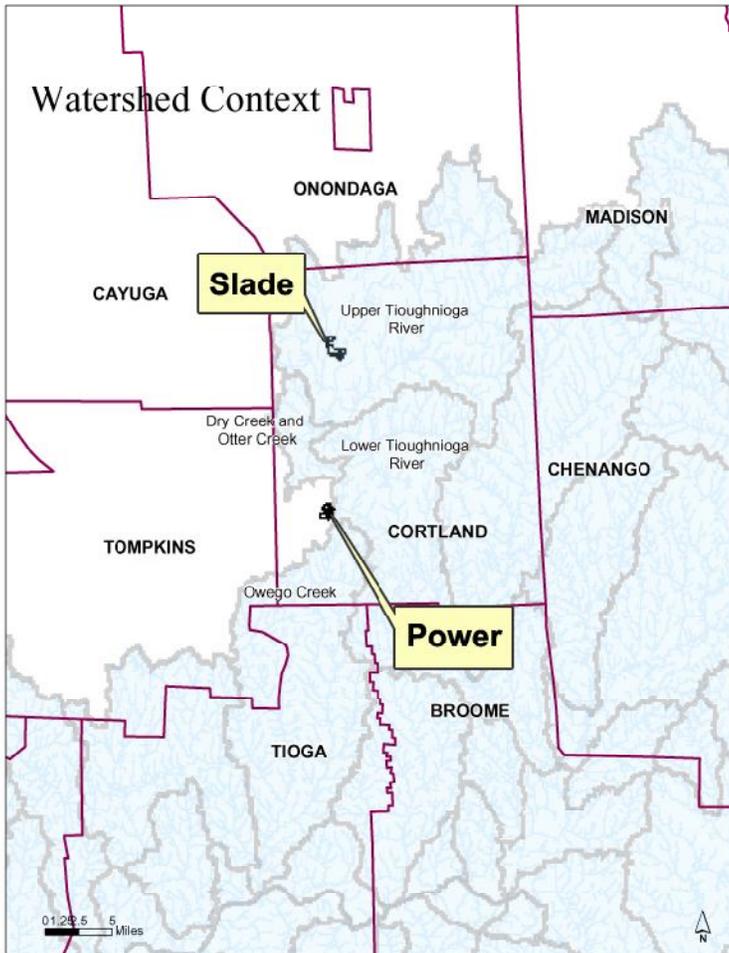


# Cortland County, Spring 2003



Cortland County is an excellent setting for designing showcase properties for the Rural Design Workbook. Both the county and the local communities of Virgil and Homer, in which the two featured properties are located, have put in place a framework for agriculture and open space protection.

Cortland County government views agriculture as an industry which must be maintained, so they work hard to keep farms in business primarily through incentives, assistance in finding funding, and the opportunity to participate in state and federal Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs, described below. According to agricultural census data contained in the Town of Virgil comprehensive plan, in 1997 there were 452 farms in Cortland County with a total acreage of 120,838. These numbers represent a loss of about 13% of the county's 1992 farmland total of 138,620 acres in just five years. It is clear why the county is concerned about the loss of farmland.

Similar to a Conservation Easement, the Purchase of Development Rights is a legal transfer of the right to develop or build on land in perpetuity. The benefit to the purchaser (usually the state or federal government) is the guarantee that the land will not be developed and will be protected for its scenic value, as an open space buffer, as

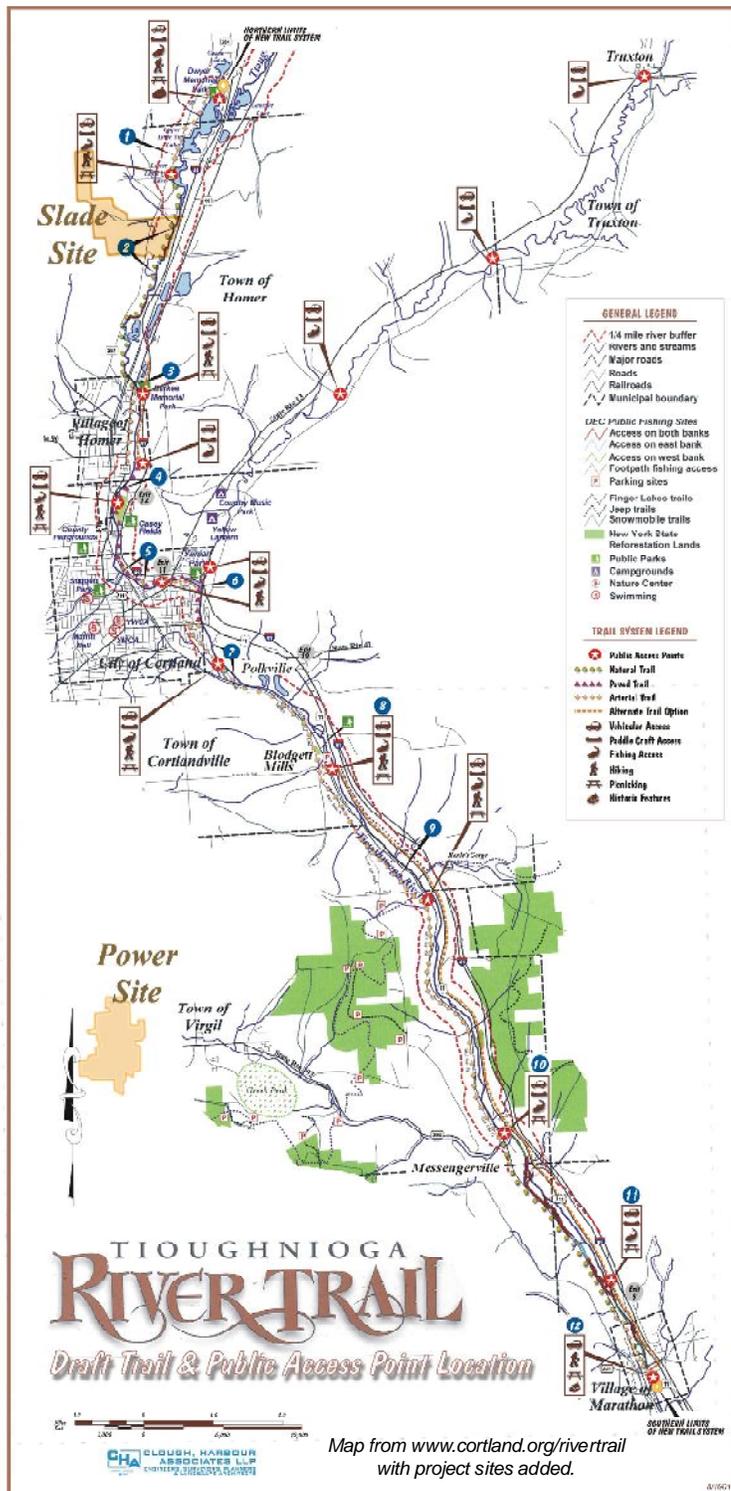
active agriculture or for other natural resource values. For the landowner, the lowered property tax assessment and the income from the sale of development rights, both provide financial incentives for maintaining active agriculture on the land. Although funding through these highly competitive agricultural protection programs is limited, Cortland County actively supports applications from their best farms.



The Power's dairy herd is an example of the area's farming base.



The large, open areas of agriculture are a prime candidate for PDR.



Another county initiative is the Tioughnioga River Trail, a biking/hiking/cross-country skiing trail that passes through or near both of the project sites. The River Trail, located along existing roads and rail rights-of-way, connects Homer and Cortland and provides access to parks, historic and cultural sites, and the River along the way. Connecting to larger trail systems such as the Finger Lakes Trail, the Tioughnioga River Trail is an important open space protection/economic development tool. More information on the trail is available at: <http://www.cortland.org/rivertrail>.

On the local level, the Towns of Virgil and Homer both have recently adopted comprehensive plans. These plans shape a concise vision of the future for each town, establishing development goals and guidelines, designating areas for prime agricultural use and conservation protection, suggesting controls over density of development, and so forth. Both plans call on its citizens to take personal responsibility as good stewards of the land and to consider land use and infrastructure on a regional basis rather than simply within the town itself. One local restriction of note (given the previous chapters' focus) is that both towns are opposed to gravel mining at depths below the water table or in aquifer protection districts. Thus, mining cannot provide supplemental farm income.



Location on the Trail may support recreational uses on the Slade Farm.

The students were challenged to create thoughtful designs respectful of the limitations and issues raised by the towns' master plans, encouraged to consider connections to larger regional systems such as the River Trail, and asked to identify opportunities for the Purchase of Development Rights and other financial incentives to enable the long traditions of farming on both sites to continue into the future and preserve the rural character of Cortland County.

# 14: Good Design - Power Site

## Site Introduction:

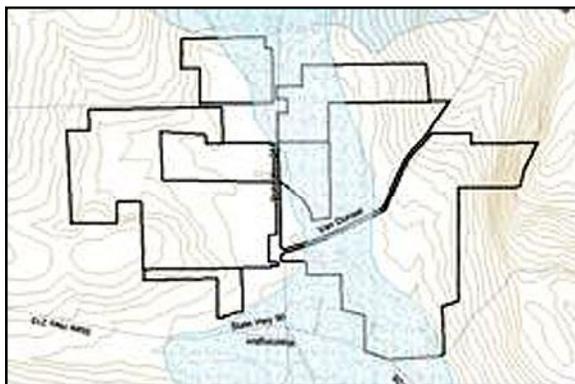
Gerald Power's property, flanking the Town of Virgil, is a family dairy farm with a long history of agriculture. Jerry is the second generation of the Power family to own and operate the farm. He now owns 600 head of cattle and 350 acres of cropland, and rents and operates another 350-450 acres a year. However, as is the case with so many farms, the next generation in the family is not interested in farming, and, as Mr. Power advances in age, he is increasingly concerned about the future of this richly diverse landscape.

Power Farms has been a participant in the Conservation Reserve Program and the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program for the Fall Creek Watershed. Through the funding from these programs, the family has installed various conservation practices, including 33.8 acres of new riparian buffers along Virgil Creek, and has received funding for manure storage practices which are currently in development. These measures help protect the water quality of Fall Creek, Cornell University's source of drinking water.

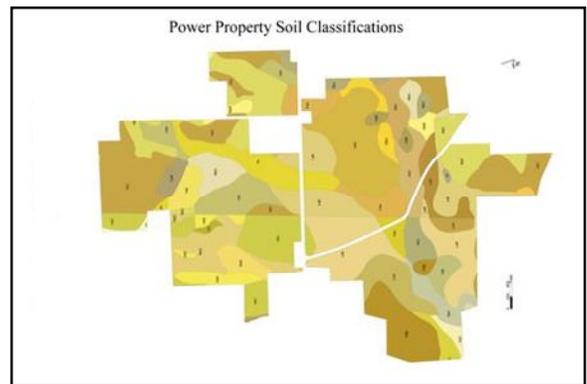
Jerry hopes to bolster the economic viability of the dairy operation without harming the environment. In addition, maintaining the farm's good-neighbor relationships with the hamlet of Virgil and the adjacent landowners is also a high priority.

The students took on the task of proposing projects that both complemented and enhanced the viability of the dairy operation while improving the overall health of the watershed.

## Site Analysis:



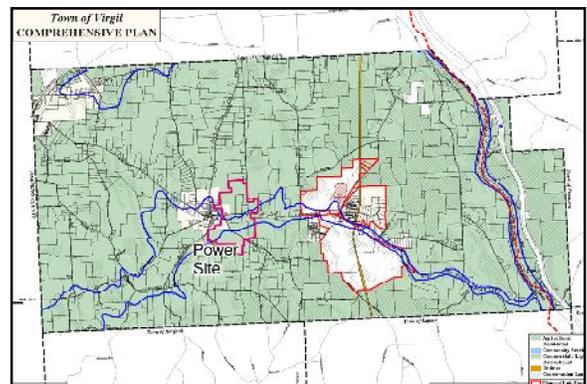
Site Topography



Soil Suitability

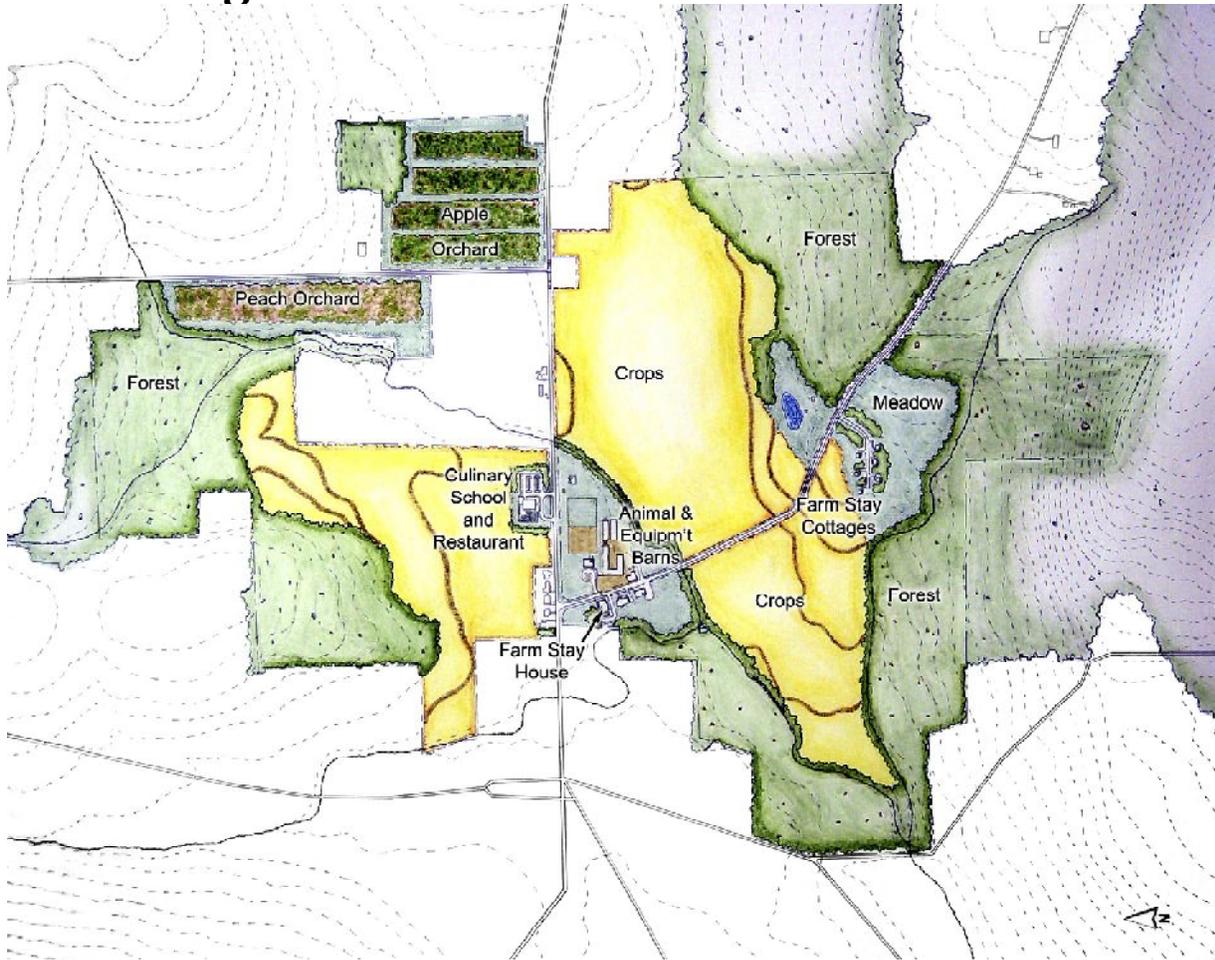


Significant Features



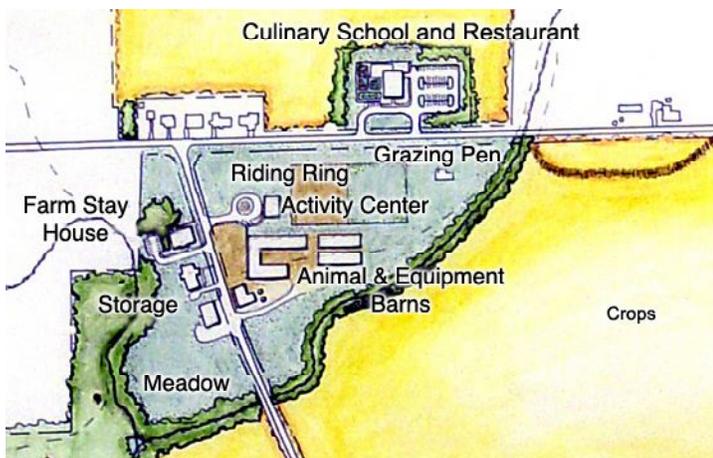
Virgil Comprehensive Plan

## Power Site: Agri-tourism



### *Design overview:*

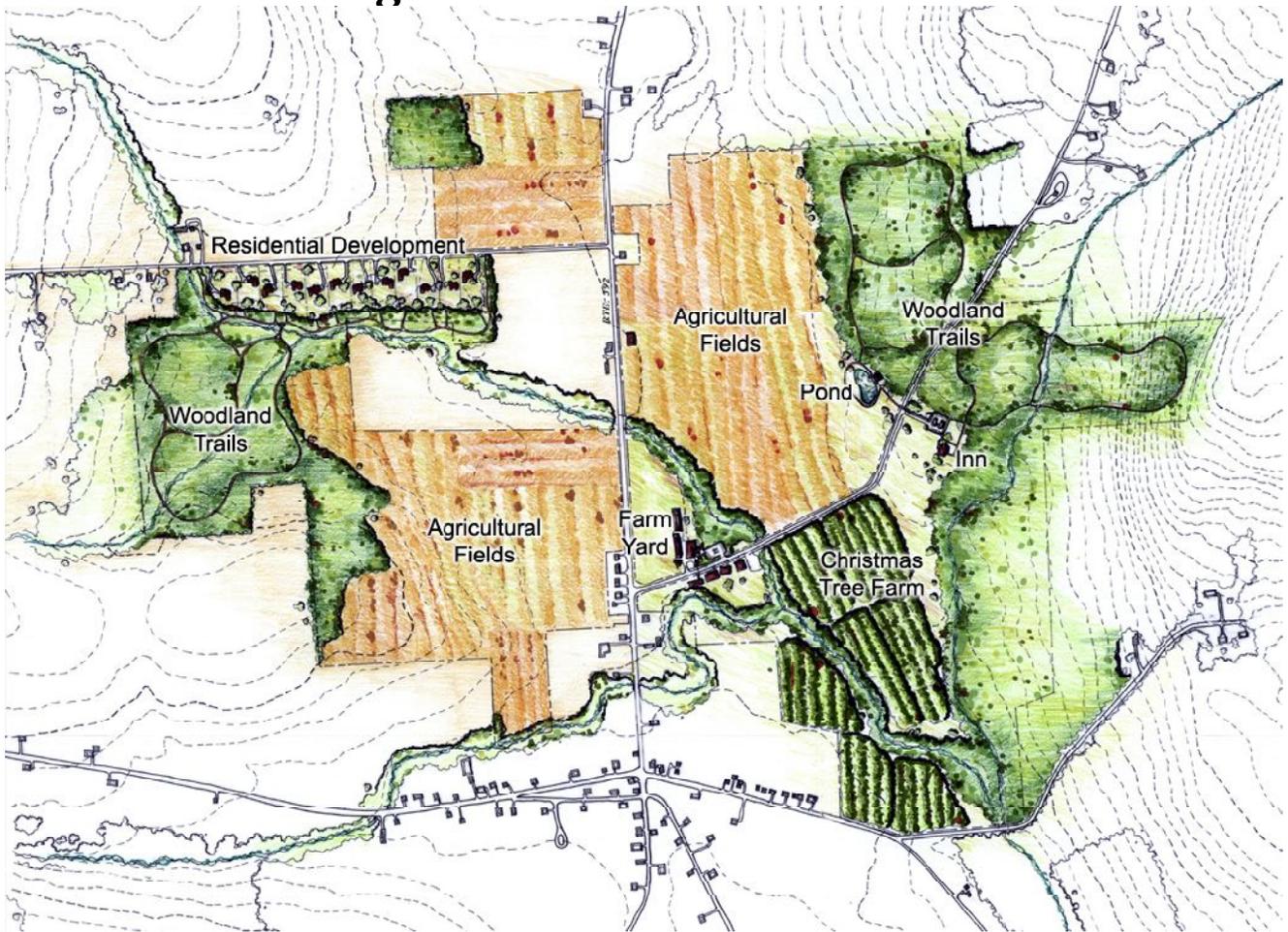
Promoting the concept of agriculture-focused tourist activities, this project merges a bed-and-breakfast, tied into over 400 acres of working farm, with a culinary school and restaurant. With recreational amenities, riding trails, and educational opportunities connected to the farm, the “farm-stay” would be a tourist destination. The food raised, meanwhile, would be a vital component of the restaurant and the classes. The students looked at a number of existing, successful case studies of these ventures. They found that the synergy between the activities on the property increases the value of any one activity on its own, and provides an example of the sorts of innovative combinations that can make such a venture profitable, unique, and respectful of the rural character and continuity.



### *Highlighted Incentives:*

The Purchase of Development Rights on the site's 400 acres of farmland could provide the start-up funds to help build the restaurant or improve the existing buildings for the farmstay. The farm buildings will be renovated and added to as part of the agritourism program.

# Power Site: Heritage Farms



## *Design overview:*

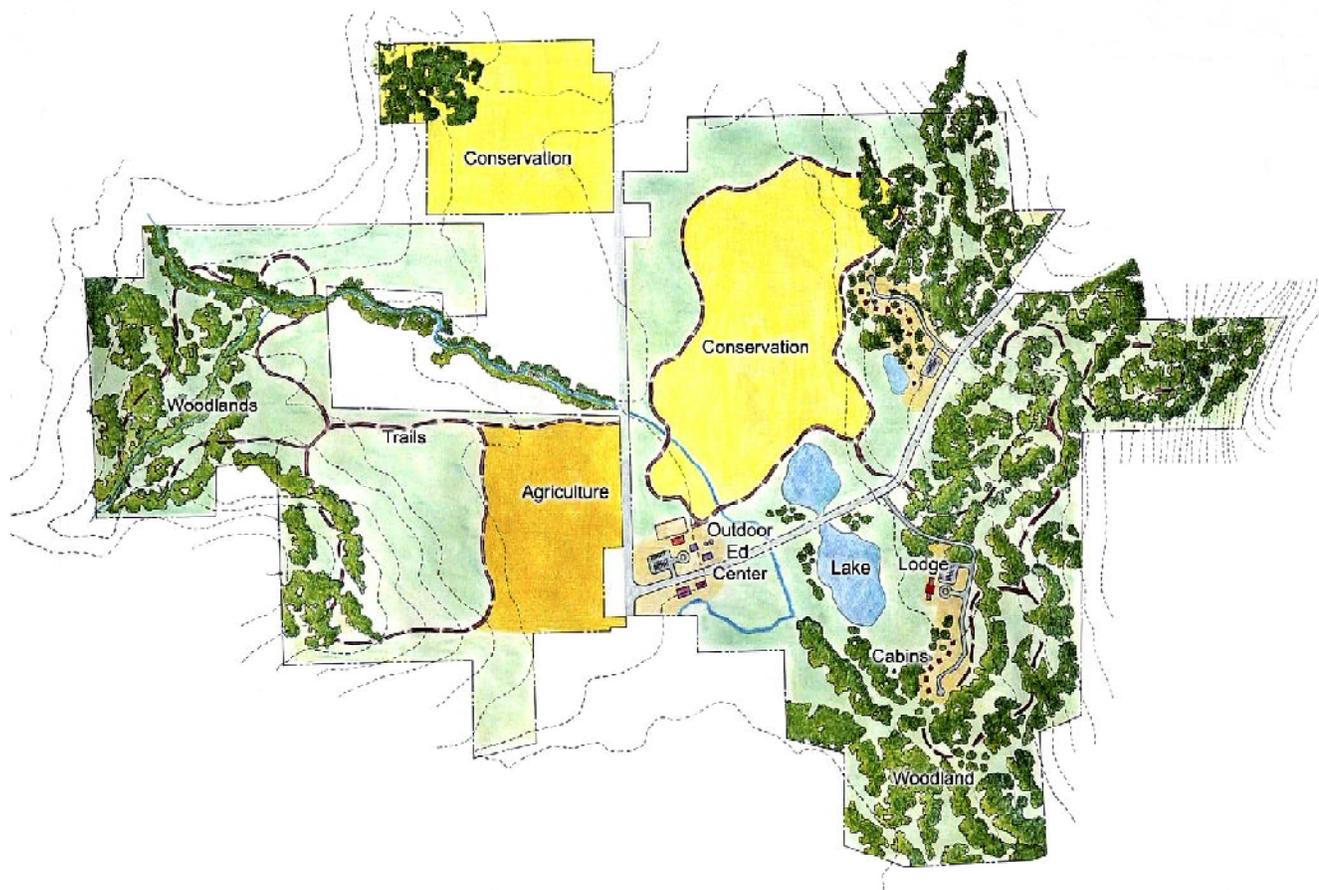
The switch to a smaller herd of cattle and an emphasis on farming heritage and quality product, particularly artisan-crafted specialty dairy products, forms the core of this project, providing a more manageable size and a niche market suited to the “heritage farm” concept. Also included is a Christmas tree farm and several swaths of preserved natural woodland. Locating an inn and cafe on some of the land not suited for agriculture allows further opportunity to market the products of the farm and provide an alternate source of income. In addition, it draws attention to the farm’s goals and message of preserving rural traditions and heritage. Finally, another portion of the non-farmable land is given over to a small residential development, the value of which is enhanced by the surrounding conservation.

## *Highlighted Incentives:*

Cash to start up the inn and cafe can be generated by selling the isolated parcel of about 30 acres for 12 single-family homes, and through Christmas tree sales. Using PDR on the remaining farmland also provides money to invest in heritage varieties of crops and fruit trees.

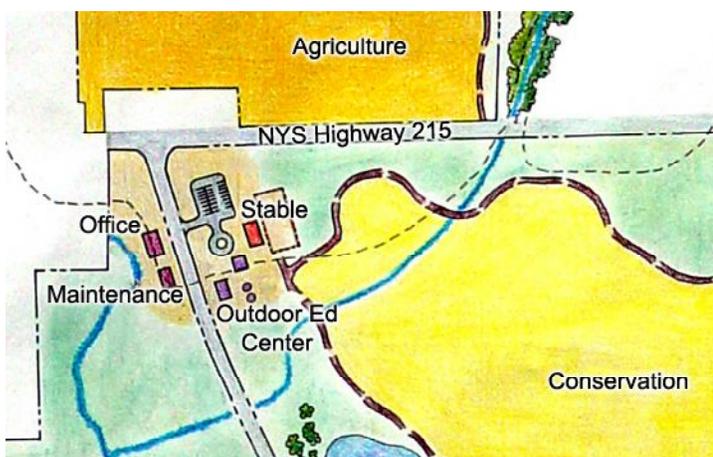


# Power Site: Outdoor Recreation Complex



## *Design overview:*

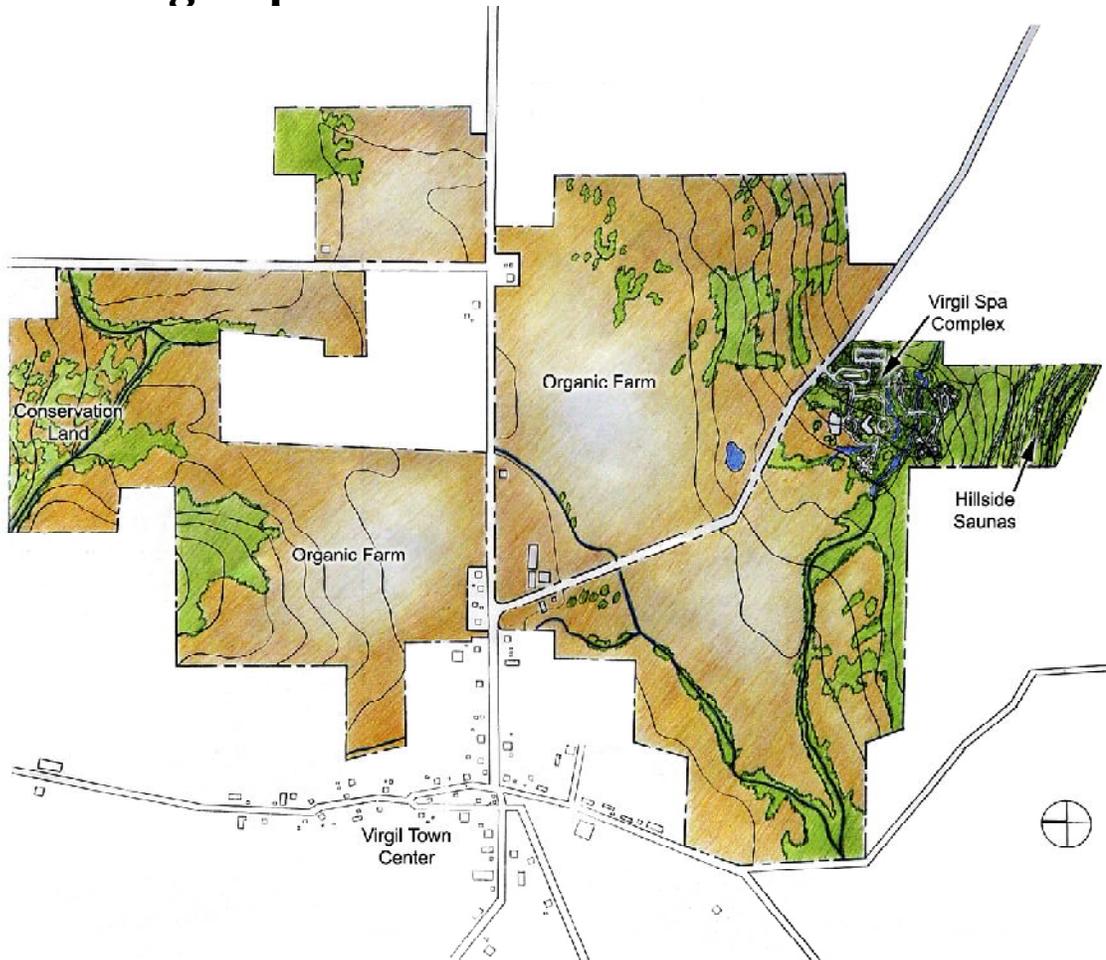
Utilizing the site's natural features, its varied terrain, and its vegetation (both existing and reclaimed), this project proposes an outdoor recreational complex boasting horseback and walking trails, picnic and day camping areas, a created lake, an outdoor education center and lodge, a ropes course and other extreme-sports facilities, silo climbing, and more. The facilities are based out of a conversion of the existing farmstead buildings along NYS Route 215 and new construction in that area. Except for this concentrated development of the farmhouses, all of the land along the road corridor will remain either in active farmland or conserved meadow, with only trails crossing it, thus protecting the rural character and the experience of the land for passersby.



## *Highlighted Incentives:*

The donation of a Conservation Easement on roughly 400 acres of open land, to be managed as meadow under the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, will maintain this land as open space for the recreation complex's trails.

## Power Site: Virgil Spa

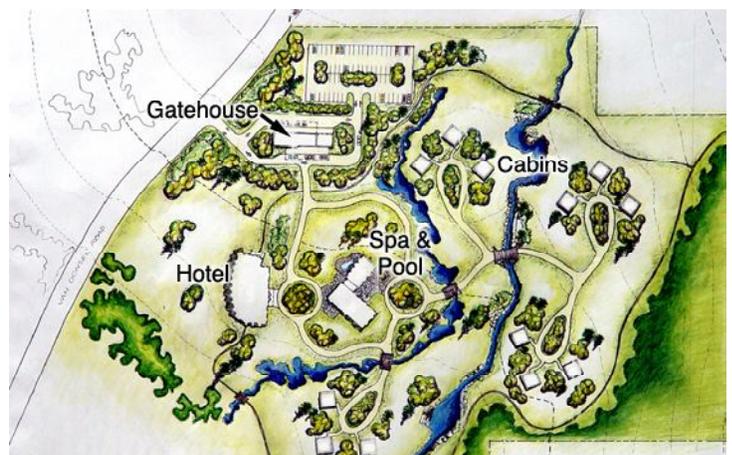


### *Design overview:*

Capitalizing on the rural environment's sense of "being away from it all," this proposal focuses on the creation of a spa. The central themes of health and well-being extend into the surrounding farmland, which can be maintained as an active farm focusing on organic crop production. Outdoor activities, conservation and farming information sessions, and so on, augment the program. In addition, the spa's proximity to other activities in the region (Greek Peak's skiing and golf functions, a number of state parks, and the Toughnioga Trail, among others) provide enough variety to enhance the spa's destination value. Finally, in addition to supplying the spa resort with food and herbs, the organic farm is proposed as a potential Community-Supported Agriculture venture (for greater income and stability).

### *Highlighted Incentives:*

As support for the spa complex, the organic farm could serve as a Community Subscription Agriculture (CSA) program, where members pre-purchase shares of the harvest for the season, then receive regular portions of the produce. For the farmer, this has the benefit of providing capital up front and a guaranteed market.



# 15: Good Design - Slade Site

## Site Introduction:

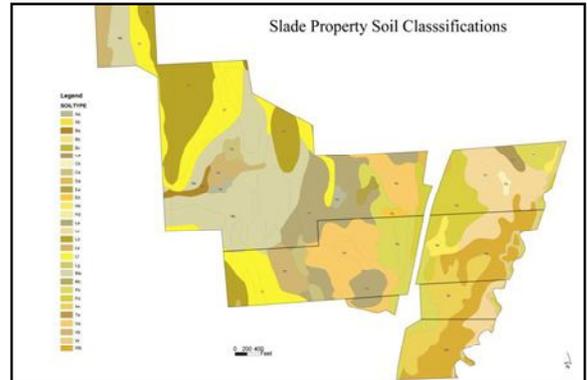
Gary Slade, his brother Chuck, and their families own this property in the Town of Homer, one of two dairy farms in the immediate area. The Slade Farm encompasses over 800 acres of agricultural land and is located along Route 281. The surrounding area is varied, containing forest, agricultural land, and residential homes. Particularly significant is the site's connection with the proposed Tioughnioga River Trail, which will pass just along the eastern edge of the site. Tying into it will connect the site's green spaces to a much greater network, an ecologically important goal.

Perched on a sloping hillside and easily visible from much of the Tioughnioga valley below and from routes 81 and 11, the site's long history of farming is one of the defining visual aspects of the land. Thus, the visual impacts of any development on the area's overall rural character are even more critical than usual, leading to its high suitability for Purchase of Development Rights. Furthermore, the views from the site are spectacular, and offer an overlook of the entire area.

## Site Analysis:



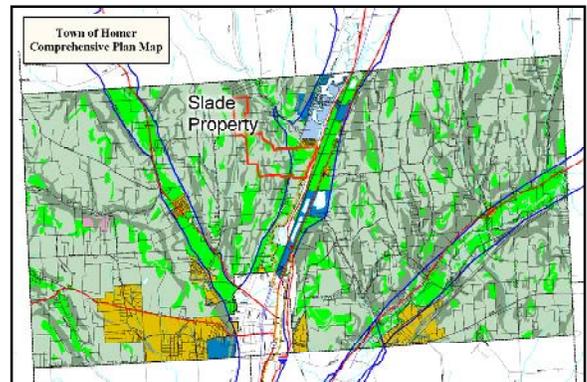
Site Topography



Soil Suitability



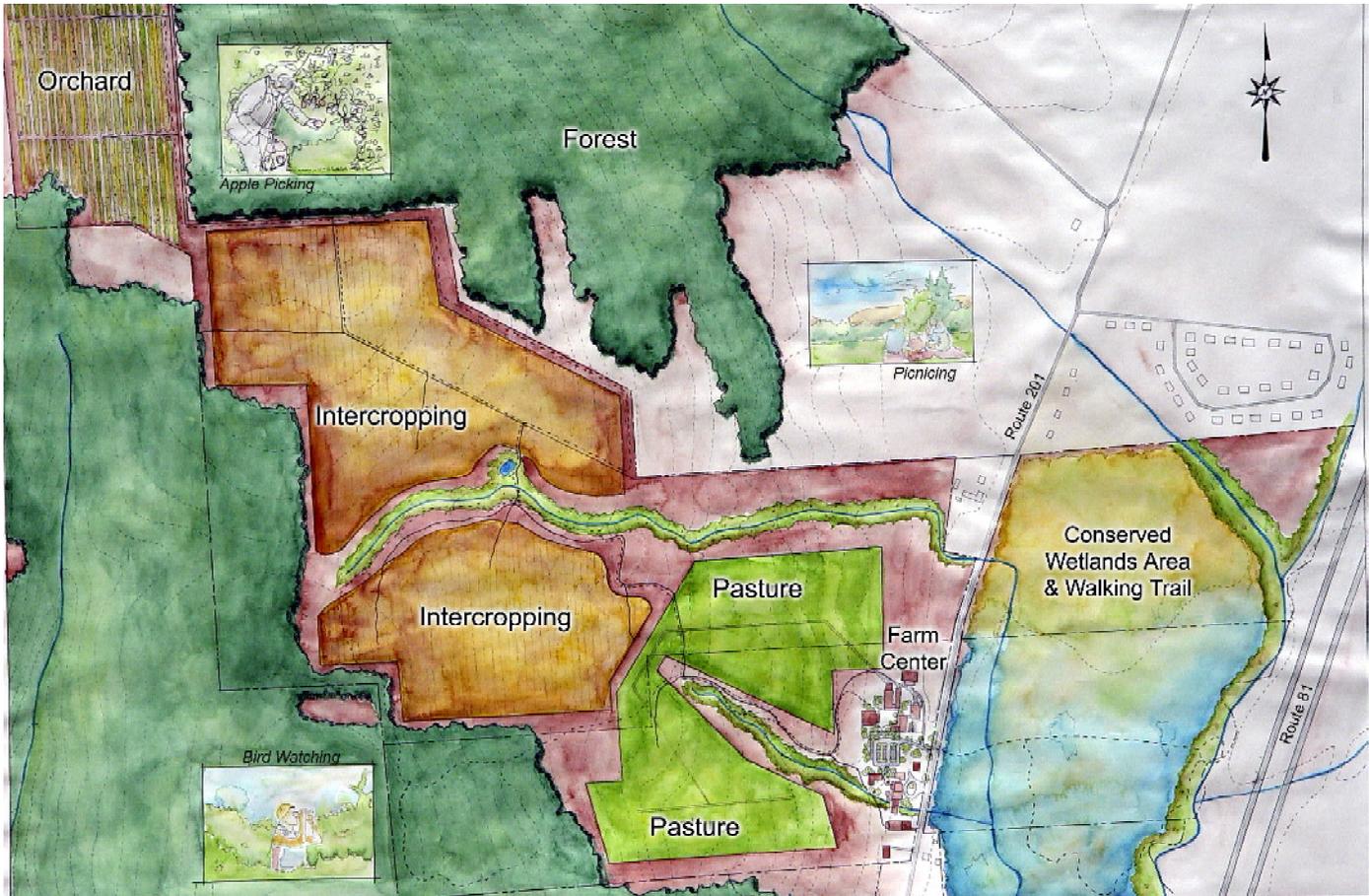
Significant Features



Homer Comprehensive Plan



# Slade Site: Agricultural Community



## *Design overview:*

With the goal of preserving the rural character by maintaining active agriculture where feasible while accommodating development, this proposal redefines the farm as a farmers' co-op agricultural community. Through an organic system of inter-cropping, a number of farmers would produce a variety of crops (fruit crops are particularly well-suited to this land), all marketed together. Meanwhile, other large areas are to be kept open, as continued pastureland and as a recreational amenity. An on-site market provides an outlet for the products, and a connected visitors' center and educational facility provides an opportunity to see these unusual, efficient agricultural practices in action and learn about the benefits, as well as a link to the other educational opportunities provided by the protected wetlands and woodlands.

## *Highlighted Incentives:*

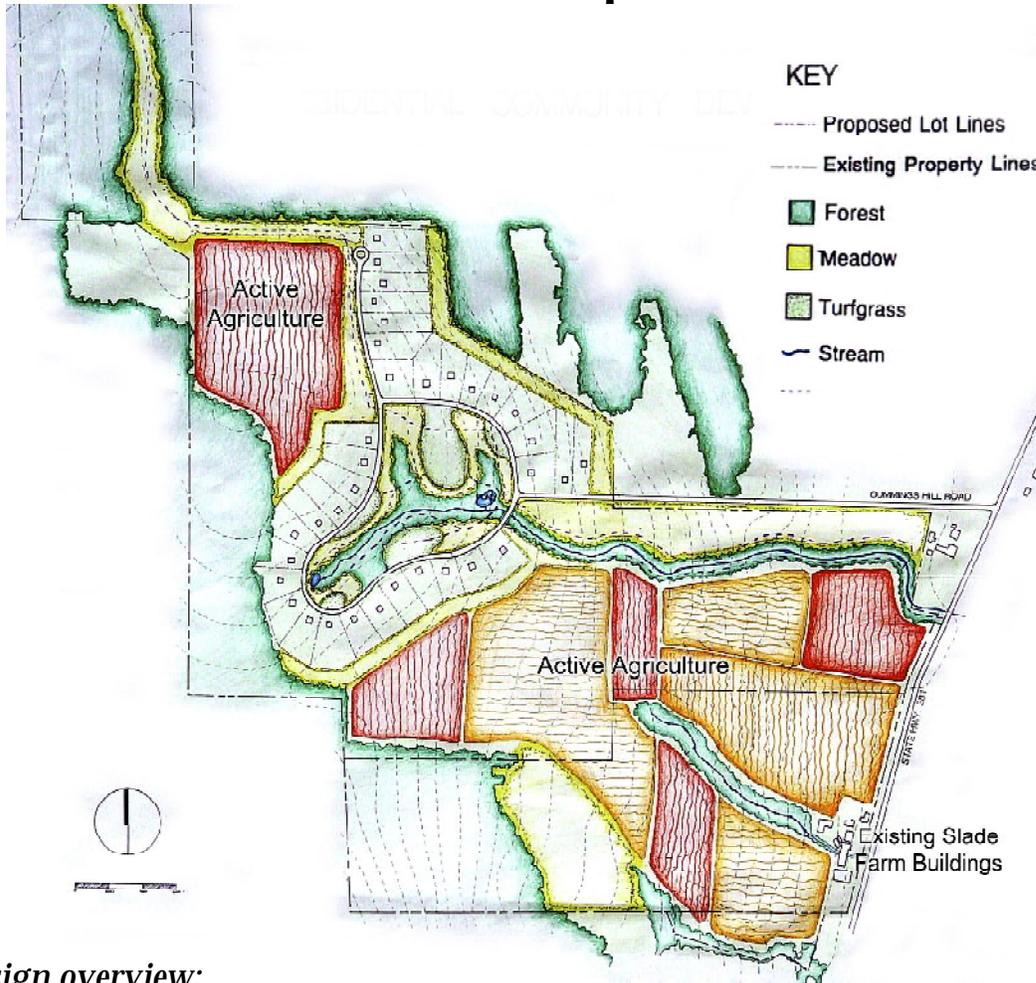
- NYS and Federal Farmland Protection Programs
- Purchase of Development Rights opportunities
- Wetlands Improvement Program
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Developed Area: 15 acres

Roads: ~1000ft..

% of Land Conserved: 97%  
(573 of 588 acres)

# Slade Site: Residential Development Plan



## Design overview:

By conserving large portions of the open space, and continuing active agriculture over significant areas of that, this development plan preserves the rural character as seen by passersby. Simultaneously, it provides highly marketable homes on 1- to 2-acre lots connected to common open space, along with the benefits of a homeowners' association. Offering terrific views from the hilltops over active farmland and conserved wilderness, the homes also connect to a community trail system that ties into the Tioughnioga River Trail. Focusing this development to appropriate areas also maintains the agriculturally prime land, and serves to buffer the slightly dense development from the surroundings. Finally, conservation and preservation measures on the undeveloped, unfarmed lands (the streamside buffers, the habitats, and so on) promote ecological health while maintaining or enhancing land value.

## Highlighted Incentives:

- Purchase of Development Rights provides for conservation of agricultural land.
- Significant setbacks from highway protect both homes' privacy and agricultural character
- NYS and Federal Farmland Protection Programs
- CRP: Streamside Buffers support for riparian buffer creation and protection

Developed Area: 63 acres

Roads: ~5000 ft..

% of Land Conserved: 90%  
(525 of 588 acres)

# Slade Site: Eco-Village & Community-Supported Agriculture

Woodlands  
Wetlands and  
Wheatfields...

Riparian Corridor  
EcoVillage and  
Farmers Market



## *Design overview:*

This design takes advantage of the site's connection to the proposed Toughnioga River Trail system, and the large areas of farmable land, to merge a continued use of much of the site for agricultural purposes (and an associated farmer's market and community-supported agriculture program) with recreational and conservational purposes. In addition, the proximity of such uses to major transportation routes is explored through a proposal for a co-housing development, in which residents of private condominiums share common areas, responsibilities to the larger community, and a focus on more efficient, sustainable modes of living. The "eco-village" residents would take part in the operation of, and share in the profits from, the farm and the farmers' market.

## *Highlighted Incentives:*

- Forestry Incentive Program and CRP: Erodible Land funding may help establish the forest reserve sections of the project.
- The farmland and the eco-village would be eligible for NYS and Federal Farmland Protection Program support, as well as Agricultural Management Assistance funding.
- CRP: Streamside Buffer and Environmental Quality Incentives Program would cover the riparian buffers designed into the project.

Developed Area: 22 acres

Roads: ~3500 ft..

% of Land Conserved: 96%  
(562 of 588 acres)