

Agriculture & Forestry Resources

Outstanding Questions/Comments:

- Open Space Subdivision with Agricultural / Forested Land (Mill Stream Subdivision)
- Need to add land that has been preserved as a result of the Town's subdivision regulations (see Table 22 in 2011 Comp Plan as an example). Town staff will provide this information.
- If the State regulates Timber Harvesting, do they send the town any data about harvesting?
- Freeport Conservation Commission Questions:
 - Town or Public Woodlands that would benefit from Forest Management?
- Consistent use of language for conserved (deed restricted / easement) land, preserved land, stewardship lands. Should reach a common ground on these and then edit the chapter accordingly.
- Need to coordinate with Town staff on a list of town-owned open space and parks to the chapter, or the natural/water resources chapter (i.e., Florida Lake, Hedgehog Mountain, Soule Park, etc.).
- Need to coordinate with Maine Farmland Trust, or another organization, for a complete list of local farms in the community
- Need to check if there is any local data related to the percentage of lands dedicated to crop production in Freeport.
- Need to coordinate with Town staff on a list of town-owned.
- Need to coordinate with the Assessing office to confirm reduction in participation in open space and farmland tax incentive programs.
- Need to confirm 2012 numbers in the Open Space/Farmland/Tree Growth table, as open space acres and tree growth acres seem off, open space was 49,400.
- Need to reference Section 504B (Village Open Space Residential Developments Ordinance) in the Zoning Ordinance in the "Local Regulations" section of the chapter.
- Need to confirm if the Harraseeket Grange farmers market existed in 2023 and will continue to in 2024.

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Highlights

- Freeport has several organizations that manage and protect conserved lands –
 - Freeport Conservation Commission
 - Freeport Conservation Trust (approximately 1,769-acres of conserved lands)
 - Wolfe’s Neck Center for Agriculture & the Environment (approximately-682 acres of conserved lands)
 - State of Maine – Wolfe’s Neck State Park (approximately 245-acres of conserved lands)
 - Freeport Historical Society – Pettengill Farm (approximately 140-acres of conserved lands)
 - Through the Trees – (approximately 58-acres of conserved lands)
- Timber harvesting in Freeport is generally uniform and stable with a 5-year average of 242-acres per year. The most recent data on timber harvesting comes from 2020, which are likely skewed due to COVID-19 restrictions during the pandemic. In this year, a total of 81 acres of forested land were harvested in Freeport.
- According to the town’s 2022 assessment records, Freeport had 2 parcels containing 47 acres enrolled in the Farmland Use program, 10 parcels containing 139 acres enrolled in Open Space program, and 90 parcels containing 2,868 acres enrolled in Tree Growth program.
- Freeport has several small local farms, most of which are on the coastal-side of Interstate 295 –
 - The Farm at Wolfe’s Neck for Agriculture & the Environment
 - Winter Hill Farm
 - Lone Bee Farm
 - Bessie’s Farm
 - Wealden Farm
 - Tripping Gnome Farm
 - Farthest Field Farm
 - Fable Farmstead
 - Winterwood Farm
 - Laughing Stock Farm*
- Freeport has a vibrant network of agricultural hubs where residents can explore local agriculture and purchase a variety of fresh produce including Farmers Markets, Community Serviced Agriculture programs, and Community Gardens.

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Farm and Forest Resources

Freeport's forests and farmland contribute to the town's natural resources and economic vitality. Farms in Freeport enhance the town's agrarian charm and provide a source of income. Forests offer food and sanctuary for animals, stabilize soils by preventing erosion, and are a source of lumber. Forests harbor wetlands and include riparian zones, which are critical for maintaining the health of aquifers and groundwater. Riparian habitat and wetlands play a crucial role in protecting water from fertilizers, acting as natural buffers, filtering and absorbing excess nutrients that otherwise leach into and contaminate drinking water supplies.¹

Freeport's pastoral image depends in part on the continued maintenance and protection of the town's agricultural lands, forested lands, open space, scenic views, and natural resources. Most farmland in Cumberland County is covered by woods or pasture, with only about 30% dedicated to crops. Similar to other areas in Maine, agriculture's prominence in Cumberland County has shifted since the end of World War 2. Although it is the most populous county in Maine, Cumberland County only generates 4% of the state's agricultural sales. From 2012-2107, the acreage dedicated to agriculture decreased 20% in the county; this is concomitant with a decrease in the number of farms, farm-related income, and market value of crops.^{2,3}

Prime Farmland

In 2020, the State of Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry (MEDACF) published guidelines for determining prime farmland. Factors that predict prime farmland are related to the landscape (e.g. slope and associated water drainage) and soil health, including physical structure, moisture content, percent organic matter, and nutrient availability. Farmland of statewide importance produces high yields of crops when treated and managed according to optimal farming methods. Prime farmland is defined as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for cropland, pastureland, rangeland, and forest land.

The greatest concentration of prime farmland in Freeport is located at the Wolfe's Neck Center and its vicinity.

¹

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/nac/practices/riparian-forest-buffers.php#:~:text=Riparian%20forest%20buffers%20can%20deliver,providing%20wildlife%20habitat%20and%20corridors>

² https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Maine/cp23005.pdf

³ https://www.cfoodsecurity.org/uploads/9/7/0/5/97051956/coo_profiles_cumberland_county_20160509_hi_res.pdf

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Conserved Lands

Freeport has several organizations that manage and protect conserved lands. The Freeport Conservation Trust manages the protection of nearly 1,800 predominantly wooded acres including three agricultural easements at Mitchell Ledge (Fable Farmland), Winter Hill Farm, and Winter Wood Farm. Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture & the Environment is the second largest entity of conserved land; this non-profit owns and protects 626 acres of coastal land, and attracts thousands of tourists and residents alike. Adjacent to this property lies Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park; the park contains 245 acres that is owned and managed by the State of Maine. Additionally, the Freeport Historical Society manages the Pettengill Farm, which contains an apple orchard on its 140-acre property. Lastly, Through the Trees is another non-profit in town that oversees 58 acres of wooded land.⁴

- Deed Restriction
- Conservation Easement
- Agricultural Easement
- Municipal/Recreation Land
- Open Space

Timber Harvesting

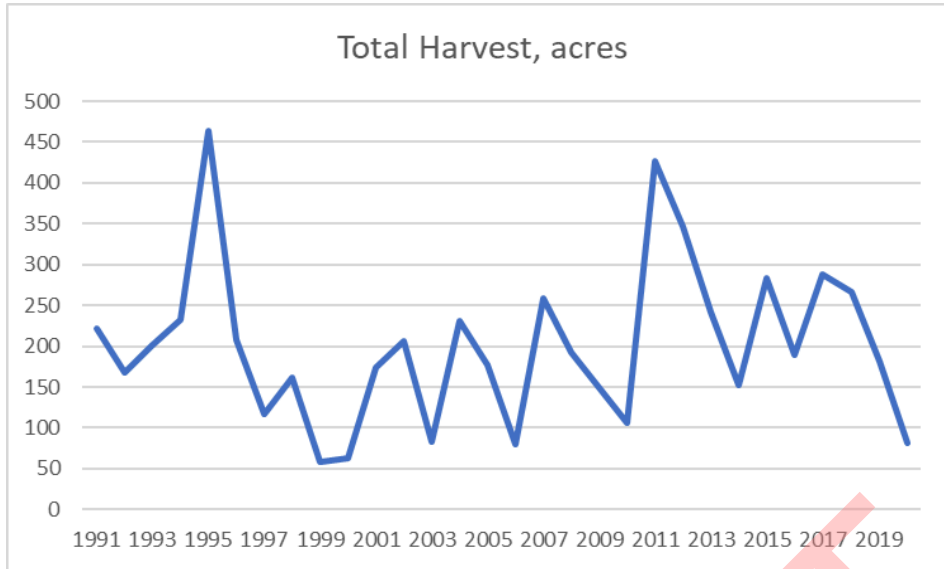
Throughout Maine, harvested timber contributes significantly to the state's economy, serving as a vital raw material for various industries, including wood products manufacturing, construction, and paper production. The Maine Forestry Service breaks timber harvesting into three categories: selection, shelterwood, and clearcut. Selection harvest involves the targeted removal of specific trees, typically the mature or damaged ones, while leaving the rest of the forest intact. Shelterwood harvest focuses on the gradual removal of mature trees in a series of cuts, maintaining some canopy cover. Clearcut harvest involves the complete removal of all trees within a designated area, leaving the land devoid of forest vegetation.

In 2020, a total of 81 acres of forested land were harvested in Freeport - down from previous years due to COVID-19 restrictions. The five-year mean was 242 harvested acres, which is a slight increase compared to the 30-year average of 200 harvested acres. These numbers suggest that the amount of timber harvesting in Freeport is uniform and stable.

From 2015-2019, 99% of timber was derived from selection harvesting. Shelterwood harvesting has been more sporadic over the years. In fact, no acreage was selected for shelterwood harvesting from 2014-2019, but 15 acres were shelterwood harvested in 2020. In 2016, 13 acres were clear cut, and represents the only year since 1990 when more than one acre was completely cleared. No acres in Freeport were clearcut in 2020. Timber harvesting data does not incorporate site clearing associated with development of a site.

⁴ https://www.freeportmaine.com/sites/g/files/vyhlif4436/f/uploads/freeport_open_spaces.pdf

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YEAR	Selection harvest, acres	Shelterwood harvest, acres	Clearcut harvest, acres	Total Harvest, acres	Change of land use, acres	Number of active Notifications
1991	221	0	0	221	0	9
1992	168	0	0	168	0	4
1993	194	7	1	202	1	10
1994	232	0	0	232	0	8
1995	464	0	0	464	10	13
1996	163	45	0	208	0	7
1997	117	0	0	117	10	9
1998	145	17	0	162	0	9
1999	59	0	0	59	2	13
2000	15	48	0	63	4	10
2001	179	0	0	174	5	16
2002	191	15	0	206	3	11
2003	83	0	0	83	77	10

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2004	231	0	0	231	0	10
2005	160	17	0	177	48	14
2006	80	0	0	80	9	10
2007	184	75	0	259	43	16
2008	193	0	0	193	3	14
2009	150	0	0	150	3	13
2010	106	0	0	106	2	6
2011	427	0	0	427	0	15
2012	318	28	0	346	2	15
2013	238	4	0	242	4	12
2014	153	0	0	153	0	9
2015	284	0	0	284	25	16
2016	177	0	13	190	4	14
2017	288.5	0	0	288.5	0	10
2018	266.5	0	0	266.5	0	9
2019	181.9	0	0	181.9	0	12
2020	66	15	0	81	14	8
Total	5,735	271	14	6,015	269	332
Average	191	9	0	200	9	11

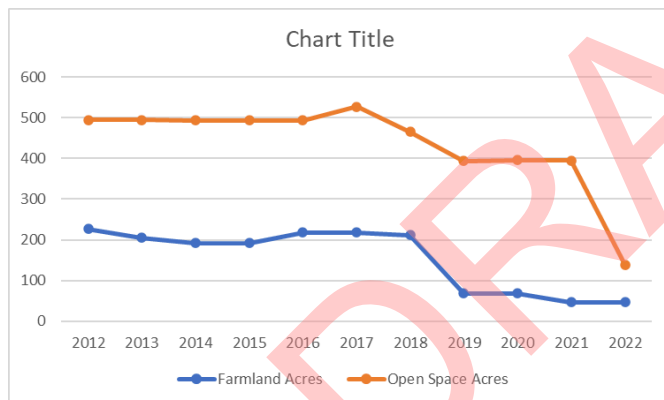
Source: Maine Forest Service year-end landowner reports

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Tax Program Enrollment

The State of Maine’s Current Use Taxation Program incentivizes landowners to actively manage and utilize working lands. Landowners with eligible parcels can enroll in this program and receive favorable property tax assessment reductions. In Maine, the three different tax enrollment programs are: Farmland, Open Space, and Tree Growth. Under the Farmland Use program, property owners are required to have at least five contiguous acres of land and the tract must generate \$2,000 gross income from farming activities annually. Under the Open Space Use program, the tract of land must be preserved or restricted in use to provide a public benefit. The Tree Growth Use program provides a benefit to residents who own at least ten acres of forested land used for commercial harvesting.^{5,6,7}

According to the town’s 2022 assessment records, Freeport had two (2) parcels containing 47 acres enrolled in the Farmland Use program, 10 parcels containing 139 acres enrolled in Open Space program, and 90 parcels containing 2,868 acres enrolled in Tree Growth program. Between 2012 and 2018 the number of parcels and acreage enrolled in all three tax programs remained fairly consistent. From 2019 to 2022 the number of parcels and acreage enrolled dropped off slightly.

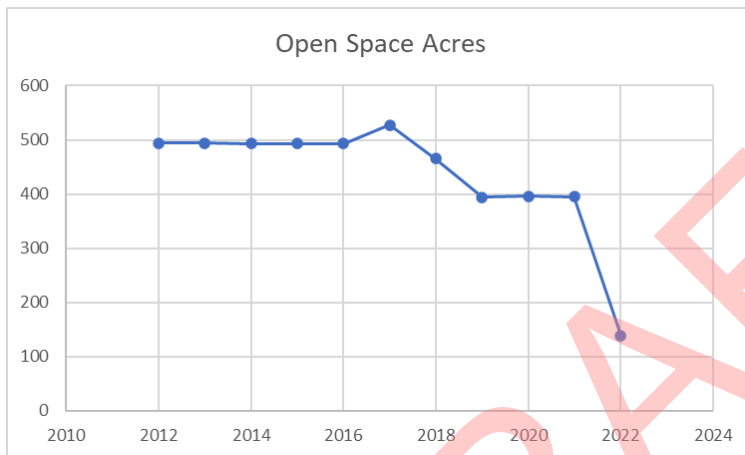
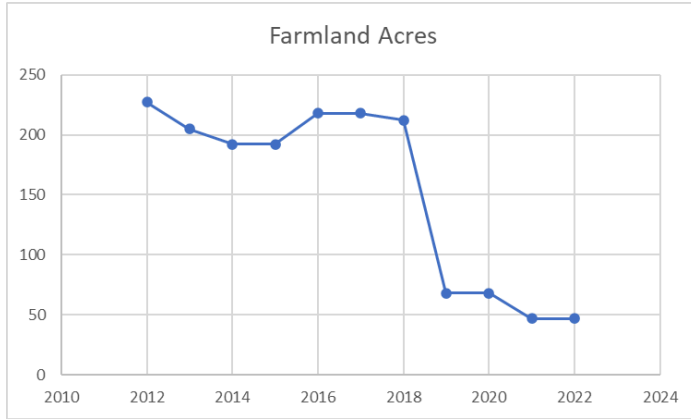


⁵ https://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/policy_management/tree_growth_tax_law_info.html

⁶ <https://www.freeportmaine.com/assessor/pages/farm-and-open-space>

⁷ <https://gis.vgsi.com/FreeportMEMap/>

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	Farmland		Open Space		Tree Growth	
Year	Number of Parcels	Acres	Number of Parcels	Acres	Number of Parcels	Acres
2012	13	227	27	494	127	1,120
2013	12	205	27	494	127	3,755
2014	12	192	26	493	116	3,727
2015	12	192	26	493	121	3,709
2016	12	218	26	493	120	3,739
2017	12	218	26	527	118	3,475
2018	11	212	22	465	107	3,289
2019	3	68	18	394	98	3,108

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2020	3	68	18	396	96	3,151
2021	2	47	18	395	93	3,012
2022	2	47	10	139	90	2,868

Source: Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary (2012-2022)

Local Regulations and Land Trusts

Freeport's Zoning Ordinance permits agriculture as an allowed use in the Rural Residential, Medium Density Residential, Commercial, Industrial, and Resource Protection districts. The definitions around agriculture and farming are consistent with Maine's Right to Farm law, which protects farmers and agricultural operations. Section 504A of Freeport's Zoning Ordinance encourages larger lot residential developments to preserve open space, forests, and farmland.

Freeport Conservation Trust is a land trust that works to preserve farmland, shorefront, and woodland areas in Freeport. The organization works with private landowners to conserve land through permanent restrictions like conservation easements. The organization has protected over 1,700 acres of land.⁸

Local Farms

Freeport has several small local farms, most of which are on the coastal-side of Interstate 295. The farm at Wolfe's Neck Center offers a wide-variety of produce, meat, and milk, in addition to its educational and conservation efforts. Winter Hill Farm supports the production of pork and a range of dairy products. Other smaller farms in Freeport include Lone Bee Farm, Bessie's Farm, Wealden Farm, Fable Farmstead, and Tripping Gnome Farm.

Community Garden plots are available through Freeport Community Services and the Wolfe's Neck Center. Additionally, Wolfe's Neck Center runs a Community Supported Agriculture program connecting shareholders with local farms and farmers. Freeport land use regulations pertaining to agricultural uses allow many small roadside farm stands throughout the community.

⁸ Services 1 — Freeport Conservation Trust. (n.d.). Freeport Conservation Trust. <https://freeportconservationtrust.org/all-trails>

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Farmer’s Markets

The Freeport Farmers Market, a project of Freeport Climate Action Now, operates mid-June through September in Memorial Park. This location lends itself to substantial foot traffic, including both residents and tourists visiting LL Bean and other establishments in the village. Freeport Harraseeket Grange #9 hosts a farmers market late-June through October.

Community Gardens

Community gardens provide communal spaces where local residents come together to cultivate on small plots. These plots are typically available to locals depending on availability. Freeport Community Services has a community garden located on Grove Street with roughly 20 garden plots. The Wolfe’s Neck Center operates a community garden, supported by an on-site composting facility.

Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a farming model built on fairness and transparency for both the farmer and the consumer. A CSA program requires a consumer to purchase a share of the farm at the beginning of the season, which provides financial security to the farmer for the season. In return, the consumer receives a regular box of fresh produce, typically on a weekly basis through the growing season.

There are two CSAs in Freeport. The more well-recognized CSA is managed by Wolfe’s Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment. The CSA offers its members to select local products for eighteen weeks. It also provides training and educational resources to community members who wish to learn more about farming. The Fable Farmstead is closer to downtown Freeport and provides local products to its members for fifteen weeks each summer. The CSA offers its members both half- and full-share options.