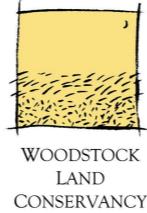
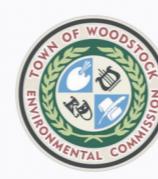


# Zena Woods

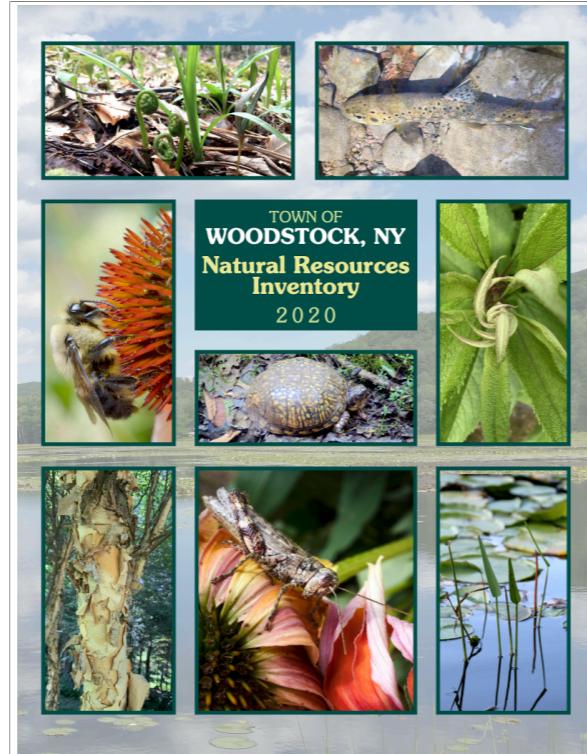
## Critical Environmental Area

A proposal of the Woodstock Environmental Commission and the CEA Working Group with members from the WEC, Planning Board, Town Board, and the Woodstock Land Conservancy



Good evening. Thank you all for joining us for this information session about the proposed Zena Woods CEA and thank you to the Supervisor and the Town Board for hosting us this evening. My name is Alex Bolotow and I am the Chair of the Woodstock Environmental Commission and a member of the CEA Working Group. This proposal was created by the Woodstock Environmental Commission and the CEA Working Group consisting of members representing the WEC, Planning Board, Town Board, and the Woodstock Land Conservancy

I will give a short presentation and then the CEA group, along with Gretchen Stevens of Hudsonia and Ingrid Haeckl of the Hudson River Estuary Program will be available to answer questions, but please do save any questions until the presentation is finished. Thank you.



## Town of Woodstock, NY Natural Resources Inventory

Prepared by the DEC Hudson River Estuary Program and Cornell University,  
the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension  
of Ulster County, and Ulster County Department of the Environment,  
with assistance from the Town of Woodstock Environmental Commission  
and the Woodstock Land Conservancy

2020

<https://townwoodstock.digitaltowpath.org:10111/content/Boards/View/2:field=documents:/content/Documents/File/1598.pdf>

In 2020, the WEC assisted in the completion of a Natural Resources Inventory along with the DEC Hudson River Estuary Program and Cornell University, the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County, and the Ulster County Department of the Environment. The NRI catalogued the wealth of natural resources and green infrastructure in the Town of Woodstock, using mapping data from the 2012 Hudsonia Habitat Mapping Project, which drew information from aerial photography, USGS Maps, GIS Data, and extensive field verification which involved physically walking as much of the land as possible to confirm the expected ecological features.

Once the NRI was completed, the next question was how to utilize the information it provided, and one way to do this was to consider designation of one or more Critical Environmental Areas in Woodstock.

# CEA Process

- January 2021: Planning Board begins looking into CEA designation
- April 2021: CEA Working Group is formed
- Awarded fully-funded technical assistance and training
- Resources used include 2020 NRI, the Hudsonia Habitat Mapping Project, the Climate Resiliency Planning Tool, and the 2018 Comprehensive Plan
- Educational outreach and continuing dialogue with stakeholders

In early 2021, the Planning Board began to look into CEA designations as a tool for them to use to help guide responsible development in Woodstock, particularly given the unprecedented development we are currently seeing.

The Planning Board asked the WEC to take over the project and a CEA working group was formed. The WEC, on behalf of the Town of Woodstock, applied for and won a fully-funded program of CEA technical assistance and training from Hudsonia and the Hudson River Estuary Program of the NYS DEC.

Using tools such as the 2020 NRI, the Hudsonia Habitat Mapping Project, the Climate Resiliency Planning Tool, and the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, the group identified the Zena Woods area for CEA designation.

The Working Group then embarked on a series of presentations and educational outreach about the proposed CEA as well as ongoing stakeholder dialogue

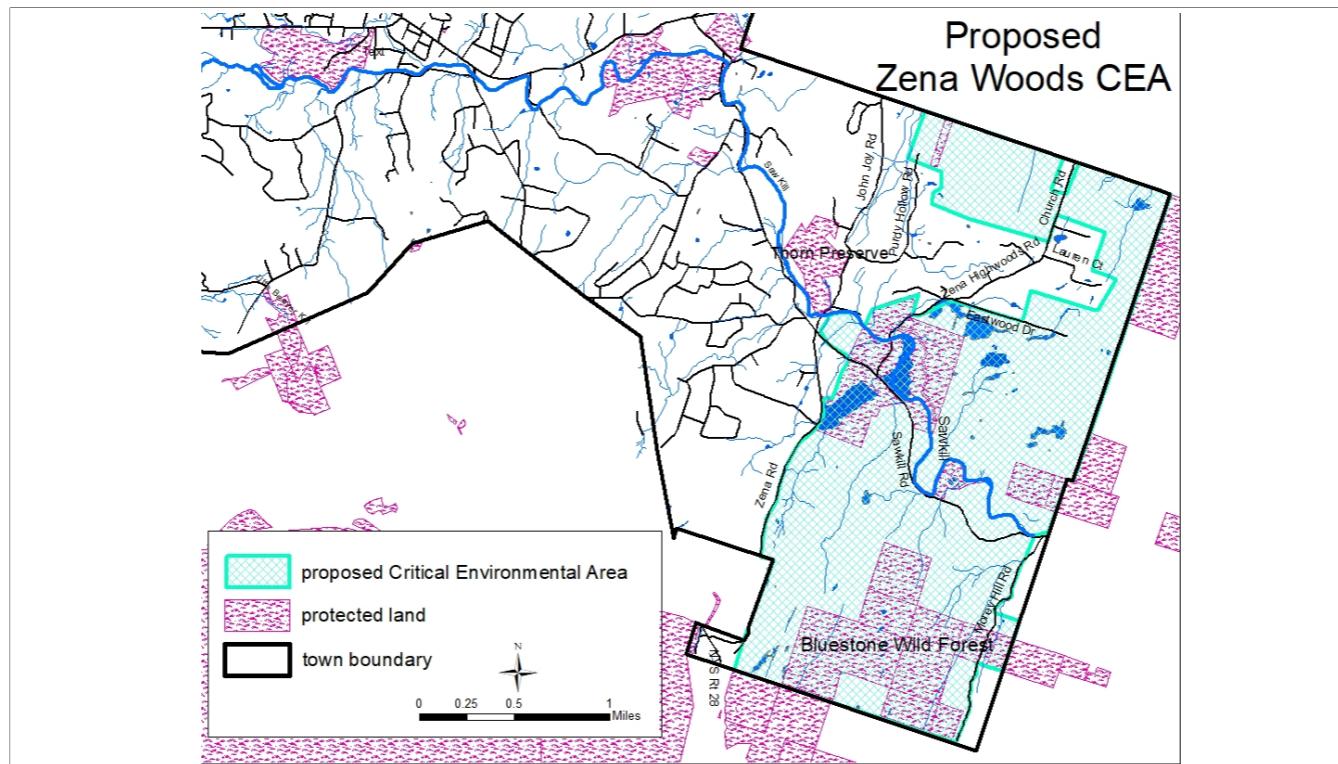
## What is a “Critical Environmental Area”?

- A geographic area with exceptional or unique environmental characteristics
- Local governments may designate Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs) that become registered with the State
- Woodstock has previously gone through this process. In 1993, the town adopted and registered as a CEA “All State Designated Freshwater Wetlands”

You may be asking just what exactly is a Critical Environmental Area? A CEA is a geographic area with exceptional or unique environmental characteristics, that could include fish and wildlife habitat, forest or vegetation, open space, spaces that benefit human health, and areas of important aesthetic or scenic quality

New York State law authorizes municipalities to designate Critical Environmental Areas within the municipal boundaries to bring awareness to places that deserve special attention in the course of land use planning, regulatory reviews of certain development projects, and decisions about development and conservation.

Woodstock has previously gone through this process. In 1993, the town adopted and registered as a CEA “All State Designated Freshwater Wetlands”



Utilizing our prior work on the NRI and our other mapping tools, the group narrowed down the CEA options to what we are calling the Zena Woods area.

The blue shaded area of this map shows the proposed Zena Woods CEA. The area encompasses the large forests east of John Joy Road and Zena Road and includes parts of the Bluestone Wild Forest. These are the largest lowland forest areas in the town, and are part of a much larger forest extending north, south, and east into the towns of Saugerties, Ulster and beyond. The total area of the proposed CEA is approximately 2290 acres (3.6 square mile).

Most of the land in the proposed CEA is in private ownership. Exceptions are the land parcels that constitute the Bluestone Wild Forest, owned by NYSDEC; three adjacent parcels owned by the Town of Woodstock, and the land surrounding the Kingston reservoirs owned by the City of Kingston.

Although Woodstock is lucky to have numerous areas of ecological importance, the group recognized that many of the higher elevation forests are already protected or difficult to develop due to their natural features. We also recognized that the western half of the town has greater protections from the DEP, and that in reviewing all of the NRI maps, the Zena Woods area emerged as an exceptional confluence of large interconnected forests, wetlands, high biodiversity, features promoting climate resilience, while also being particularly vulnerable to fragmentation from development.

# Special Ecological Features

- Core Forests
- Shrublands
- Meadows
- Forested Swamps
- Vernal Pools
- Small Streams and other Wetlands
- Sawkill River



The CEA designation is in recognition of the importance of this area for ecological services to the human community, valuable habitats for wildlife and plants, and support of local ecosystems. The proposed CEA would further the town goals set forth in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan to strengthen protections for natural resources, reduce habitat fragmentation, and promote conservation of land and water for climate resilience. The Zena Woods area is particularly rich in core forests, shrublands, meadows, forested swamps, vernal pools, small streams and other wetlands, and also contains a portion of the Sawkill River.

# Benefits to Humans

- Forests maintain clean and abundant ground and surface water, including much of our drinking water
- Aid flood resiliency by absorbing flood flows
- Carbon storage
- Absorb air pollution and moderate temperatures
- Scenic views and recreation provide natural beauty and economic benefits

Forests with intact canopy, understory, ground vegetation, and forest floors promote the infiltration of precipitation into the soil and may be the best insurance for maintaining groundwater quality and quantity, for reducing rapid runoff and soil erosion, and for maintaining water and habitat quality in streams. The forests also help to protect the quality and quantity of water feeding the unconsolidated aquifer that underlies this part of town.

Forested watersheds and floodplains help to absorb and dampen floodflows, thus aiding flood resiliency for local and downstream areas.

Carbon storage: Forests are great repositories of stored carbon in the vegetation, the organic duff on the forest floor, and the soils

- Air pollution and air temperatures: Forests also absorb air pollution and help to moderate local air temperatures—services of increasing importance with the warming climate.
- Scenic views and recreation: Forests are an important component of Woodstock's scenic landscapes, and provide a destination and haven for recreation and rest for locals and tourists alike, and are a draw for tourism dollars to the area

# Habitats

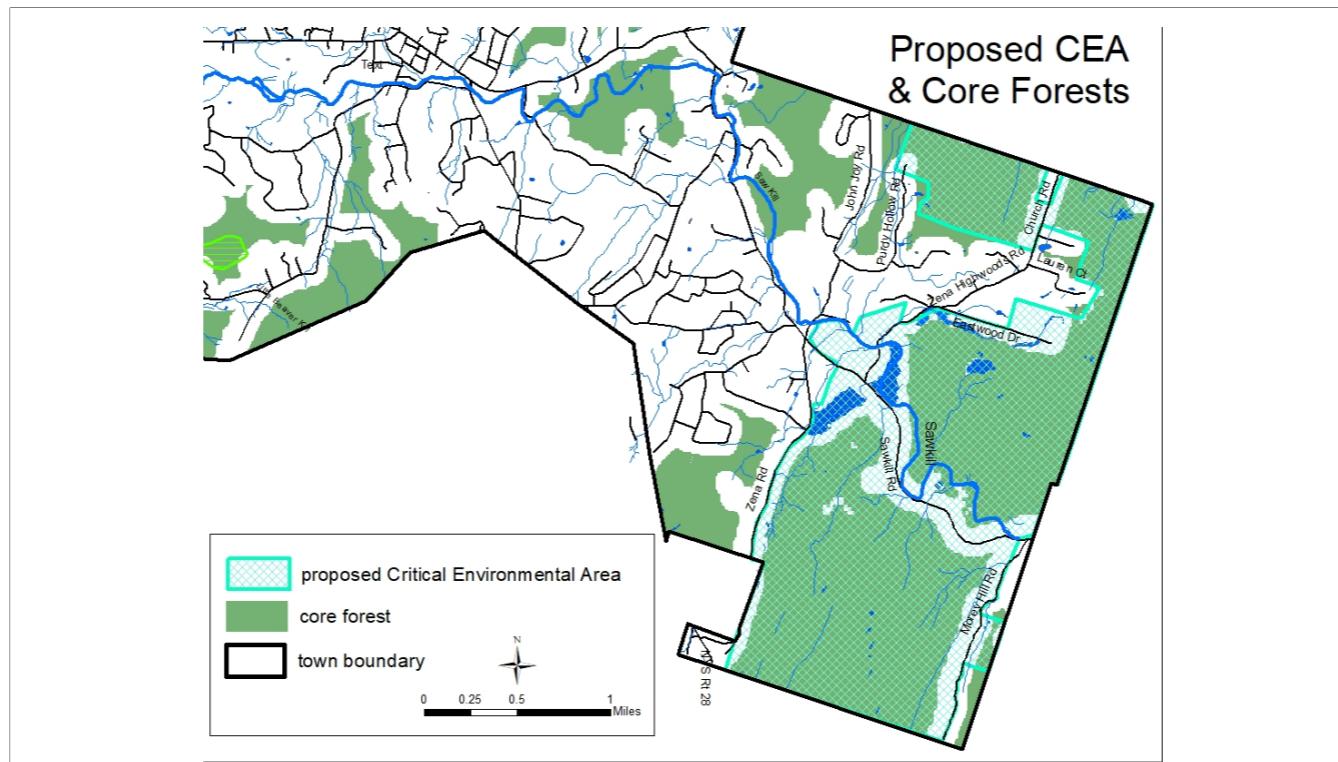
- Forests provide important habitat for plants and wildlife
- North-South Climate Corridor
- Classified NYS DEC Trout Streams



Forests provide important habitats for plants and wildlife- in the Zena Woods area you will find turtles, snakes, salamanders, bats, songbirds, raptors, large and small mammals, and invertebrates.

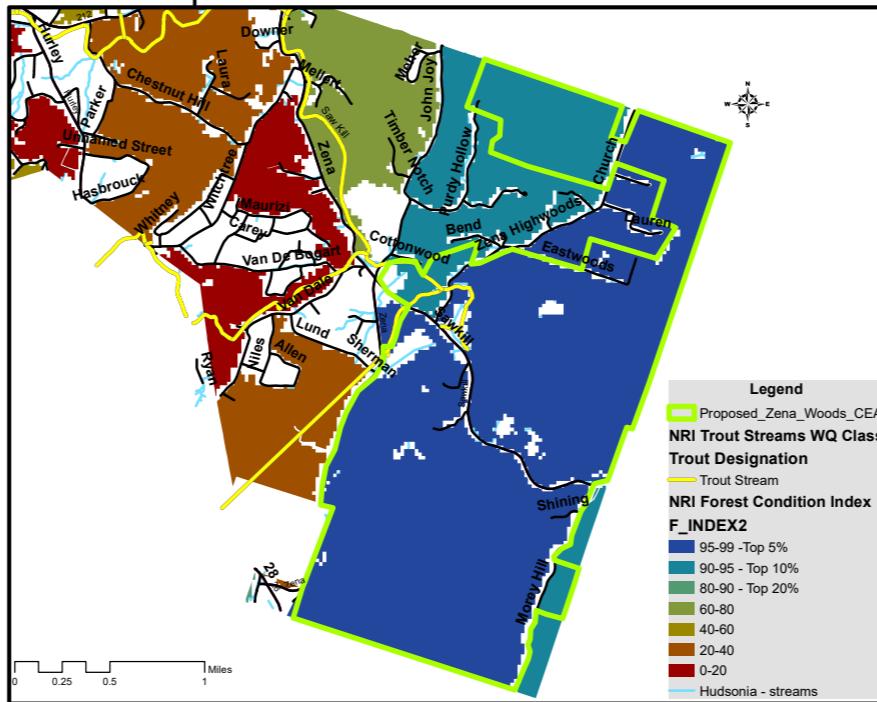
The Zena Woods area is also an important North-South corridor which could serve as a conduit for animals and plants to migrate northwards as the climate warms.

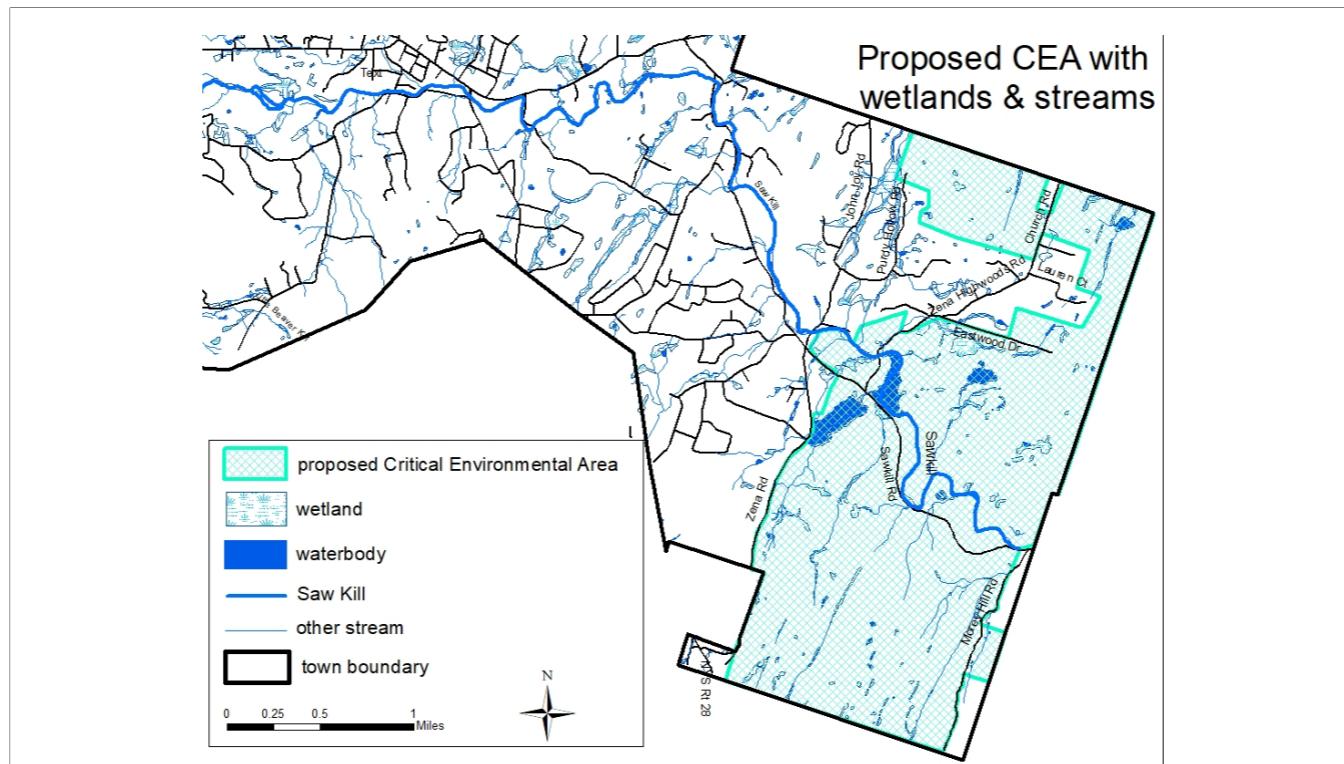
The proposed CEA contains nearly two miles of the Sawkill River, which, along with many of the smaller tributaries present, are classified NYS DEC Trout Streams. Forests bordering streams help to keep the streams cool, and supply them with organic and structural material for the aquatic food web and the forests of the Zena Woods help to protect the water quality, water volumes, and habitat quality of the Sawkill, and provide a forested corridor for over 8,000 feet of the stream where it winds through unprotected land.



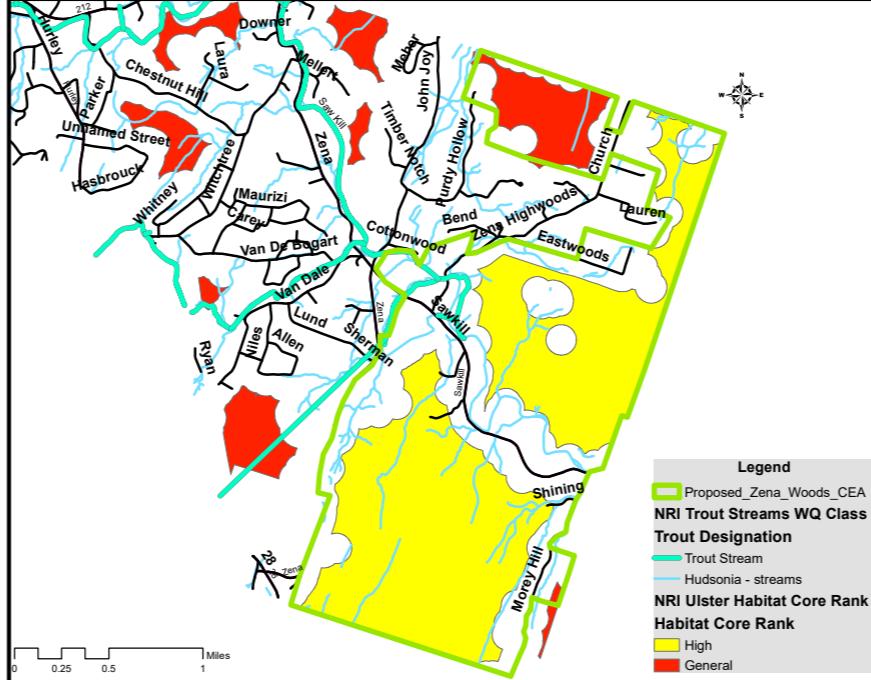
Core forests are interior forest areas surrounded by at least a 100-meter-wide buffer of edge forest habitat. These interior forest areas support a unique array of plants and animals that are easily disturbed by human activity.

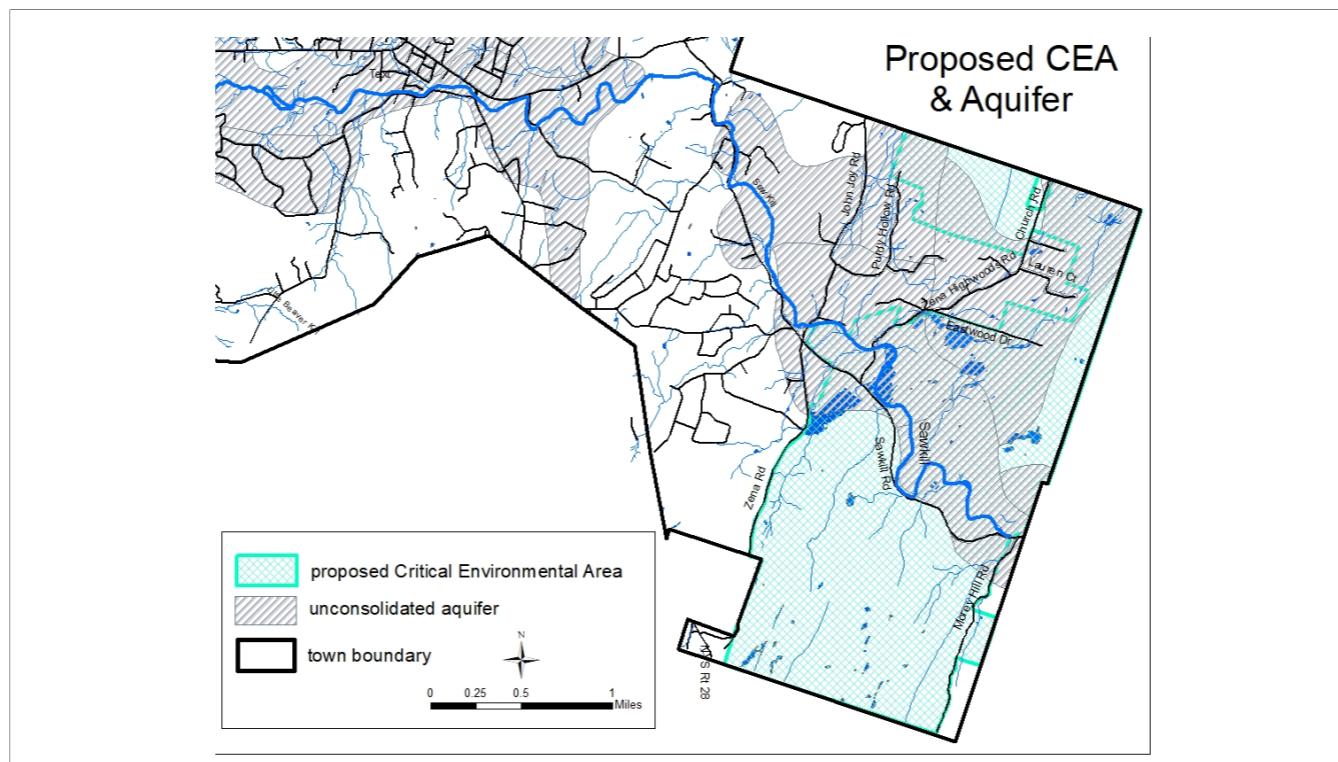
## Proposed Zena Woods CEA - Forest





## Proposed Zena Woods CEA - Habitat Quality





## IPCC issues 'bleakest warning yet' on impacts of climate breakdown



February 28, 2022

Sources: The Guardian; Times Union

HUDSON VALLEY // NEWS

## Ulster plans for the next flood

Towns in Ashokan Reservoir watershed prepare for 'worst-case scenario'

Lauren Harkawik

March 1, 2022



A road in Middleburgh becomes a river as a creek that normally runs under the road overflowed its banks when Tropical Storm Irene hit the area on Sunday, Aug. 28, 2011. The northern Catskills were hit hardest, but the storm was also the worst natural disaster in Ulster County's history. (Paul Buckowski / Times Union)

It is undeniable that we will be facing increasingly severe impacts of climate breakdown in the coming years. We have already seen a bit of what that could look like with weather events like Hurricane Irene and the recent ice storm that left so many without power or heat on the coldest days. The plans we make now will have lasting effects on future generations, and maximizing the natural resources that can help protect us- our forests and our wetlands in particular, is imperative to our future survival.

## How Does a CEA Affect Landowners?

- Activities of most landowners are unaffected, such as building a house, garage, minor accessory structure, or landscaping
- Subdivisions and larger projects which are subject to Planning Board review and already go through SEQR (the State Environmental Quality Review) will require consideration of potential impacts to CEAs

## How Does a CEA Affect Planning Board Reviews?

- If a project already subject to Type 1 or Unlisted actions under SEQR is in or adjacent to a CEA, the Planning Board must determine whether there will be any significant impacts to the CEA.
- If so, can those impacts be avoided or substantially mitigated?
- CEA designation does not affect the classification of actions under SEQR



Consideration of CEAs only applies to Type I or Unlisted actions under SEQR. Type II actions such as construction of a single-family dwelling on an approved lot are not subject to such review.

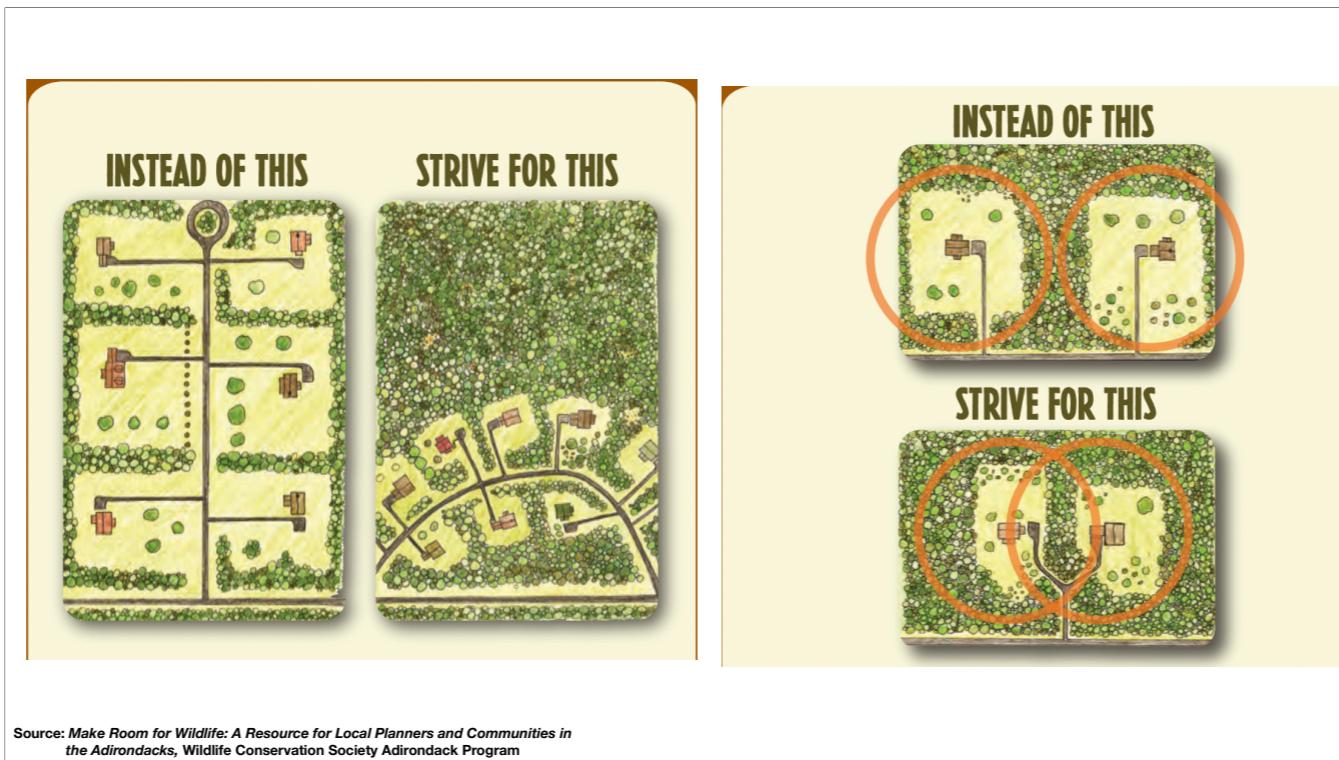
The short and full Environmental Assessment Forms (EAFs) identify whether proposed actions are within or adjacent to a designated CEA. If so, the lead agency must identify and evaluate the magnitude of potential adverse impacts to the qualities of the CEA. If a moderate or large impact is identified, the lead agency must decide if the impact is significant, whether the impact will be avoided or substantially mitigated.

**It is important to note that CEA designation does not affect the classification of actions under SEQR (i.e., it does not change actions from Unlisted to Type I or otherwise). Actions within a CEA likewise do not automatically trigger a declaration of a positive impact or automatically require preparation of an environmental impact statement.**

A CEA designation does not restrict or regulate land use, but rather helps alert landowners/developers and the PB upfront that they are working in an area with sensitive environmental resources, so that they can work together to site their development projects in a way that avoids or minimizes impacts to the most sensitive areas and maintains the overall integrity of the CEA.

## **Ways for Landowners to Minimize Their Impact in the CEA:**

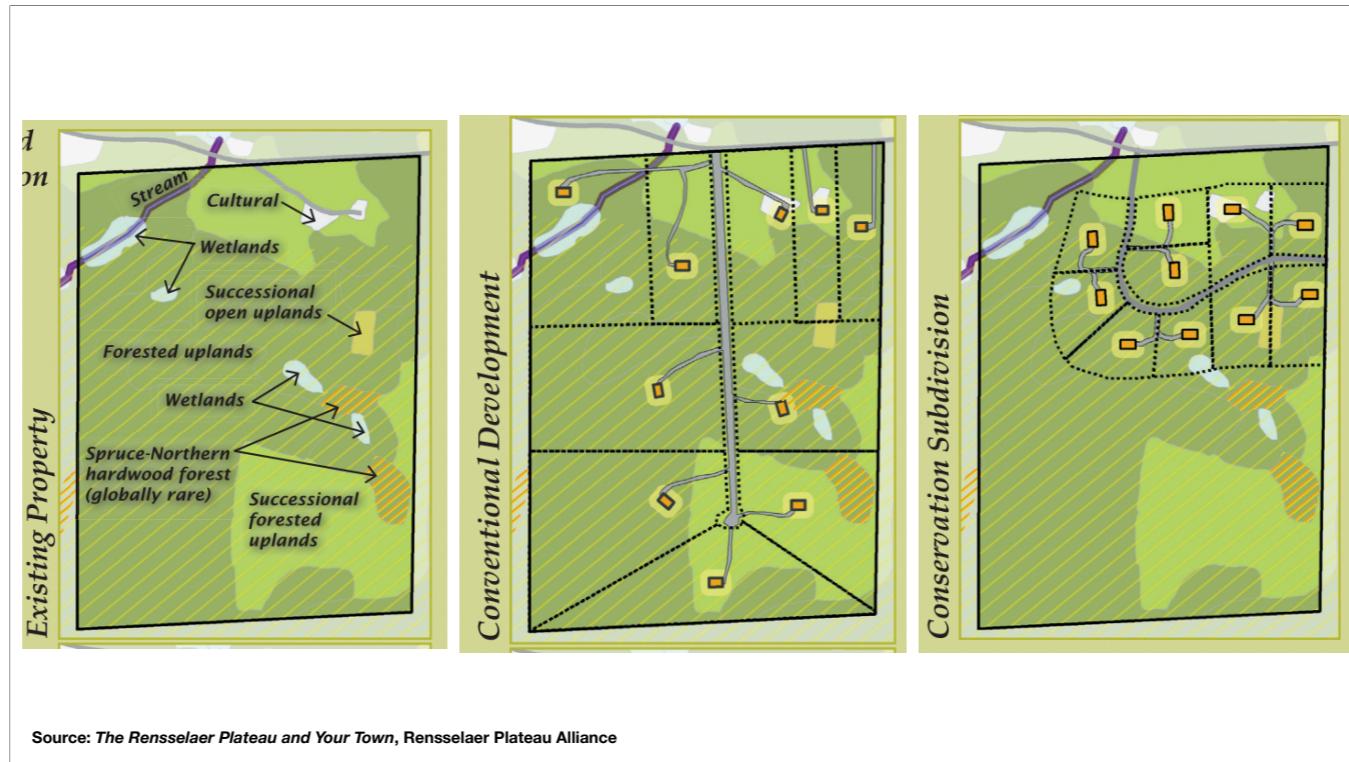
- Minimize disturbances
- Follow best practices for timber harvests
- Avoid or minimize forest fragmentation
- Maintain connectivity with forests outside the borders
- Keep vernal pools, wetlands, and small streams intact and the connections between wetlands intact
- Design development to accommodate storms of 500-year intensity in anticipation of more severe storms in coming years
- Do not obstruct or concentrate flood flows



Clustering homes

Minimizing new road construction

Adjusting the configuration of lots to avoid sensitive areas



## What Are the Benefits of a CEA?

- Alert developers and landowners about the resources present
- Ensure unique environmental areas are given appropriate consideration during project design and the SEQR process
- Provide information early to streamline reviews and avoid/reduce impacts
- Educate and advise on best practices and keep the “big picture” in mind
- Support conservation-based development
- Another tool to help Woodstock meet its conservation and climate goals as set forth in the Comprehensive Plan

CEA designation alerts landowners, developers, and regulatory agencies to features of importance or concern contained within the CEA.

It ensures these unique environmental areas are given appropriate consideration during the project design and planning stages and the SEQR process

It provides information early on in the development process which will streamline reviews and help avoid/ reduce impacts to the important ecological features

It will educate and advise on best practices and it will support and promote conservation-based development strategies that keep the big picture in mind- things like habitat connectivity and watershed protection

Another tool to help Woodstock meet its conservation and climate goals as set forth in the Comprehensive Plan

## **CEAs *DO NOT***

- Legally preserve land
- Affect construction of a single-family dwelling on an approved lot
- Restrict or prohibit development
- Require that any development be considered a SEQR Type 1 action
- Require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement

## Next Steps per NYS DEC

- Public Hearing
- SEQR
- Town Board vote
- File with NYSDEC—takes effect after 30 days



Thank you so much for joining us tonight. In this area, we are incredibly lucky to be surrounded by rich ecological resources and preserved biodiversity, but we are also in an area where those resources and biodiversity are threatened by irresponsible development. The work we are doing for environmental protection — The Woodstock Land Conservancy and the Town, including the CEA project, the WEC, Planning Board, and others — is a small but real part of necessary worldwide efforts to protect the planet

## Links to Further Information

- CEA Fact Sheet: [https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/remediation\\_hudson\\_pdf/ceafactsheet.pdf](https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/remediation_hudson_pdf/ceafactsheet.pdf)
- SEQR Handbook (see p. 49) <https://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/6188.html>
- FEAf Workbook: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/91771.html>
- Zena Woods CEA Proposal: <https://townwoodstock.digitaltowpath.org:10111/content/Boards/View/2:field=documents;/content/Documents/File/1637.pdf>
- Zena Woods CEA Presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isEIPKFEAw0&t=492s>