

A Salt Marsh Advancement Zone Assessment of Darien, Connecticut



Front cover image: Open space and unprotected parcels critical to the conservation of marsh advancement corridors in Darien; from the accompanying Comprehensive Map Book of Darien, Connecticut.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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Introduction

In 2006, The Nature Conservancy established the Coastal Resilience Program (www.coastalresilience.org) that provides tools and a solution framework to reduce the ecological and socio-economic risk of hazards and comprehensively improve community resilience. The Program focuses on helping decision-makers explore locally relevant, downscaled, flooding scenarios from sea-level rise and/or storm surge, analyze the potential ecological, social and economic impacts of each scenario at a local, regional, and state scale, and facilitate solutions to address these issues. Since 2006, The Nature Conservancy has assisted many coastal and inland communities in Connecticut by providing this critical information and a comprehensive, community-based process that improves overall resilience and sustainability.

There is a universal recognition by coastal and inland communities in Connecticut and elsewhere that natural infrastructure – wetlands and forests - is a cost effective, long-term part of the solution to help protect people, infrastructure and natural systems from extreme weather and climatic change. Fortunately, our state has a remarkable diversity and abundance of natural resources that provide habitat for wildlife and fisheries, enhance the aesthetics and quality of life for residents, and, of course, defend the shoreline and rivers against storm surge, inland flooding, and sea level rise. The presence of natural resources across the state – in particular salt marsh, beaches/dunes, forested headwaters, and river floodplains – is the result of previous recognition and commitment to long-term conservation and the requisite balance with socio-economic growth. In order to maintain these natural resources it will require 1) routine and on-going management activities as well as the restoration of degraded areas, 2) forward-looking planning to accommodate changes in habitat composition and location due to climatic change and 3) enforcement, modification and/or development of new land use policies and growth strategies. Opportunities also exist to account for and integrate the services or co-benefits provided by natural infrastructure via new development, redevelopment, or realignment activities. Economically important services/co-benefits from natural infrastructure include wave attenuation, improved water storage and filtering of pollutants from surface runoff, erosion control, and improved aesthetics and desirable public amenities. Taken in total, the immediate and longer-term management of natural infrastructure by the state, towns, private property owners, non-profit organizations, and others will help to reduce hazard risk and improve resilience across Connecticut.

While longer-term changes in temperature and precipitation patterns will alter the species composition and type of habitats in a given location, the more immediate implication is the upslope advancement of habitats such as salt marsh in response to continued sea level rise. Sea level rise and the impacts of flooding have and will continue to alter the presence and abundance of natural resources in Connecticut. One of the most noticeable changes is occurring at the shoreline's edge where salt marsh is in the process of advancing upslope into areas now considered uplands. In order to clearly identify where this will occur along Darien's shoreline, The Nature Conservancy presents the following report to assist with future planning for natural resources in the context of overall risk reduction and resiliency improvement for the community. Ultimately, it is our hope that this report will serve to inform the community about

future marsh advancement locations, current land use of those locations and which parcels are critical to ensure the persistence of natural resources in Darien longer term.

The Salt Marsh Advancement Model used in this analysis was co-developed by The Nature Conservancy and the University of Connecticut's Department of Natural Resources Management and Engineering. A full discussion of the Model and underlying methodology is beyond the scope of this report, but a few important details are needed to put the following analysis into context and define how to use the results for planning and implementation.

Suitable vs. Unsuitable Advancement

In the following figures and tables suitable advancement areas are abbreviated as “Yes” and unsuitable areas are abbreviated as “No”. Suitable areas are classified based on the current land cover type - “forest” or “agrigrass” - and as such are expected to convert to salt marsh as hydrologic conditions change due to sea level rise, in the absence of further land use conversion. Land cover types classified as “urban” (i.e. roads, buildings, runways, parking lots, etc...) are considered to be unsuitable for salt marsh advancement at this time. Though much of our analysis is grouped by parcel ID and associated characteristics, these classifications – suitable and unsuitable – exist independent of the parcel boundaries. In other words, a given residential parcel can have both suitable (lawn) and unsuitable (building footprint) advancement areas.

Marsh Advancement vs. Wetland Extent

There is a key distinction in this report between the current wetland extent in a municipality and the marsh advancement areas analyzed herein. Marsh advancement areas include only the future projected wetland extent clipped to current upland land cover. Therefore, no assumption should be made about net gain or loss of current wetland extent based on this advancement area analysis. Another key consideration is that in some cases the identified advancement area will include land that converts to wetlands and subsequently to open-water over time. This further demonstrates that net change in both existing and future wetland extent should not be inferred from our analysis.

Planning for the Future

The advancement and eventual establishment of coastal marshes will occur over the course of several decades and as such our analysis extends out to the 2080s. The rate of change is slow and decadal, yet inevitable. There is an abundance of existing property, infrastructure and natural infrastructure assets clustered along the Connecticut coast and communities will need to formulate growth and realignment plans well in advance of the 2080s scenario presented here. The following data analysis and associated map book (Appendix) can assist with a resilient transition through the presentation of marsh advancement areas and an accounting of the projected changes to coastal property.

Total Marsh Advancement

The full extent of marsh advancement in Darien by the 2080s is projected to be 506.5 acres, with 415.9 acres (82.1%) having suitable (Yes) land cover for wetland advancement. The other 90.6 acres (17.9%) are occupied by built structures and associated infrastructure and are unsuitable for marsh advancement (No), currently.

Total Marsh Advancement by 2080s		
Marsh Adv	Acres	Percent (%)
Yes	415.9	82.1
No	90.6	17.9
Total	506.5	100.0

Marsh Advancement in Open Space Parcels

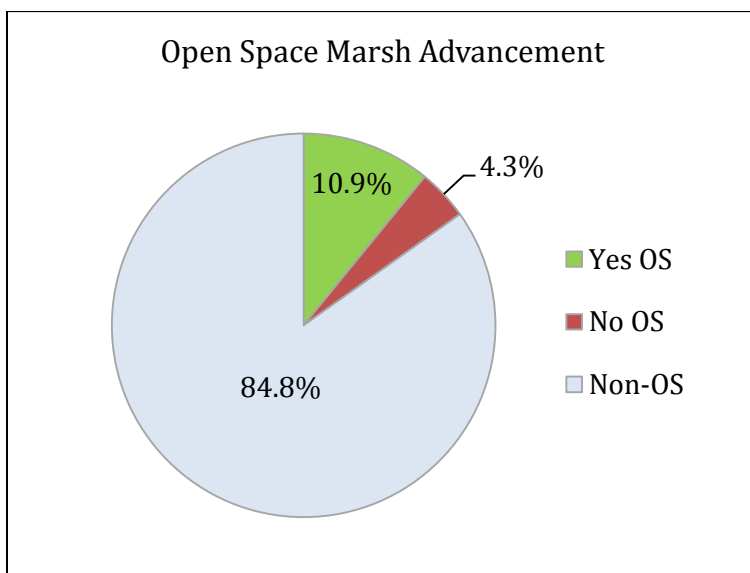
Open space (OS) properties are a critical component of long-term community resilience because they currently have little to no development and are the most likely areas to remain undeveloped through the 2080s. The recognition of their role in future wetland extent and improved resilience in Darien is vital for strategic land management, economic development, and planning.

Total Advancement in Open Space Parcels

The following three categories are considered in this section:

- Yes OS: Areas of open space suitable for marsh advancement
- No OS: Areas of open space unsuitable for marsh advancement
- Non-OS: Unprotected areas both suitable and unsuitable for marsh advancement

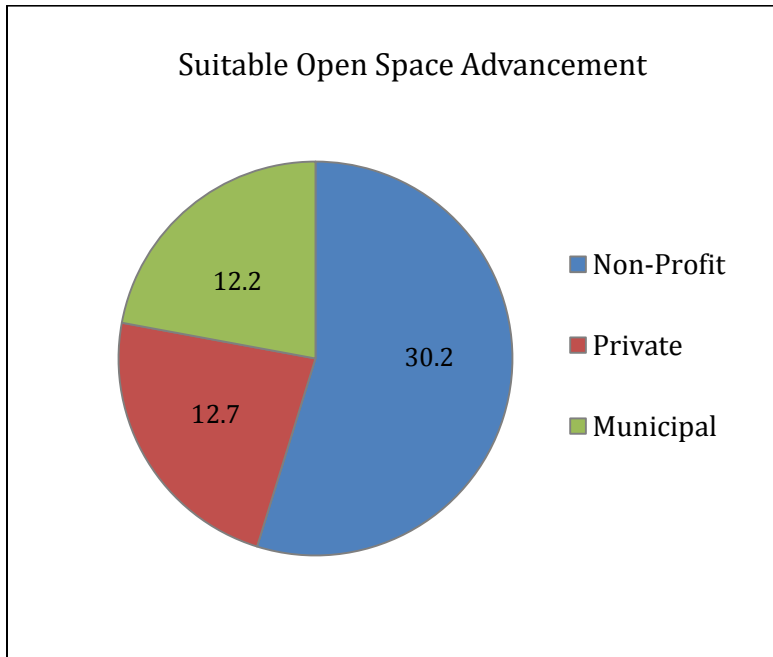
Darien’s open space parcels contain 76.8 acres of total marsh advancement area with 55.2 acres (10% of total) having a land cover suitable for future wetlands (Yes OS). Further analysis of the 429.7 acres of unprotected parcels (Non-OS) can be found in the following “Marsh Advancement in All Parcels” section.



Open Space Marsh Advancement	
OS type	Acres
Yes OS	55.1
No OS	21.6
Non-OS	429.7
Total	506.5

Suitable Open Space Advancement by Owner

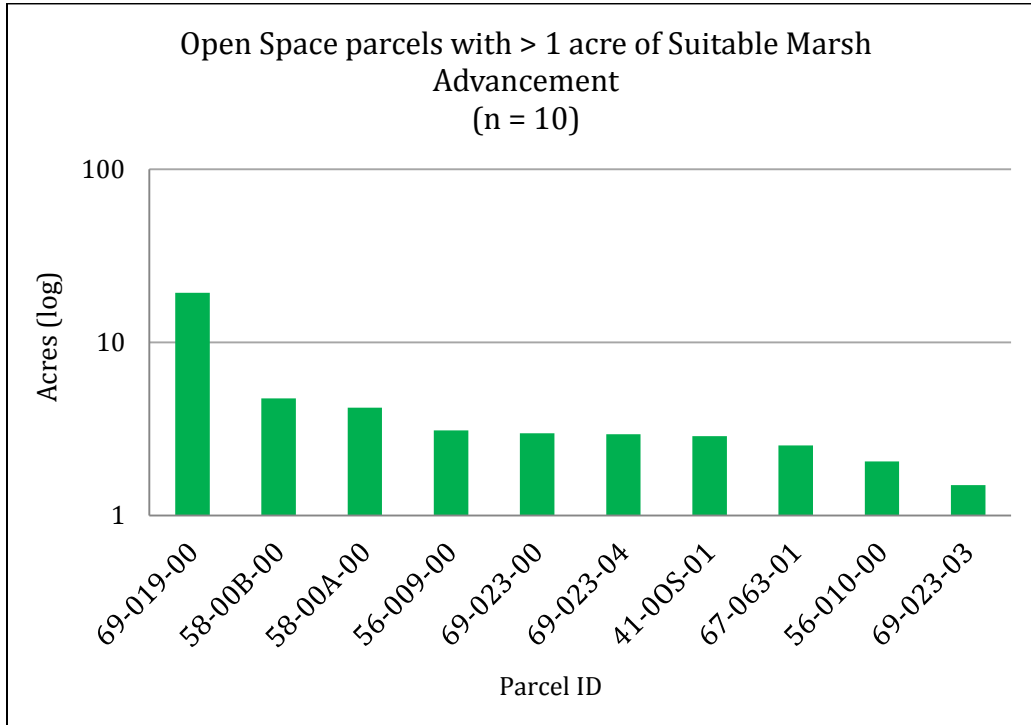
A closer look at Darien’s protected open space reveals that the The Darien Land Trust owns the greatest share of suitable land cover for marsh advancement accounting for 30.2 acres (54.8%). The remaining suitable open space is split between private and municipal ownership each providing 12.7 acres and 12.2 acres, respectively.



Owner type	Acres	Total "yes" OS (%)	Total "yes" adv (%)
Non-Profit	30.2	54.8	7.3
Private	12.7	23.0	3.1
Municipal	12.2	22.2	2.9
Total	55.1	100.0	13.3

Suitable Advancement by Open Space Parcel

Darien has 34 open space parcels that intersect the full extent of marsh advancement by the 2080s. There are 10 open space parcels that each provides more than 1 acre of advancement area with a total aggregate of 46.3 acres (84.0%) of Darien's suitable open space marsh advancement area. The largest parcel, Darien Land Trust's Tokeneke property, contributes significantly more than all other parcel making up 35.1% of total.



Open Space parcels with > 1 acre Suitable Marsh Advancement				
Parcel ID	Acres	Total "yes" OS (%)	Owner	Map Book Page #
69-019-00	19.3	35.1	Non-Profit	6
58-00B-00	4.8	8.6	Private	6
58-00A-00	4.2	7.6	Private	6
56-009-00	3.1	5.6	Municipal	6
69-023-00	3.0	5.4	Non-Profit	7
69-023-04	3.0	5.4	Non-Profit	6
41-00S-01	2.9	5.2	Municipal	6
67-063-01	2.5	4.6	Non-Profit	7
56-010-00	2.1	3.7	Municipal	6
69-023-03	1.5	2.7	Non-Profit	7
Total	46.4	83.9		

Marsh Advancement in All Parcels

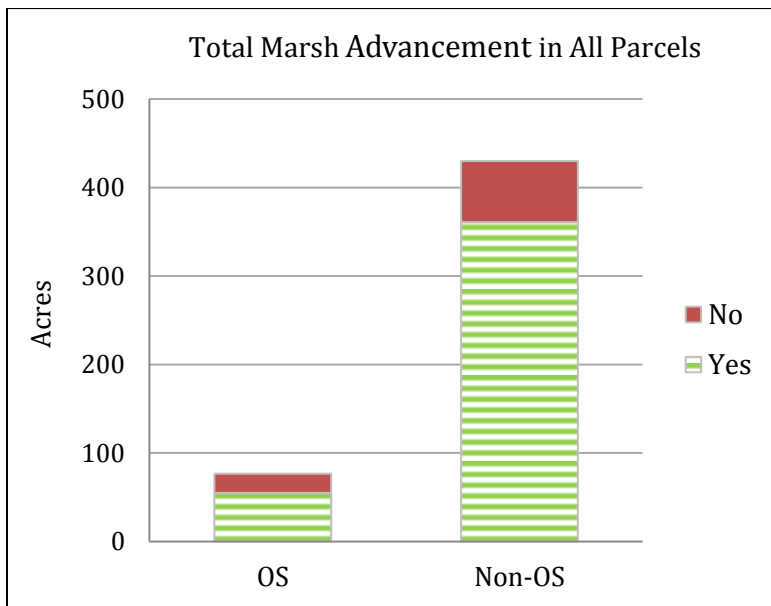
This section incorporates all parcels into the analysis of suitable marsh advancement. These results help put the open space analysis into perspective, as well as identify important unprotected parcels in Darien’s marsh advancement landscape.

Total Advancement in All Parcels (OS vs. Non-OS)

Darien’s existing open space parcels are made up of municipal parks, municipal open space, land trust properties, public schools, cemeteries, and private recreation areas including golf courses. This section provides an analysis of suitable areas for marsh advancement on these open space parcels versus all other parcels. These two types of parcels are designated as:

- ‘OS’ for open space parcels
- ‘Non-OS’ for all other parcels

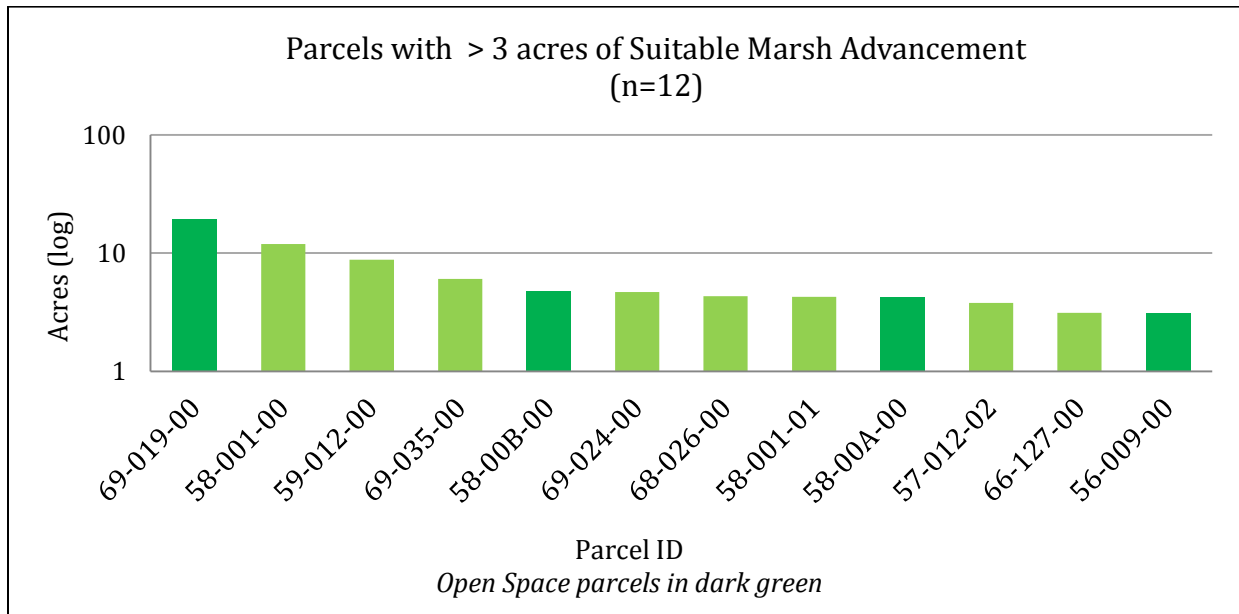
Open space parcels contain 55.1 acres (13.2% of total) of suitable marsh advancement zone. The remaining 360.8 acres of land suitable for marsh advancement (86.8% of total) are unprotected and generally occur on residential, commercial, or industrial properties. The unprotected suitable areas will receive over six times the marsh advancement by 2080s. This information has two important implications for future planning: 1) today’s unprotected properties will play a vital role in maintaining Darien’s wetland resources in the future, and 2) a large amount of current development (69.0 acres) will be in direct conflict with rising sea levels and advancing marshes.



Parcel type	Yes	No	Total
OS	55.1	21.6	76.7
Non-OS	360.8	69.0	429.8
Total	415.9	90.6	506.5

Suitable Advancement by All Parcels

There are 637 parcels in Darien that provide areas of suitable marsh advancement, but only 12 parcels offer suitable areas greater than 3 acres. This small subset provides 78.4 acres of marsh advancement zone or 18.8% of Darien’s overall total. The specific parcels can be viewed via the corresponding Map Book pages (Appendix) indicated in the table below.



Parcels with > 3 acres of Suitable Marsh Advancement			
Parcel ID	Acres	Total yes adv (%)	Map Book Page #
69-019-00	19.3	4.6	6
58-001-00	12.0	2.9	4,6,15,23
59-012-00	8.8	2.1	4,6,15,23
69-035-00	6.0	1.4	5,7,12,20
58-00B-00	4.8	1.2	6
69-024-00	4.7	1.1	5,7,12,20
68-026-00	4.3	1.0	4,6,12,20
58-001-01	4.3	1.0	4,6,12,20
58-00A-00	4.2	1.0	6
57-012-02	3.8	0.9	4,6,14,22
66-127-00	3.1	0.8	5,7,13,21
56-009-00	3.1	0.8	6
Total	78.4	18.8	

Appendix – Map Book

Please consult your Marsh Advancement Resource Disc for the complete dataset of suitable and unsuitable advancement per parcel.

The Nature Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.®

Comprehensive Map Book of Darien, Connecticut



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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

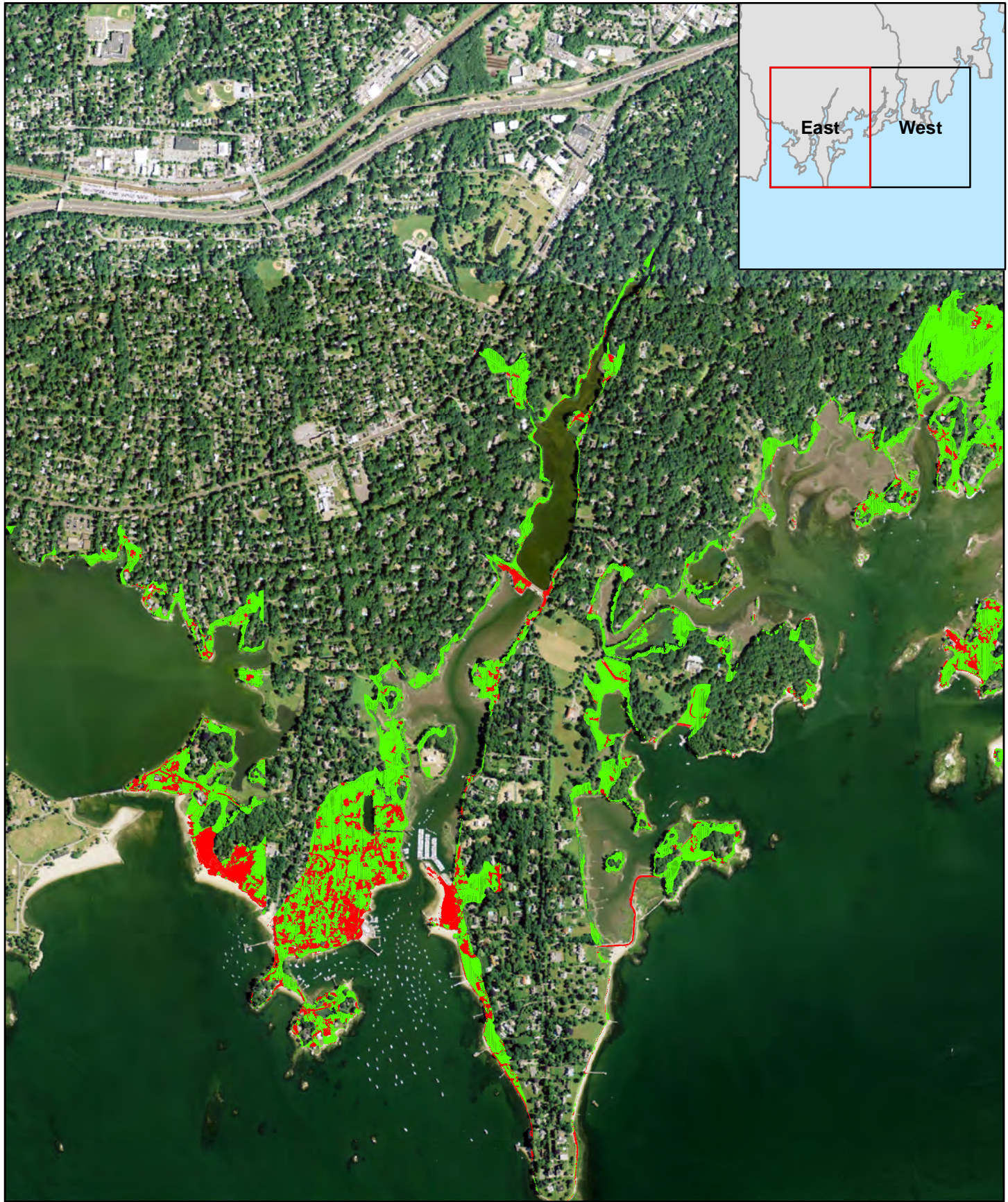
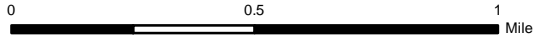
Town of Darien, CT

Marsh Advancement - East



Marsh Advancement by 2080s

- Developed Land Cover
- Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

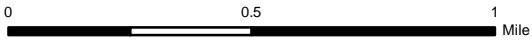
Town of Darien, CT

Marsh Advancement - West



Marsh Advancement by 2080s

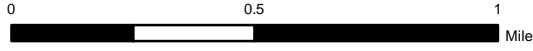
- Developed Land Cover
- Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - East



Parcels

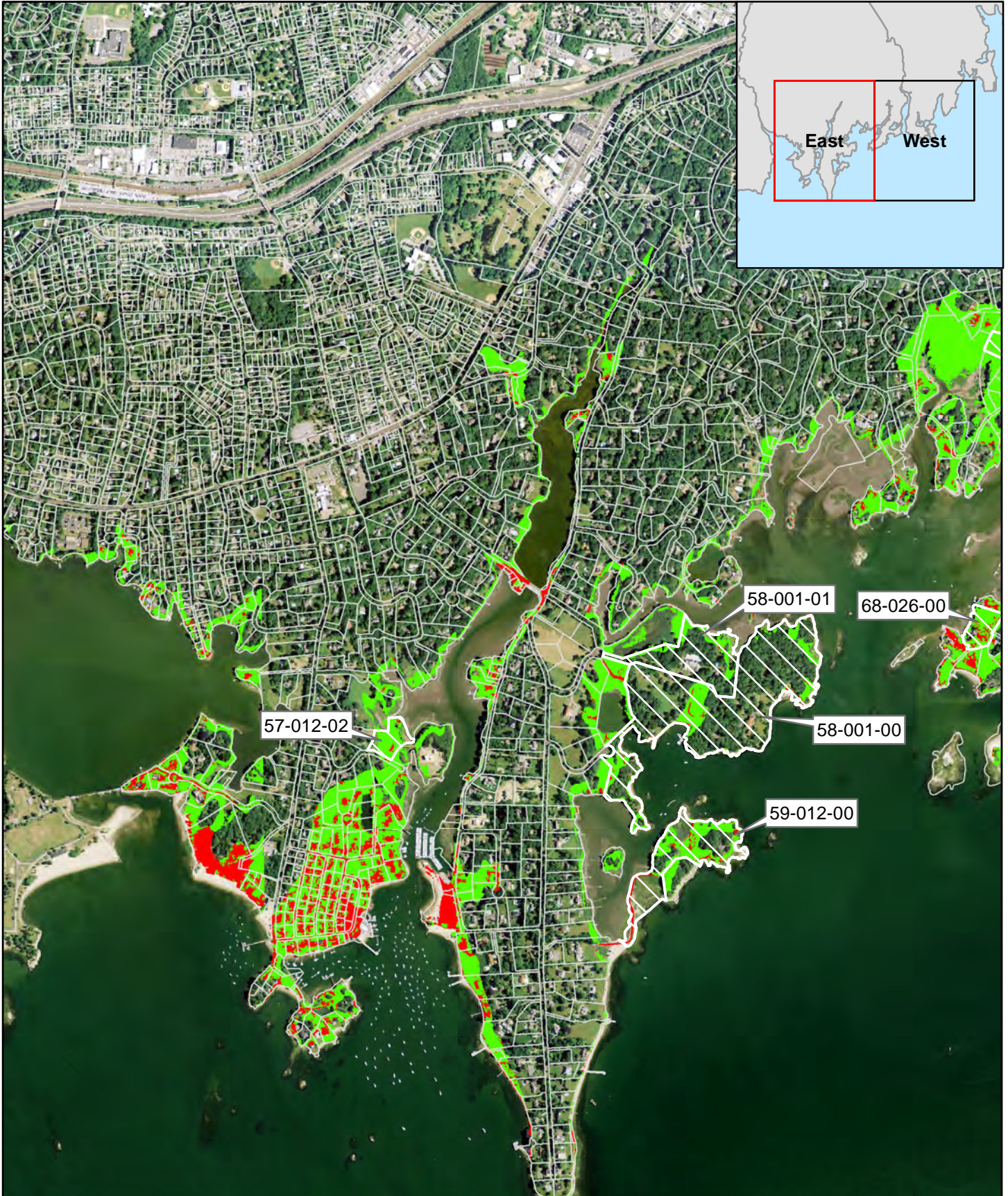
Unprotected Non-OS

Marsh Advancement by 2080s

Developed Land Cover

Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover

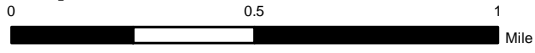
Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable advancement are shown.



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT


Unprotected Parcels - West




Parcels

 Unprotected Non-OS

Marsh Advancement by 2080s

 Developed Land Cover

 Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover

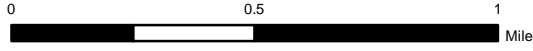
Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable advancement are shown.



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Critical Parcels - East



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable advancement and OS parcels with > 1 acre of suitable advancement are shown.

Parcels

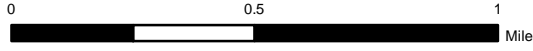
- Unprotected Non-OS
- Protected OS



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s



Town of Darien, CT

Critical Parcels - West



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable advancement and OS parcels with > 1 acre of suitable advancement are shown.

Parcels

-  Unprotected Non-OS
-  Protected OS

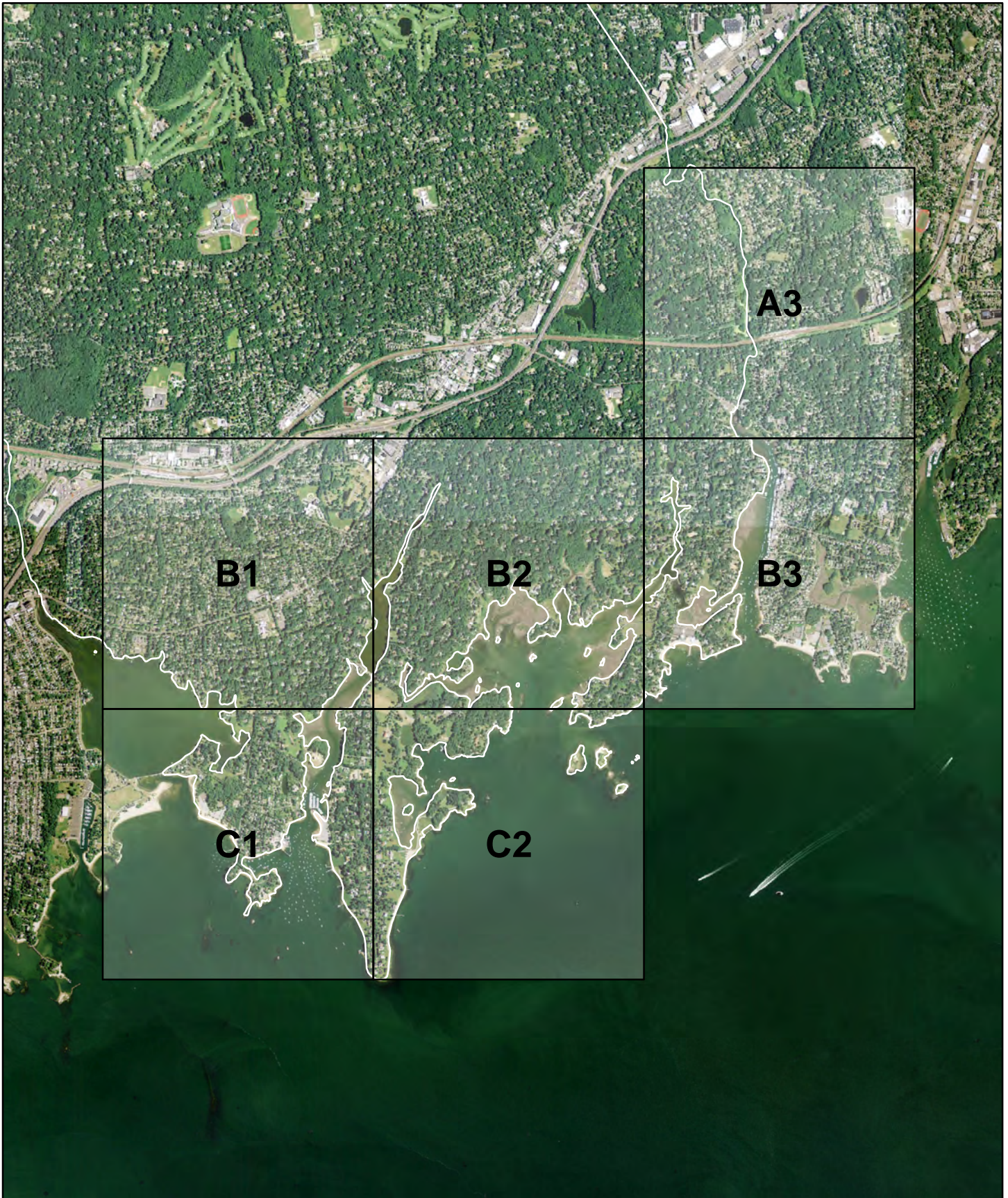


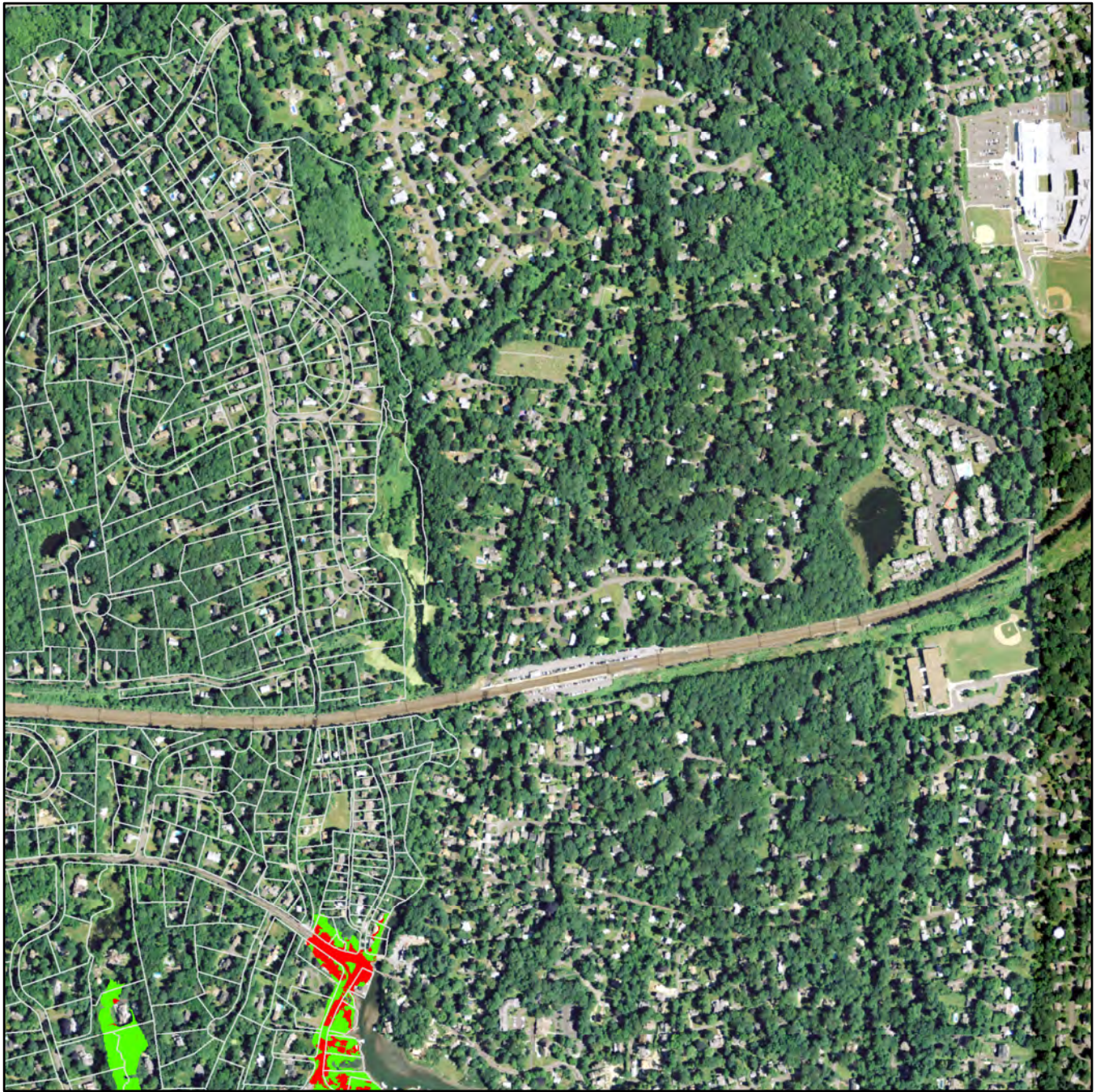
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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Map Index - Unprotected Parcels





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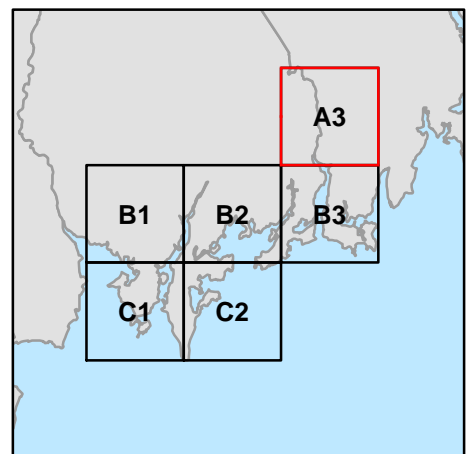
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map A3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





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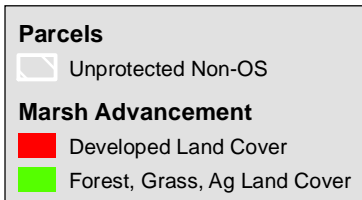


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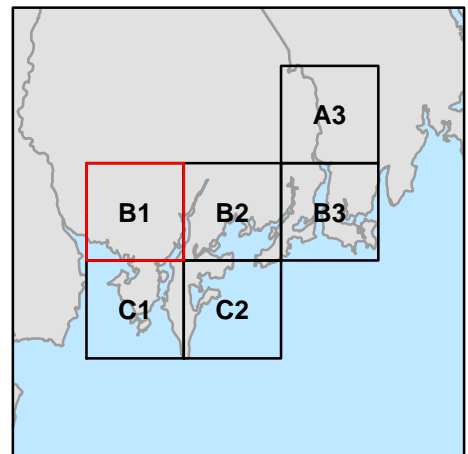
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map B1

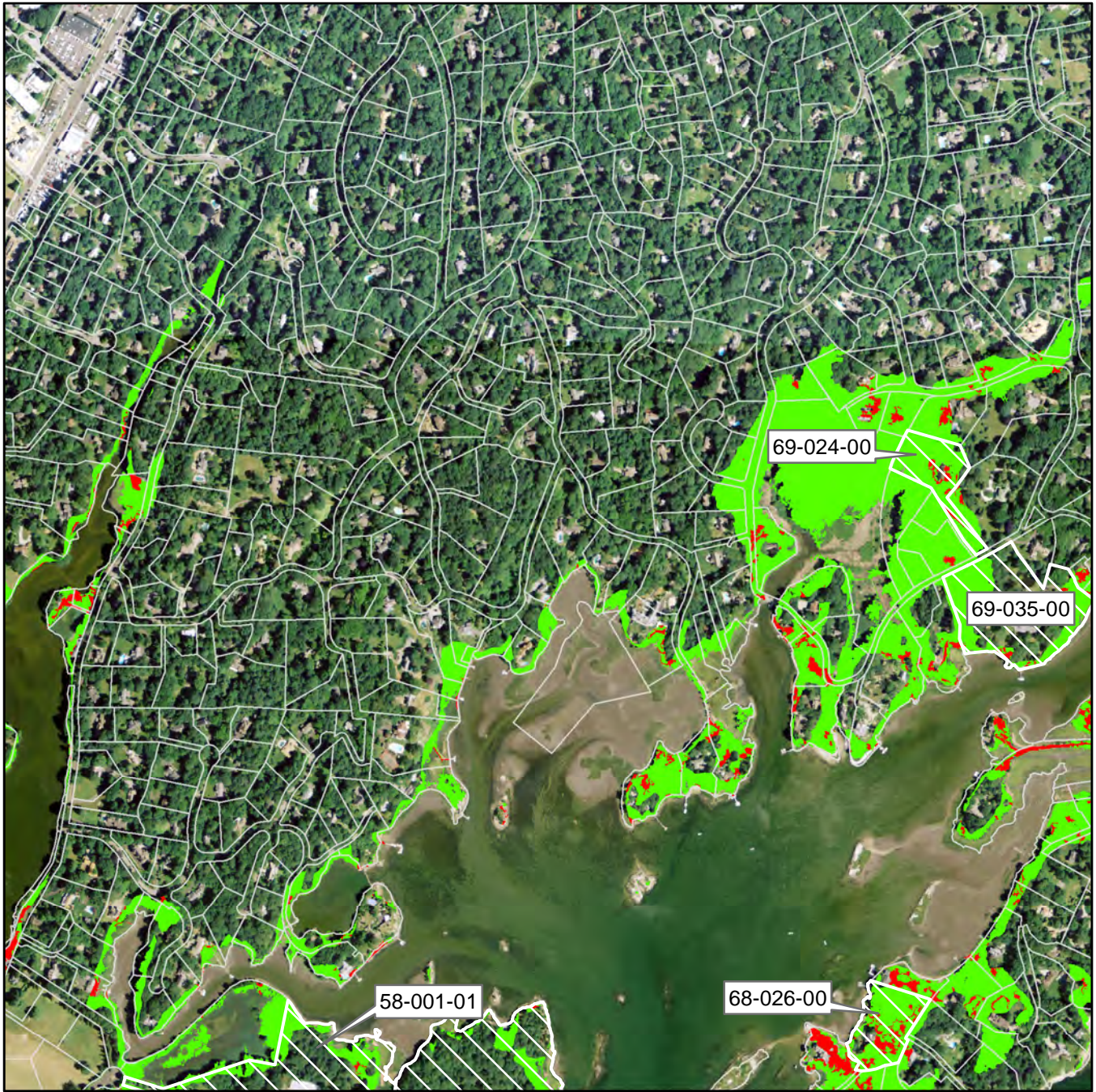


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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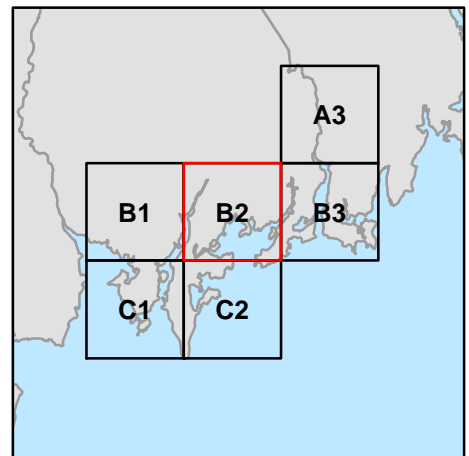
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map B2



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map B3

Parcels

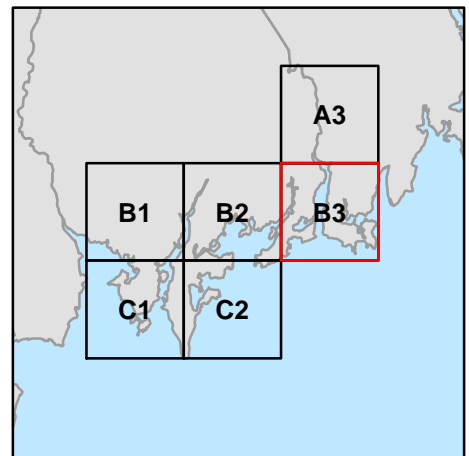
- Unprotected Non-OS

Marsh Advancement

- Developed Land Cover
- Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





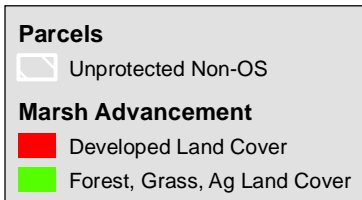
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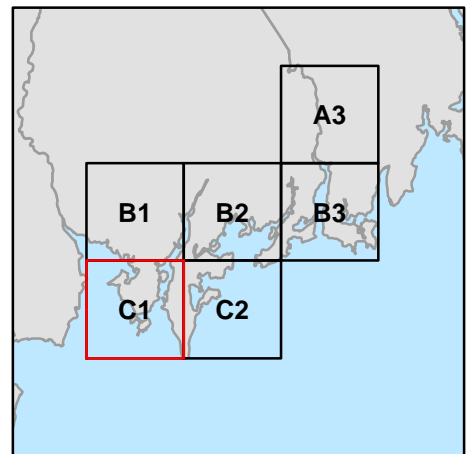
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map C1



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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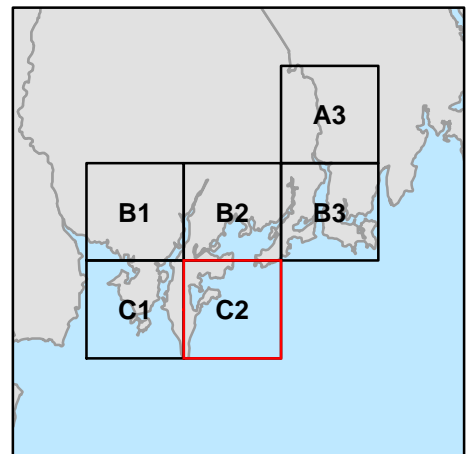
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map C2



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.

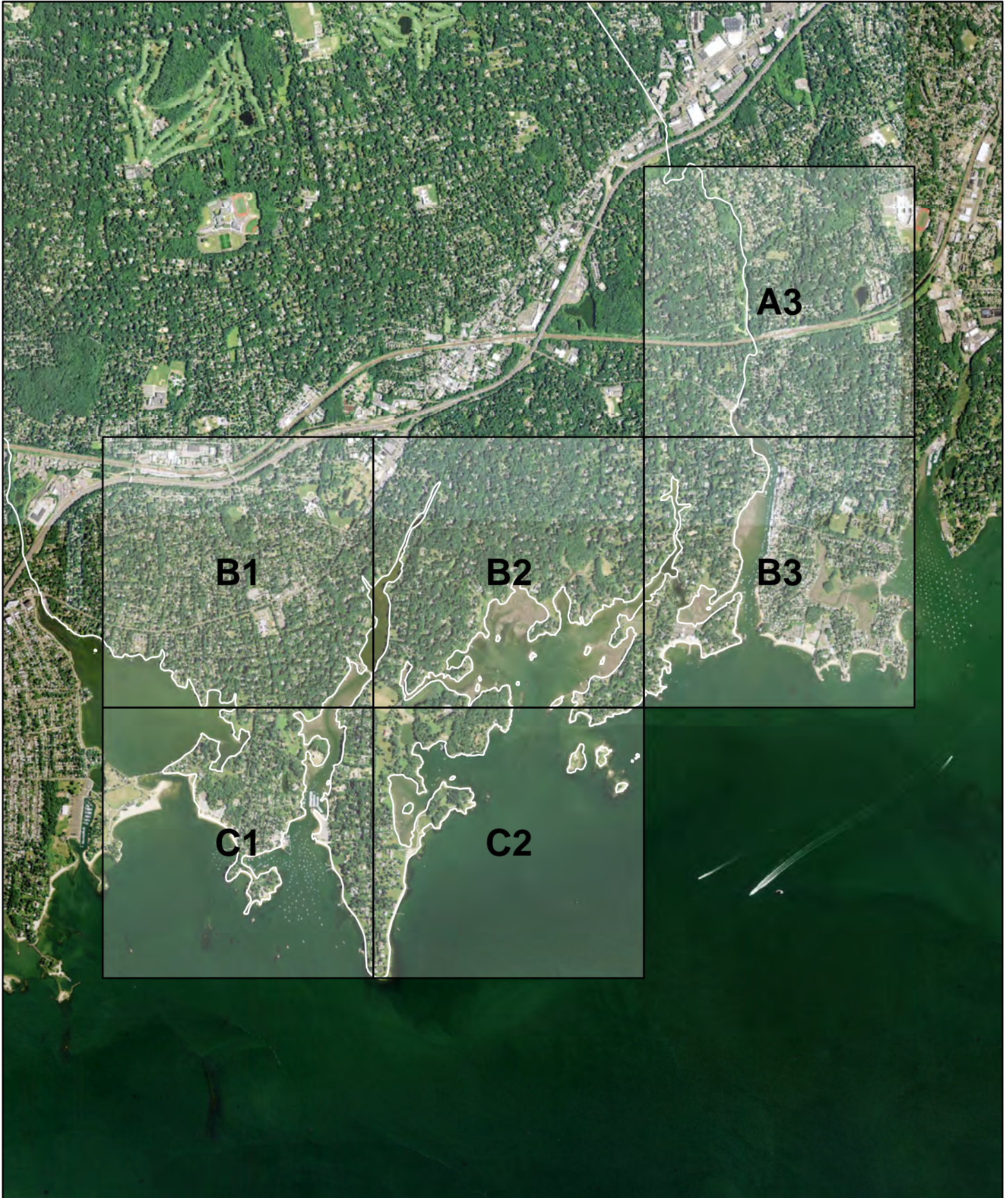


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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Map Index - Advancement per Parcel





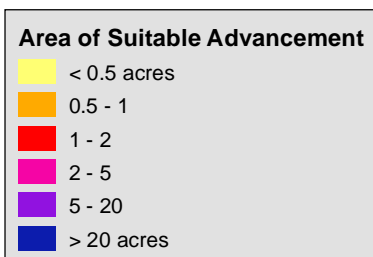
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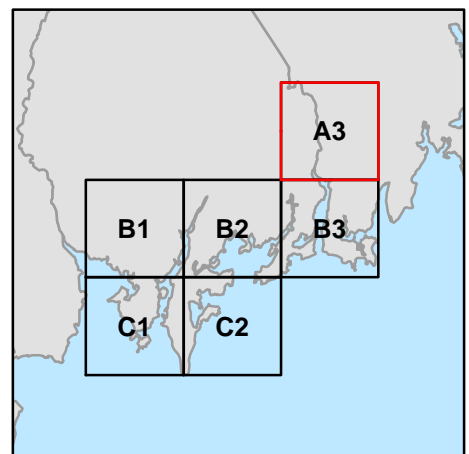
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

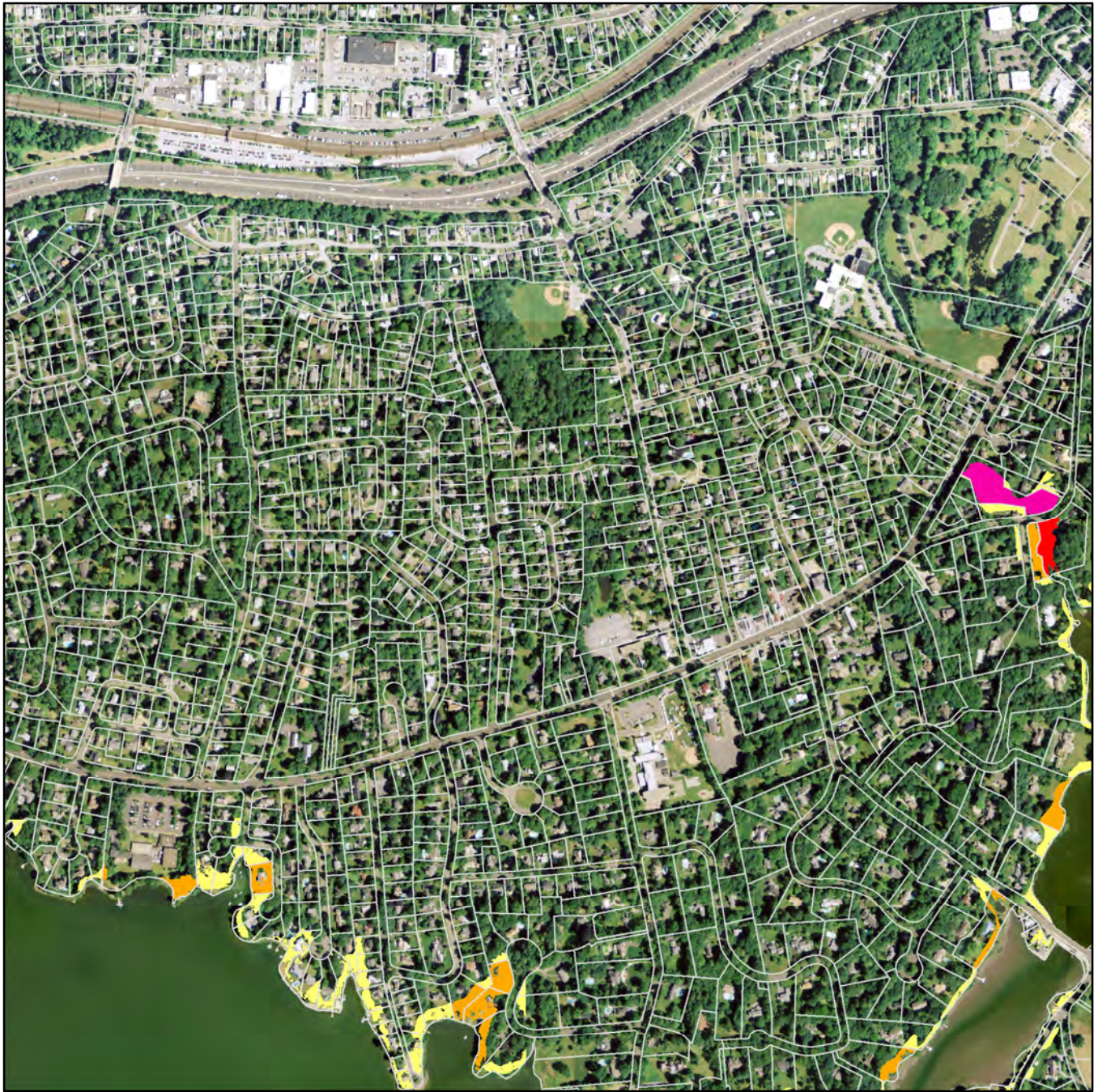
Town of Darien, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map A3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





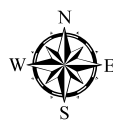
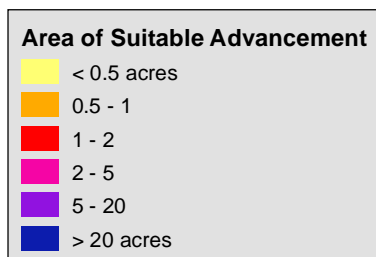
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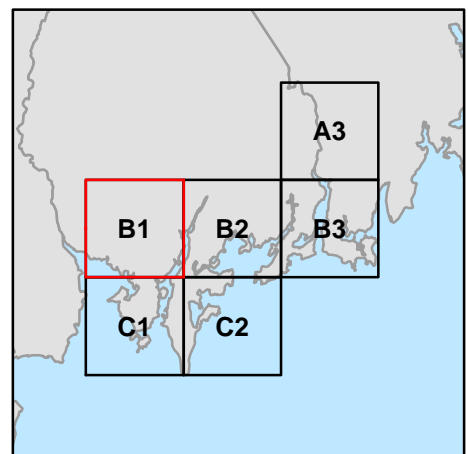
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map B1

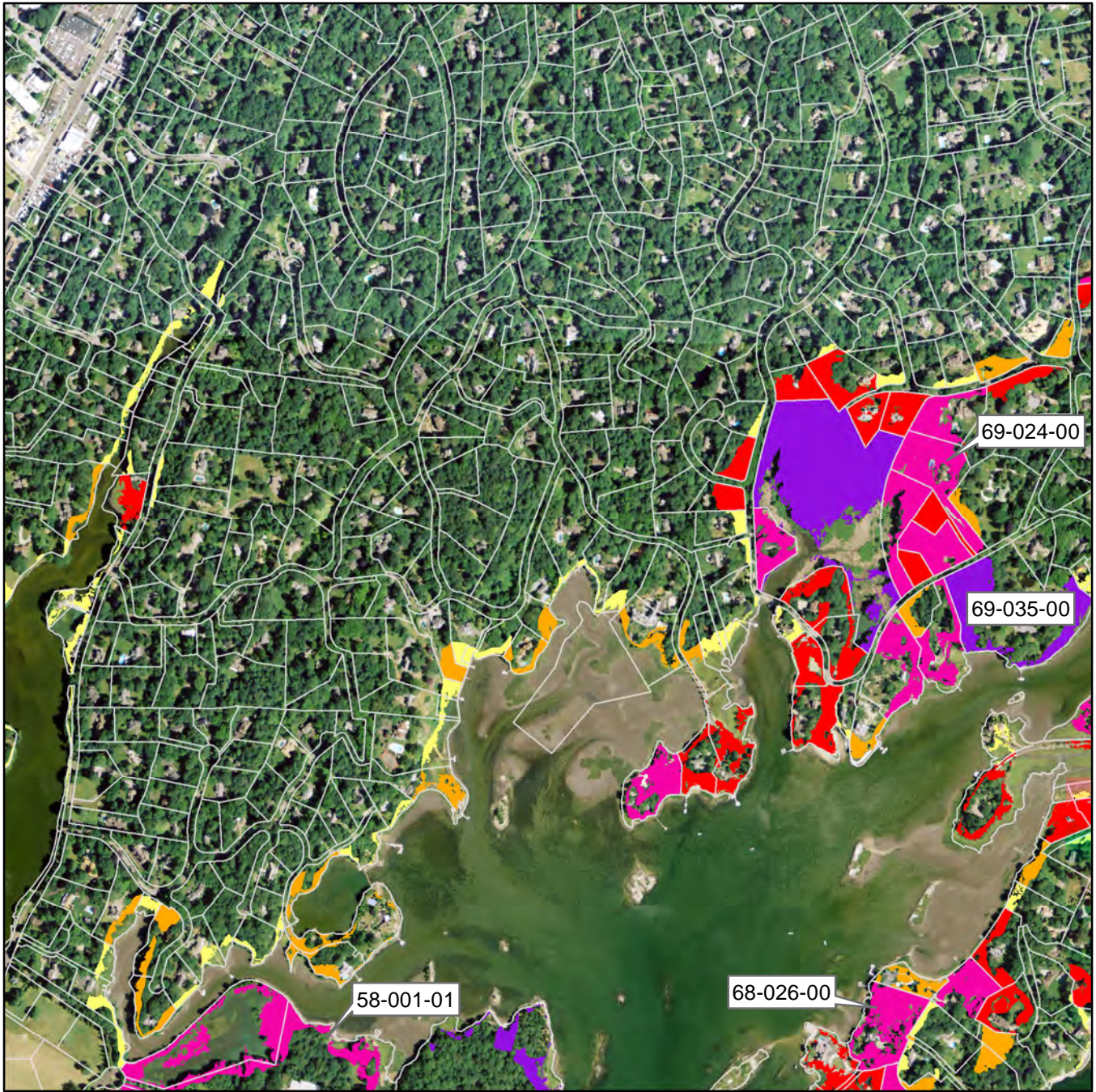


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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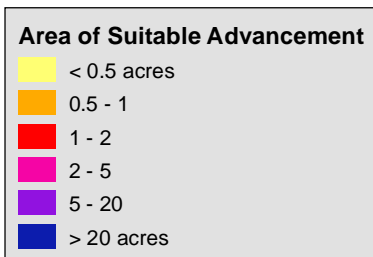


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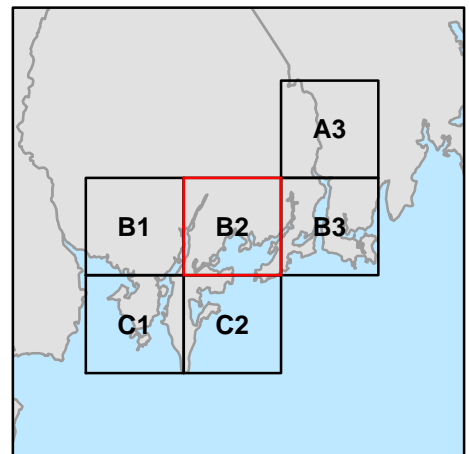
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map B2



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



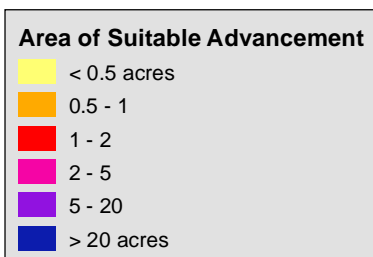
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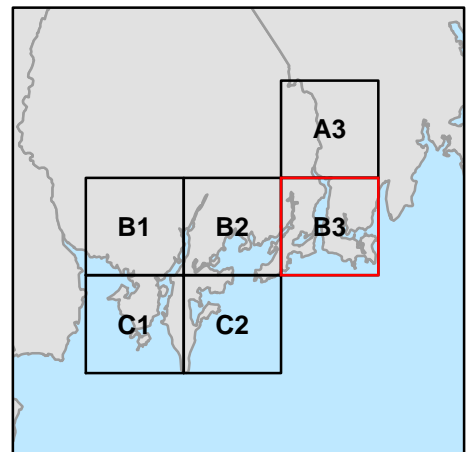
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

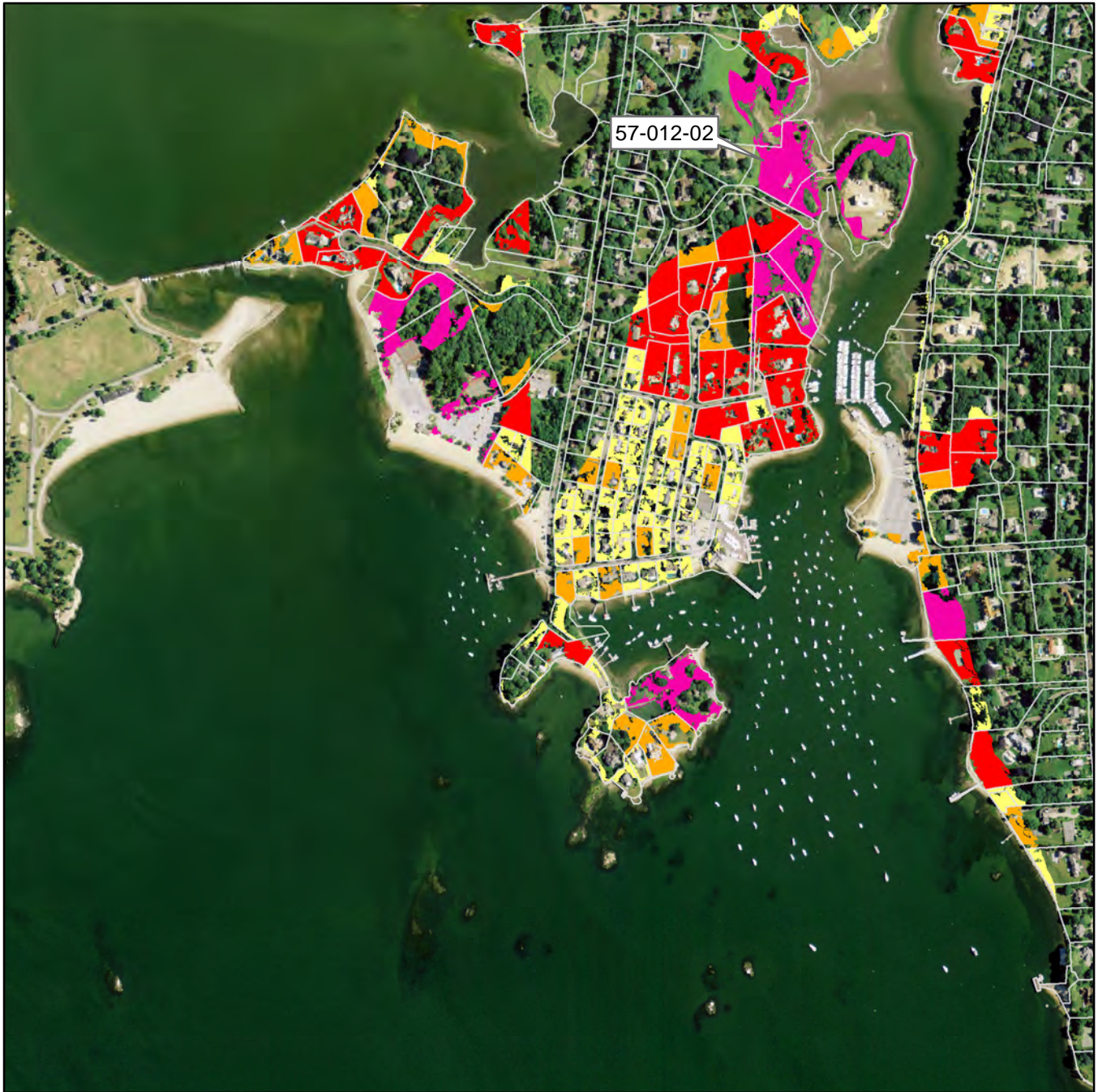
Town of Darien, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map B3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





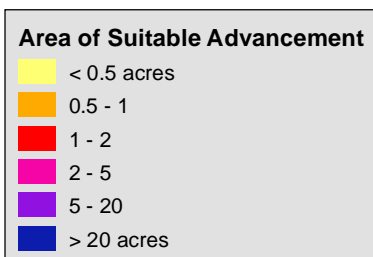
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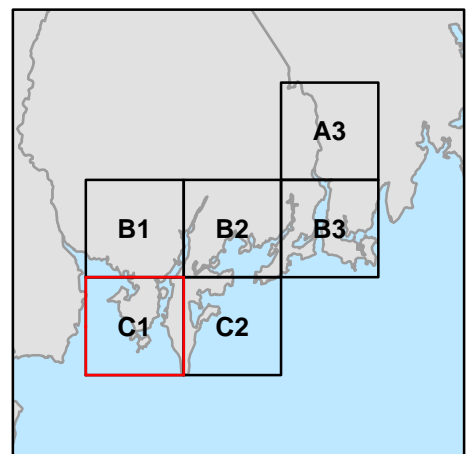
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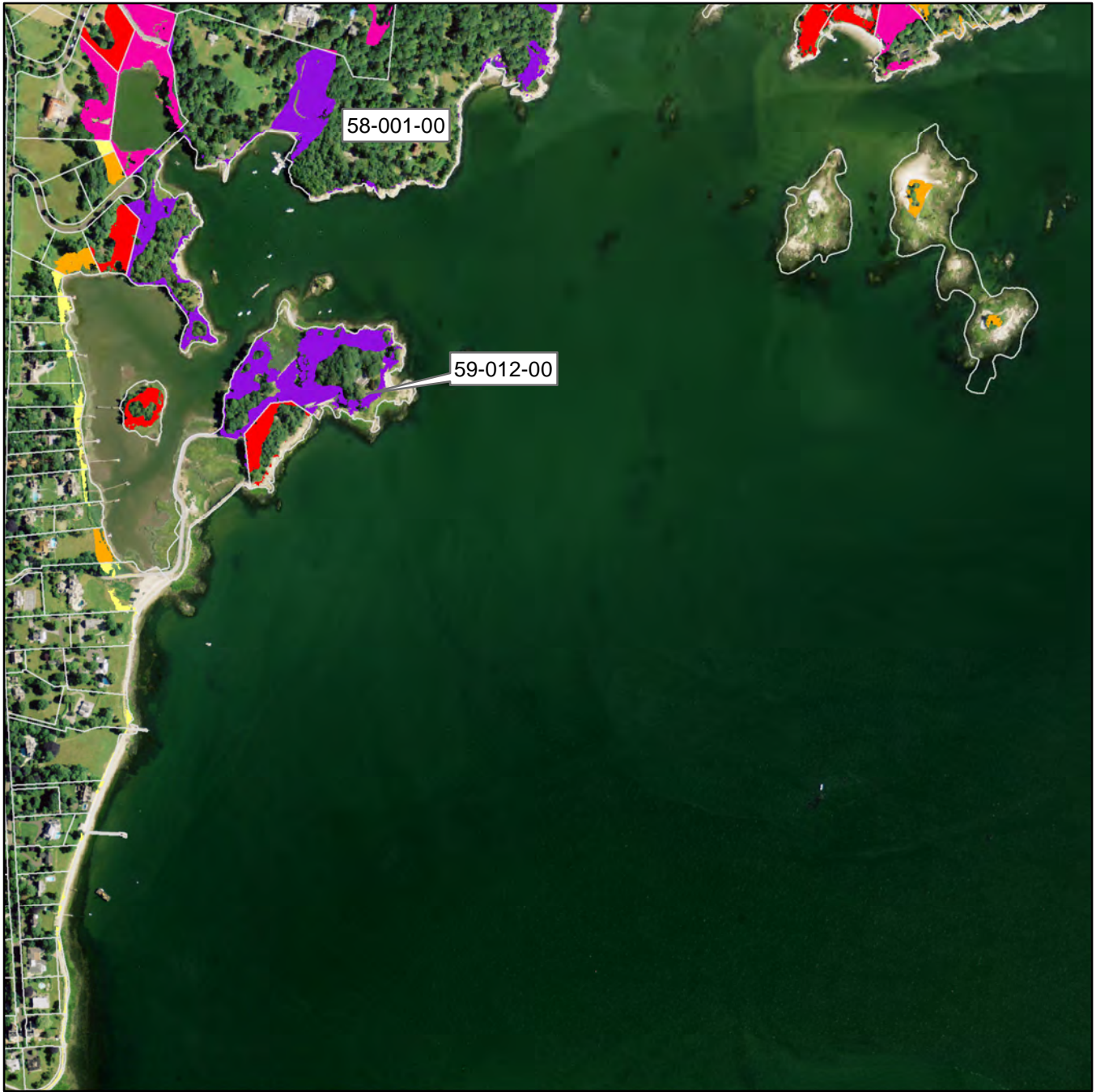
Advancement per Parcel - Map C1



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



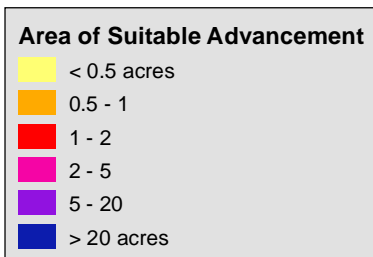
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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Darien, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map C2



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 3 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.

