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The Regional Municipality of Durham Report

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development
Report: #2022-P-16
Date: June 7, 2022

Subject:

Envision Durham – Implementation of the Provincial Agricultural System, File D12-01

Recommendation:

Receive for information

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee that draft proposed changes to implement the Provincial Agricultural System mapping in the Regional Official Plan (ROP) are being released for public and agency comment. This map is a key component of Envision Durham, the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) of the ROP.
- 1.2 The inclusion of the Provincial Agricultural System is required for the new ROP to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), and to conform with provincial plans (the Growth Plan, the Greenbelt Plan and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan). It should be noted that the Agriculture System will apply outside of any future urban boundaries and that the final proposed changes will reflect the urban area boundary that will come forward in Phase 2 of the Growth Management Study.

- 1.3 Following Regional Planning and Economic Development Committee on June 7, 2022, the draft mapping for the Provincial Agricultural System will be posted to the Envision Durham [project webpage](#) in the format of an interactive map viewer and are also provided as Attachment #1 to this report. Those wishing to provide input may do so by commenting directly into the online map viewer, emailing EnvisionDurham@durham.ca or mailing the Planning and Economic Development Department. Comments are requested by September 9, 2022.

2. Background

- 2.1 Durham is implementing the provincial agricultural system through Envision Durham, the Region's Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) of the Regional Official Plan (ROP).
- 2.2 The ROP currently designates Prime Agricultural Areas, reflecting rural areas in the Region where agricultural lands and agricultural uses predominate.
- 2.3 The ROP also includes policies that permit a full range of agricultural, agricultural-related and secondary uses within both the Prime Agricultural Area and Major Open Space Area designations, consistent with the PPS, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

3. Existing Provincial Policy Requirements

- 3.1 Provincial planning policy, plans and legislation requires the implementation of an agricultural system approach that achieves a continuous and connected agricultural system across the Greater Golden Horseshoe.
- 3.2 The PPS requires that prime agricultural areas be protected for long-term use for agriculture. In addition, the PPS requires planning authorities designate prime agricultural areas in accordance with provincial guidelines and municipalities are encouraged to use an agricultural system approach to maintain and enhance the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections of the agri-food network.
- 3.3 The PPS encourages planning authorities to use an agricultural system approach to maintain and enhance geographic continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections to the agri-food network. The Greenbelt Plan, Growth Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan all go further by requiring municipal official plan conformity with the Provincial Agricultural System, released by the Province in 2018.

- 3.4 To develop the Provincial Agricultural System, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) undertook a Land Evaluation Area Review (LEAR) and identified the following:
- areas already designated as Prime Agricultural Areas in approved official plans;
 - additional areas identified as meeting the definition of Prime Agricultural Areas, subject to municipal review; and
 - candidate areas that could be Prime Agricultural Areas, also subject to municipal review.
- 3.5 The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2020 provides for the identification and protection of an Agricultural System including a continuous and productive land base, and that Prime Agricultural Areas be designated and protected for long term use for agriculture.
- 3.6 OMAFRA identified a Provincial Agricultural System across the Greater Golden Horseshoe and released mapping in 2018 that includes the following components:
- an agricultural land base, consisting of prime agricultural areas, including speciality crop areas and rural lands that together create a continuous, productive land base for agriculture; and
 - an agri-food network that includes infrastructure, services and assets, important to the viability of the agri-food network.
- 3.7 As a supplementary direction, the Growth Plan commits the province to identifying, establishing or updating the Agricultural system. Accordingly, in March 2020 the province released its [“Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe”](#), which are intended to help municipalities, farmers and others interpret the agricultural system references in provincial plans for the GGH.
- 3.8 Upper-tier municipalities may refine provincial mapping of the agricultural land base at the time of initial implementation in their official plans, based on the Implementation Procedures issued by the province. After provincial mapping of the agricultural land base has been implemented in official plans, further refinements may only occur through a municipal comprehensive review.
- 3.9 The Growth Plan also directs municipalities to ensure that the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections to the agri-food network will be maintained and enhanced.

3.10 The Greenbelt Plan directs municipalities to update mapping within the Protected Countryside and upper-tier municipalities to refine and augment official plan mapping to bring prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and rural lands into conformity with provincial mapping and implementation procedures.

4. Implementing the Provincial Agricultural System

Provincial Agricultural System Land Base Mapping

- 4.1 Durham's Rural System in the ROP includes all lands outside of the region's designated Urban Areas. The Rural Area is primarily made up of Prime Agricultural Areas and Major Open Space Areas designations. Prime Agricultural Areas are intended to be used for agriculture and farm-related uses while Major Open Space Areas are intended for environmental conservation and a full range of agricultural uses and subject to specific criteria, major recreational and non-agricultural uses.
- 4.2 There are differences between the Provincial Agricultural System and the Prime Agricultural Areas designation in the current ROP. Areas currently designated as Major Open Space Areas in the ROP have been identified by the Province as Prime Agricultural Areas, or as Candidate Areas that could either become Prime Agricultural Areas or remain as Major Open Space Areas, depending on the outcome of municipal review.
- 4.3 According to the Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe, municipalities must assess whether to include Candidate Areas as Prime Agricultural Areas.
- 4.4 In February 2021, the Region retained Planscape Inc. to assist in the review, assessment and approaches to implementing the Provincial Agricultural System into the ROP and to provide input into how the agri-food network should be addressed.
- 4.5 Regional staff and the consultant team connected with the Envision Durham Area Municipal and Conservation Authority Working Groups, Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee, Clarington Agricultural Advisory Committee and Durham Federation of Agriculture regarding the Region's initial approach to refine the Provincial Agricultural System.
- 4.6 The review was a combination of a desktop exercise and on-the-ground assessment of the region's Rural Area. This work included:
- validating Provincial determinations of additional Prime Agricultural Areas;

- categorizing candidate areas as either those that should become Prime Agricultural Areas or remain Major Open Space Areas in the ROP;
 - excluding sites that have the majority of the area occupied by significant woodlands;
 - prioritizing the existing Major Open Space system by maintaining integrity and connectivity of Major Open Space Areas;
 - excluding national park sites, the Pickering airport lands, and special policy areas because they are federally regulated or intended for a non-agricultural use; and
 - excluding sites identified by the area municipalities, where information was provided to justify exclusion from the Prime Agriculture System.
- 4.7 Portions of the Major Open Space area between Ajax and Whitby has been proposed for redesignation to Prime Agricultural Areas as these larger parcels are contained within the Greenbelt Plan Area.
- 4.8 Proposed refinements to the Provincial Agricultural System would increase the area of land within the Prime Agricultural Areas designation by 278 hectares, representing an increase of 2.7 per cent.
- 4.9 The Oak Ridges Moraine Prime Agriculture “overlay” would be increased by 7,753 hectares (an increase of 89.7 per cent). Taken together, the total area of Prime Agricultural System (designation and overlay) would be 121,582 hectares.
- 4.10 Within the Oak Ridges Moraine Countryside designation, identification of lands as Prime Agriculture, results in some ability for establishing new non-agricultural uses, but would not allow small-scale commercial, industrial, institutional and major recreational uses in keeping with the ORMCP. The identification of the Prime Agriculture overlay on lands designated Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage Areas on the Moraine allows for some additional flexibility for agricultural sector uses, including agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses.
- 4.11 Attachments 2 through 6 identify proposed changes to the ROP for inclusion into the Prime Agricultural Areas designation, while Attachments 6 and 7 illustrate the assessment units that are proposed to be included in the Prime Agricultural overlay in the Oak Ridges Moraine.
- 4.12 Agri-food network policies will be released at a later date for consultation through the draft new ROP. Agri-food assets are not proposed to be mapped in the ROP. The agri-food network asset mapping that is maintained by the Economic

Development Division is also available through the provincial [ConnectON](#) system. This mapping is updated regularly and is more nimble than through a schedule in the official plan.

5. Major Open Space Areas Designation

- 5.1 The Region's existing Major Open Space Areas designation constitutes an important element of the Regional Structure, serving a dual function. Not only does it comprise significant natural heritage and hydrologic features, where the intent is conservation and environmental protection, but also includes rural-type lands where a full range of agricultural uses, non-agricultural and major recreational uses may be permitted, subject to site specific evaluation and criteria.
- 5.2 The Major Open Space designation provides flexibility for some non-farming uses compared to the Prime Agriculture designation. It allows for a greater variety of rural economic uses, including agri-business, commercial kennels and landscaping industrial uses, as well as major recreational uses. When lands are designated Prime Agriculture, the rural economic development potential is limited to agricultural practices.
- 5.3 Critical feedback heard in response to the [Environment and Greenlands and Agricultural and Rural Discussion Papers](#) was the importance of ensuring sufficient Major Open Space Areas are retained for parks, major recreational and non-agricultural uses, such as cemeteries.
- 5.4 Regional staff's approach to implementing the Provincial Agricultural System, was to only make a change from Major Open Space Area to the Prime Agriculture designation if no natural heritage features were present, and if the lands were under active cultivation.

6. Public Consultation Process

- 6.1 This report, the draft Regional Agricultural System mapping, including instructions on how to use the map viewer, as well as a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) regarding Natural Heritage Systems, will be posted to the project webpage at www.durham.ca/EnvisionDurham for public and agency review.
- 6.2 Interested parties are encouraged to provide input directly within the online map viewer. Comments may also be submitted to EnvisionDurham@durham.ca or by mail and are requested by September 9, 2022. Information on the release of the draft Regional Agricultural System will be announced by way of:

- a. News release and public service announcement;
- b. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn;
- c. Email notifications and report circulation, as detailed below.

6.3 A copy of this report and an invitation to provide input through the online map viewer will be forwarded to all Envision Durham Interested Parties, Durham's area municipalities, conservation authorities, Indigenous communities, BILD – Durham Chapter, and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Circulation will also be provided to Regional Advisory Committees (Durham Environmental Advisory Committee, Durham Agricultural Advisory Committee and Durham Region Roundtable on Climate Change) that may have interest in where and how the Region intends to protect and enhance the Regional Agricultural System.

7. Relationship to Strategic Plan

7.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- Priority 1.3 under the goal of environmental sustainability, protect preserve and restore the natural environment, including greenspaces, waterways, parks, trails and farmlands; and
- Priority 3.5 under the goal of economic prosperity, provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries.

8. Previous Reports and Decisions

8.1 The following Regional staff reports related to the Provincial Agricultural System have been provided to Council since the launch of Envision Durham:

- Report [#2018-INFO-57](#) - Provincial Decisions on the Regional Natural Heritage System and Agricultural System for the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe
- Report [#2019-P-12](#) Envision Durham – Agricultural and Rural System Discussion Paper.
- Report [#2021-P-7](#) Envision Durham – Proposed Policy Directions

9. Conclusion

9.1 Implementation of the Provincial Agricultural System is required to achieve conformity with provincial planning legislation.

9.2 The approach that is being proposed for the Region's new official plan is to implement provincial planning legislation on appropriate sites based on detailed research and criteria.

9.3 Input on the draft Regional Agricultural System is requested by September 9, 2022. Feedback received will be reviewed and will inform the preparation of the draft ROP.

10. Attachments

Attachment #1: Glossary

Attachment #2-6: Draft ROP Agricultural System Mapping

Attachment #7-8: Draft ROP Agricultural System Mapping on the Oak Ridges Moraine

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by Gary Muller for

Brian Bridgeman, MCIP, RPP
Commissioner of Planning and
Economic Development

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment #1 – Glossary

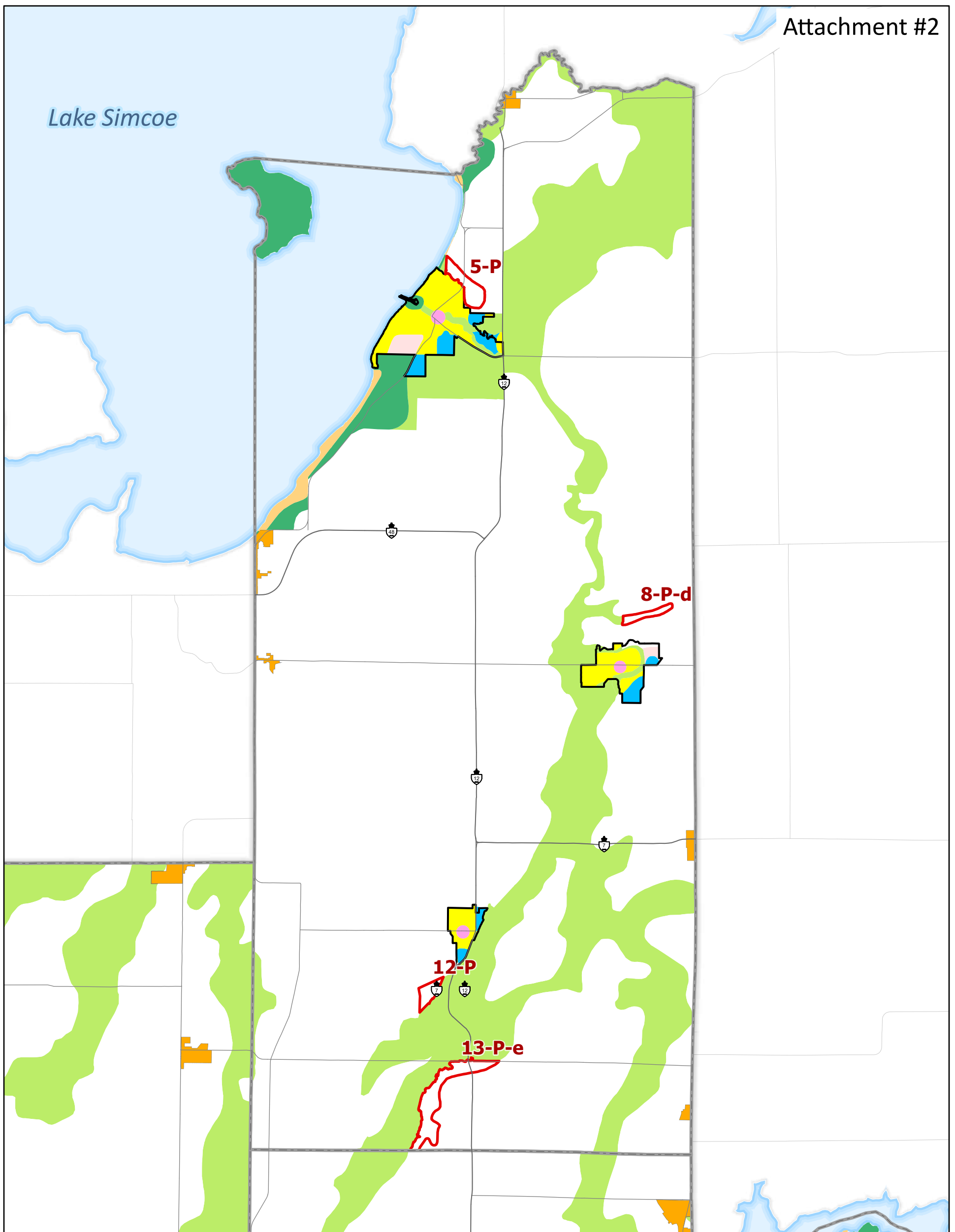
Agricultural System: is the system mapped and issued by the province in accordance, comprised of a group of inter-connected elements that collectively create a viable, thriving agricultural sector. It has two components:

- An agricultural land base comprised of prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and rural lands that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture;
- An agri-food network which includes infrastructure, services, and assets important to the viability of the agri-food sector.

Agri-Food System: is defined within provincial plans as “within the Agricultural System, a network that includes elements important to the viability of the agri-food sector such as regional infrastructure and transportation networks; on-farm buildings and infrastructure; agricultural services, farm markets, distributors, and primary processing; and vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities

Candidate Areas: areas that are equal to or larger than 250 hectares which received medium LEAR scores and are in agricultural production

Land Evaluation Area Review (LEAR): is a commonly used tool in Ontario, developed by OMAFRA to quantitatively evaluate the relative importance of lands for agriculture based on the land’s inherent characteristics and other factors affecting agricultural potential



Draft Prime Agriculture System

 Assessment Unit	Land Use Designation	 Nuclear Power Plant
 Urban Area Boundary	 Airport	 Oak Ridges Moraine
	 Employment Area	 Prime Agricultural Area
	 Hamlet	 Regional Centre
	 Living Area	 Specific Policy Area
	 Major Open Space	 Shoreline Residential
	 Municipal Service	 Special Study Area

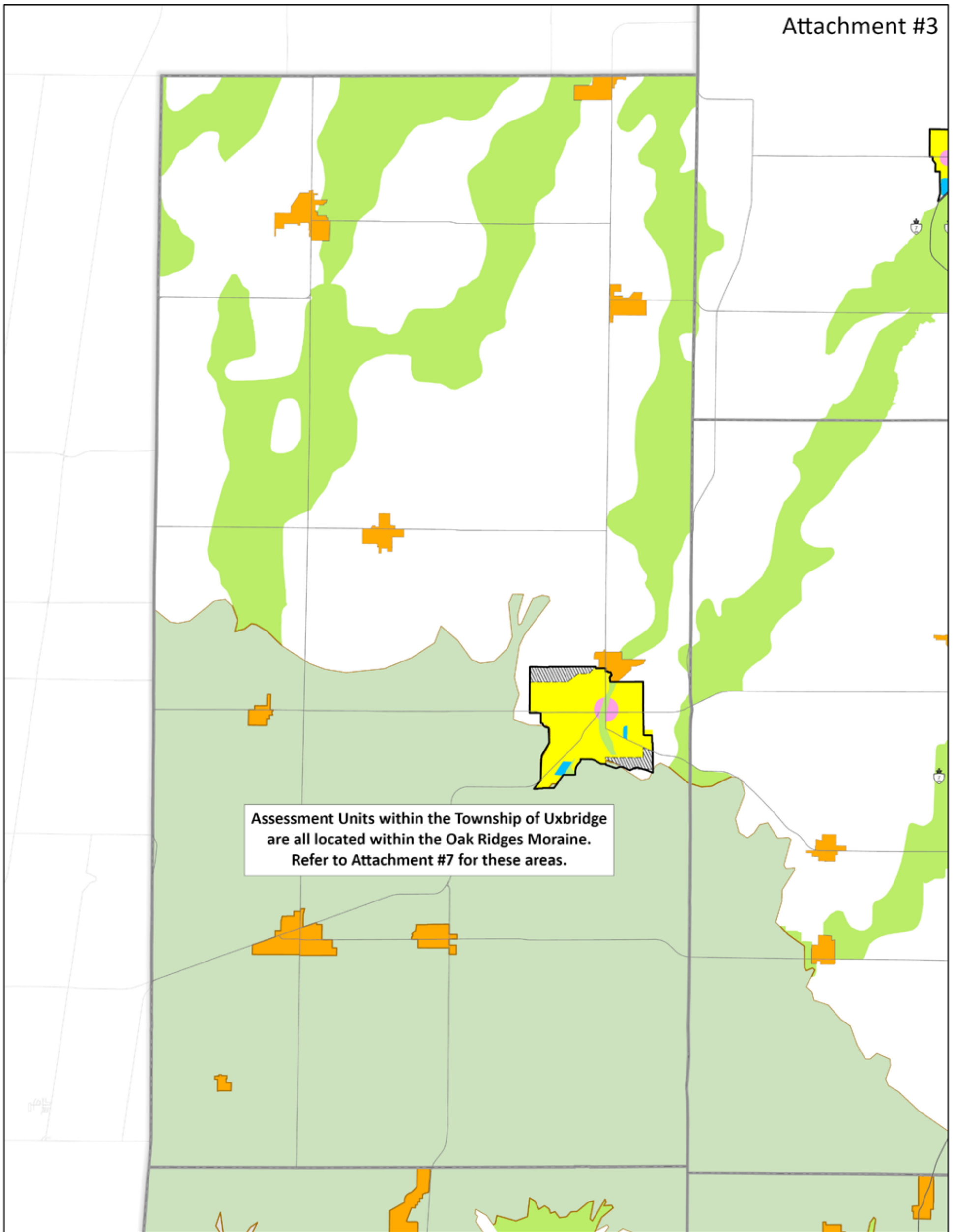


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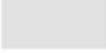






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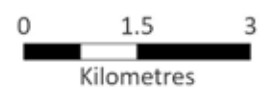
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Draft Prime Agriculture System

 Assessment Unit	Land Use Designation	 Nuclear Power Plant
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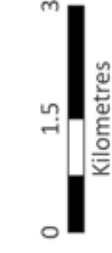
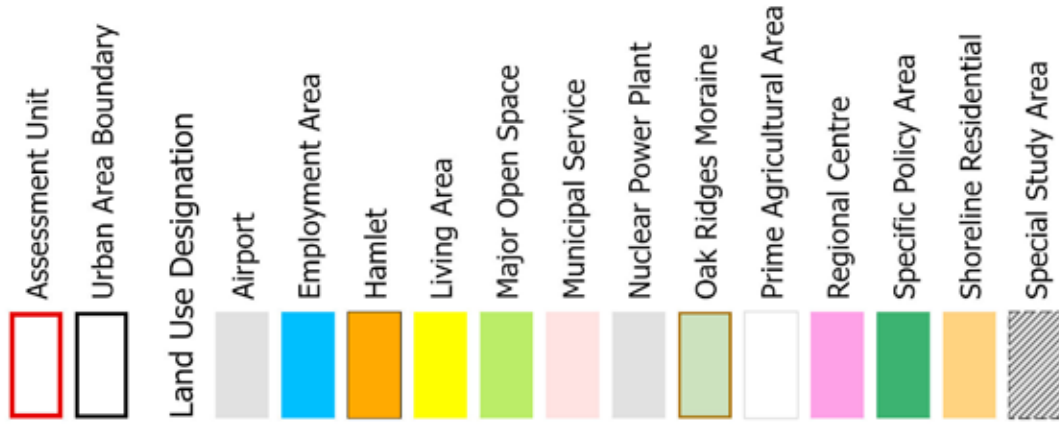
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Attachment #4

Draft Prime Agriculture System

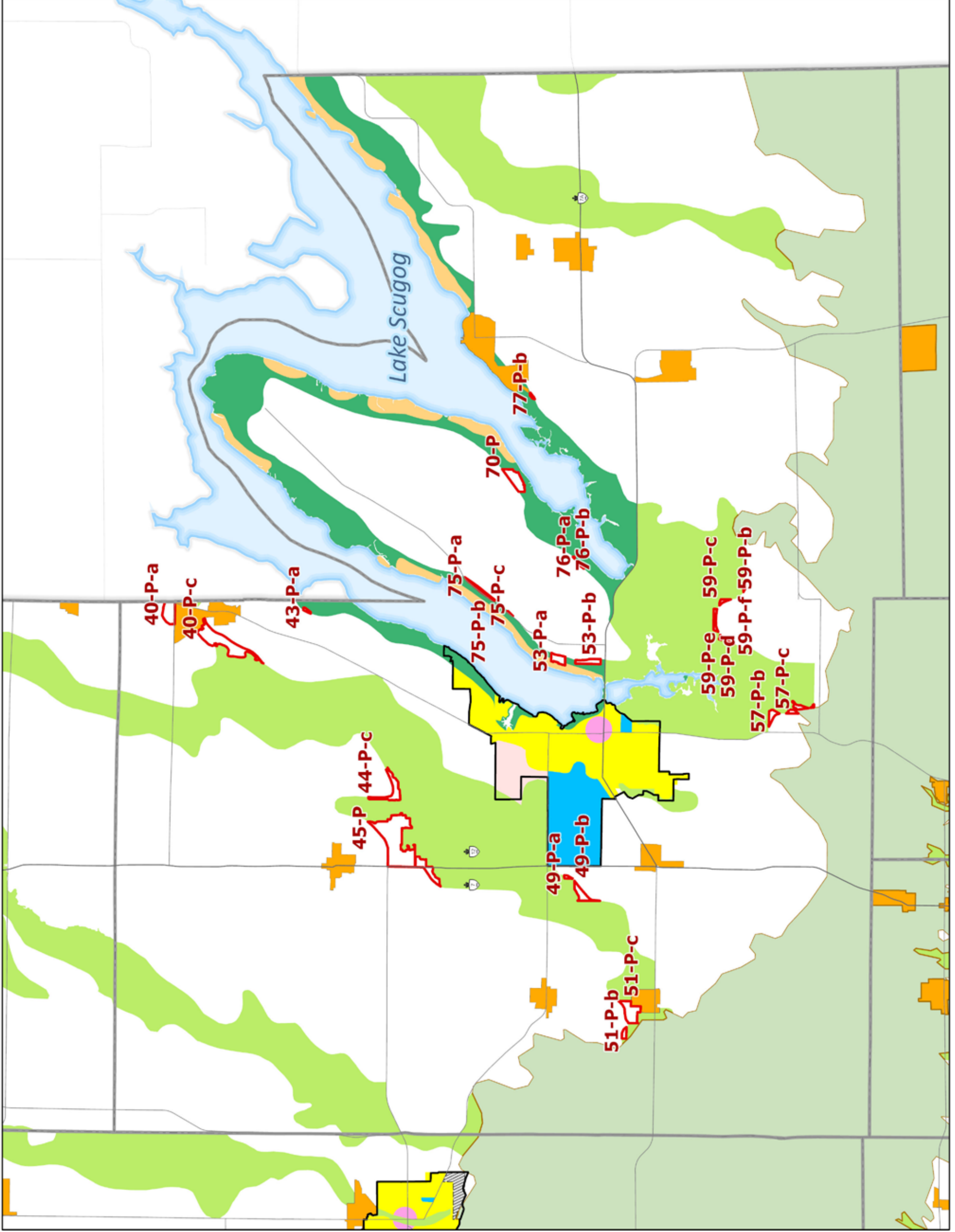


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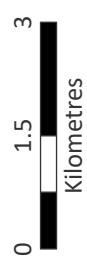
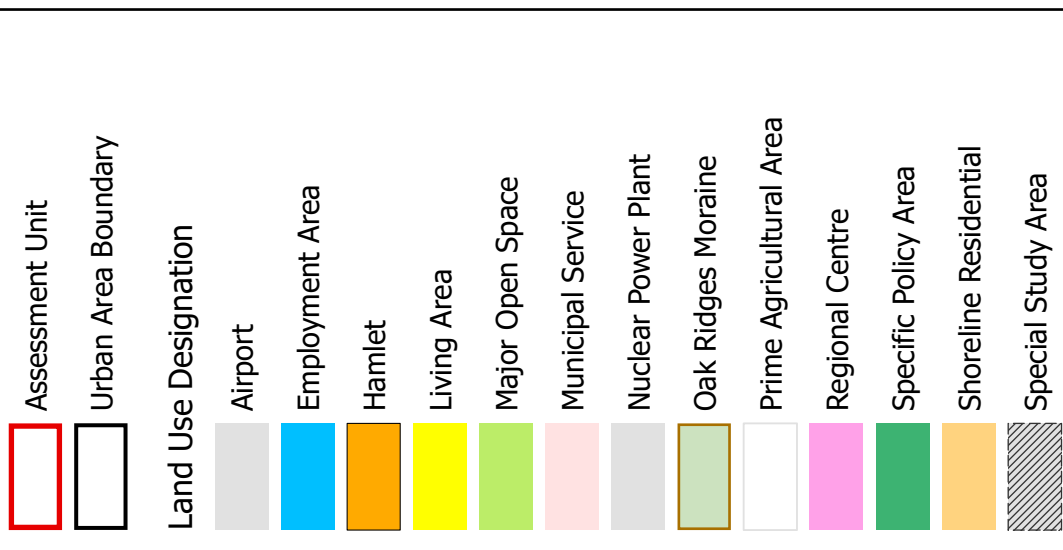
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Attachment #5

Draft Prime Agriculture System

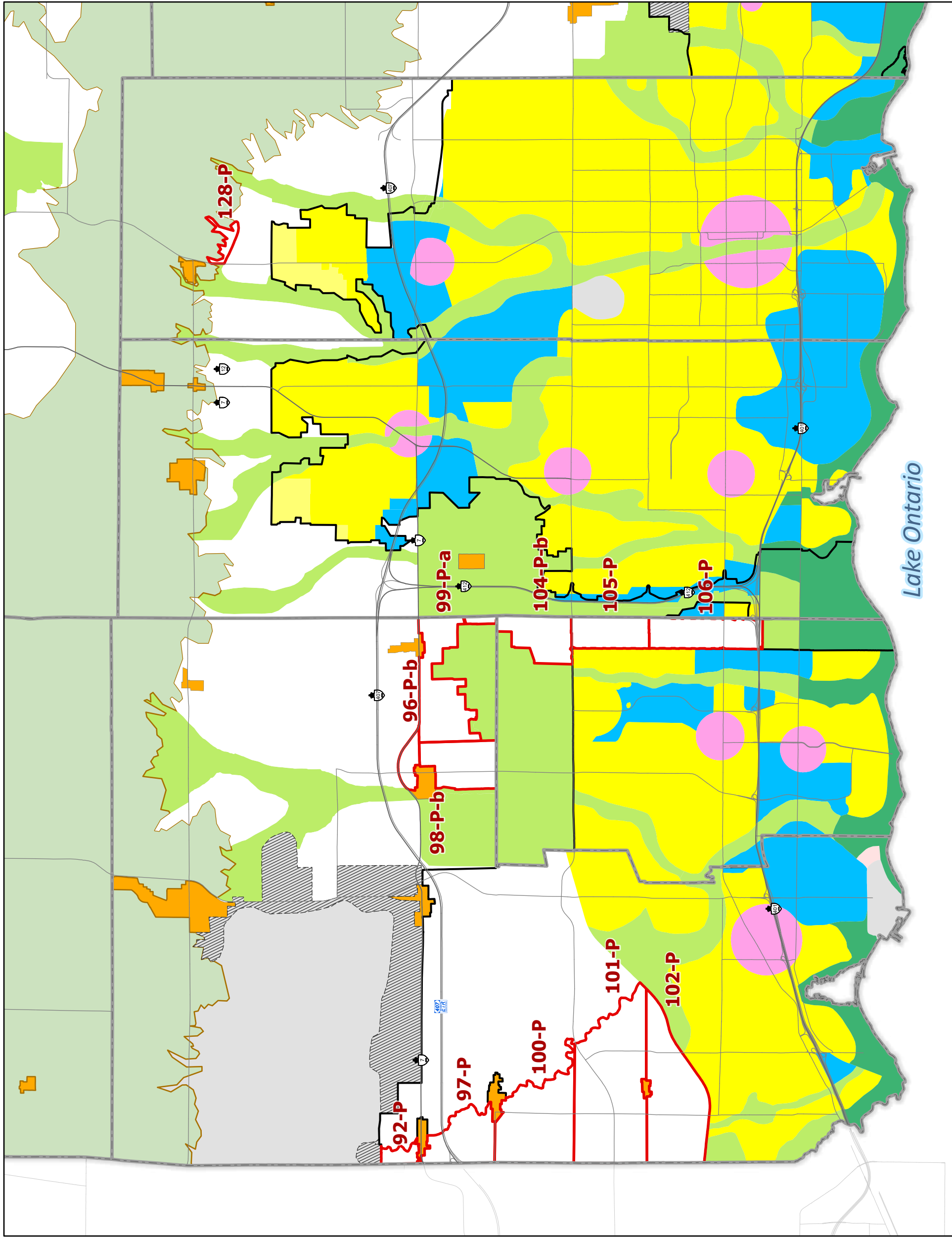


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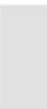


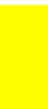


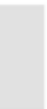






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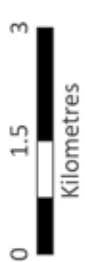
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Attachment #6

Draft Prime Agriculture System

	Assessment Unit
	Urban Area Boundary
Land Use Designation	
	Airport
	Employment Area
	Hamlet
	Living Area
	Major Open Space
	Municipal Service
	Nuclear Power Plant
	Oak Ridges Moraine
	Prime Agricultural Area
	Regional Centre
	Specific Policy Area
	Shoreline Residential
	Special Study Area

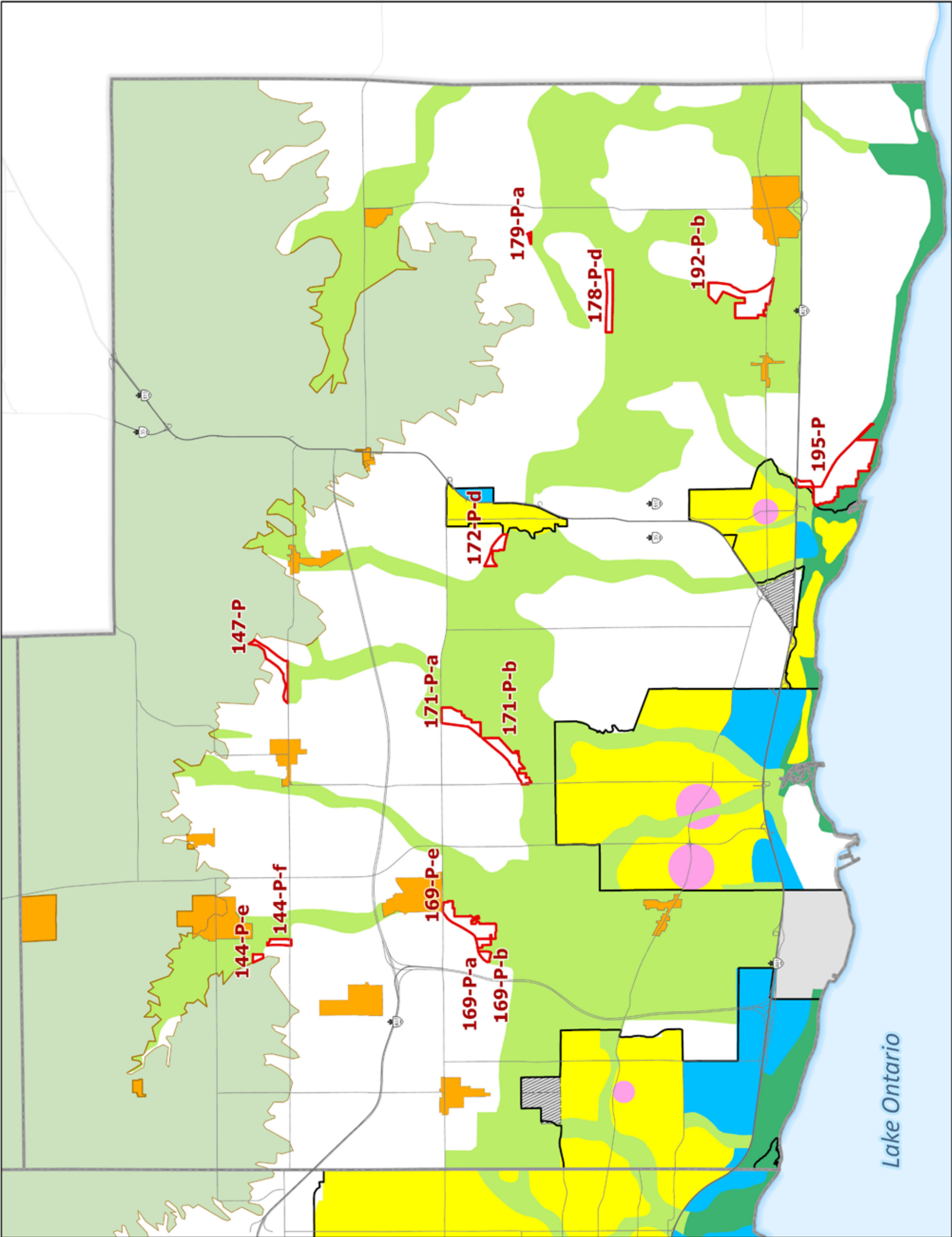


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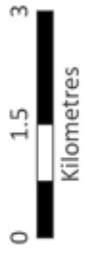


Lake Ontario

Attachment #7

Draft Prime Agriculture on the Oak Ridges Moraine

- Assessment Unit
- Urban Area Boundary
- Land Use Designation
 - Countryside Area
 - Natural Core Area
 - Natural Linkage Area
 - Hamlet
 - Settlement Area

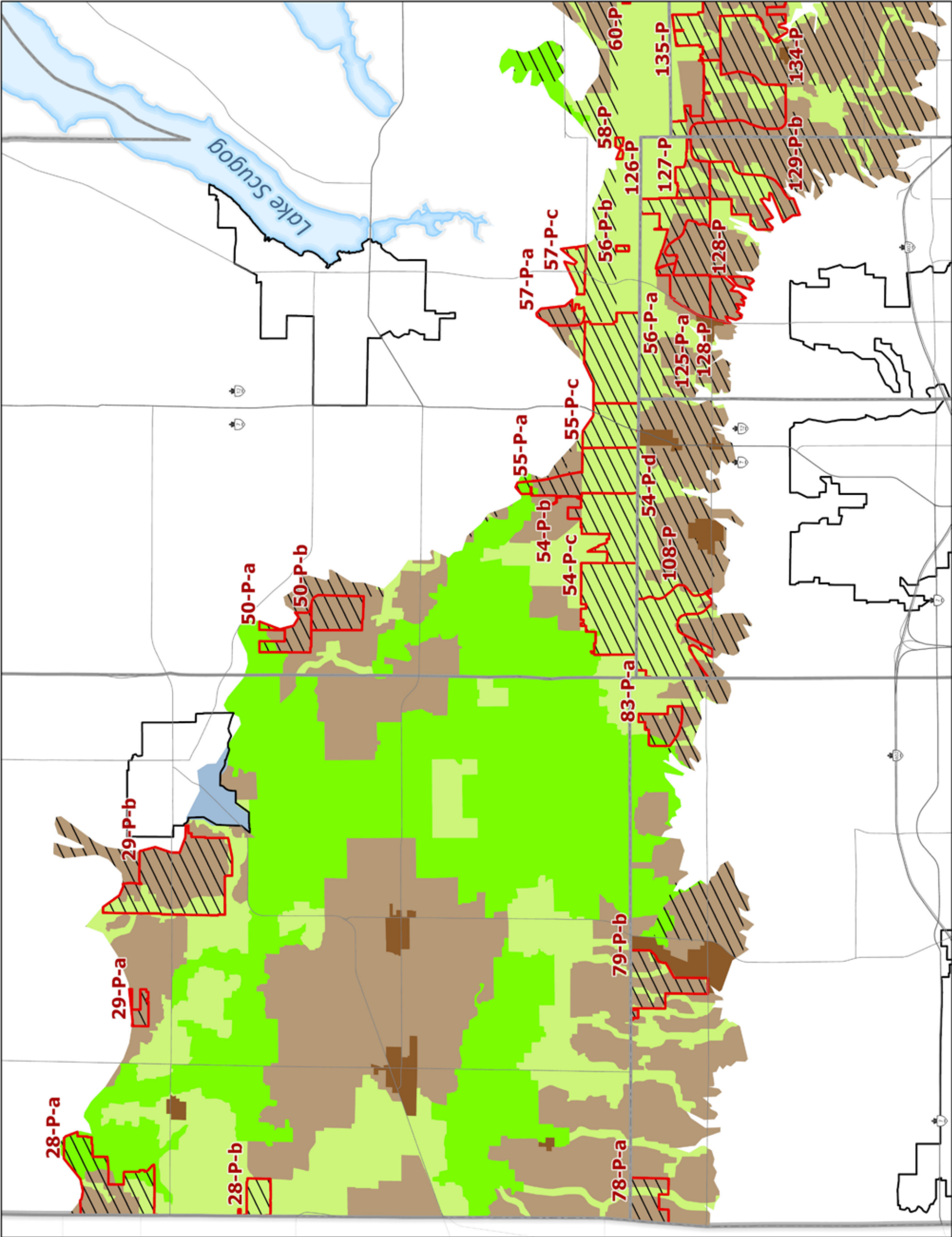


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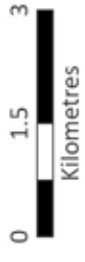
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Attachment #8 Draft Prime Agriculture on the Oak Ridges Moraine

-  Assessment Unit
-  Urban Area Boundary
- Land Use Designation**
-  Countryside Area
-  Natural Core Area
-  Natural Linkage Area
-  Hamlet
-  Settlement Area



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