



Open Space Planning

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Beginning with Habitat (BwH)



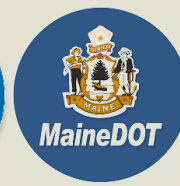
Beginning with Habitat



Conserving Maine's Natural Landscape
for Plants, Animals, and People



- *Beginning with Habitat* equips Maine communities, landowners, and conservation partners with conservation tools
- BwH is a voluntary strategizing organization



Beginning with Habitat Services



Our Services



Information



Spatial Data



Technical Assistance

- Customized Presentations & Workshops
- Library of ordinance tools, example plans, etc.
- Dedicated landowner biologist for site visits
- Assistance w/ and review of comprehensive plans

Our Users



Municipalities



Landowners



Land Trusts



Stream Viewer

Online Map Database

Digital Data

You can use our GIS data to create your own customized planning maps (GIS software required). [Simply let us know which town or region you'd like data from](#), and we will send you the data via OneDrive or on a CD.

Beginning with Habitat Programs

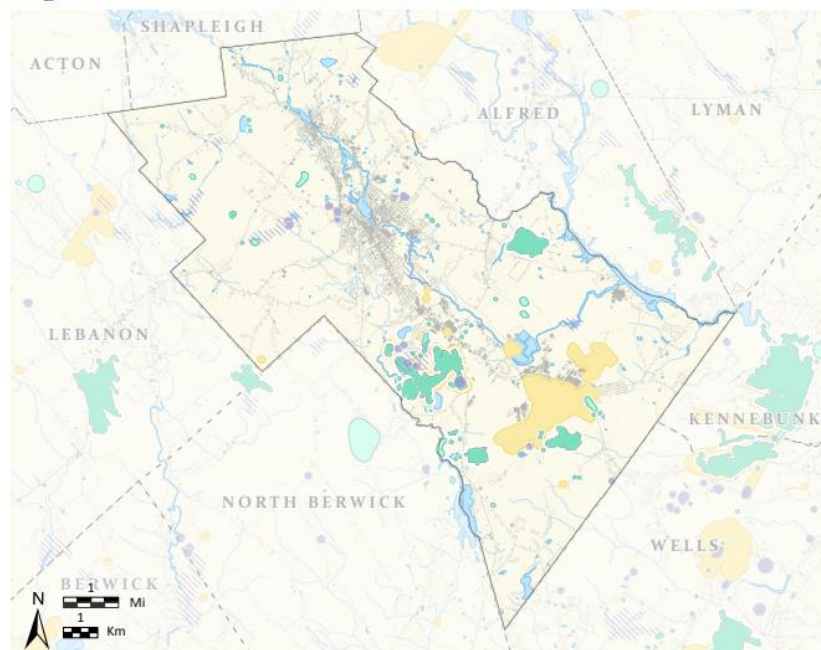


Map Communication/ Data delivery



Sanford

High Value Plant and Animal Habitats



Beginning with Habitat (BwH) equips Maine communities, landowners, and conservation partners with tools to protect, restore, and connect important habitats and ecosystems in a changing climate. www.beginningwithhabitat.org

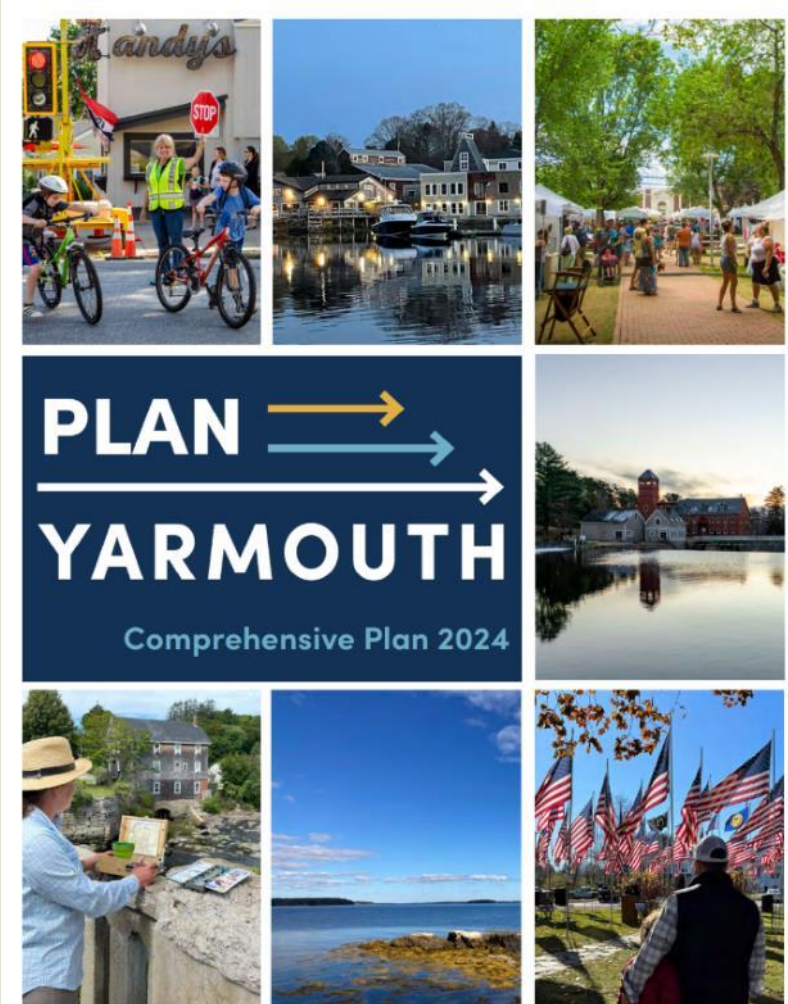
April 2025



Private Lands



Municipalities



Climate Coordination & Resilience



Landscape Conservation Planning





Open Space Planning



What is “open space”?

What is “Open Space”?



- Very broadly defined term that can mean:
 - Natural areas
 - Cultural areas
 - Public areas or non-public
 - Trails, roads, sidewalks, etc.
 - Can vary in size, from large plots of land to extremely small (e.g., a public bench).





Is there a legal definition for “open space”?

In some contexts yes, but not for open space planning per se



Is there a legal definition for open space?

Legal Definition #1 – Open Space Tax Law

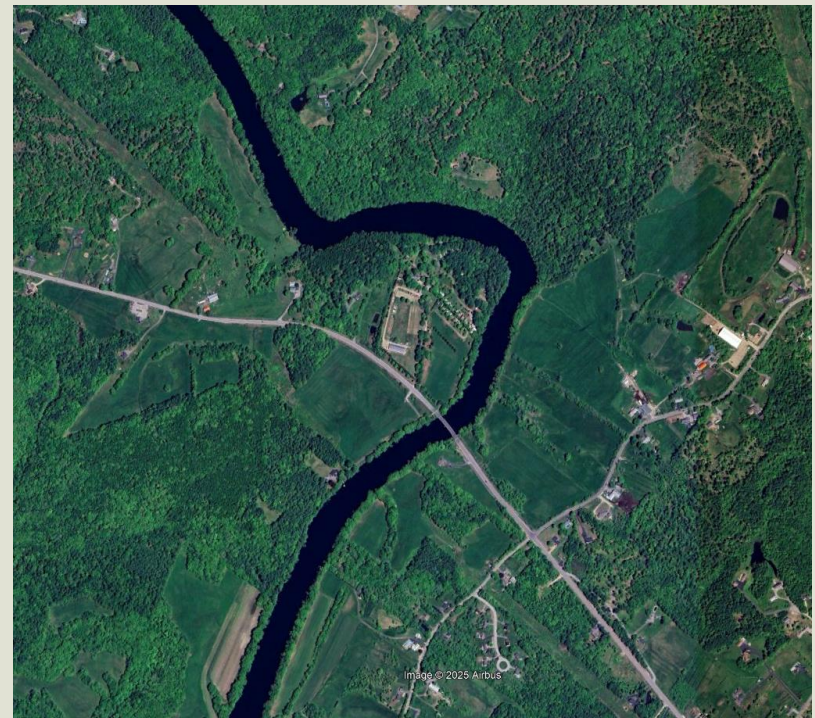
- Can get property tax reductions if you place your land in open space tax law
- “Open space” must be land held for public benefit – 16 different possible considerations for what “public benefit” can mean here! Anything from historic and scenic values to ecological and recreational value. Does not mean public has to have access to it!



Is there a legal definition for open space?

Legal Definition #2: FEMA CRS

- CRS = Community Rating System – Allows FEMA to determine flood risk and insurance premiums for towns
- Protecting open space in Special Flood Hazard Areas can earn discounts on flood insurance through the CRS
- “Open space” = any natural area in this instance.



Note: Saco currently participates in the FEMA CRS and receives a 10% flood insurance discount



How else is open space defined?

- Otherwise, no legal definitions for “open space”! Can be natural, cultural, big, small, utility-based, public, private, etc. etc.



What “open space” matters for Saco? Let’s take 5 to write some ideas down.

Saco's open space values...





Why is open space planning important?

- Open space can provide
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Recreational opportunity
 - Mental health benefits
 - Ecological benefits
 - Agricultural benefits
 - Increased sense of place/meaning/community
 - Can maintain that “rural character”!

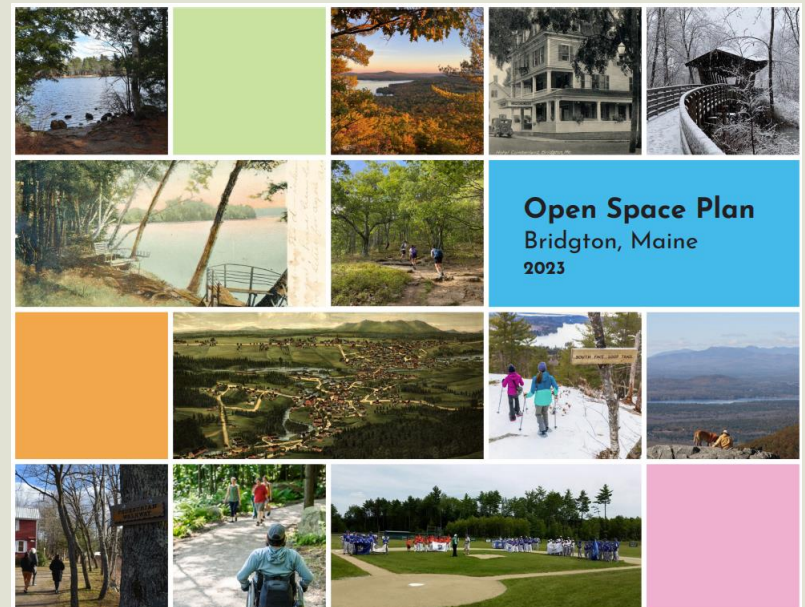
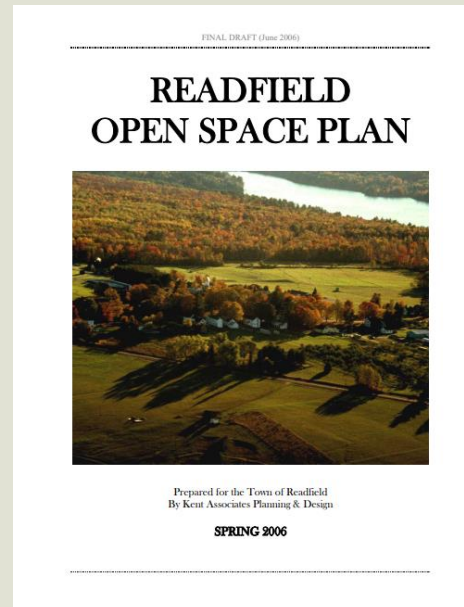




What is open space planning?



- Comprehensive documents that answer the question “what outdoor considerations are important for our town, where are the outdoor spaces we value, and how will we manage them?”
- Frequently seen as part of comprehensive plan implementation



Open Space Plans



- Open space plans can:
 - Include inventories of important open spaces in town
 - Provide direction on how to implement the comprehensive plan
 - Create plans to connect open spaces/make communities more “walkable”
 - Plan for acquisition & maintenance of open space
 - Enhance environmental & economic benefits of open space
 - Increase likelihood of receiving funding for open space projects

Open Space Plans



Becoming more
common!

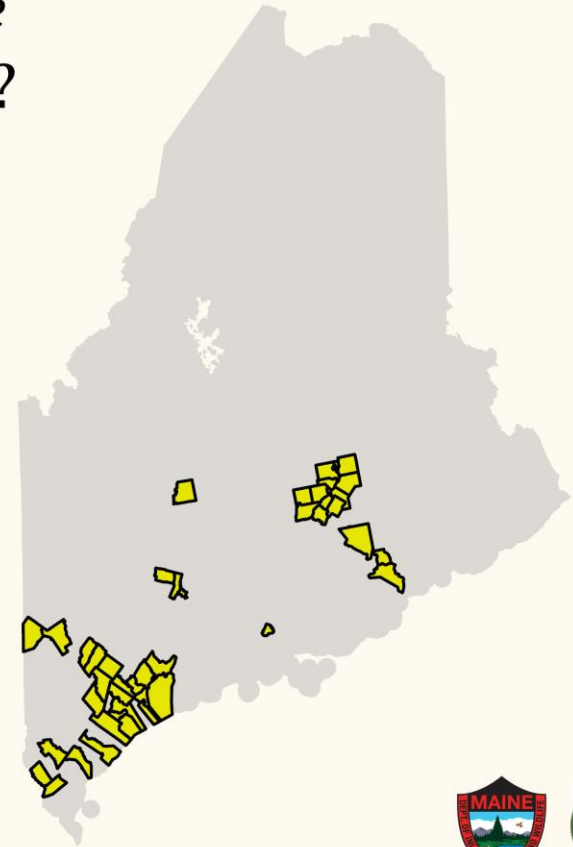
Who is *open space planning* in Maine?

Open space plans are voluntary documents that set a town's vision for managing important natural and cultural spaces in town, including wildlife habitats, recreational spaces, and more.

The first open space plan in Maine was developed for Cumberland in 1998. Since then, at least 43 towns have developed an open space plan, open space plan-like document, or were part of a regional open space plan initiative. For example, twelve towns in the Bangor region collaborated on a regional open space plan in 2009.

Open space plans do not interfere with or regulate the options of private landowners but offer citizens the opportunity to comment directly on conservation and outdoor recreation issues that matter most to them. Open space plans are a great conservation tool no matter how developed a town is; they offer a unique chance to inventory and plan for the management of natural resources and accessibility for outdoor recreation.

Beginning with Habitat is prepared to assist municipalities in developing an open space plan to help meet natural, recreational, and cultural resource goals.

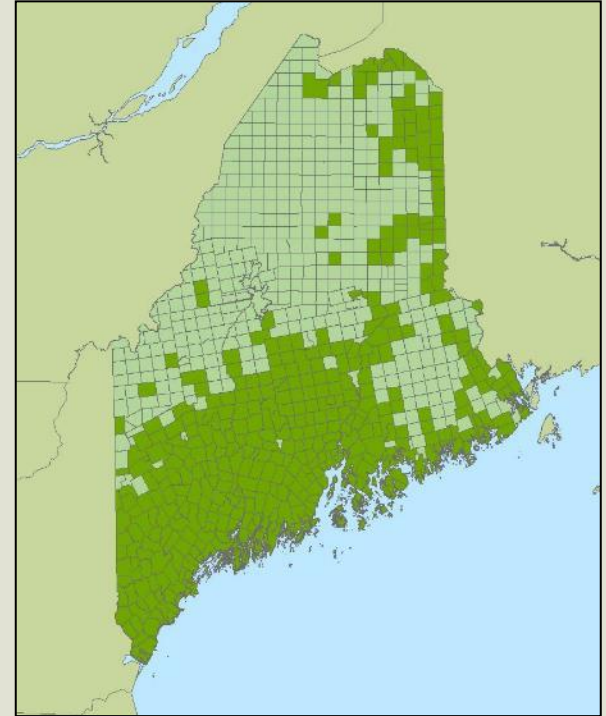


Map prepared by Beginning with Habitat, 2025.

Why is open space planning important?



- *Habitat loss is the #1 issue for wildlife*
- 492 organized towns
 - Independent growth and development visions
- Most land use decisions are made by volunteer boards & Code Enforcement Officers
- Many towns limited to state minimum zoning
- Most local development does not trigger state agency review
- **Open space plans provide clarity & direction**



Legality of Open Space Plans



- No legal definition for what constitutes an open space plan!
- Open Space Plans are non-regulatory
 - These are strategizing documents!
- Identifying a parcel/area of open space on private land doesn't change its value or legal standing in any way
 - Prepare for some concerns about this



How effective are Open Space Plans?

- Case Study: Readfield (OSP published in 2006, currently being updated)
 - Recommended creating a trails committee – was created almost immediately after the OSP was published and remains very active today
 - Strengthened partnership with Kennebec Land Trust for land management/acquisition
 - Likely more land preserved under current use tax laws
 - An open space fund was created to fund OSP projects



What goes into an open space plan?



What goes into an open space plan?

- This is a community-driven plan – up to your town what gets included
- That being said, almost every open space plan includes:
 - Data about natural resources, where they are, and conservation needs
 - Data about recreational features, like trails, boat launches, etc.
 - Data about culturally important outdoor lands, such as cemeteries, beaches, scenic views, etc.
 - Strategies for managing these resources

What goes into an open space plan?



- *see handout for ideas about what information could be compiled into an OSP

Examples



- Data & analysis heavy – Scarborough

<https://www.scarboroughmaine.org/stay-connected/municipal-projects/open-space-planc>

- Simple – Madison

<https://www.madisonmaine.com/images/RecreationTransportation.pdf>

Who do you include in open space planning?



- Public – workshops, surveys
 - Open space committee – a small team responsible for putting together and potentially implementing the plan, which may include:
 - Planning board members/selectmen
 - Conservation commission members
 - Land trust members
 - Citizen representatives
- Don't be afraid to call on state agencies for assistance either! (IFW, DEP, BPL, MOCA, etc.)





Open Space Plan Strategies



Open Space Plan Strategy Examples

- Strategies provide direction and precedent
 - “We should do this because it’s in the open space plan!”
- Can include policies, SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) objectives, etc.
 - “Saco will attempt to conserve 30% of its land by 2035”
 - “Saco Rec Department will create a campaign to clean and increase utilization of X park over the next four years”



Open Space Plan Strategy Examples

- Inventory lands
 - When was the last time a town lands were professionally inventoried?
 - You can't protect what you don't know you have!





Open Space Plan Strategy Examples

- Engage new partners
 - Schools
 - Land trusts
 - State agencies
 - Nonprofits





Open Space Plan Strategy Examples

- Create a human connectivity plan
 - Can communities be connected by trails and other non-vehicular transportation?
 - Are there recreational needs that aren't being met?





Open Space Plan Strategy Examples

- Encourage/incentivize wildlife-friendly practices on private lands
- E.g., celebrate landowners who get “certified wildlife habitat” through the National Wildlife Federation, educate public on planting native plants, wildlife-friendly agricultural practices, etc.





Open Space Plan Strategy Examples

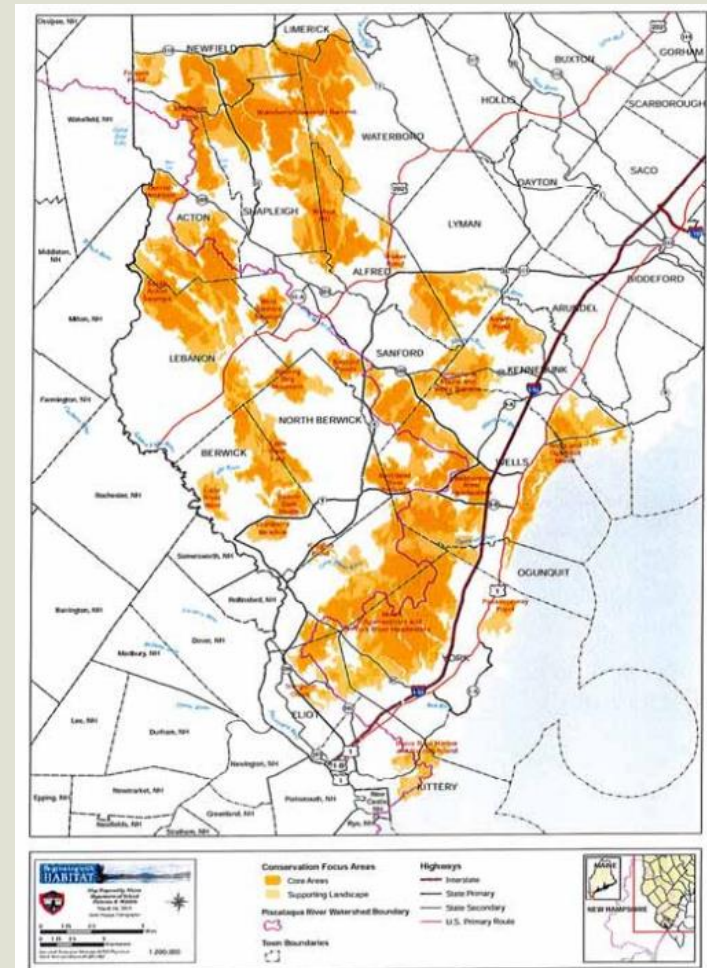
- Update ordinance language
 - Make sure open space requirements in subdivision ordinance make sense (e.g., who is responsible for the open space, what actually needs to be protected, how long does it have to be protected for, does it have to be connected to other open space, etc.)
 - Create incentives for denser developments and/or more open space conserved

(Winslow and Bethel have great examples for language)

Open Space Plan Strategy Examples



- Create focus areas
 - What areas matter most in town in terms of open space?
 - Determining the most valuable location(s) simplifies problem-solving and dissolves a huge amount of information into one tool
 - Non-regulatory, but can be very useful!
 - (South Berwick Open Space Plan)



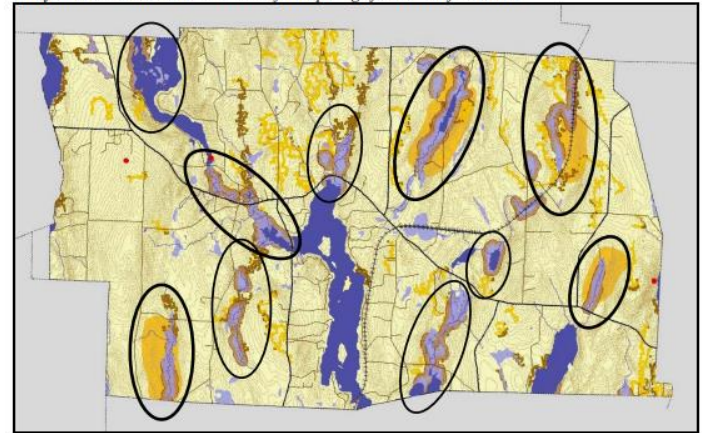
Open Space Plan Strategy Examples



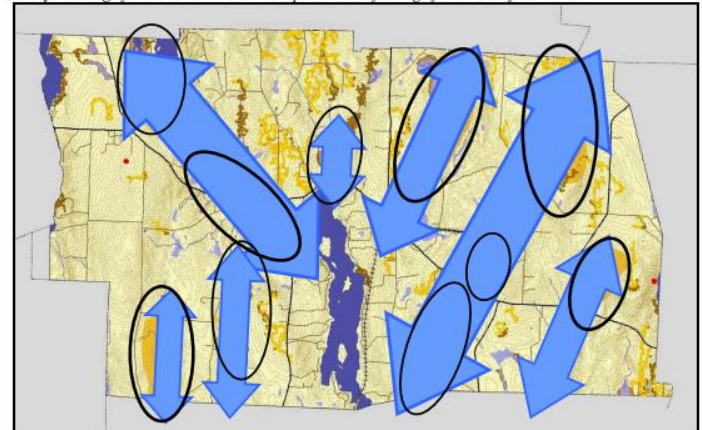
- Create a habitat connectivity plan
 - How will wildlife move through the town? What needs to be done to make sure wildlife can move & respond to changes?
 - (Readfield 2006 Open Space Plan)

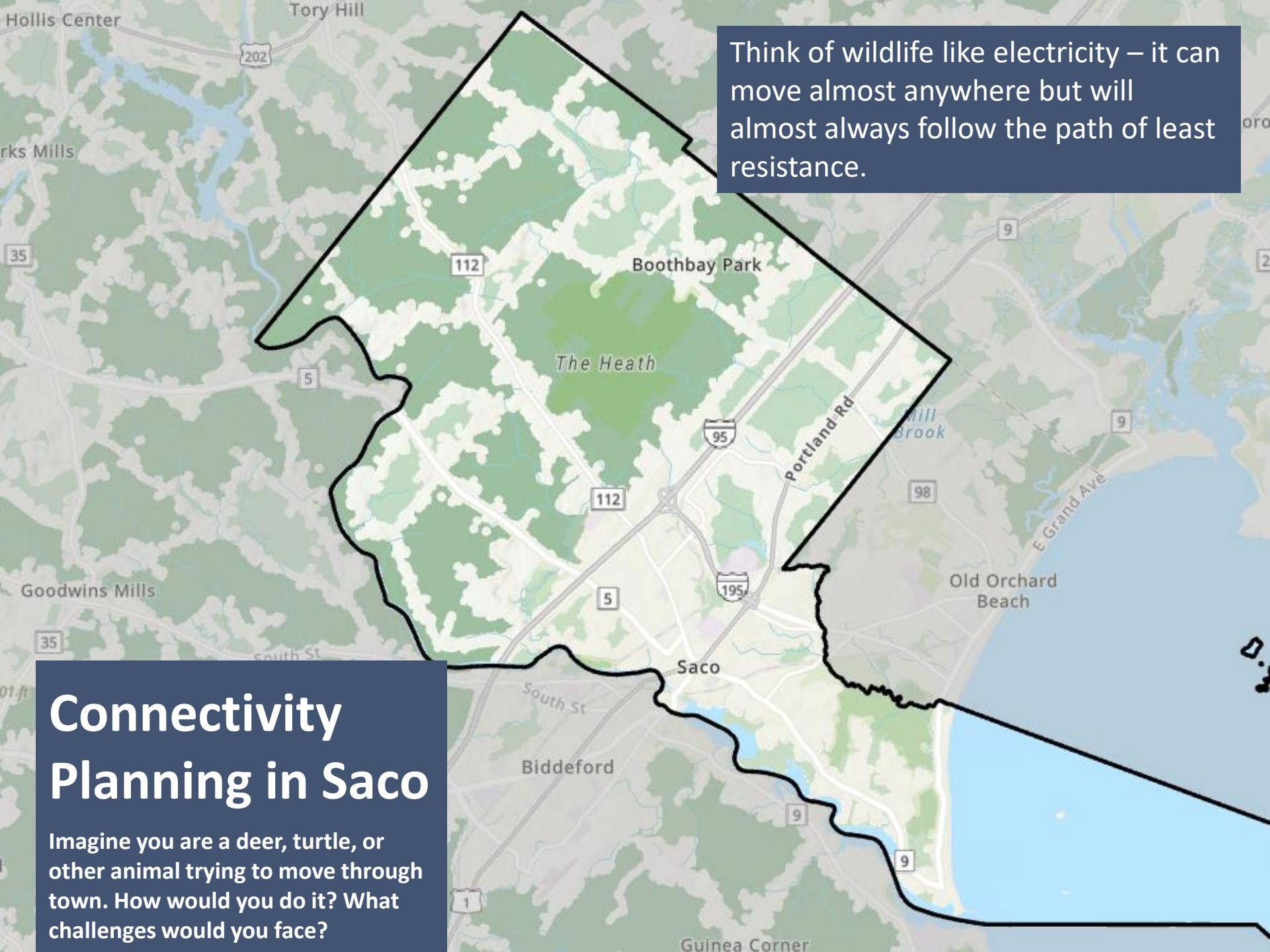
High Value Wildlife Habitat

Analysis 1: Areas with and occurrence of multiple significant wildlife habitats



Analysis 2: Significant habitat areas overlap with identified significant wildlife corridors





Think of wildlife like electricity – it can move almost anywhere but will almost always follow the path of least resistance.

Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or other animal trying to move through town. How would you do it? What challenges would you face?

Dark green patches =
500+ acre habitat patches

Light green patches = 10-
499 acre habitat patches

Habitat patches are
where wildlife move to
and from

Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or
other animal trying to move through
town. How would you do it? What
challenges would you face?

Habitat Block Size Requirements for Wildlife in Maine: **UNDEVELOPED**

RACCOON

HARE

COYOTE

SMALL RODENT

PORCUPINE

BOBCAT

COTTONTAIL

BEAVER

BLACK BEAR

SQUIRREL

WEASEL

MINK

FISHER

WOODCHUCK

DEER

MUSKRAT

MOOSE

RED FOX

SONGBIRDS

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

BALD EAGLE

SKUNK

COOPER'S HAWK

HARRIER

BROAD-WINGED HAWK

GOSHAWK

KESTREL

RED-TAIL HAWK

HORNED OWL

RAVEN

BARRED OWL

OSPREY

TURKEY VULTURE

TURKEY

MOST REPTILES

GARTER SNAKE

RING-NECK SNAKE

MOST AMPHIBIANS

WOOD FROG

Habitat Block Size Requirements for Wildlife in Maine: 100 -499 ACRES

RACCOON

HARE

SMALL RODENT

PORCUPINE

COTTONTAIL

BEAVER

SQUIRREL

WEASEL

MINK

WOODCHUCK

DEER

MUSKRAT

RED FOX

SONGBIRDS

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

SKUNK

COOPER'S HAWK

HARRIER

BROAD-WINGED HAWK

KESTREL

HORNED OWL

BARRED OWL

OSPREY

TURKEY VULTURE

TURKEY

MOST REPTILES

GARTER SNAKE

RING-NECK SNAKE

MOST AMPHIBIANS

WOOD FROG



Habitat Block Size Requirements for Wildlife in Maine: **1-19 ACRES**

RACCOON

SMALL RODENT

COTTONTAIL

SQUIRREL

MUSKRAT

RED FOX

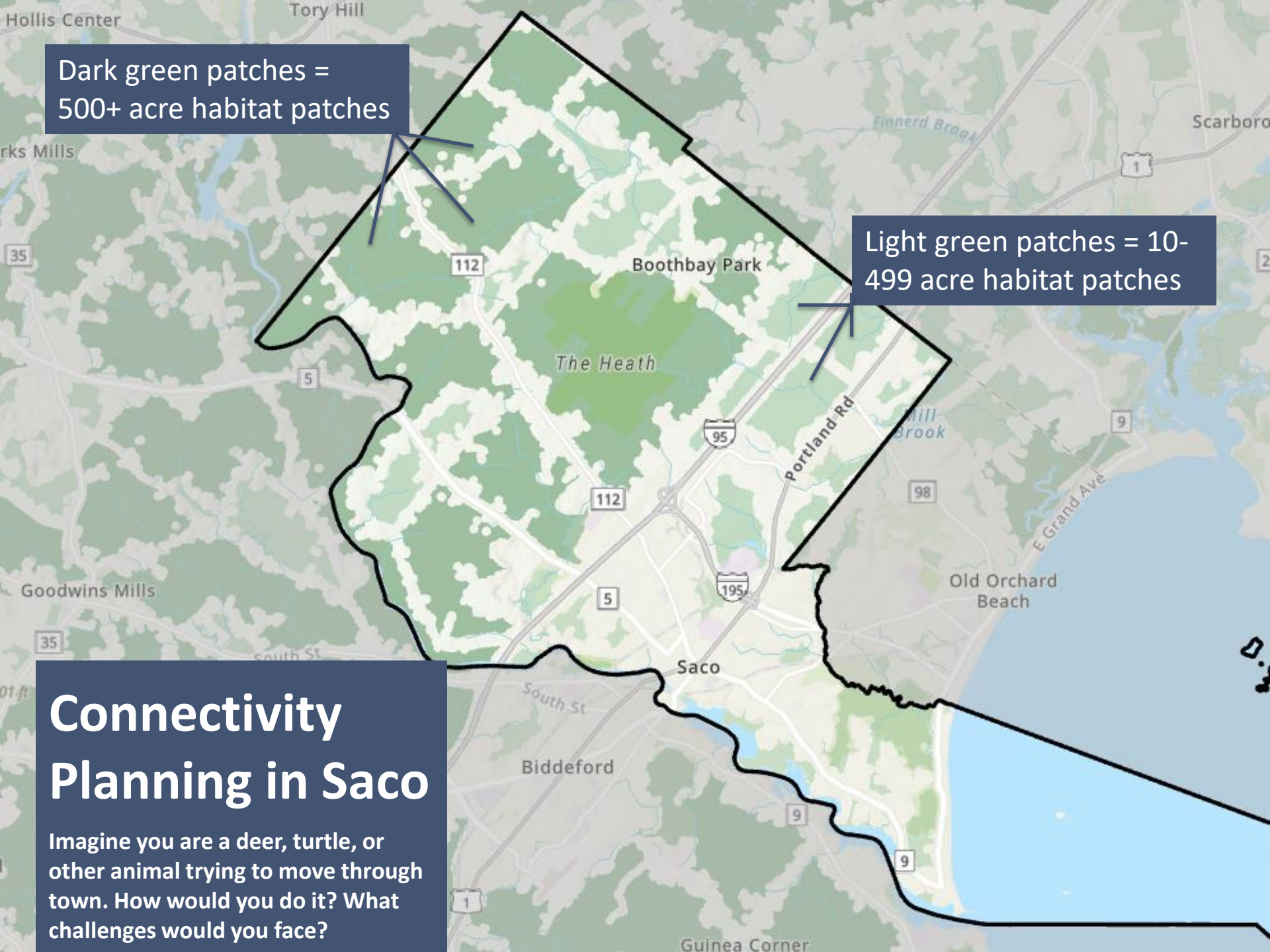
SONGBIRDS (SOME)

SKUNK

(SOME) REPTILES

(SOME) AMPHIBIANS





Dark green patches =
500+ acre habitat patches

Light green patches = 10-
499 acre habitat patches

Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or other animal trying to move through town. How would you do it? What challenges would you face?

Focus Areas of Statewide Ecological Significance – areas with high concentrations of critical wildlife/habitats. Can wildlife get in and out of them?

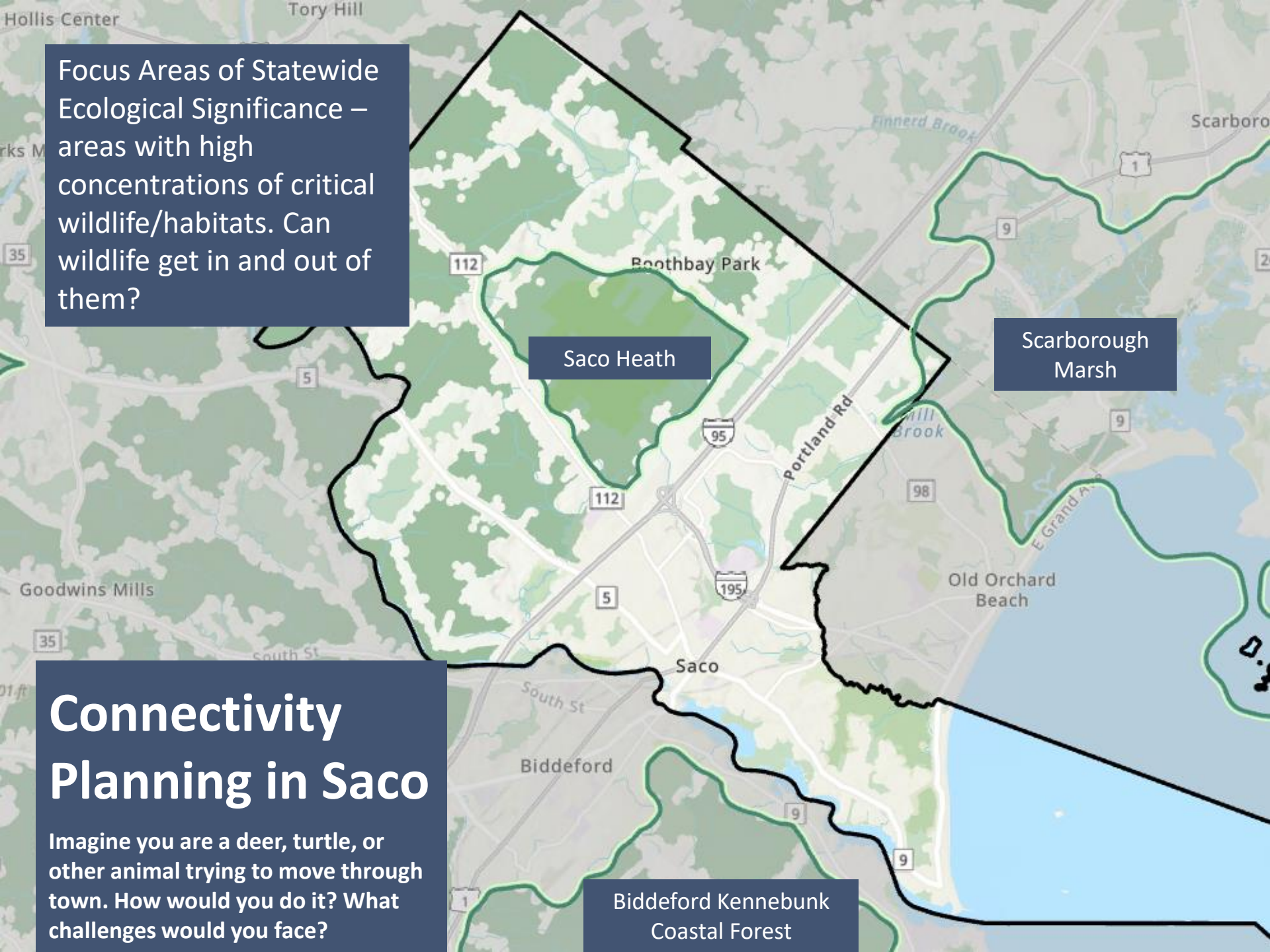
Saco Heath

Scarborough Marsh

Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or other animal trying to move through town. How would you do it? What challenges would you face?

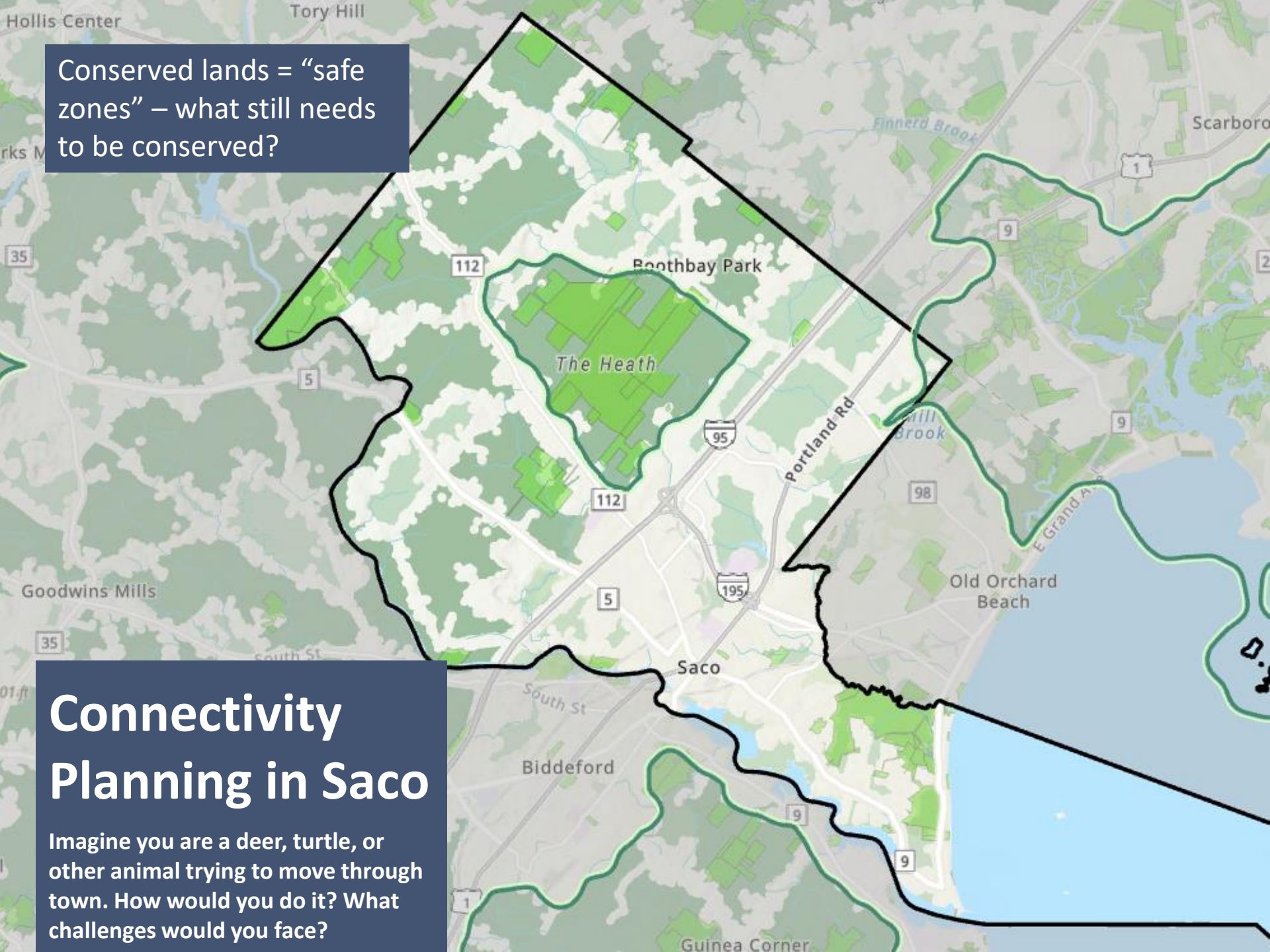
Biddeford Kennebunk Coastal Forest



Conserved lands = “safe zones” – what still needs to be conserved?

Connectivity Planning in Saco

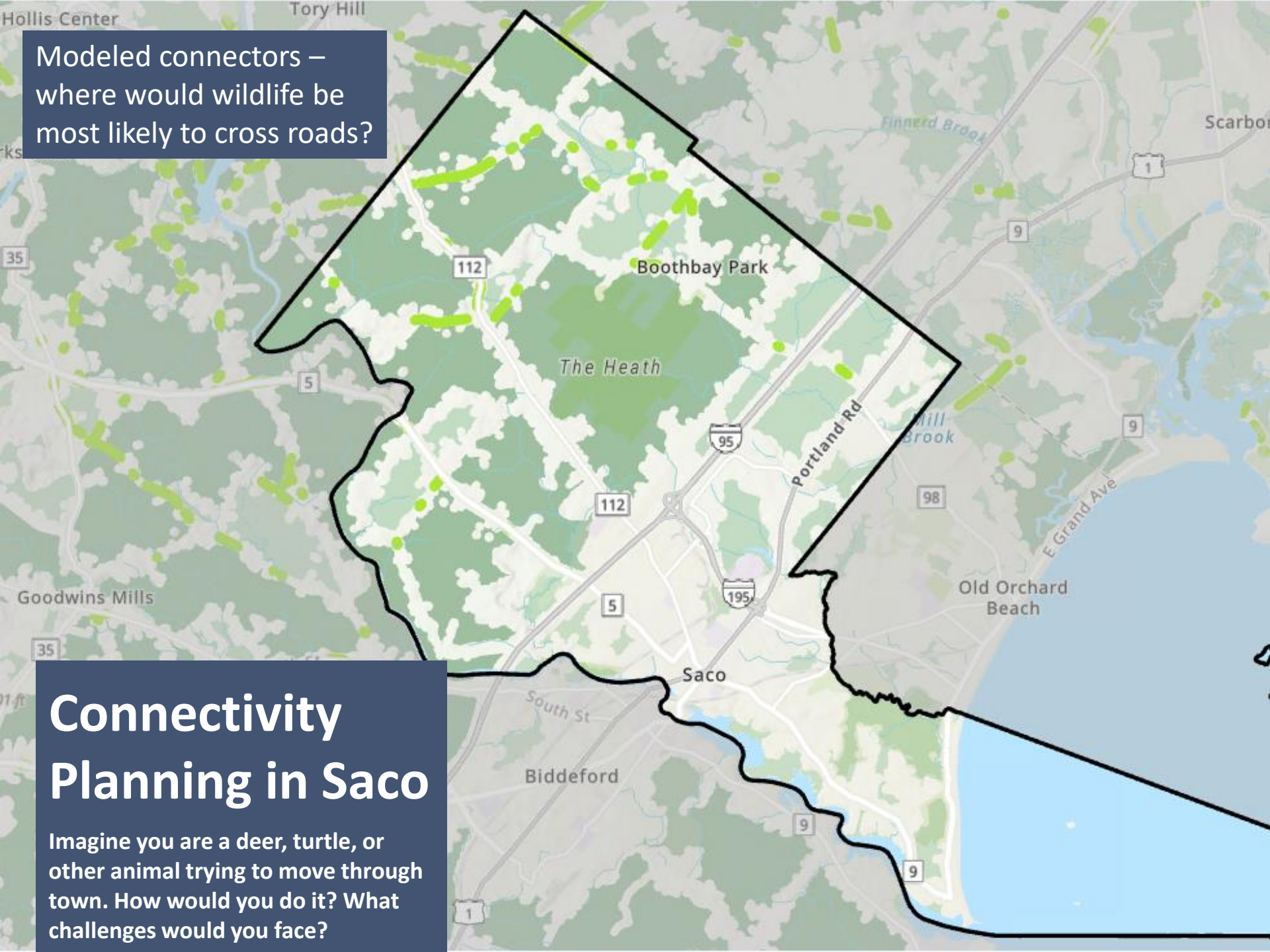
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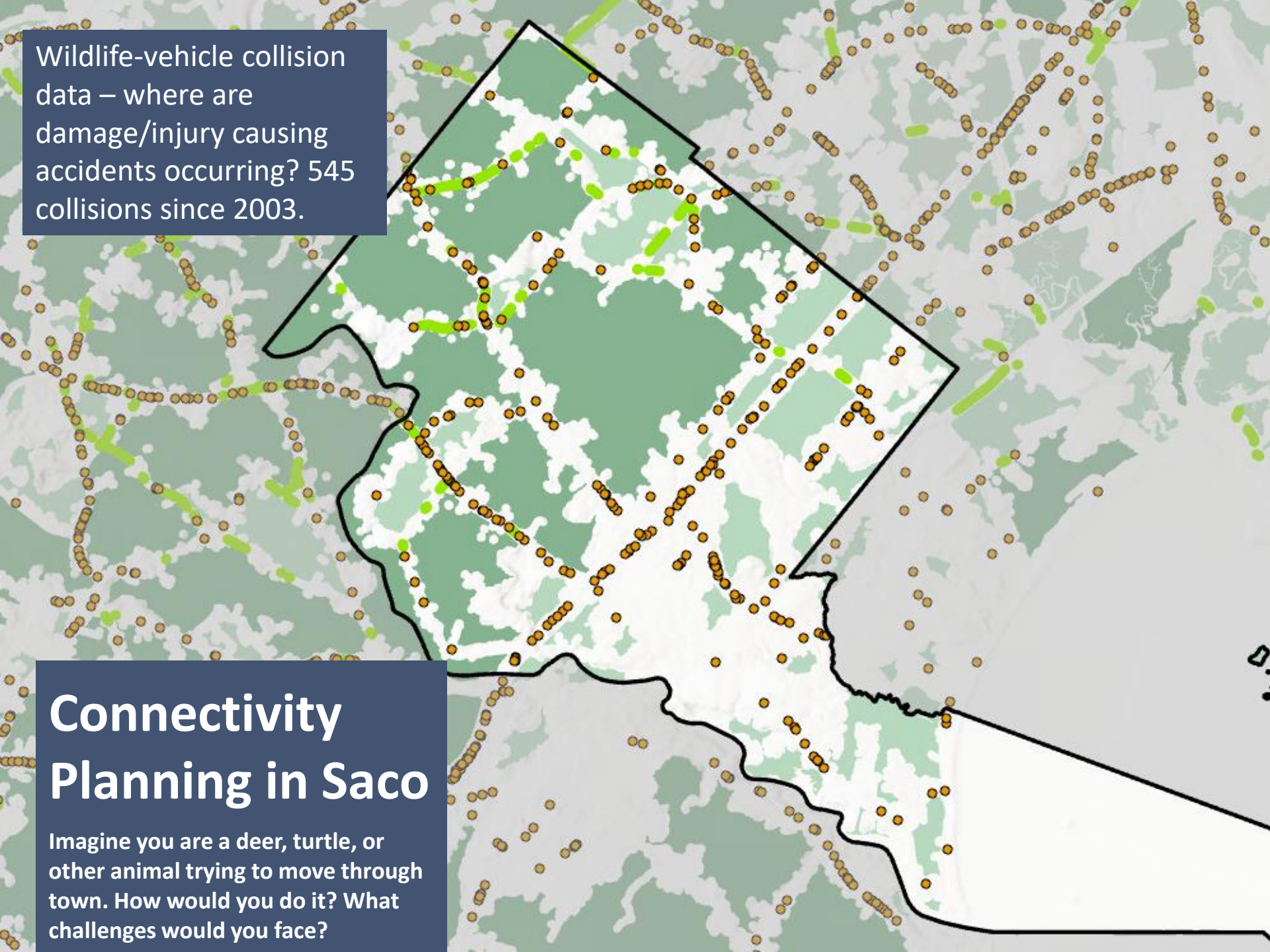


Modeled connectors –
where would wildlife be
most likely to cross roads?

Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or
other animal trying to move through
town. How would you do it? What
challenges would you face?





Wildlife-vehicle collision data – where are damage/injury causing accidents occurring? 545 collisions since 2003.

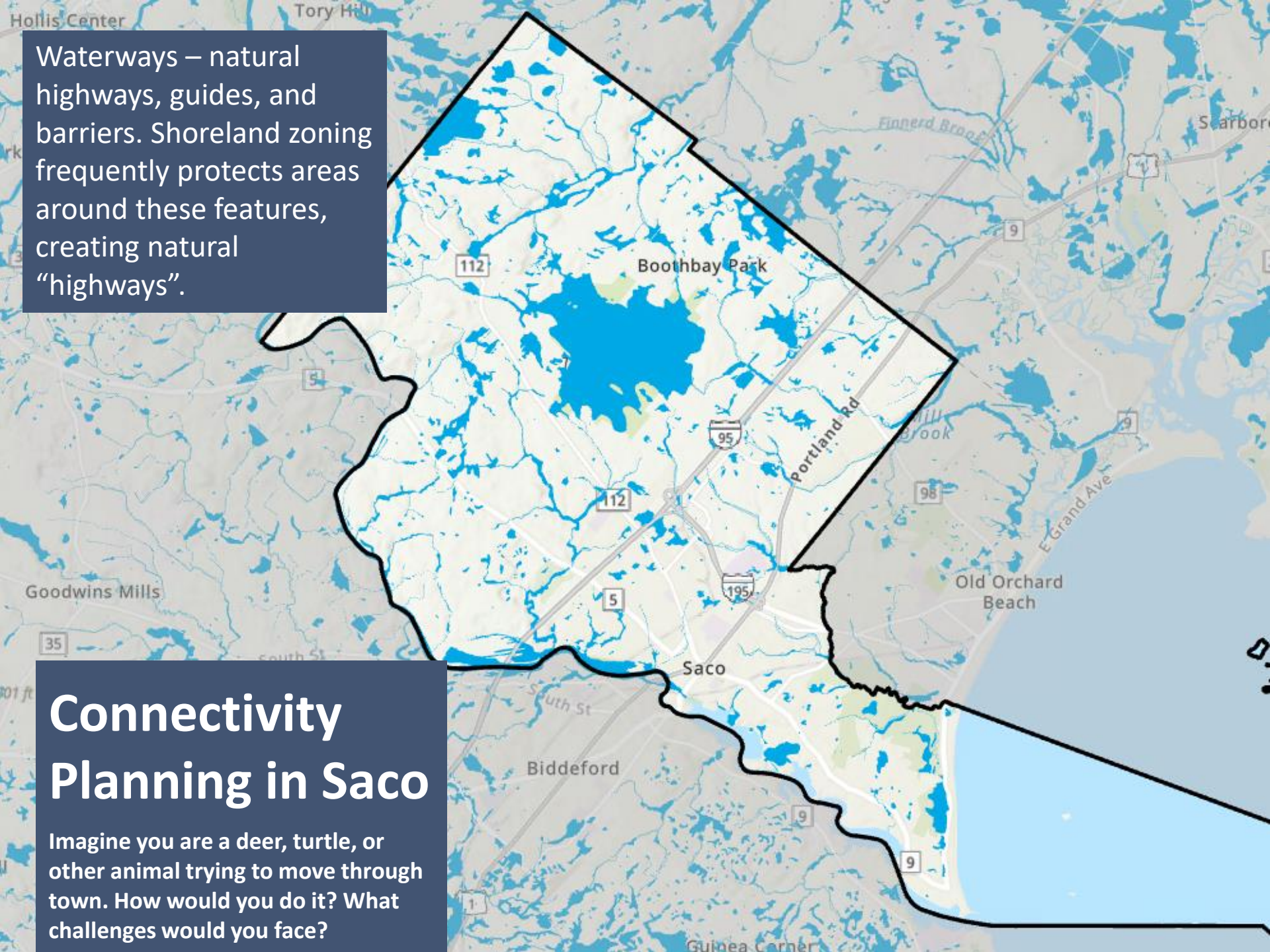
Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or other animal trying to move through town. How would you do it? What challenges would you face?

Waterways – natural highways, guides, and barriers. Shoreland zoning frequently protects areas around these features, creating natural “highways”.

Connectivity Planning in Saco

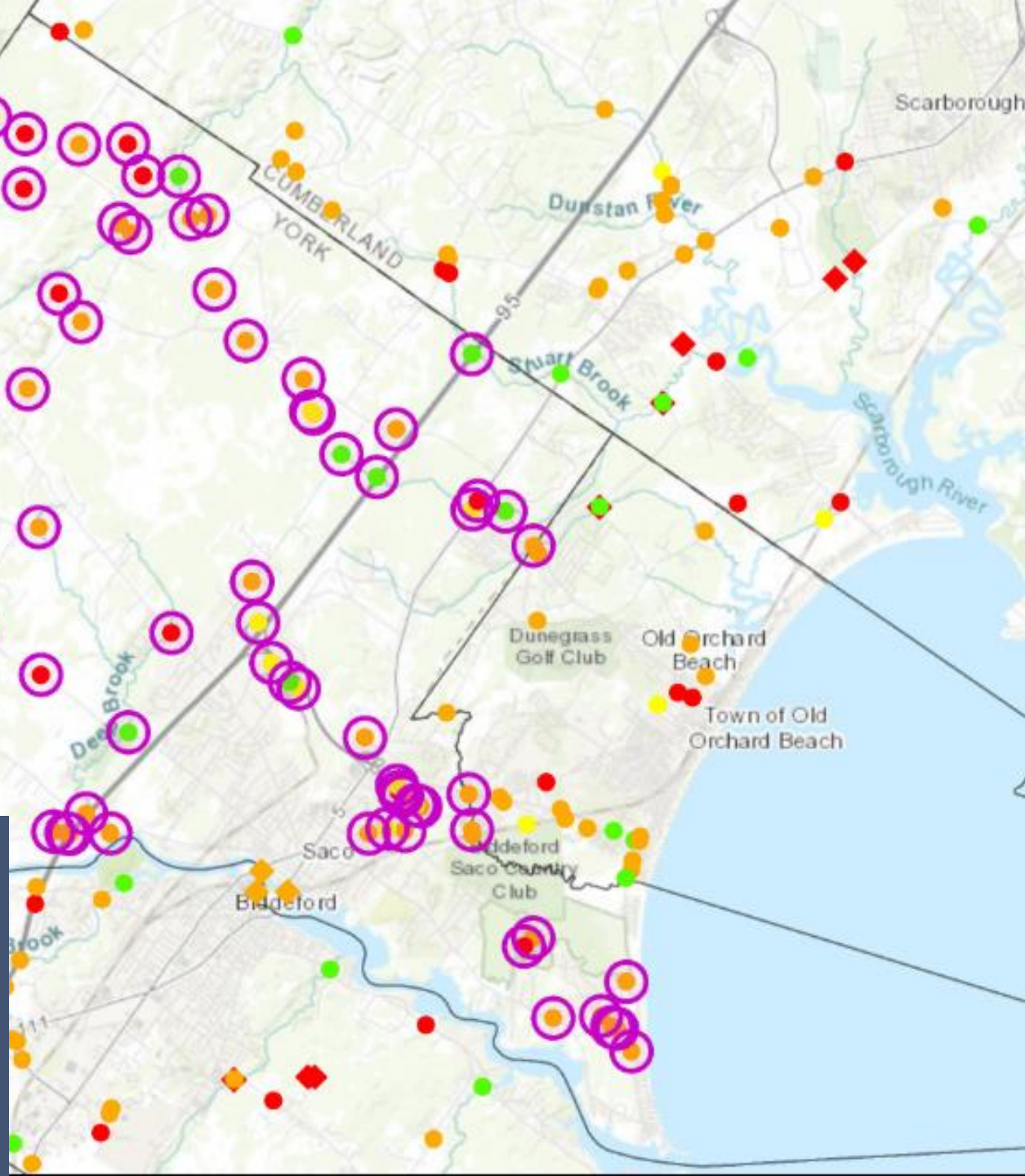
Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or other animal trying to move through town. How would you do it? What challenges would you face?



Where are waterways
impeded by
dams/culverts?
Green = passable
Orange = potentially
impassable
Red = impassable

Connectivity Planning in Saco

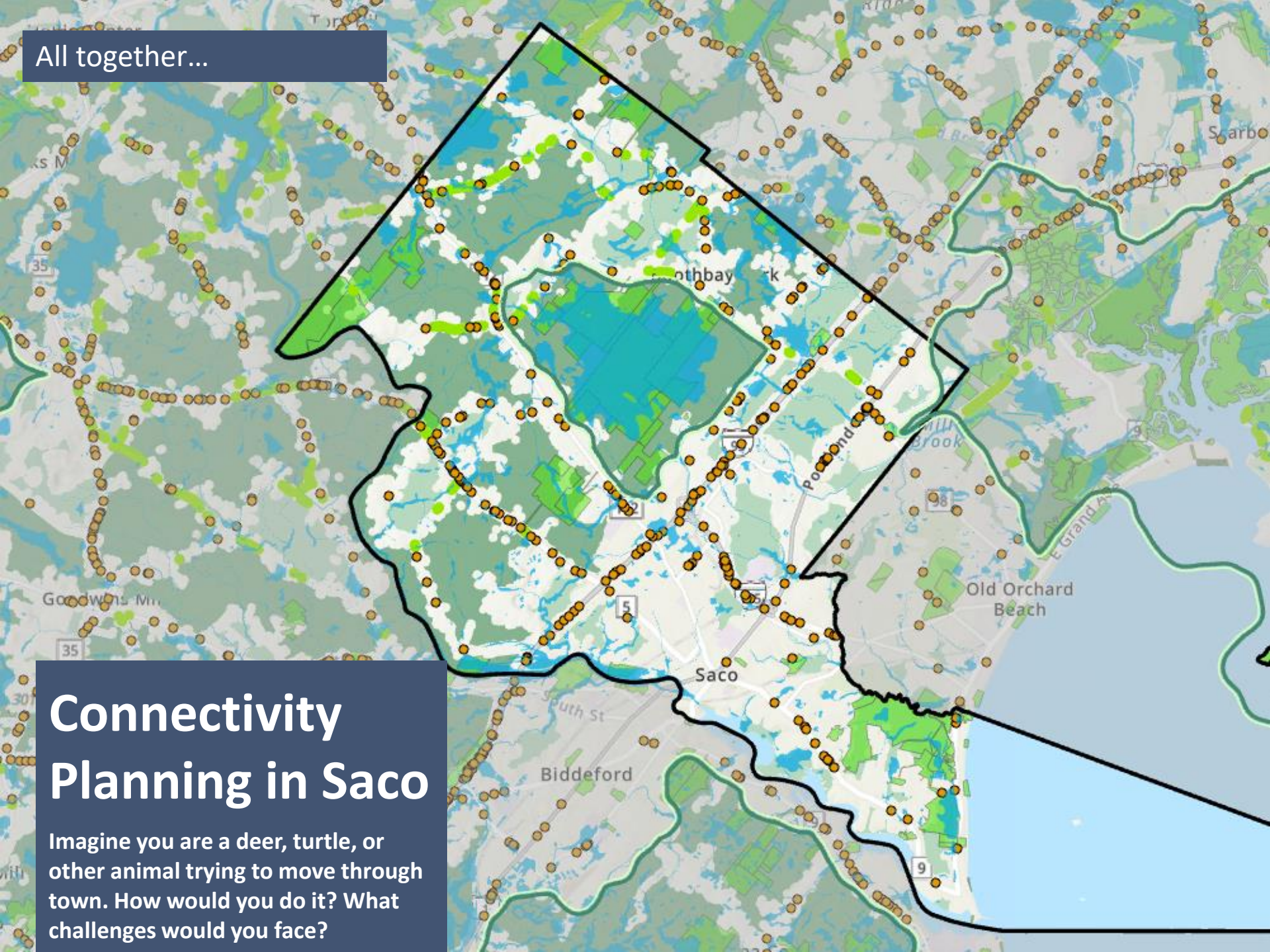
Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or
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All together...

Connectivity Planning in Saco

Imagine you are a deer, turtle, or other animal trying to move through town. How would you do it? What challenges would you face?





Funding an Open Space Plan



How much does an open space plan cost?

- Creating an open space plan *can* be free if made by volunteers!
 - Many towns go this route
- However, towns with more resources may elect to hire consultants to assist in plan creation (e.g., mapping, writing, design)
- Funds may also be used to support plan creation, such as meetings and materials

Expect a plan to be \$0-\$50,000, depending on your resources, time, goals, and needs.



Funding Programs that Support OSP

- Community Resilience Partnership (CRP) will fund the creation & implementation of open space plans
 - Can access greater funding if working with multiple towns
 - Funds directly for towns
 - Up to \$75,000



Funding Programs that Support OSP

- Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund – More broad clients & categories
- Two grant cycles/year
 - Must partner with a state agency
 - Amounts average ~\$10-20k



Learning Review



What we covered

- Intro to Beginning with Habitat
- Open space – definitions and values
- Open space planning
 - What goes into a plan
 - Who gets involved
 - Legality
 - Effectiveness
- Strategies – focus areas, connectivity, inventories, etc.
- Funding – MOHF, CRP

Questions?



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Beginning with Habitat

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More Assistance:

Maine Municipal Association

Grow Smart Maine

Municipal Planning Assistance Program

Southern Maine Planning and

Development Corporation

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