

A Salt Marsh Advancement Zone Assessment of Stonington, Connecticut



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

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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 Stonington'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 Stonington 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 Stonington by the 2080s is projected to be 1,999.4 acres, with 1,731.2 acres (86.6%) having suitable (Yes) land cover for wetland advancement. The other 268.2 acres (13.4%) 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	1,731.2	86.6
No	268.2	13.4
Total	1,999.4	100.0

Marsh Advancement in Open Space Parcels

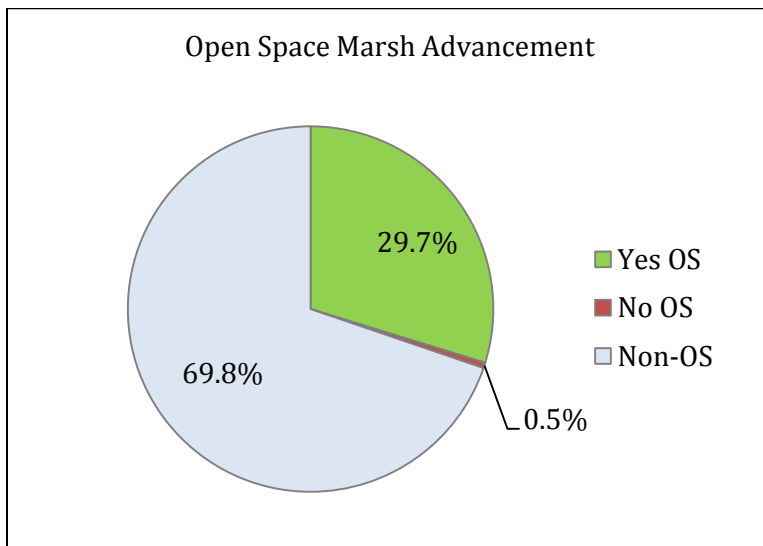
Open space (OS) properties are a critical component of long-term community resilience because they currently have little to no development and are the most likely areas to remain undeveloped through the 2080s. The recognition of the role of these parcels in future wetland extent and improved resilience in Stonington 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

Stonington’s open space parcels contain 604.5 acres of total marsh advancement area with 594.8 acres (29.7% of total) having a land cover suitable for future wetlands (Yes OS). Further analysis of the 1,394.9 acres of unprotected parcels (Non-OS) can be found in the following “Marsh Advancement in All Parcels” section.

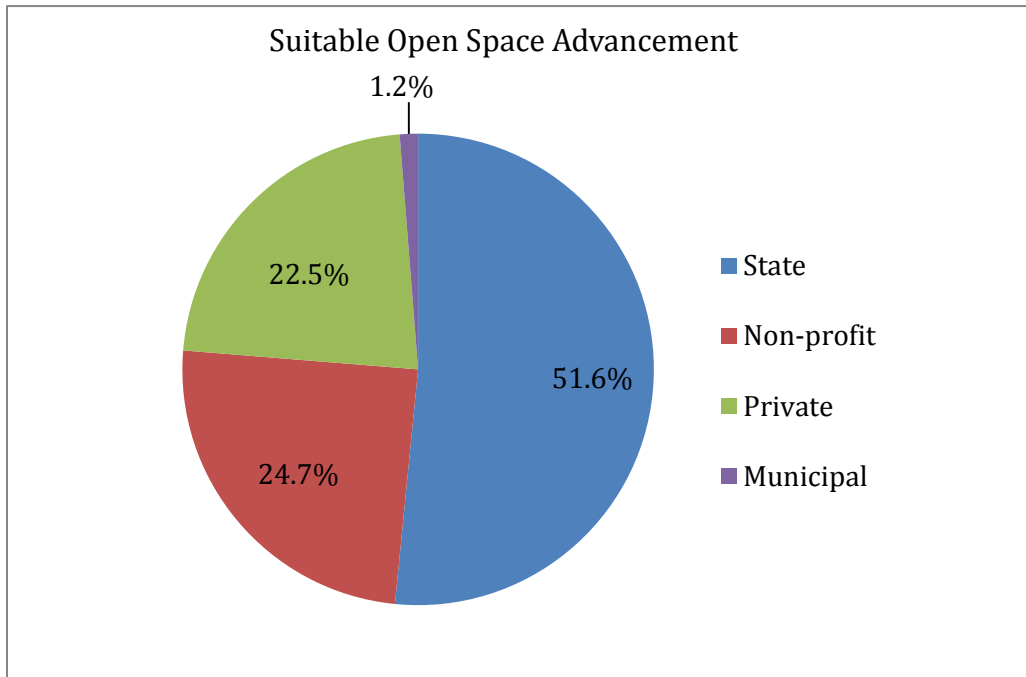


Open Space Marsh Advancement	
OS type	Acres
Yes OS	594.8
No OS	9.7
Non-OS	1,394.9
Total	1,999.4

Suitable Open Space Advancement by Owner

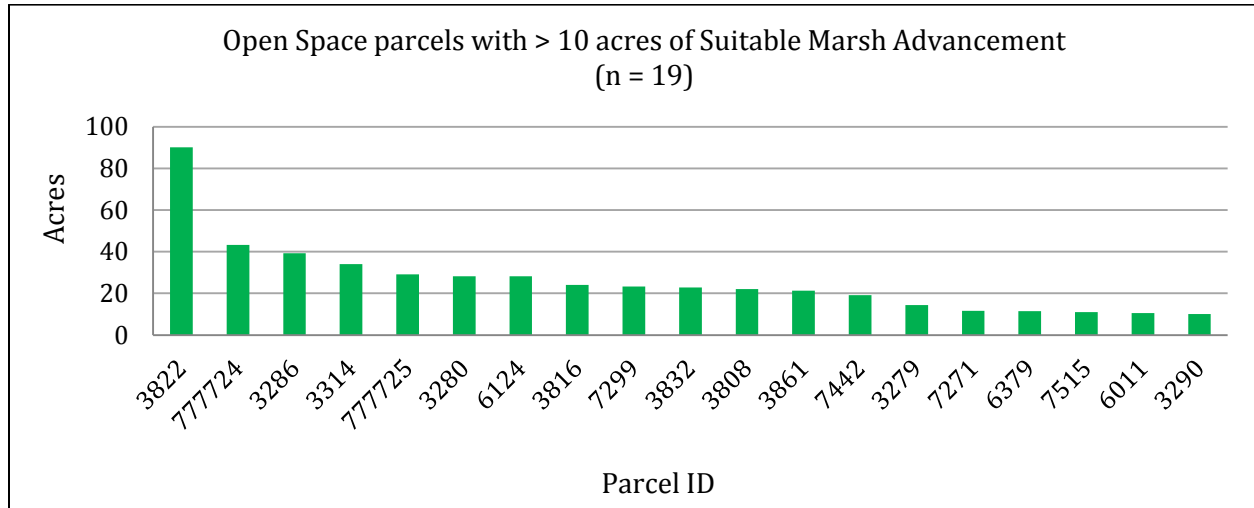
The State of Connecticut owns the greatest share of suitable open space for marsh advancement accounting for 306.7 acres (51.6%). Non-profit and private owners hold the next greatest shares of suitable open space with 147.0 acres (24.7%) and 133.6 (22.5%), respectively. The Town of Stonington owns the smallest share with 7.4 acres (1.2%).

Suitable Open Space Advancement			
Owner type	Acres	Total "yes" OS (%)	Total "yes" adv (%)
State	306.7	51.6	17.7
Non-profit	147.0	24.7	8.5
Private	133.6	22.5	7.7
Municipal	7.4	1.2	0.4
Total	594.7	100.0	34.3



Suitable Advancement by Open Space Parcel

Stonington has 137 open space parcels that intersect the full extent of marsh advancement by the 2080s. There are 19 open space parcels that each provides more than 10 acres of advancement area with a total aggregate of 493.9 acres (83.0%) of Stonington's suitable open space marsh advancement area. Parcel 3822, one of several state owned parcels that make up the Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, contributes the greatest amount of any single parcel with 90.1 acres or 15.2% of the total.



Parcel ID	Acres	Total "yes" OS (%)	Owner	Map Book Page #
3822	90.1	15.2	State	13
777724	43.3	7.3	Private	12
3286	39.2	6.6	State	13
3314	34.1	5.7	State	13
777725	29.2	4.9	Private	12
3280	28.2	4.7	State	13
6124	28.1	4.7	Non-profit	12
3816	24.1	4.0	State	13
7299	23.3	3.9	Non-profit	12
3832	22.9	3.8	State	13
3808	22.1	3.7	State	13
3861	21.3	3.6	Non-profit	13
7442	19.2	3.2	Non-profit	12
3279	14.3	2.4	State	13
7271	11.6	2.0	Private	12
6379	11.5	1.9	Non-profit	12
7515	10.9	1.8	Non-profit	12
6011	10.5	1.8	Non-profit	12
3290	10.0	1.7	State	13
Total	493.9	82.9		

Marsh Advancement in All Parcels

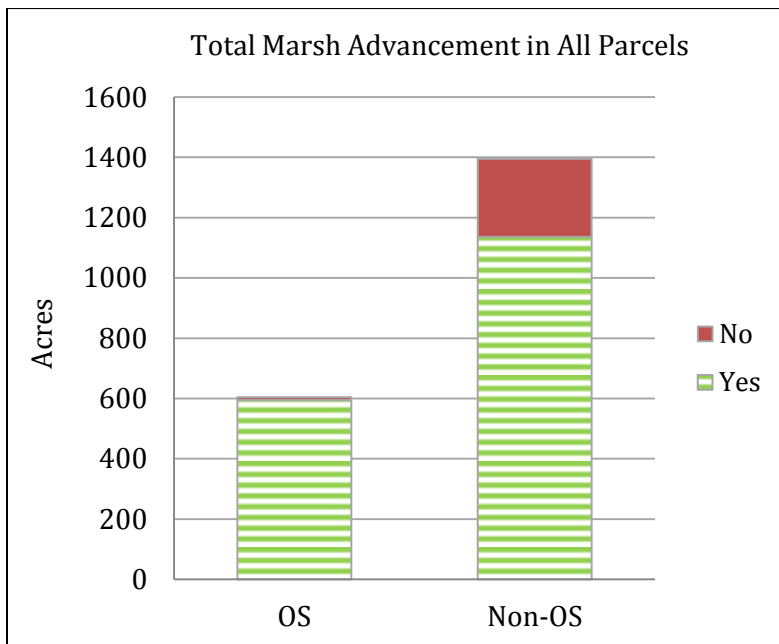
This section incorporates all parcels into the analysis of suitable marsh advancement. These results help put the open space analysis into perspective, as well as identify important unprotected parcels in Stonington’s marsh advancement landscape.

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

Stonington’s open space parcels are made up of state land, parks and recreation properties, cemeteries, conservation non-profit properties, public schools, subdivision open space set-asides, and other private properties. 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

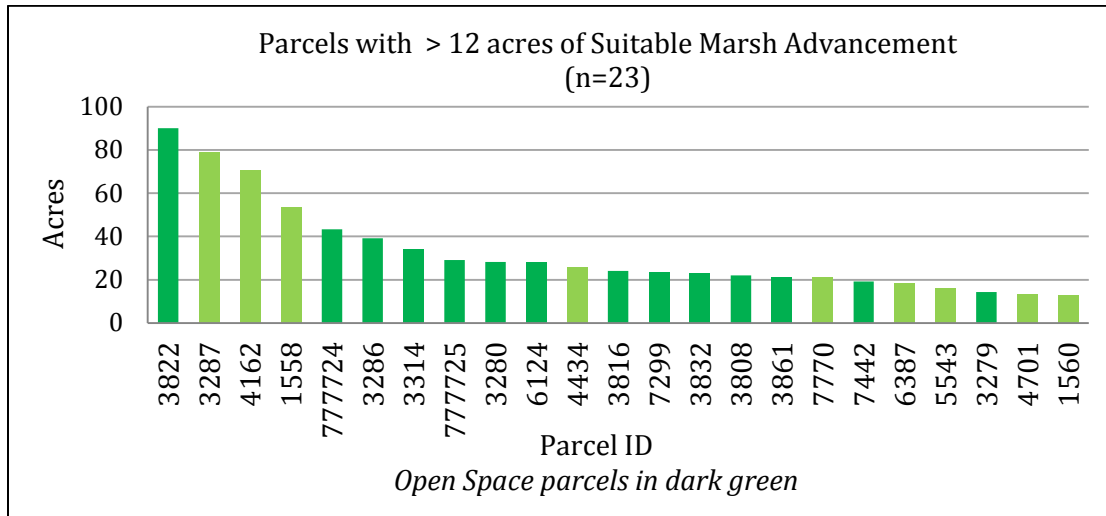
Open space parcels contain 594.8 acres (34.4% of total) of suitable marsh advancement zone. The other 1,136.4 acres of land suitable for marsh advancement (65.6% of total) are unprotected and generally occur on residential, commercial, or industrial properties. The unprotected suitable areas will receive nearly twofold the amount of 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 Stonington’s wetland resources in the future, and 2) a large amount of current development (258.5 acres) will be in direct conflict with rising sea levels and advancing marshes.



Total Marsh Advancement			
Parcel type	Yes	No	Total
OS	594.8	9.7	604.5
Non-OS	1,136.4	258.5	1,394.9
Total	1,731.2	268.2	1,999.4

Suitable Advancement by All Parcels

There are 1,886 parcels in Stonington that provide areas of suitable marsh advancement, but only 23 parcels offer suitable areas greater than 12 acres. This small subset provides 748.8 acres of marsh advancement zone or 43.2% of Stonington's overall total. The specific parcels can be viewed via the corresponding Map Book pages (Appendix) indicated in the table below.



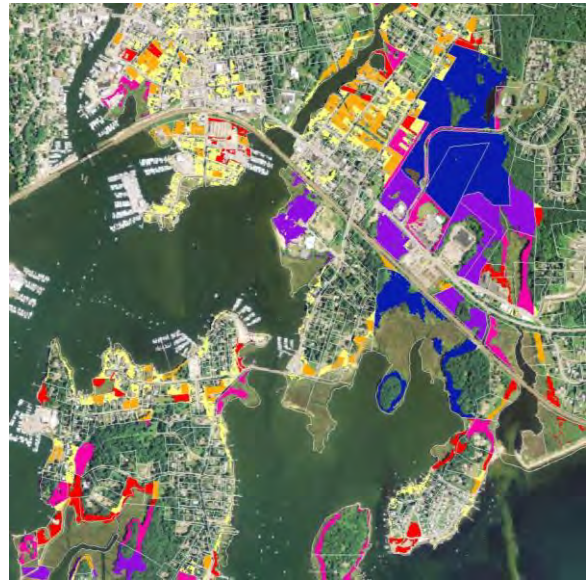
Parcel ID	Acres	Total yes adv (%)	Map Book Page #
3822	90.1	5.2	13
3287	78.9	4.6	9,13,20,24,30,34
4162	70.5	4.1	9,13,19,29
1558	53.2	3.1	9,13,24,34
777724	43.3	2.5	12
3286	39.2	2.3	13
3314	34.1	2.0	13
777725	29.2	1.7	12
3280	28.2	1.6	13
6124	28.1	1.6	12
4434	25.6	1.5	9,13,19,29
3816	24.1	1.4	13
7299	23.3	1.3	12
3832	22.9	1.3	13
3808	22.1	1.3	13
3861	21.3	1.2	13
7770	21.0	1.2	8,12,17,27
7442	19.2	1.1	12
6387	18.1	1.0	8,12,18,28
5543	16.0	0.9	8,12,18,28
3279	14.3	0.8	13
4701	13.3	0.8	9,13,19,29
1560	12.8	0.7	9,13,20,24,30,34
Total	748.8	43.2	

Appendix – Map Book

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

The Nature Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.®

Comprehensive Map Book of Stonington, Connecticut



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Inset Maps

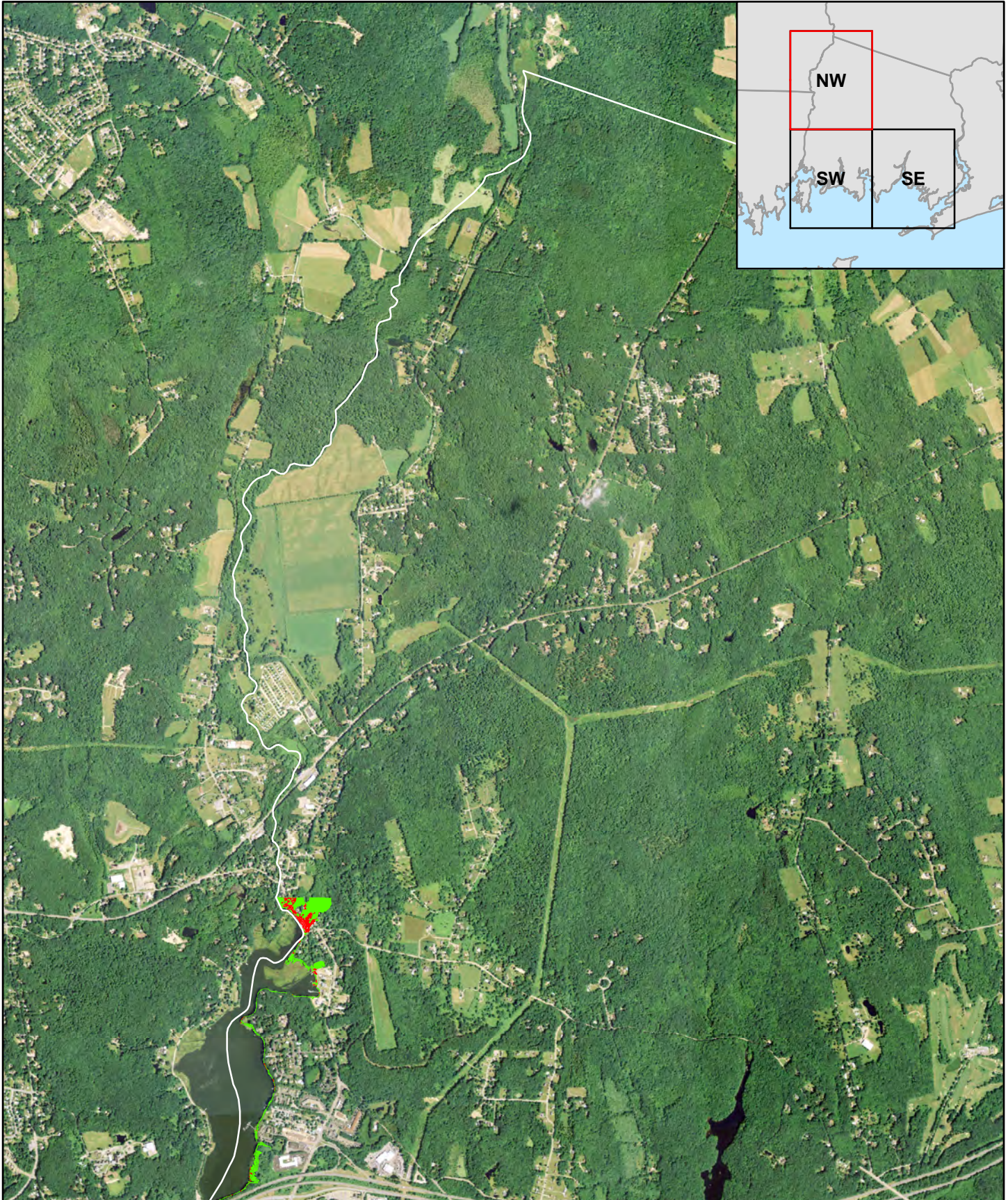
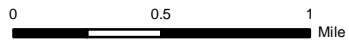
Unprotected Parcels	15
Advancement per Parcel	27

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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Marsh Advancement - NW



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

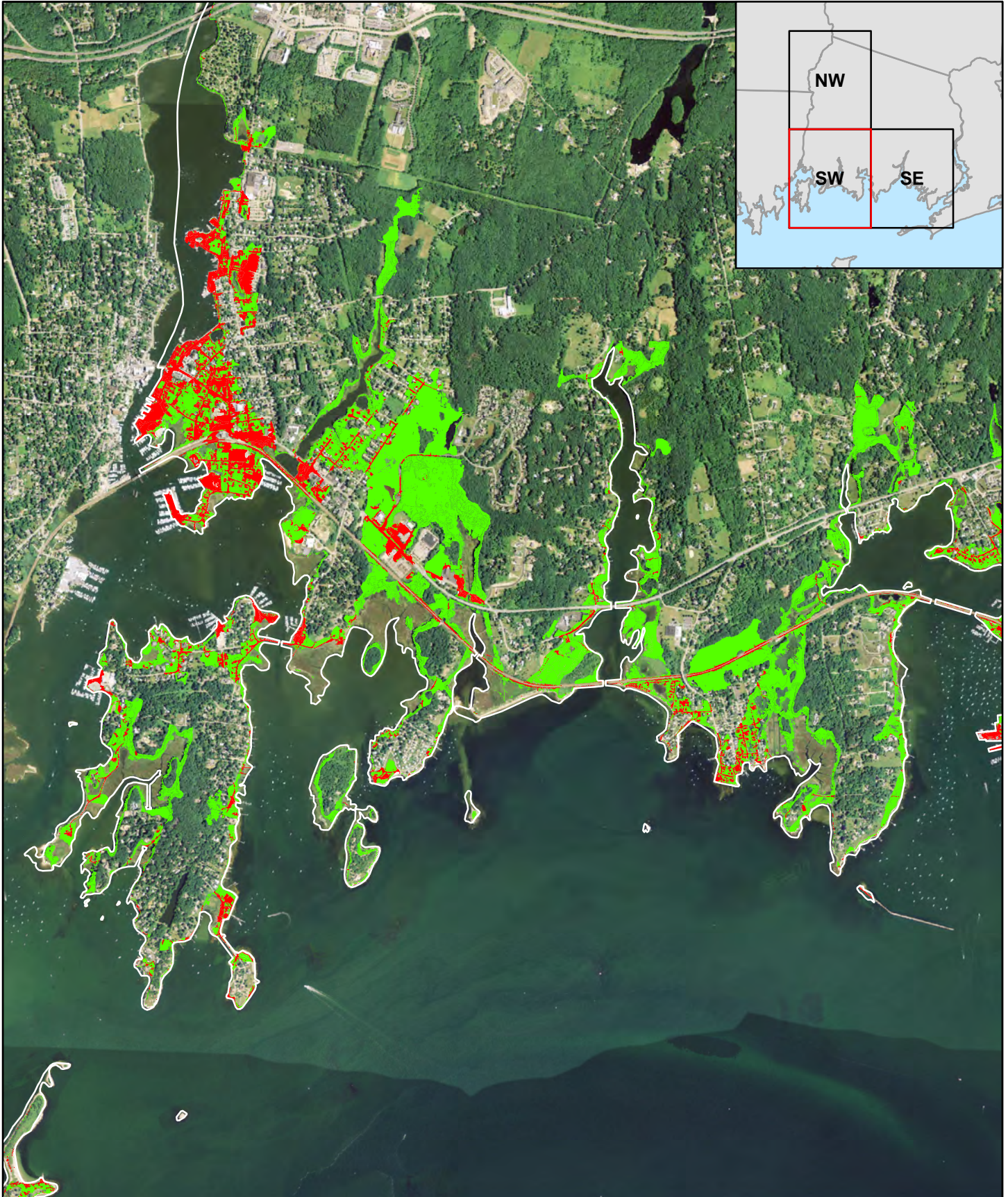
Marsh Advancement - SW



Marsh Advancement by 2080s

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

0 0.5 1 Mile



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

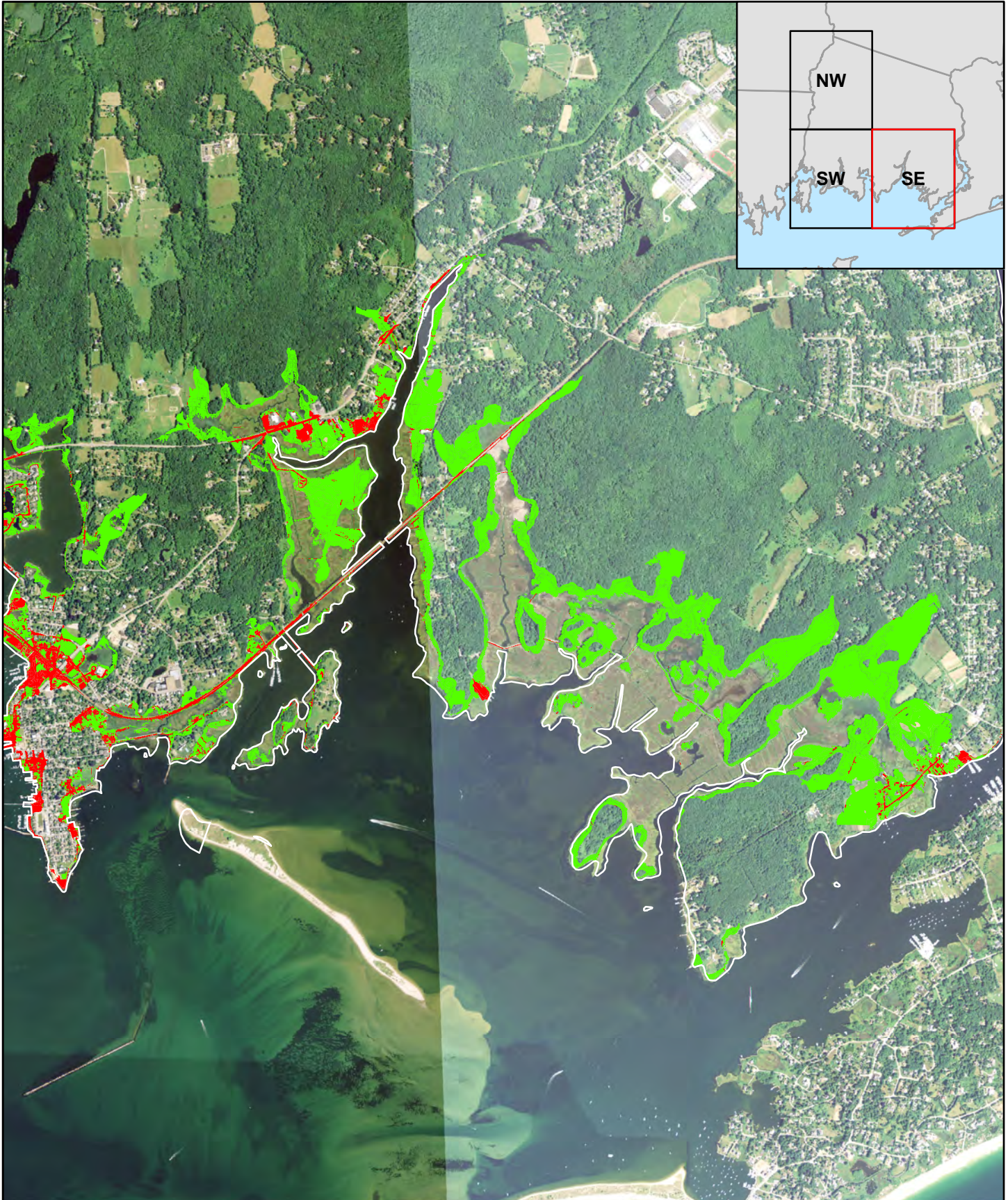
Marsh Advancement - SE

0 0.5 1 Mile



Marsh Advancement by 2080s

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

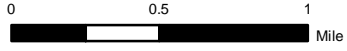


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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT


Unprotected Parcels - NW




Parcels

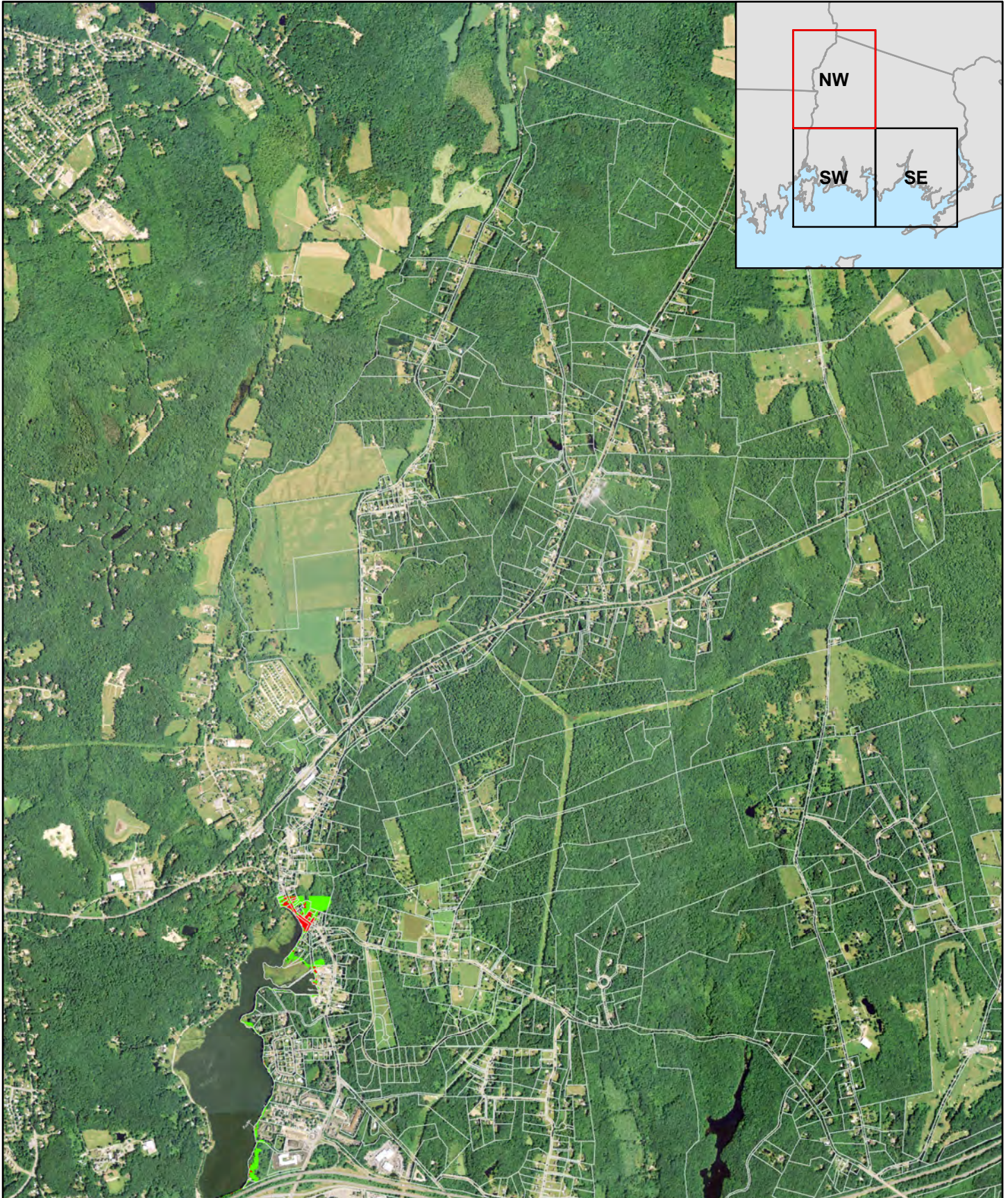
 Unprotected Non-OS

Marsh Advancement by 2080s

 Developed Land Cover

 Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover

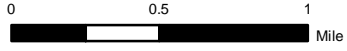
Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable advancement are shown.



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT


Unprotected Parcels - SW




Parcels

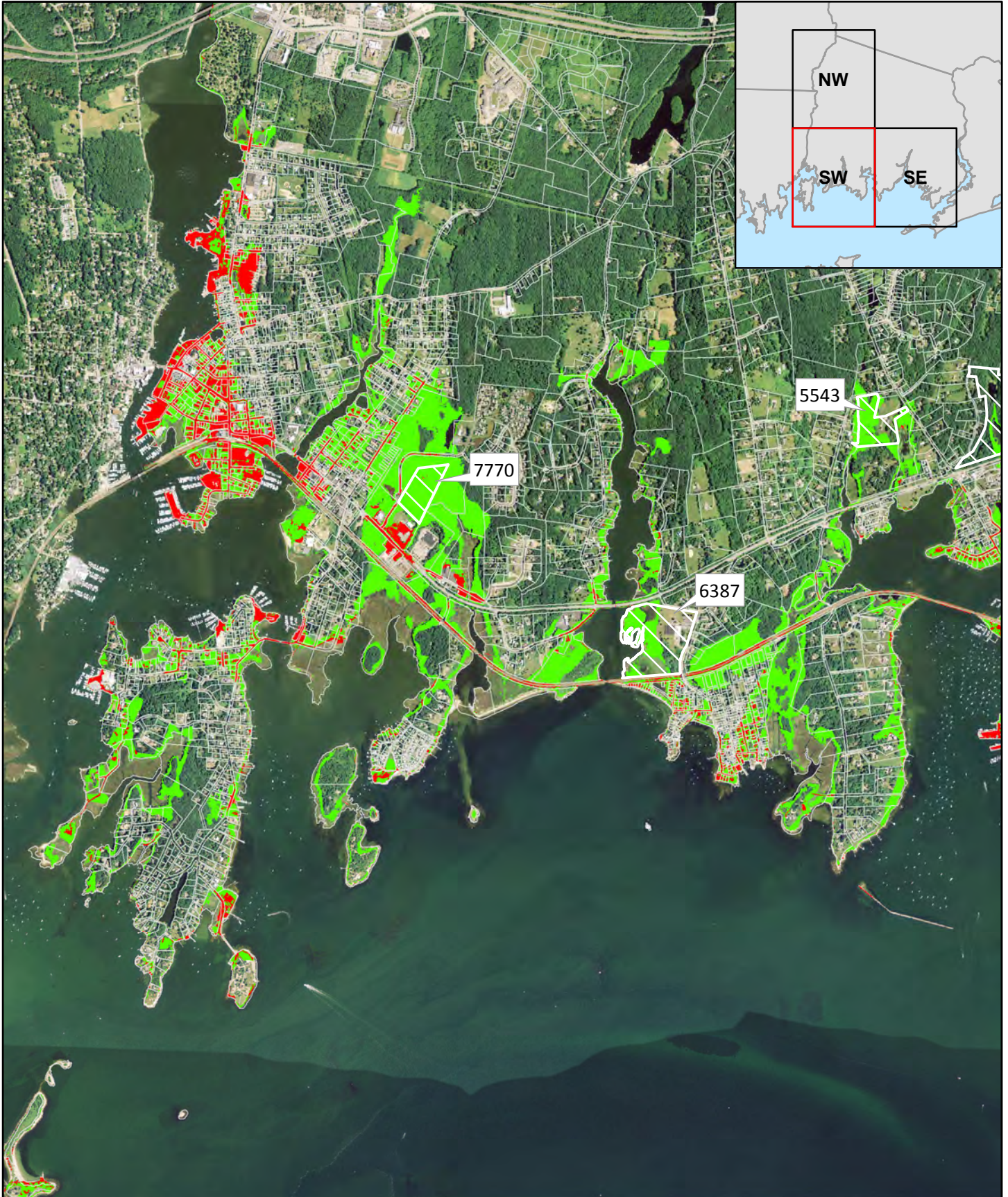
 Unprotected Non-OS

Marsh Advancement by 2080s

 Developed Land Cover

 Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover

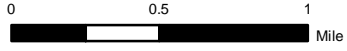
Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable advancement are shown.



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - SE



Parcels

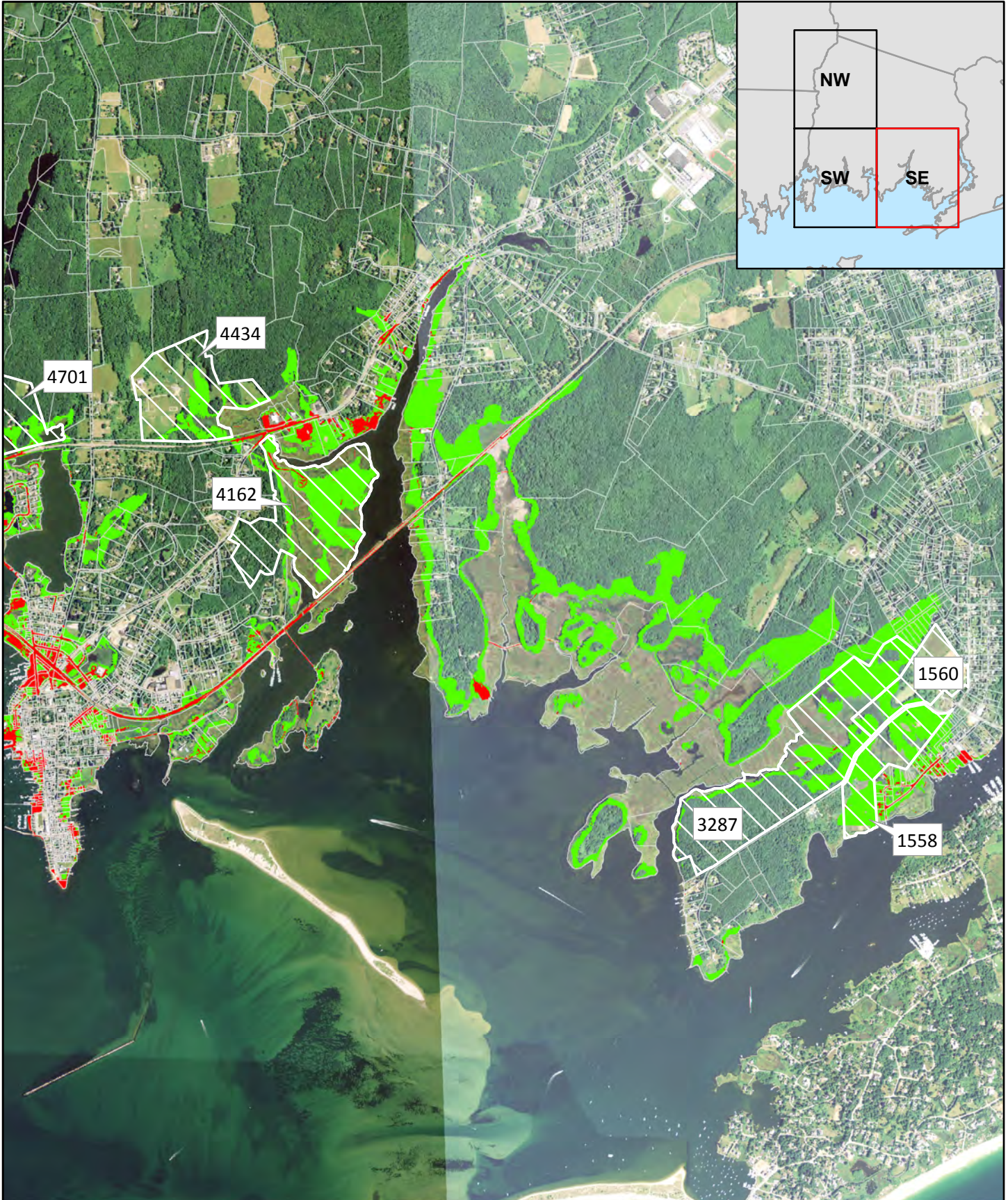
Unprotected Non-OS

Marsh Advancement by 2080s

Developed Land Cover

Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover

Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable advancement are shown.

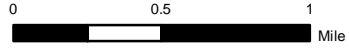


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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s



Town of Stonington, CT

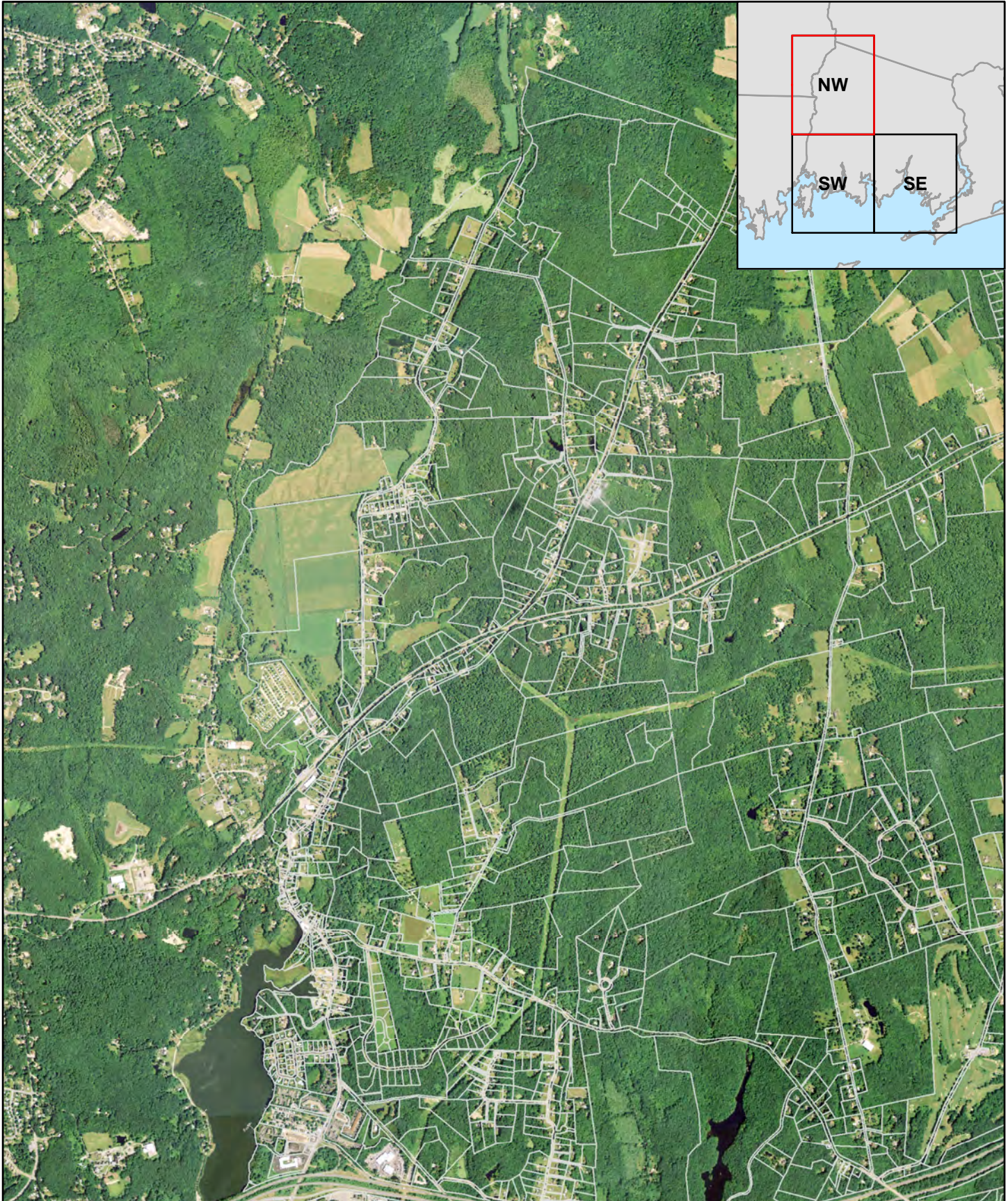
Critical Parcels - NW



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable advancement and OS parcels with > 10 acres of suitable advancement are shown.

Parcels

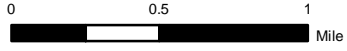
-  Unprotected Non-OS
-  Protected OS



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Critical Parcels - SW



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable advancement and OS parcels with > 10 acres of suitable advancement are shown.

Parcels

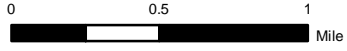
- Unprotected Non-OS
- Protected OS



Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

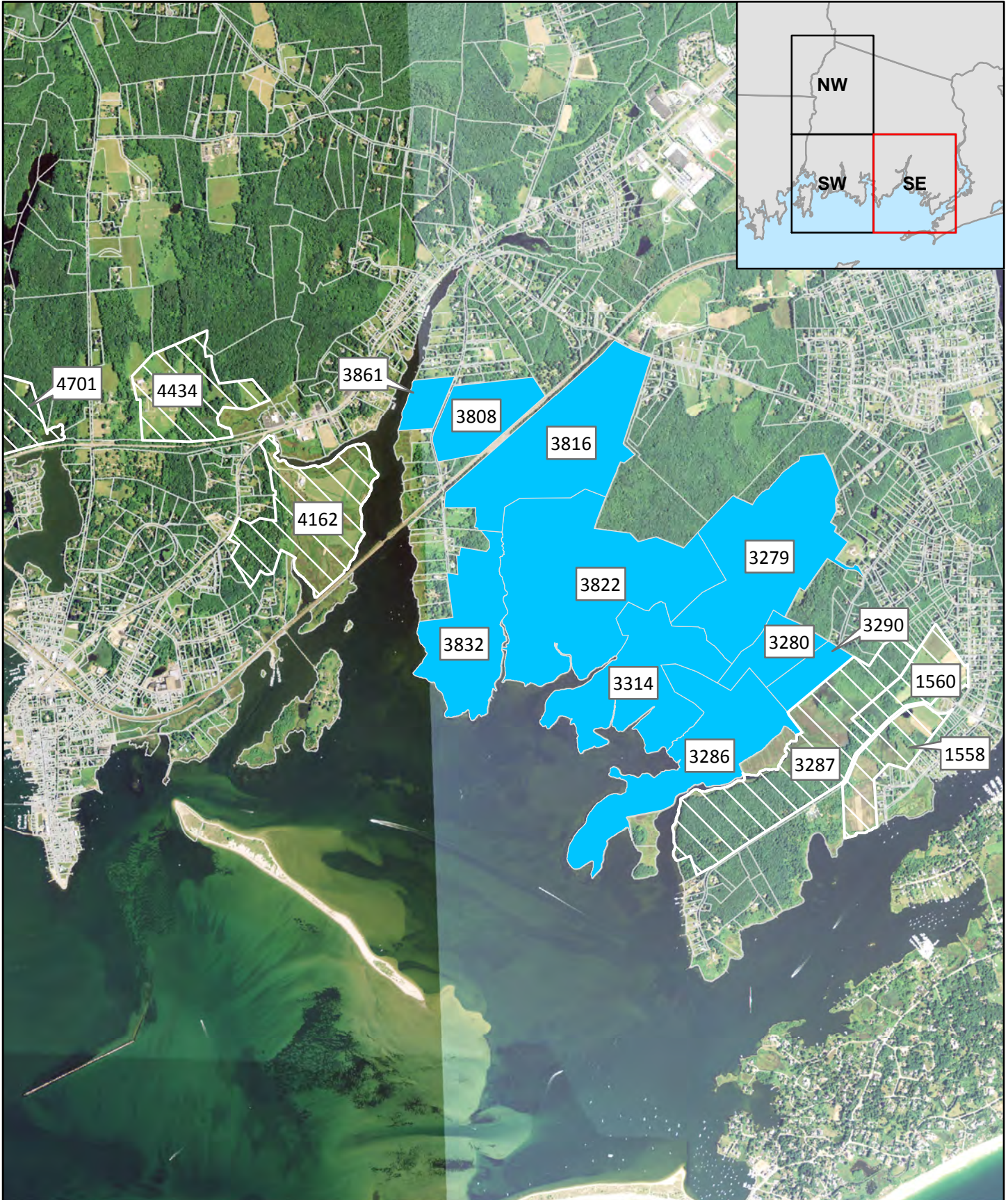
Critical Parcels - SE



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable advancement and OS parcels with > 10 acres of suitable advancement are shown.

Parcels

- Unprotected Non-OS
- Protected OS

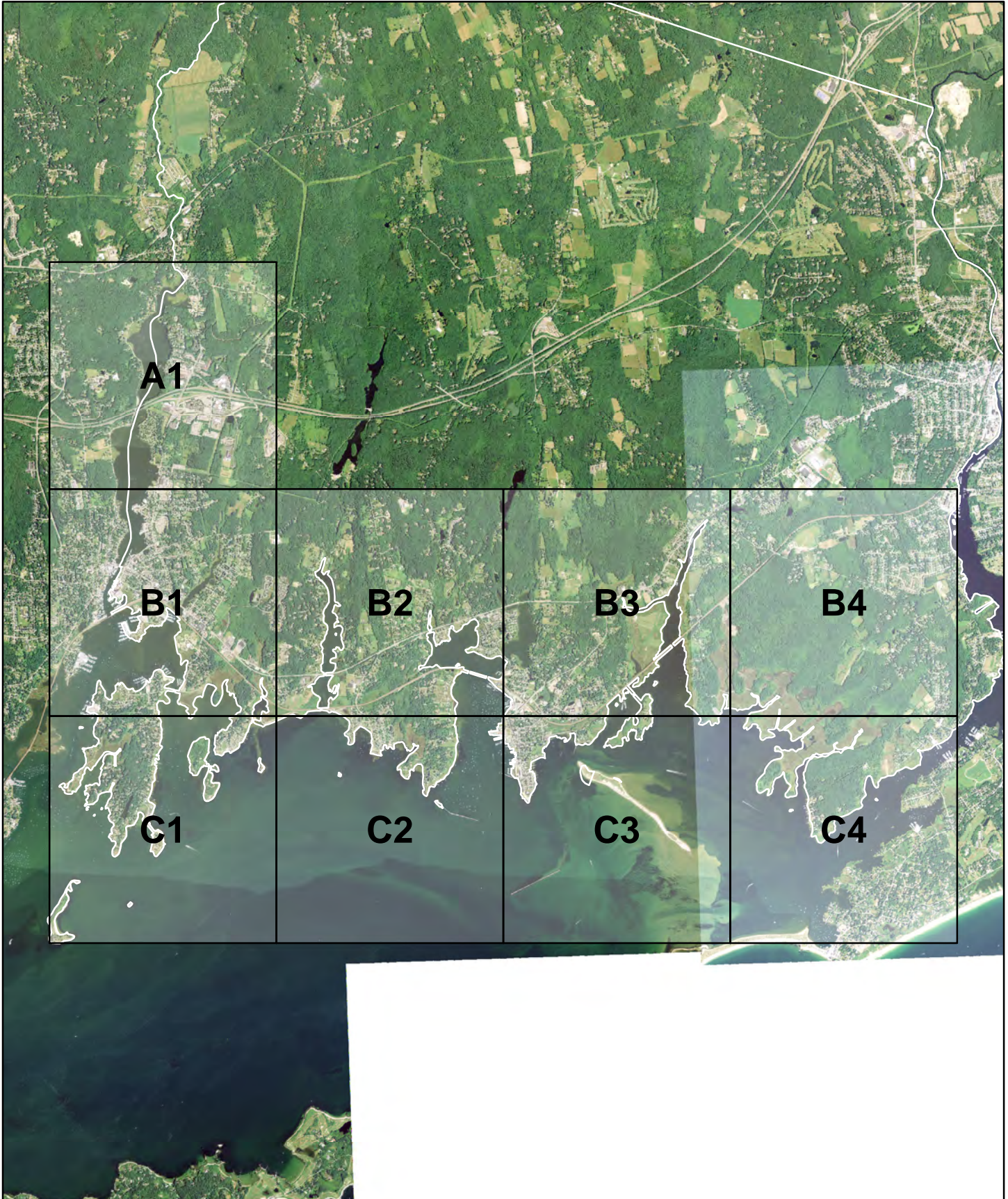


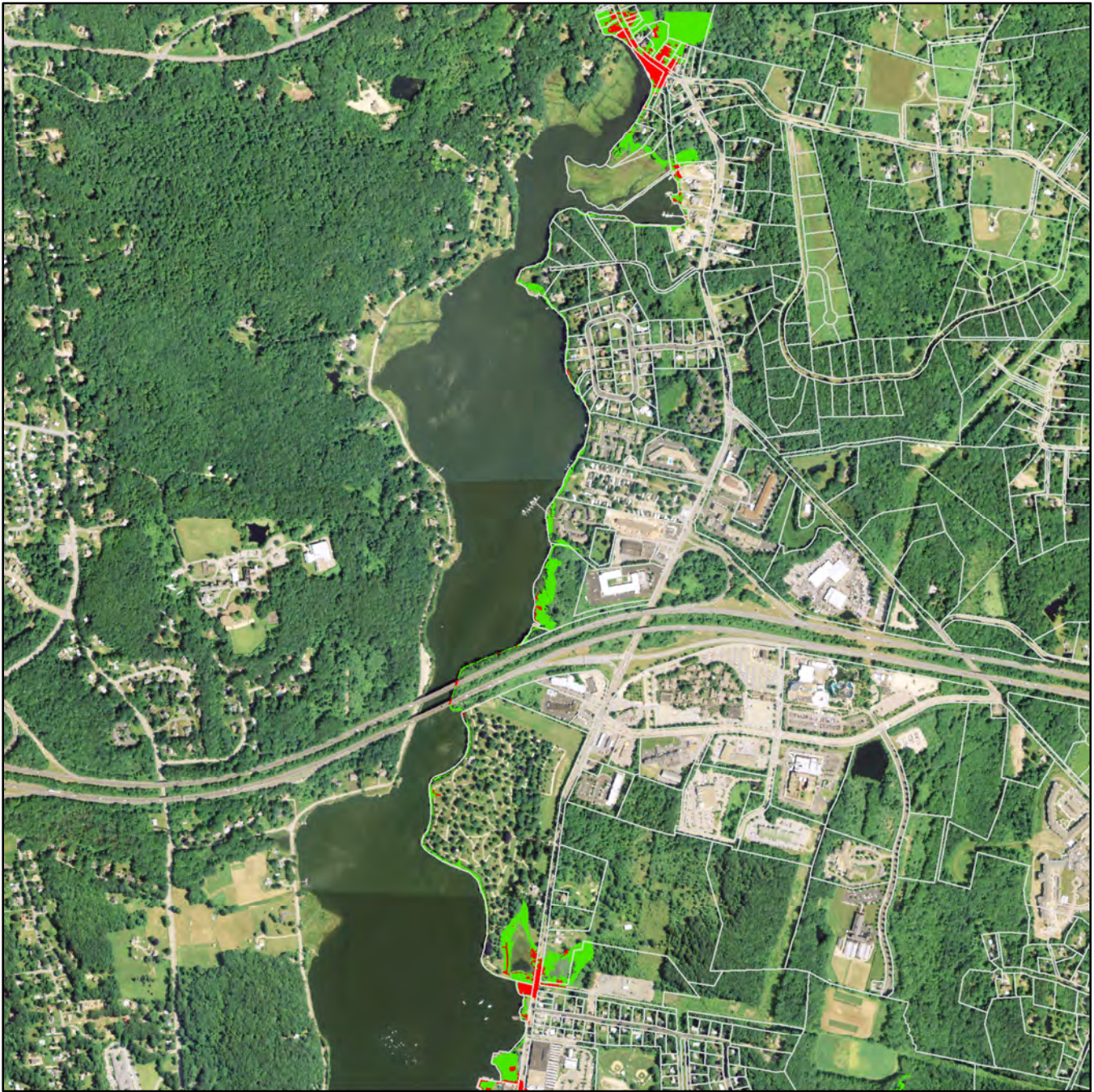
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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Map Index - Unprotected Parcels





0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map A1

Parcels

Unprotected Non-OS

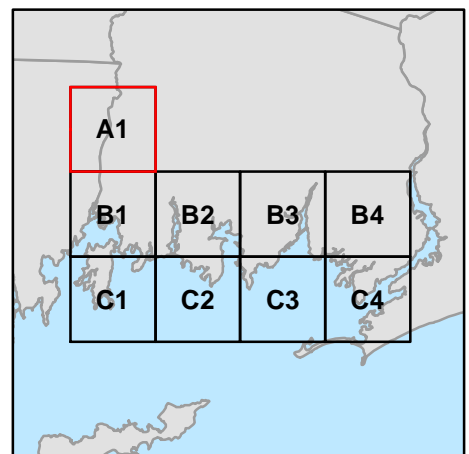
Marsh Advancement

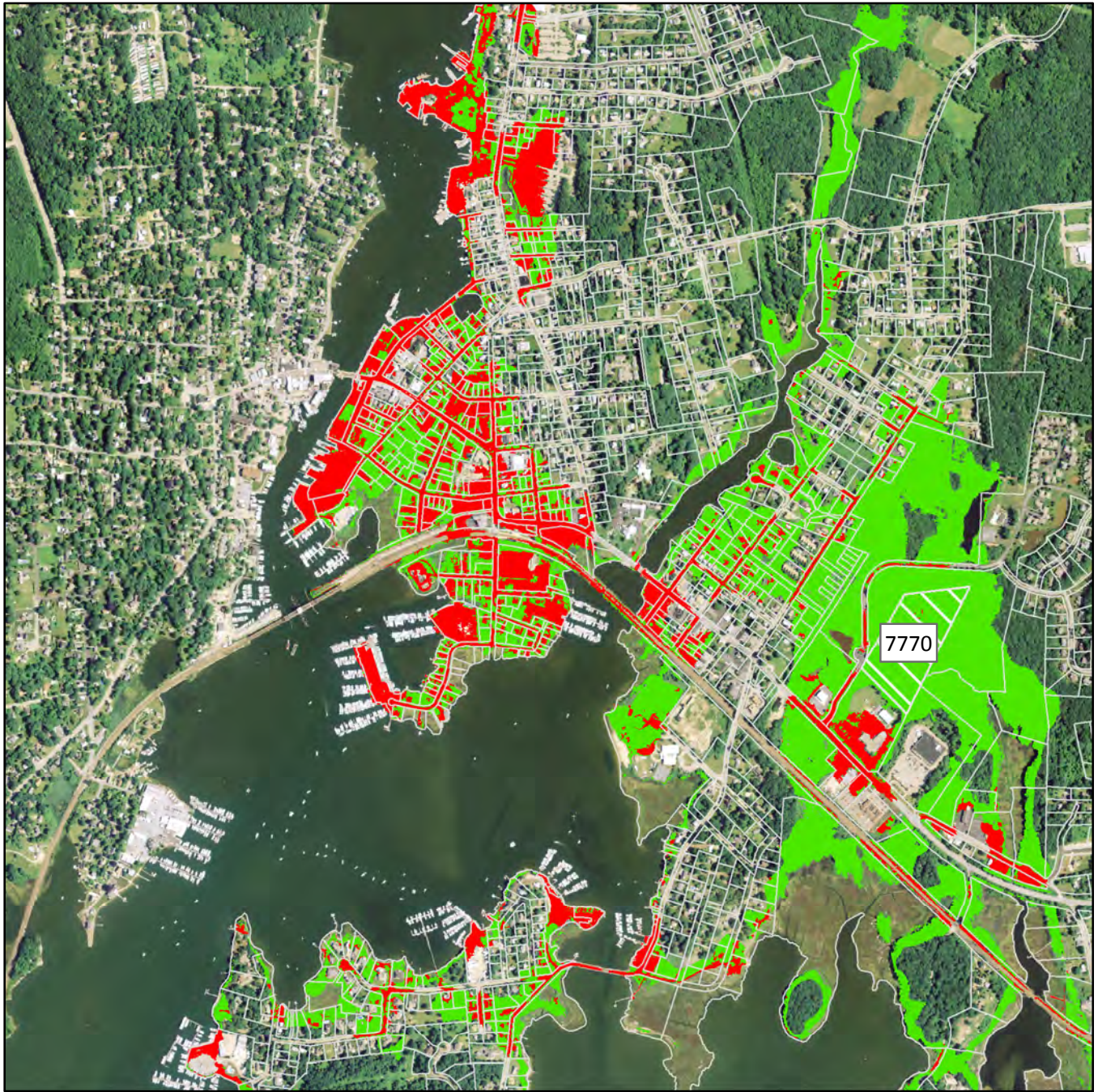
Developed Land Cover

Forest, Grass, Ag Land Cover

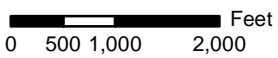


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





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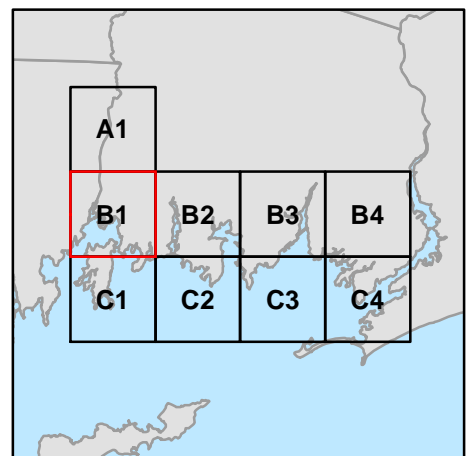
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map B1

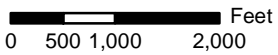
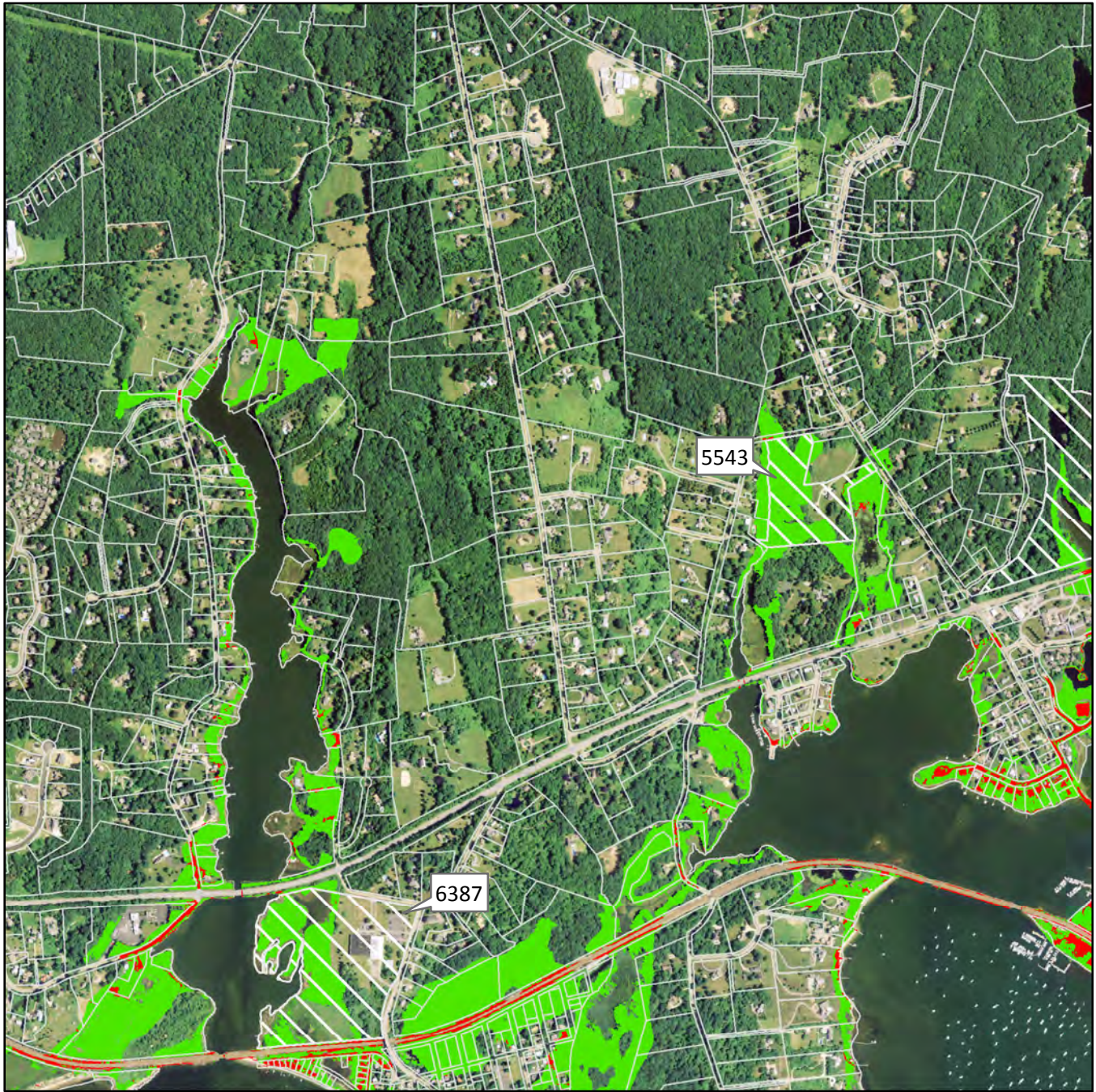


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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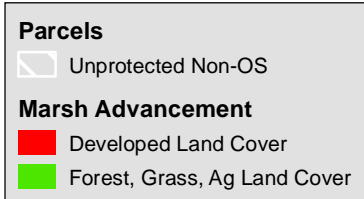


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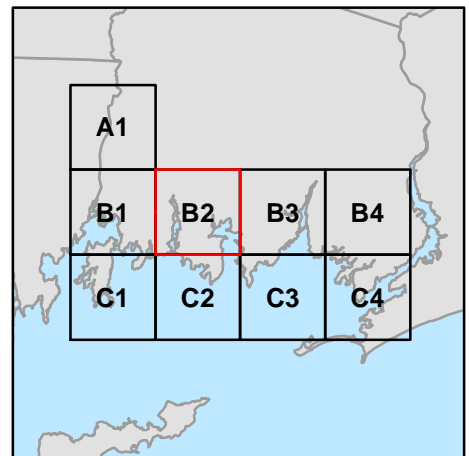
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map B2

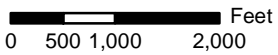
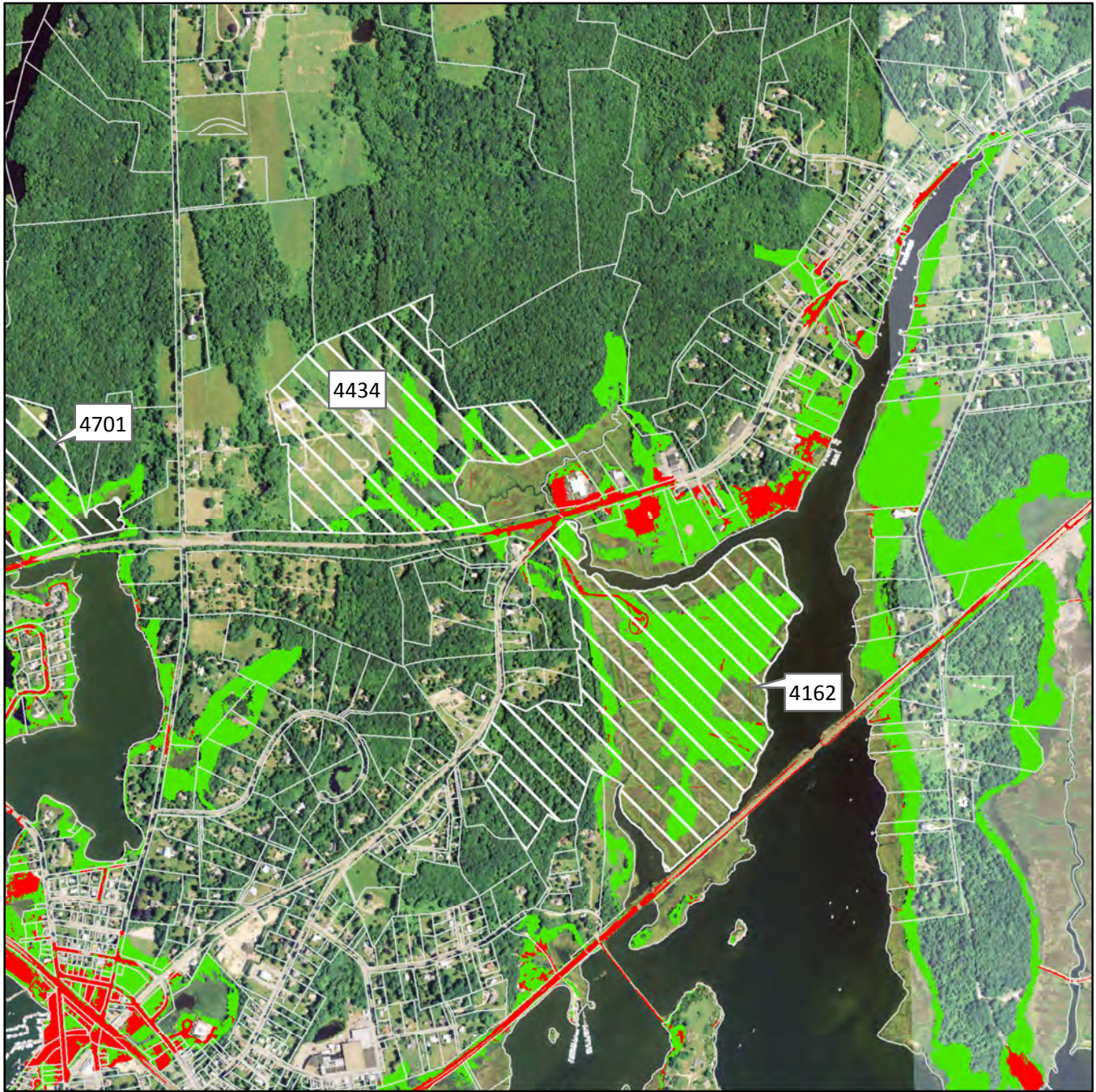


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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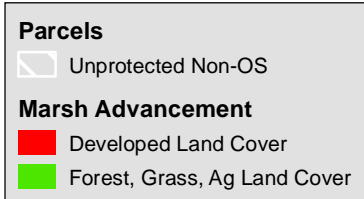


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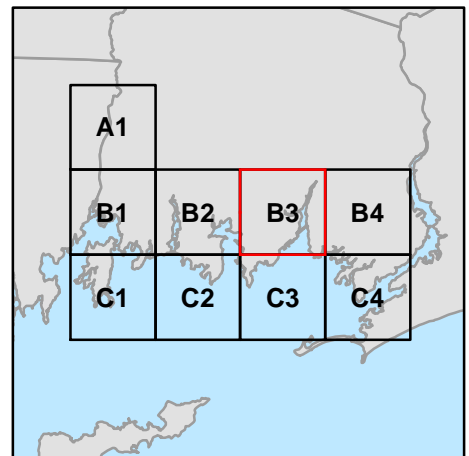
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

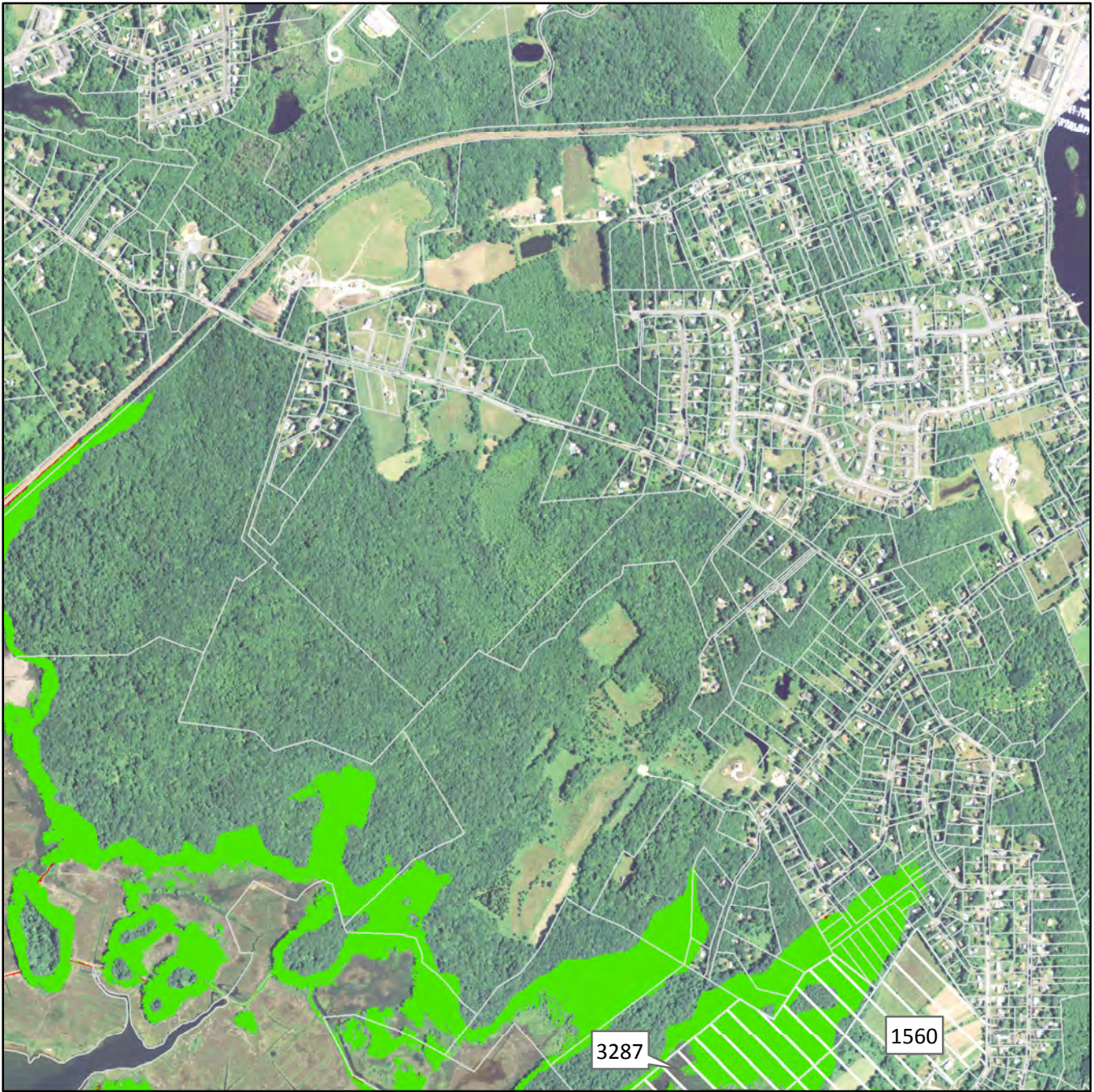
Unprotected Parcels - Map B3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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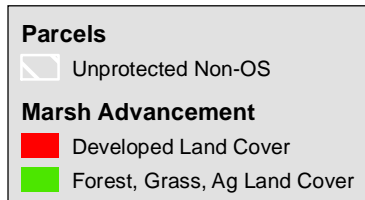
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0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

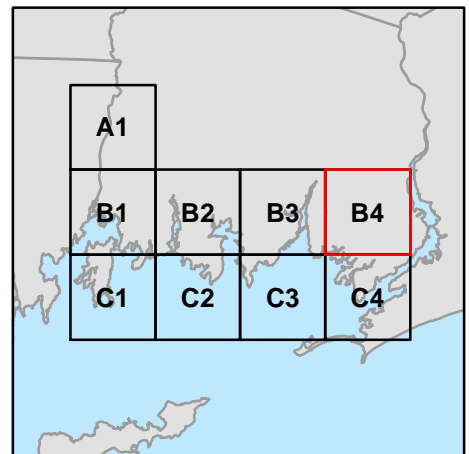
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

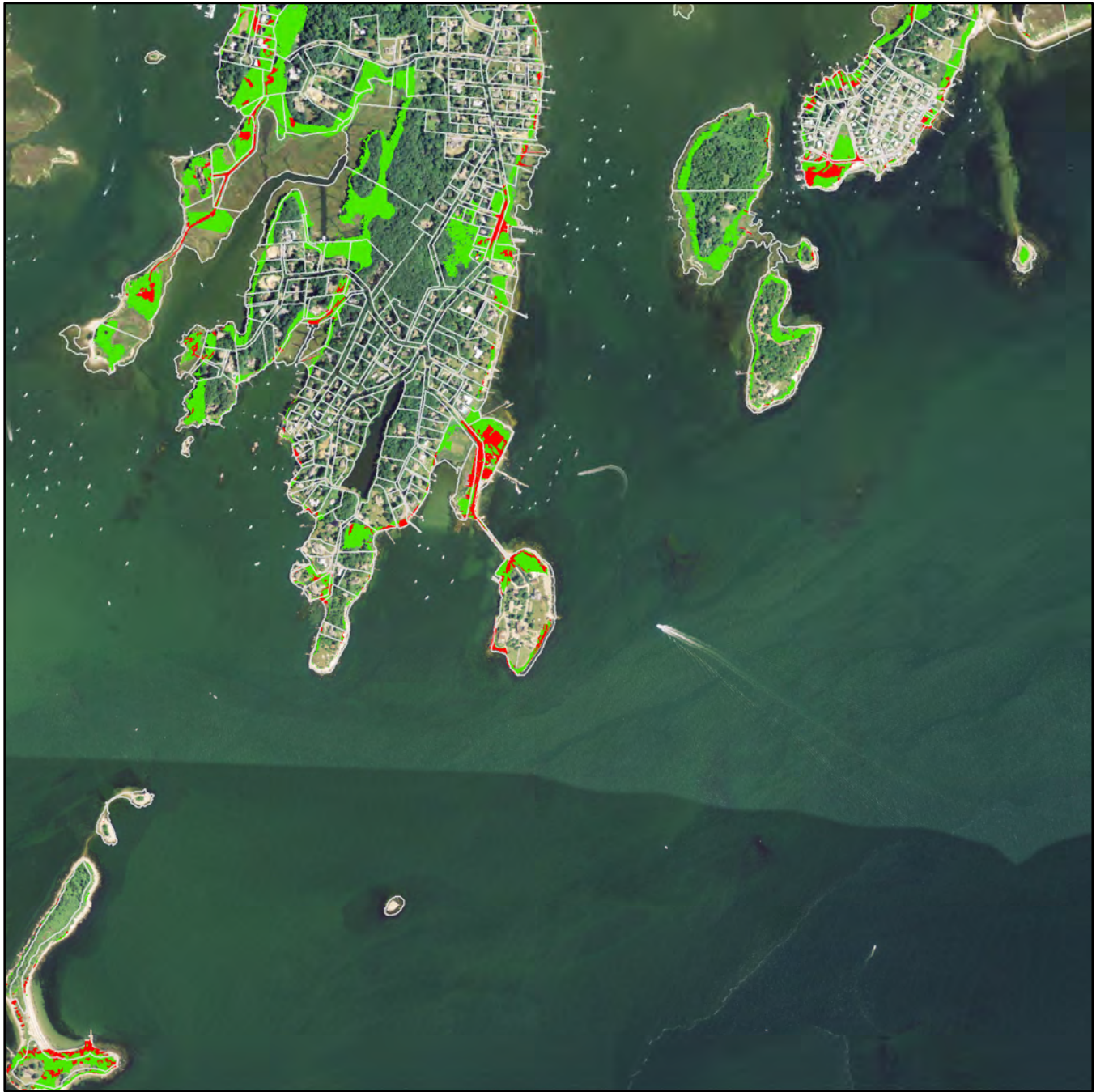
Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map B4



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





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0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

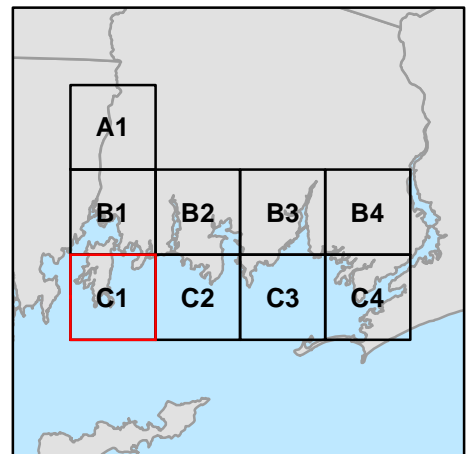
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map C1



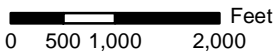
Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





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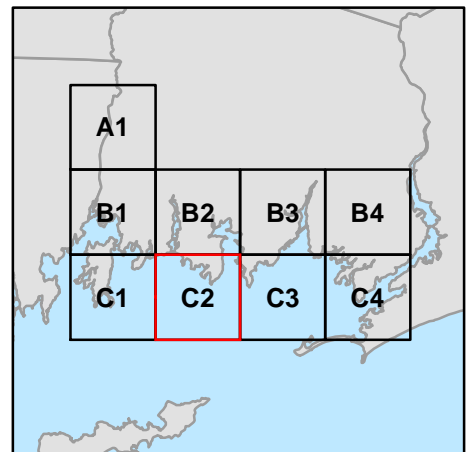
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map C2

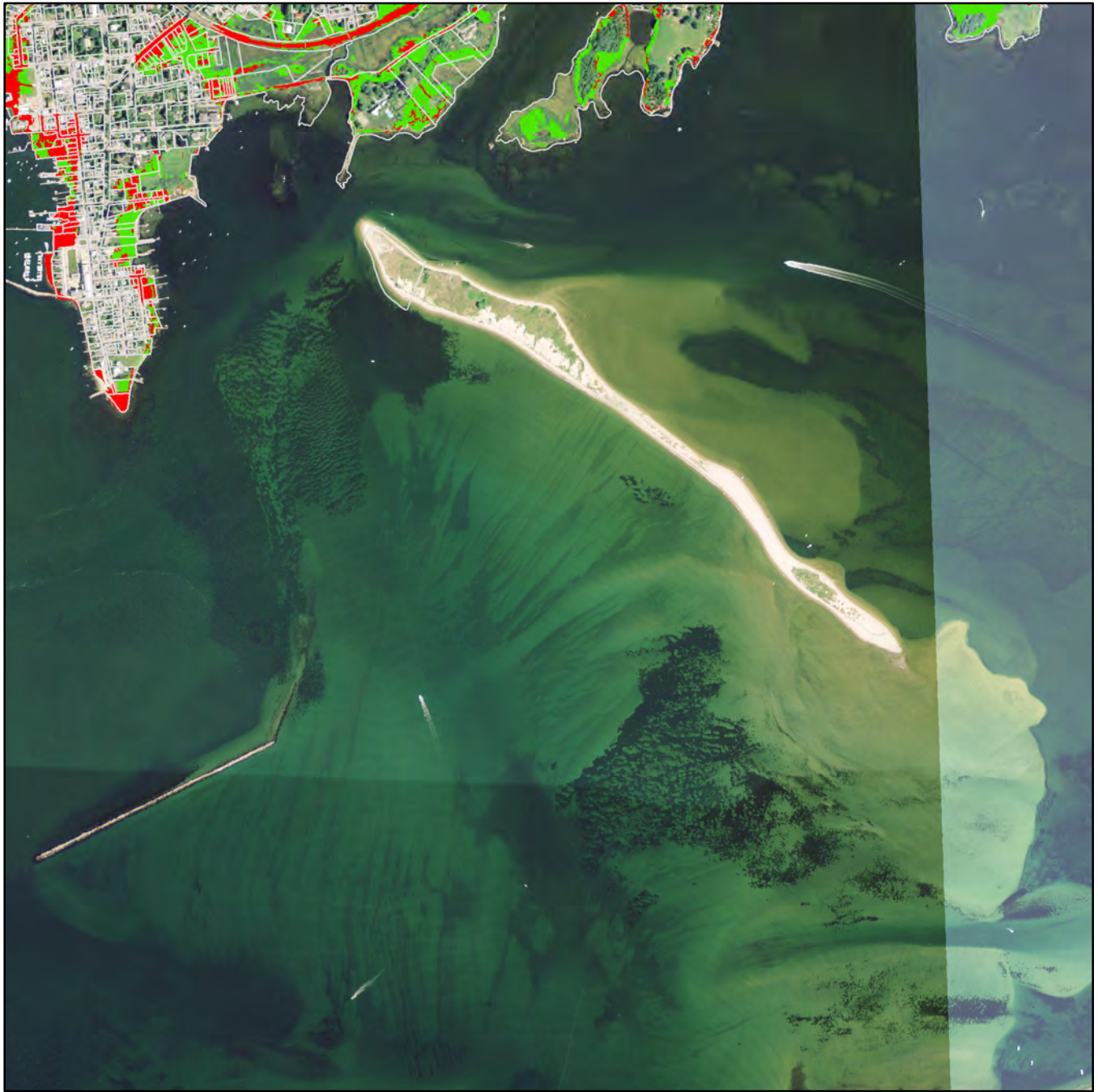


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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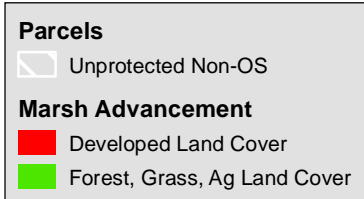


0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

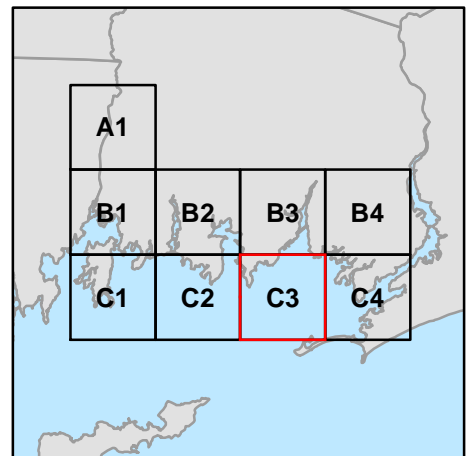
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

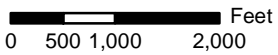
Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map C3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





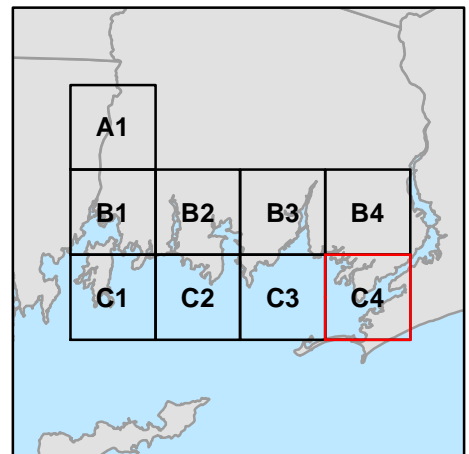
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Unprotected Parcels - Map C4



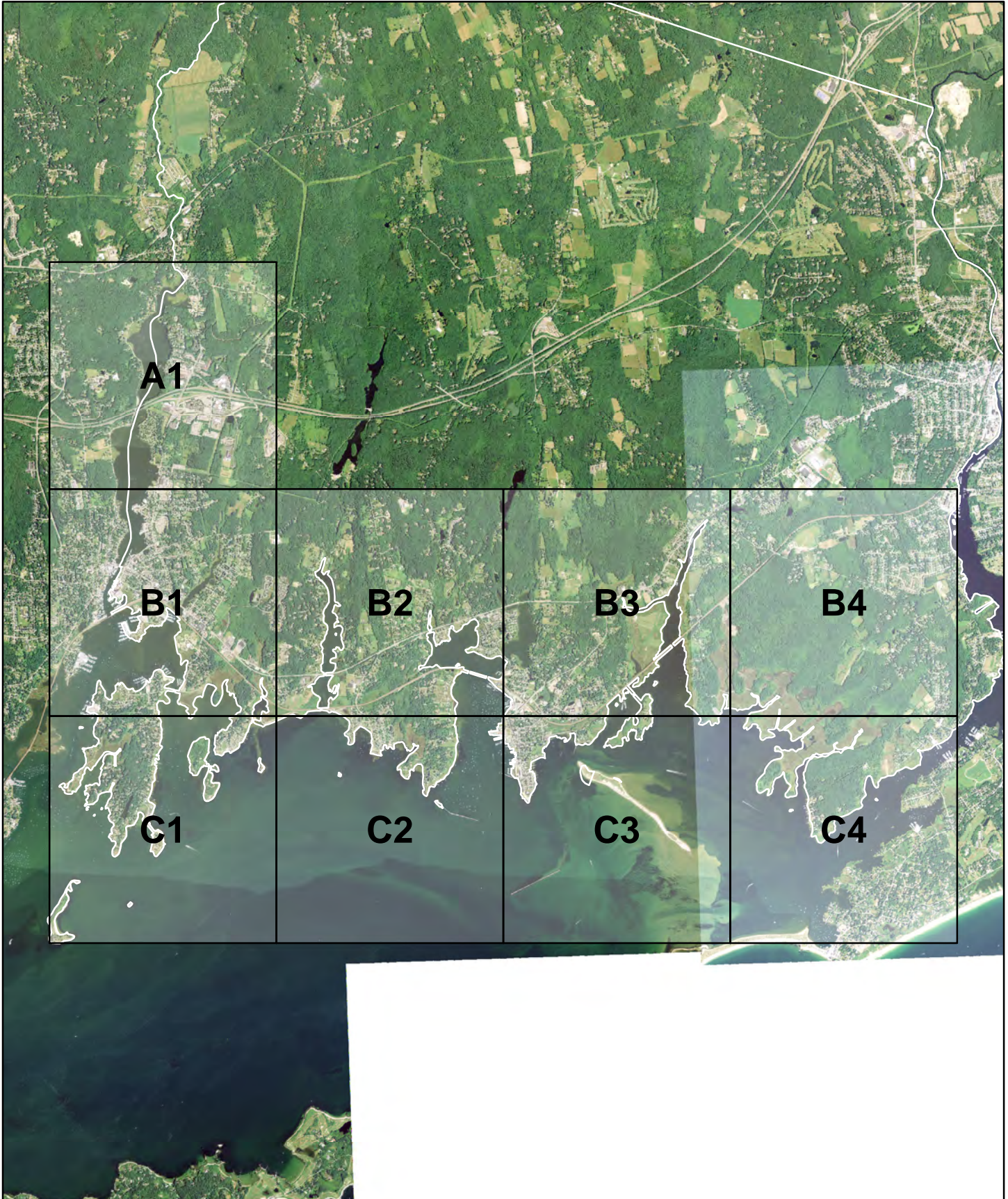
Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.

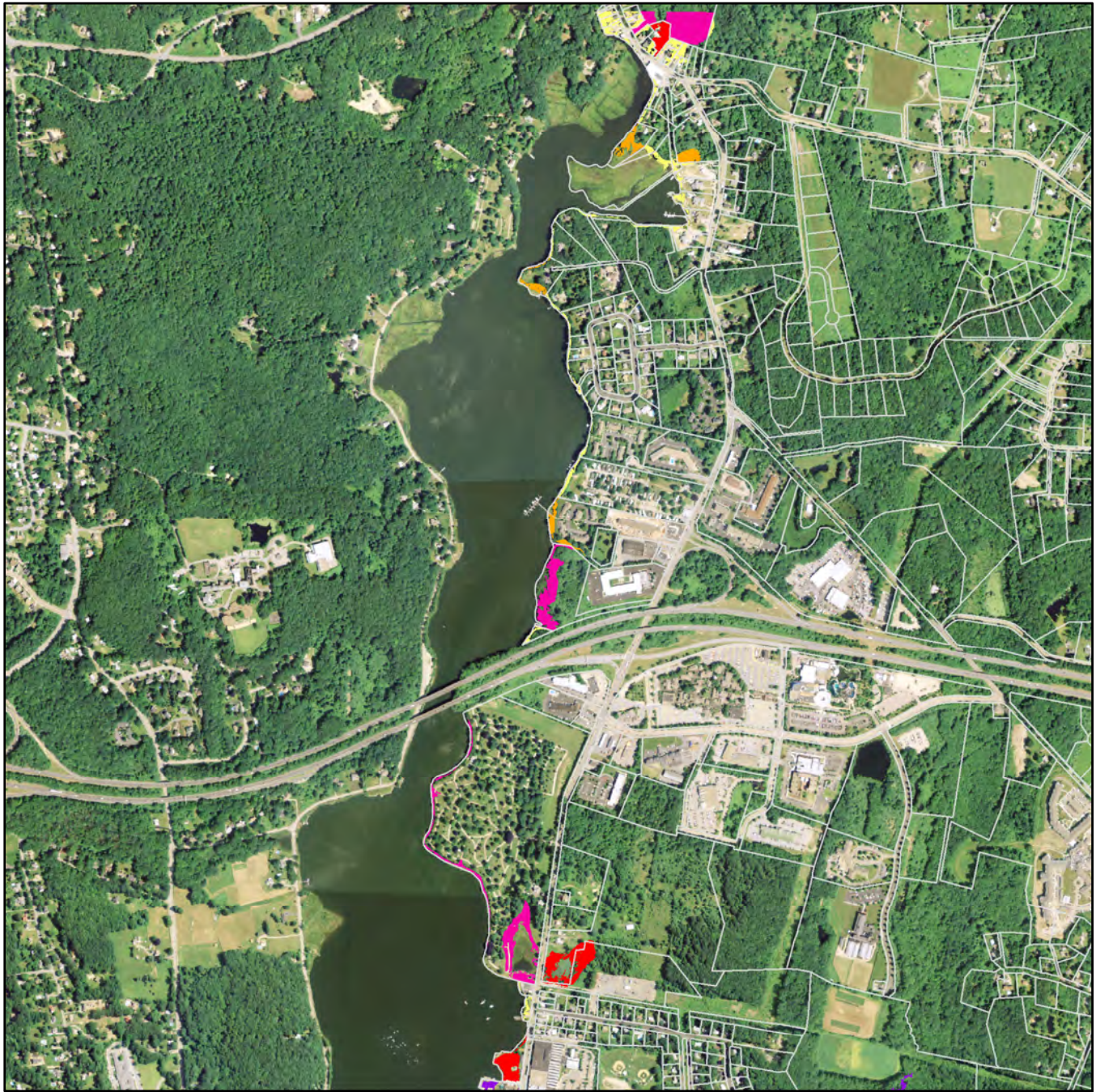


Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Map Index - Advancement per Parcel





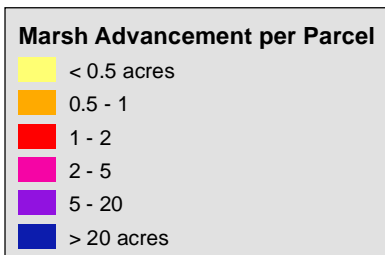
0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

see page 27

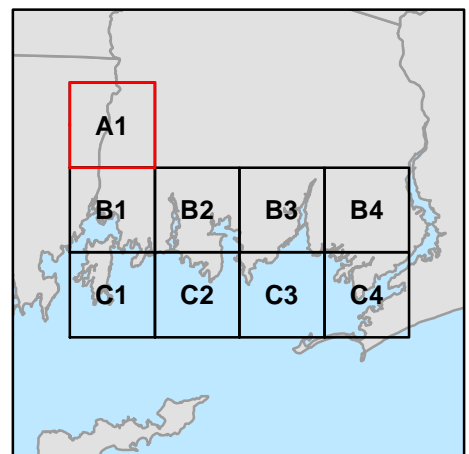
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

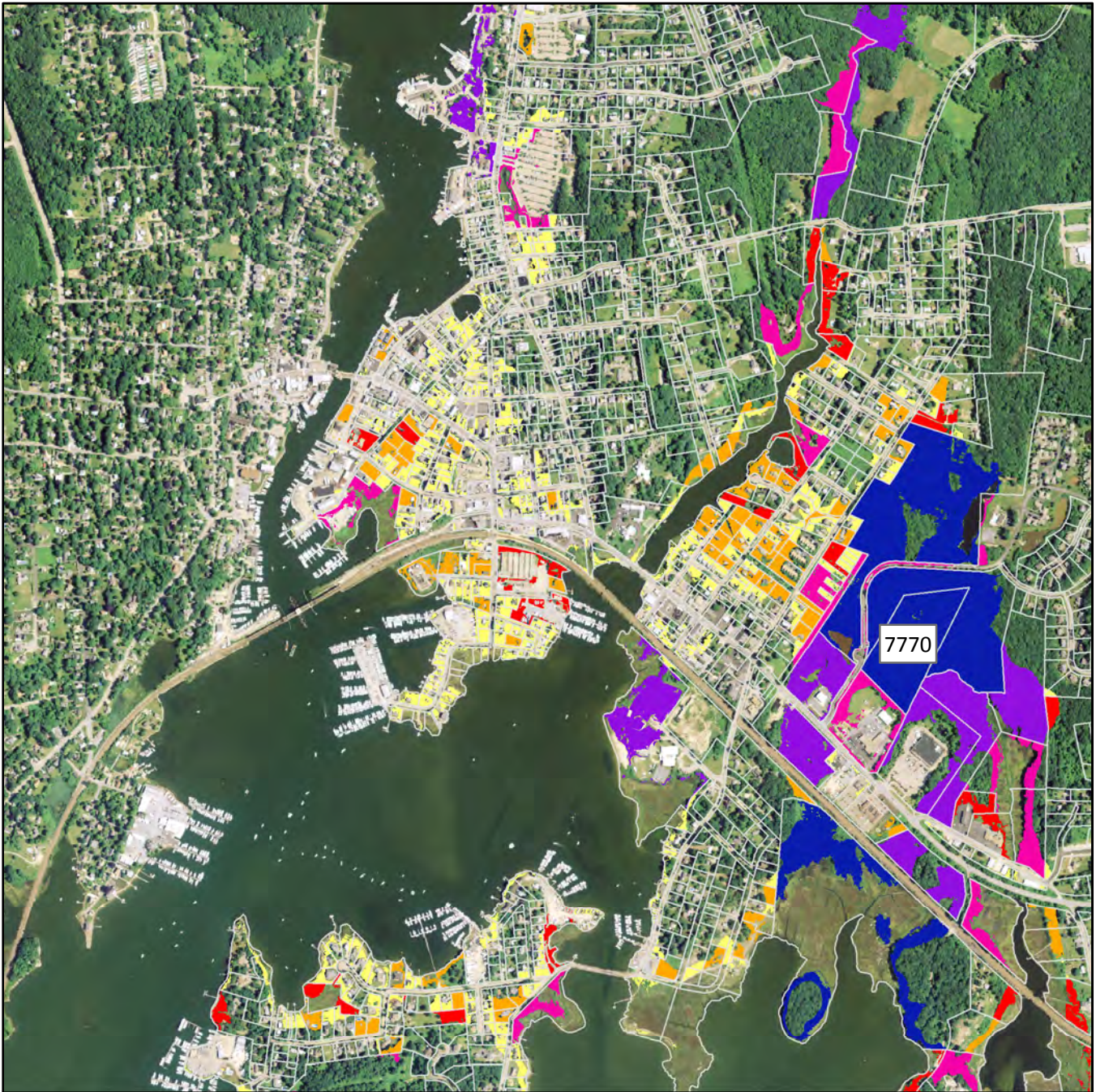
Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map A1

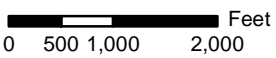


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





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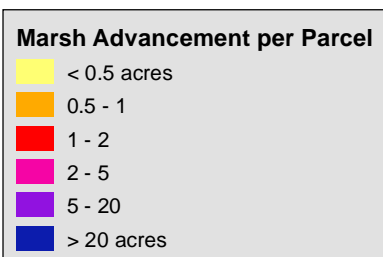


see page 31

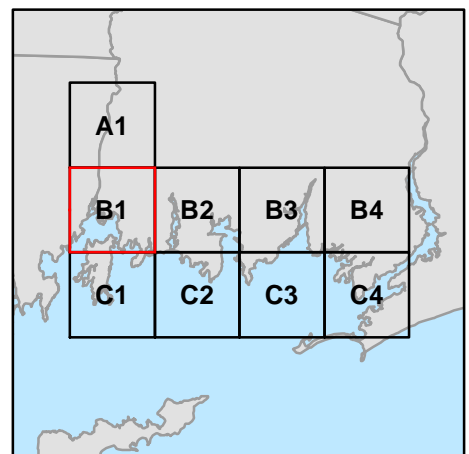
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map B1

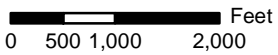
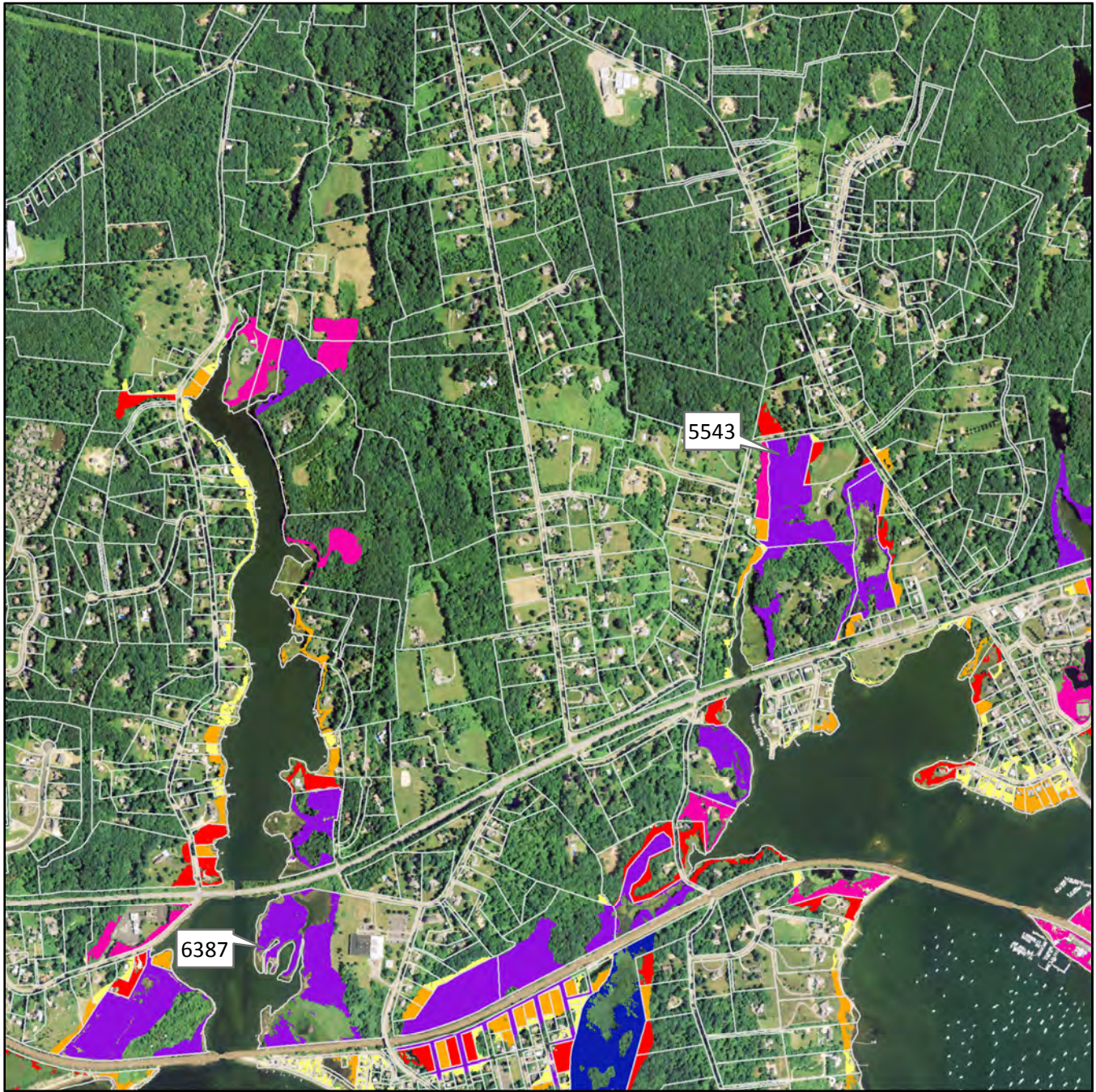


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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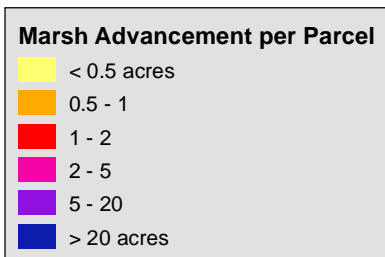


see page 32

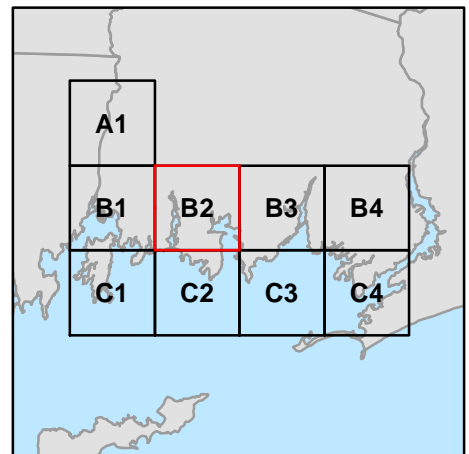
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map B2

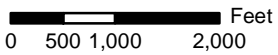
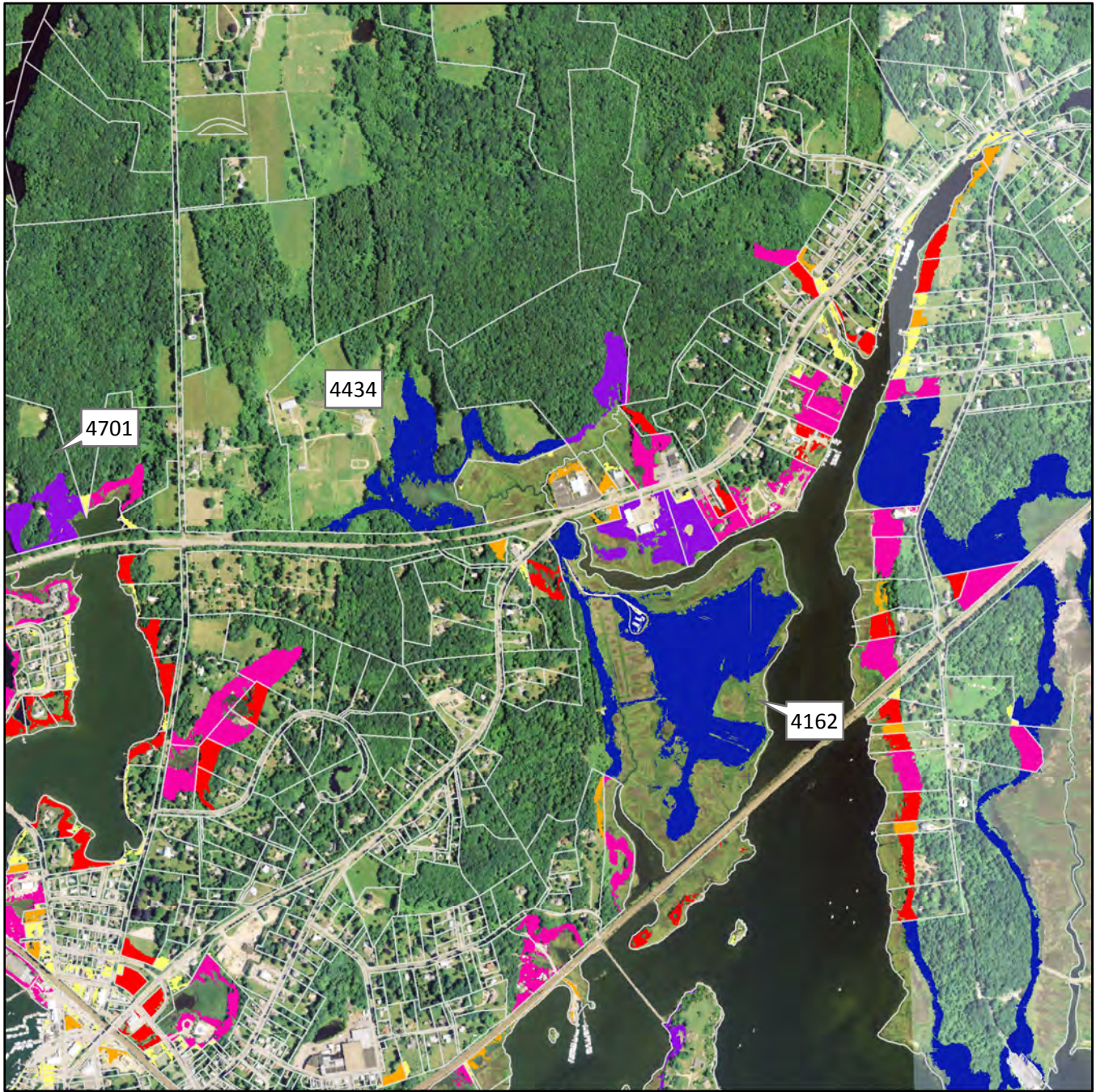


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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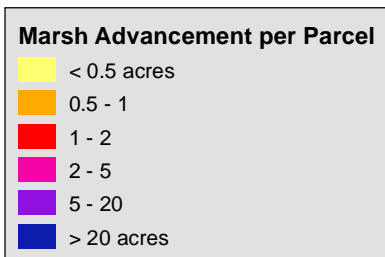


see page 33

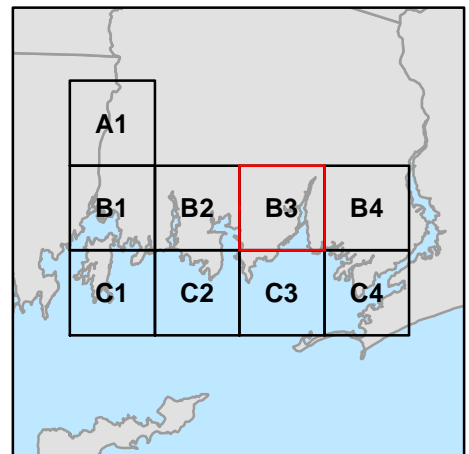
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

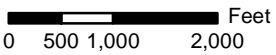
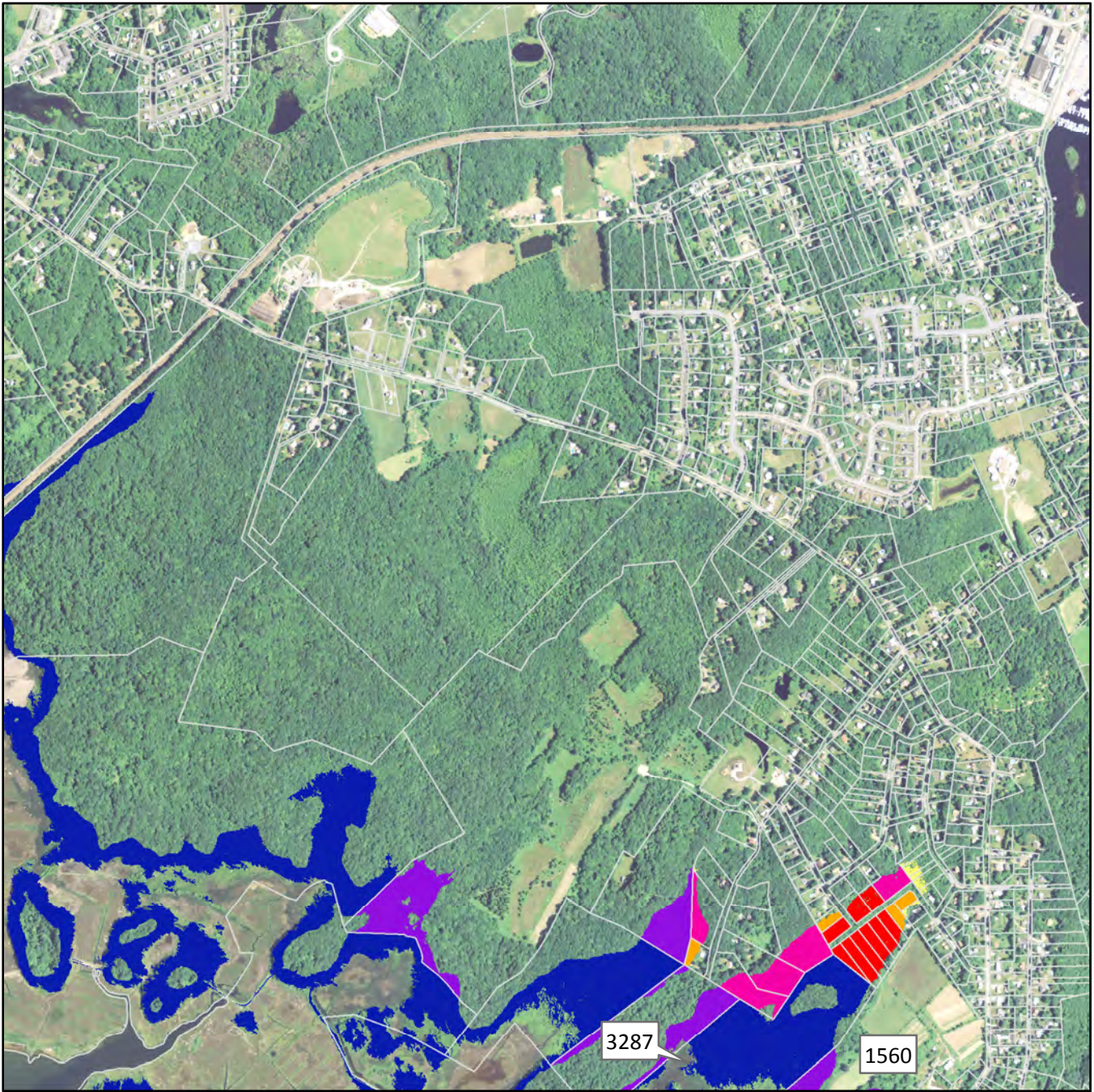
Advancement per Parcel - Map B3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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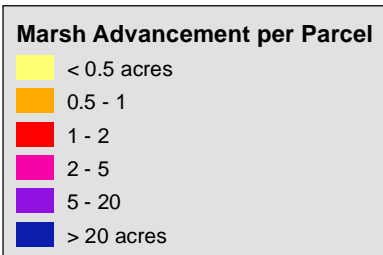


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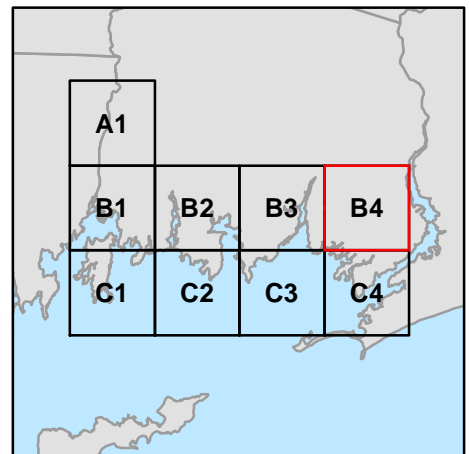
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map B4



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.





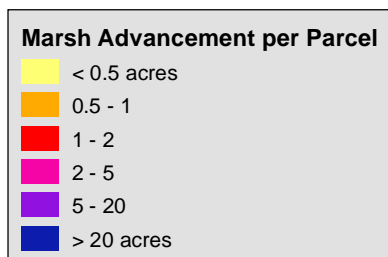
see page 32

0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

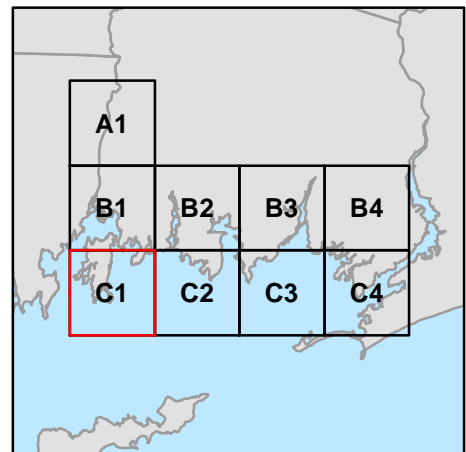
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map C1

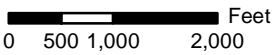
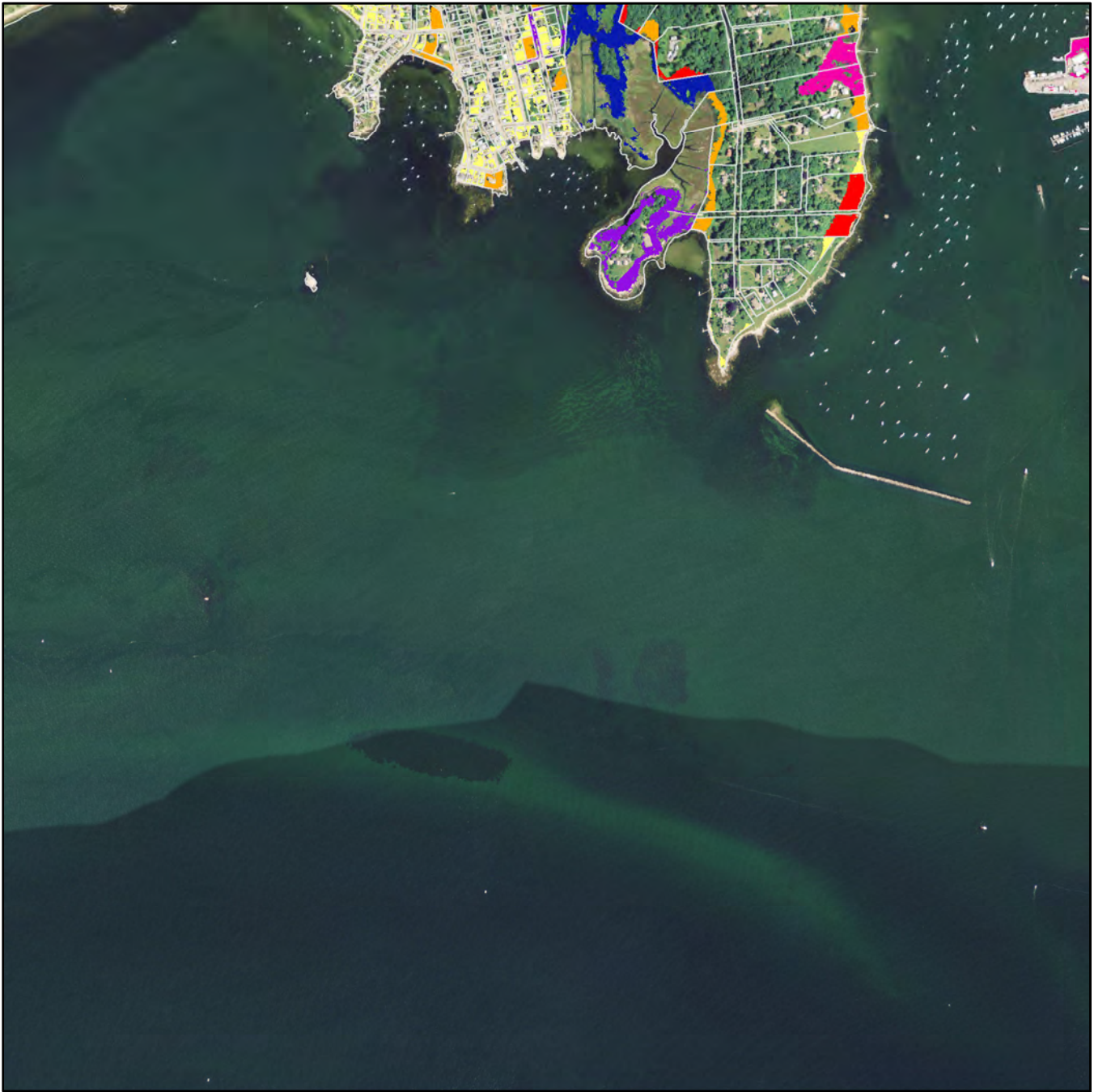


Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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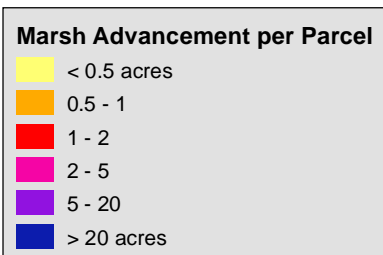
see page 33



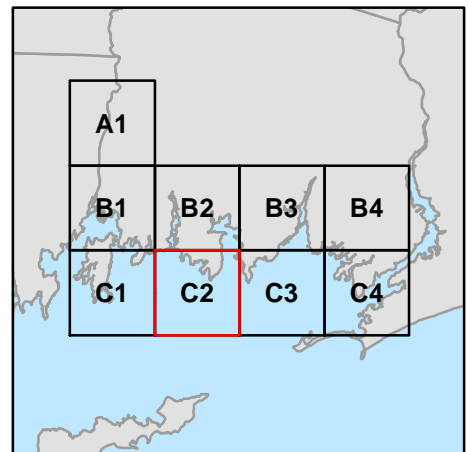
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map C2



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



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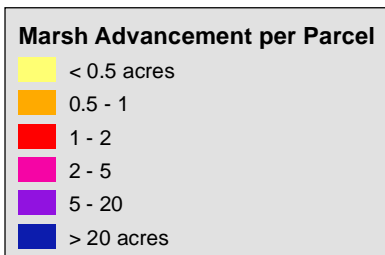


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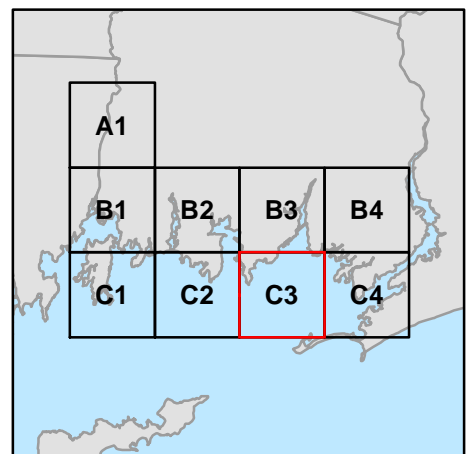
Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

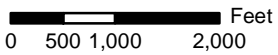
Advancement per Parcel - Map C3



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.



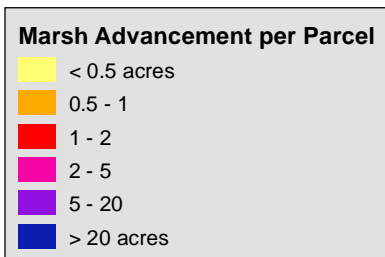
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Marsh Advancement by the 2080s

Town of Stonington, CT

Advancement per Parcel - Map C4



Note: Only Non-OS parcels with > 12 acres of suitable marsh advancement are shown.

