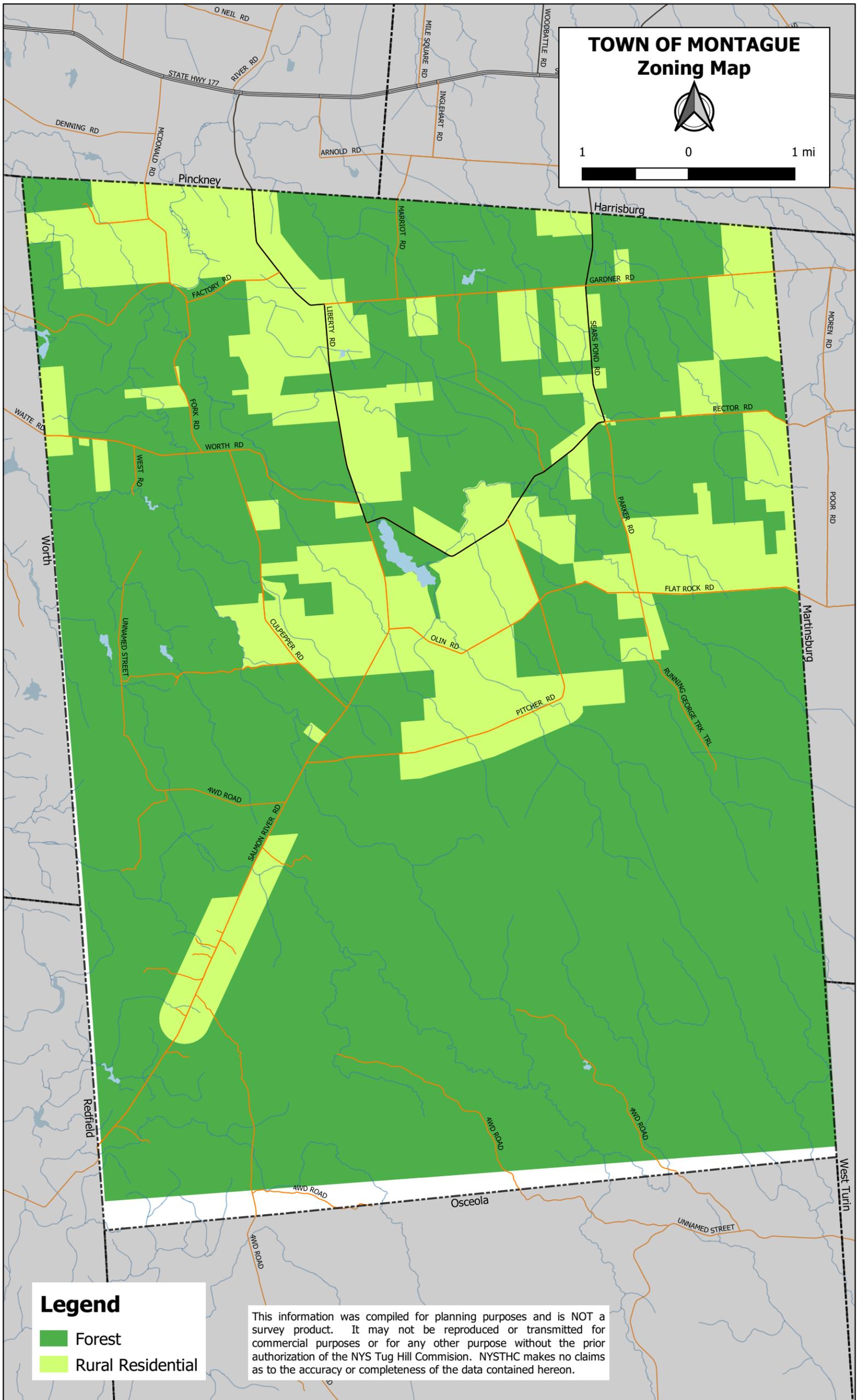
The law defines general regulations for all districts (and district-specific regulations), such as uses permitted, lot sizes, height, setbacks from roads, and waste disposal standards. The law outlines processes and procedures and provides rules for amending the law, and applying for permits.

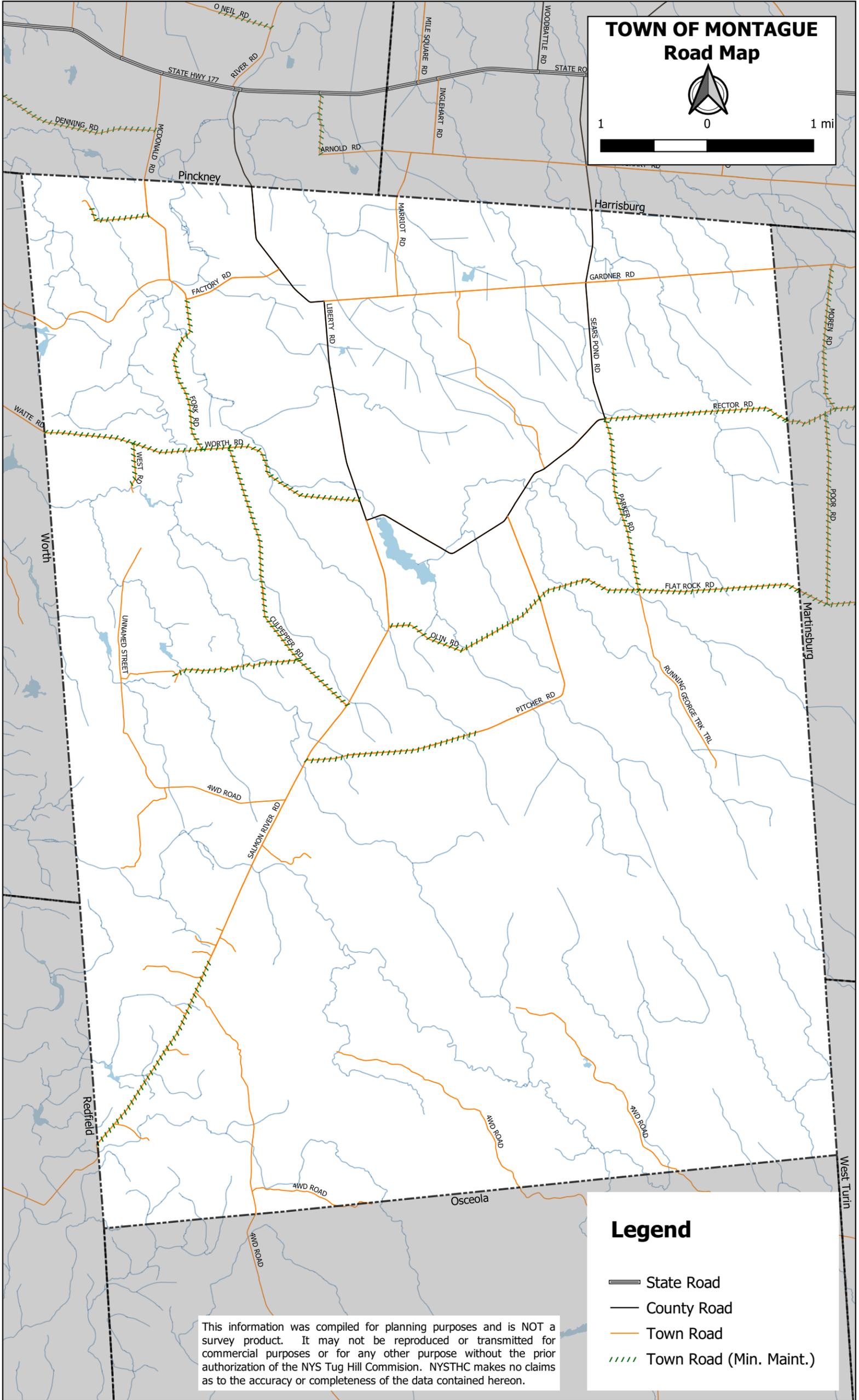
Agricultural parcels in Montague, although few, are subject to New York State laws such as Article 25AA.

“Special Areas” in Montague are subject to the provisions of the Tug Hill Reserve Act, Chapter 486 of the New York State Laws of 1992. The town board must be consulted before public sector development takes place in these areas.

SUBDIVISION laws

The Town of Montague Subdivision Law regulates the process for creating subdivisions. It provides general design standards and road standards, and outlines cluster development requirements. The Town of Montague’s authority to maintain development standards and outline development procedures is further protected by this law.





TOWN OF MONTAGUE Road Map



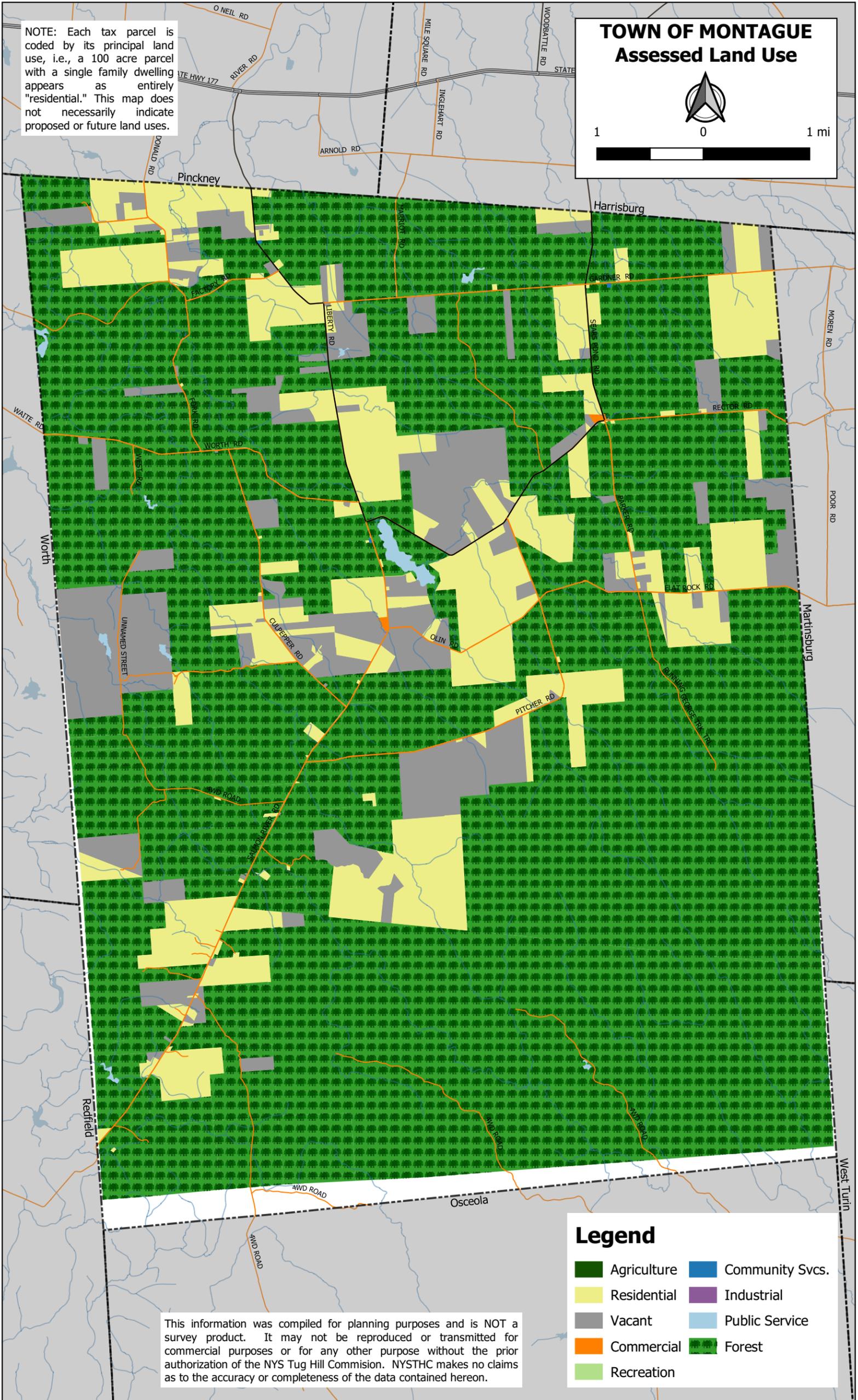
1 0 1 mi

- ### Legend
- State Road
 - County Road
 - Town Road
 - Town Road (Min. Maint.)

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NOTE: Each tax parcel is coded by its principal land use, i.e., a 100 acre parcel with a single family dwelling appears as entirely "residential." This map does not necessarily indicate proposed or future land uses.

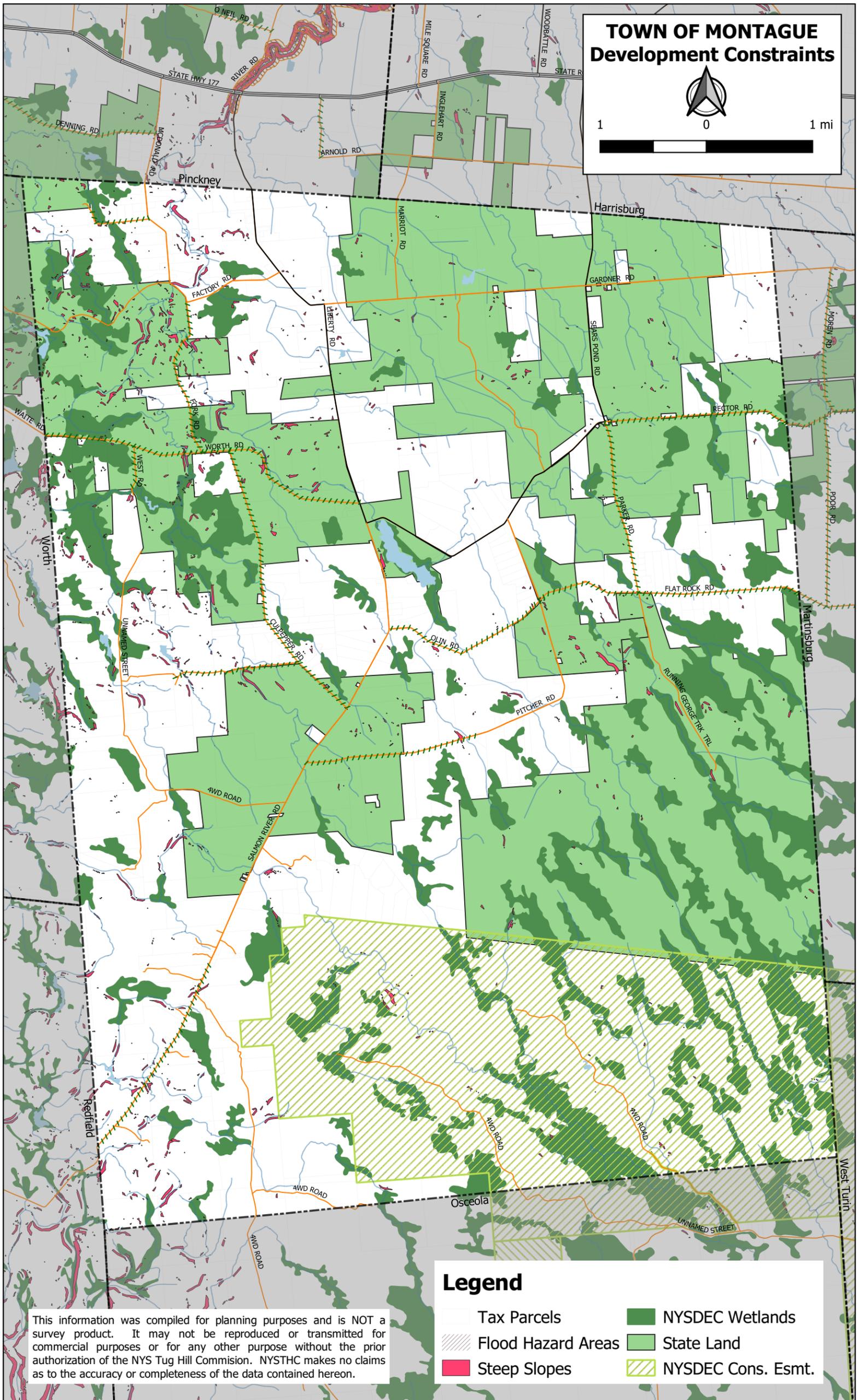
TOWN OF MONTAGUE Assessed Land Use



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Legend

- Agriculture
- Residential
- Vacant
- Commercial
- Recreation
- Community Svcs.
- Industrial
- Public Service
- Forest



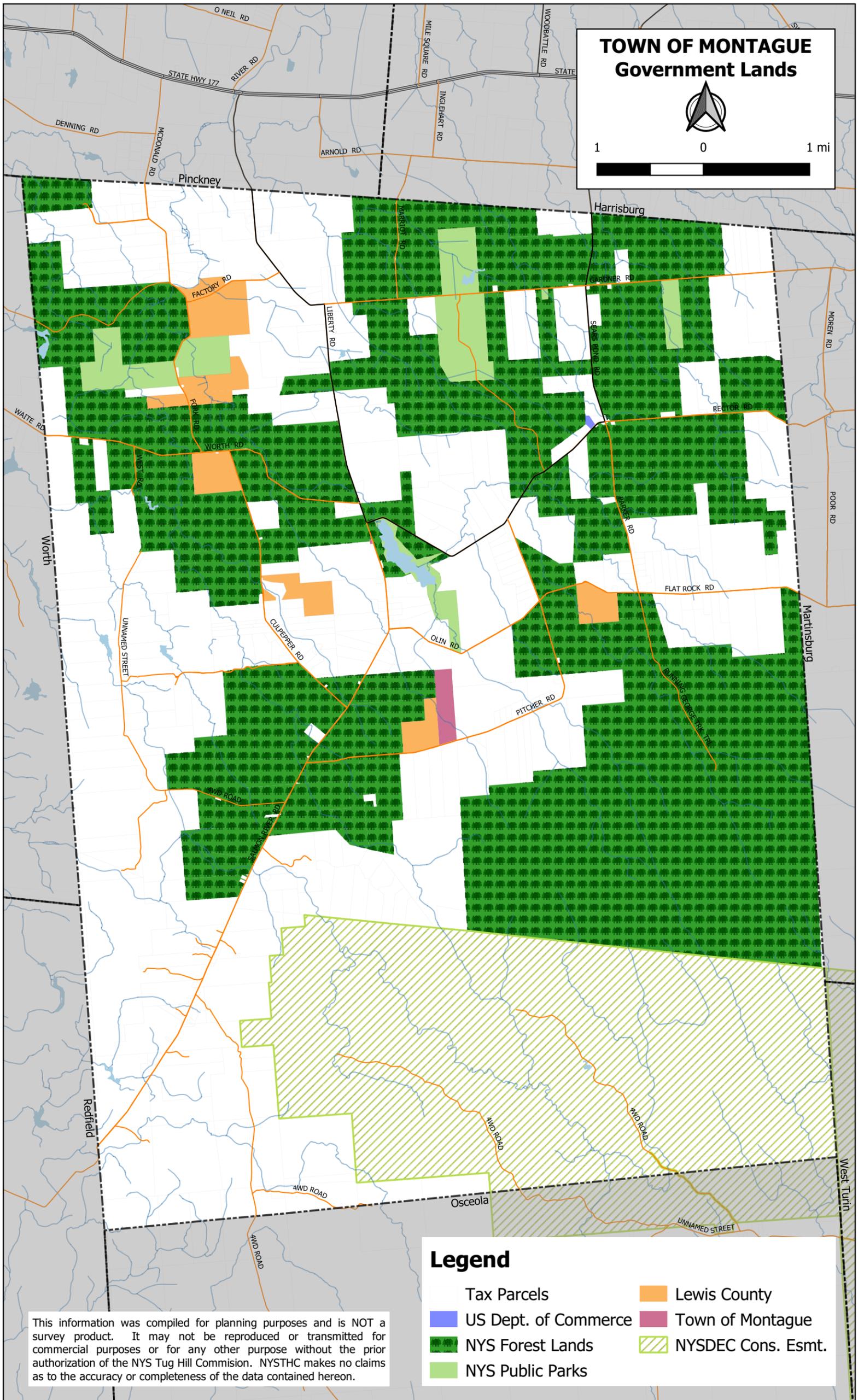
TOWN OF MONTAGUE
Development Constraints

1 0 1 mi

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Legend

Tax Parcels	NYSDEC Wetlands
Flood Hazard Areas	State Land
Steep Slopes	NYSDEC Cons. Esmt.



TOWN OF MONTAGUE
Government Lands

1 0 1 mi

Legend

Tax Parcels	Lewis County
US Dept. of Commerce	Town of Montague
NYS Forest Lands	NYSDEC Cons. Esmt.
NYS Public Parks	

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