

Tina Scharf, MS
Consulting Wildlife Biologist
99 Hall Road
Lincoln, VT 05443
802.453.4658
cmscharf@yahoo.com



Ridge View Road, Warren, VT
Date of report: March 3, 2010

I visited this site on February 23 and March 2, 2010. On both visits there were about 0-8 inches of old snow with a dusting of newer snow on top of old crust. On March 2nd the snow was soft. The temperature was about or above freezing and the weather was calm on both occasions.

The property is mostly wooded with a lawn of several acres in the center that surrounds the existing house. Most of the woods on the west side of the driveway are softwoods and mixed hardwoods and softwoods. East of the driveway the woods are mixed and northern hardwoods. These woods are not very old - the conifers are almost all eastern white pines. White pine is an old field-early successional species. The property doesn't have many large-diameter trees. Some of the older trees are "wolf" trees, meaning that they have wide branches and grew to maturity in open-field conditions. The presence of old stone walls also attests to this parcel's recent past as field or pasture. The property slopes to the northwest; that is, it has a northwest aspect.

There are several small streams, some undoubtedly seasonal, and also a few seeps. No evidence of vernal pools was found, although these can be difficult to identify in wintertime. A small alder wetland exists near the road. There are a few rock outcrops of chlorite schist, the most notable one being near the southeast border. There are also some larger outcrops on the Haskins property immediately to the east of the parcel. The outcrops are not suitable for bobcat denning, as they don't have good crevices that could be used as dens.

Looking at the larger landscape, there are two other houses on this road, a permitted house site, and more houses on Cider Hill Road to the east. To the east of Cider Hill Road is a large area of core wildlife habitat in the Northfield Mountain Range, with Burnt Mountain being the closest peak. Across the East Warren Road from the property is a large field with a stream running through it. The field is surrounded by a four-strand barbed wire fence in good condition that runs for quite some distance along the road. West of that are more fields and eventually the slope leading down to the Mad River valley, known as the Warren Pinnacle area. This slope is mostly covered with softwood forest.

I found tracks of the following species: red squirrel, coyote, red fox, and white-tailed deer. I also flushed a ruffed grouse and saw its tracks. The majority of the tracks were deer tracks. I also found deer beds between the existing house and the house owned by the Resniks. These beds were in sight of one or both houses. Several lightly-used deer trails criss-crossed the property. The shrub layer in these woods was poor. Deer have browsed most of it down, except in the alder swamp area where there is quite a bit of low growth of both alders and willows. Deer had also visited a few old apple trees near the East Warren Road but had not crossed the road. It is likely that they were after the apples, and not traveling to or from areas west of East Warren Road.

This general area is marked as a possible wildlife-crossing location in the Natural Heritage Element Inventory and Assessment performed by Arrowwood Environmental (2008). However, I found no evidence of any animal crossing the road to or from this property. As stated above, there is a well-maintained barbed wire fence on the other side of the road that, while not an impediment to deer, is a barrier to other species. Deer did not cross the road either, even though they had visited apple trees near the road. In addition, the field is quite open and therefore this particular spot is not suitable for shier species such as bear, bobcat or fisher.

Just north over the town line in Waitsfield on East Warren Road, however, is an area that has coniferous forest cover to the edge on both sides of the road. There is also a small stream and a good-sized culvert, which is attractive to shy species such as fisher and bobcat. The west side of this forest cover connects to the Warren Pinnacle area through woodlands north of the fields immediately west of Ridge View Road. It is quite probable that this area is a wildlife crossing, and may well be worth study since it is a small patch of cover in the matrix of fields that mostly line the East Warren Road. I found deer tracks that had crossed the road in two places on the March 2nd visit. Unfortunately there are already several houses built there that may be a deterrent to wildlife usage. It seems probable that this is the area that the Arrowwood report was referencing, although because the report's map is small, it's hard to tell the exact location of the arrow. See the two attached maps for clarification.

The Ridge View parcel is also included in an area of "likely deer winter habitat" in the Inventory. While deer are using the property in the wintertime, it does not appear to be a primary deer wintering area (DWA). If it were so there would be several, or many, well-trodden runways and many more pellet groups than were in evidence. Softwoods and mixed woods are sometimes used as primary DWA; however, the aspect of this property is to the northwest, which is unattractive to deer because it's not as warm and snow doesn't melt as readily on northwest-facing slopes as on south or southeastern slopes.

This particular parcel is not located in core wildlife habitat. There is an existing house on the property and other houses in the near vicinity that fragment the habitat. The other houses and fields to the east fragment what would have otherwise been part of the core habitat of the Northfield Mountain Range. Species such as deer, coyote, and red fox are quite adaptable to human constructions and are opportunistic in their habitat usage. Deer beds between the two houses are an example of this. Shier species such as bobcats and bears may or may not use the area, but the parcel is certainly not critical habitat for them.

I checked the state GIS databases for deer wintering areas and the 2009 Rare, Threatened and Endangered (R, T, & E) Species and Natural Communities of Vermont (i.e., the VFWD Natural Heritage database) and the Warren Town Plan (2005). While the VFWD database shows DWA to the north and west of the property, it is all on the west side of East Warren Road and is mostly in Waitsfield. This VFWD-identified area links with the potential road crossing mentioned above. The Town Plan also mentions that the majority of DWA in Warren is between East Warren Road and the Mad River Valley (page 3-9). There are no points-of-interest on the VFWD Natural Heritage database in the Ridge View Road area. In addition, there is no critical wildlife habitat shown on Map 2 of the Town Plan (2005) in the Ridge View Road area.

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Scharf, MS

References

Anonymous. Town Plan, Warren Vermont. 2005. As amended on October 9, 2007.

http://www.warrenvt.org/depts/pc/Town_plan_2007/TownPlan.Complete.Amended.SB.10.09.07.pdf.

140 pp.

Arrowwood Environmental. 2008. Natural heritage element inventory and assessment for Warren,

Vermont. http://www.warrenvt.org/depts/Conserv_Com/WildLifeFHabitaStudy/1_WarrenReport.pdf.

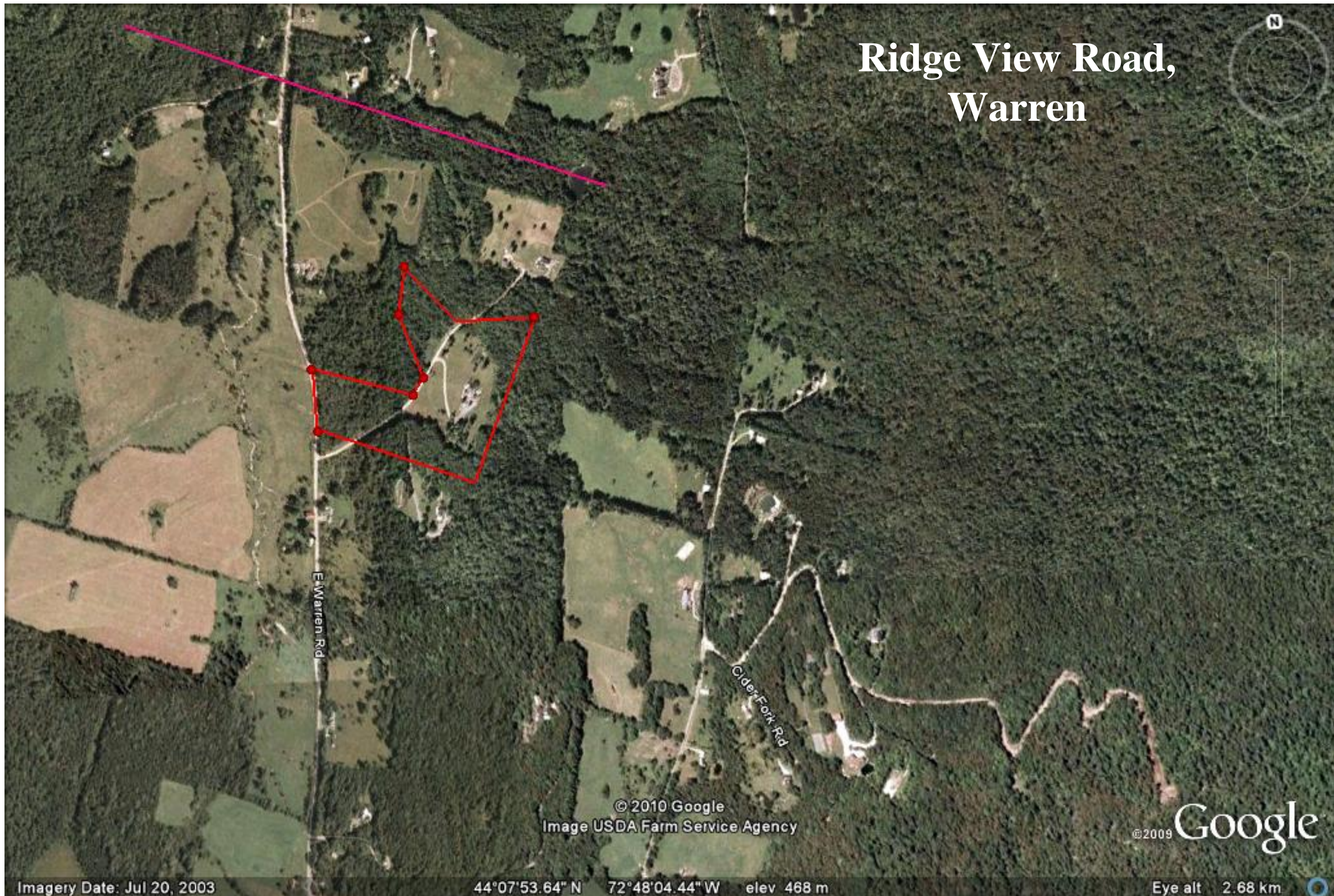
53pp.


Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department GIS databases: Deer Wintering Areas in Vermont, and 2009

Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species and Natural Communities of Vermont.

Note: The Warren Town Plan encourages animal control laws (Objective 3.3, page 3-18). It is always a good idea for towns to enforce the control of dogs, as they are more of an irritant to wildlife than human constructions such as houses, which do not move, bark, or smell like predators.

Ridge View Road, Warren

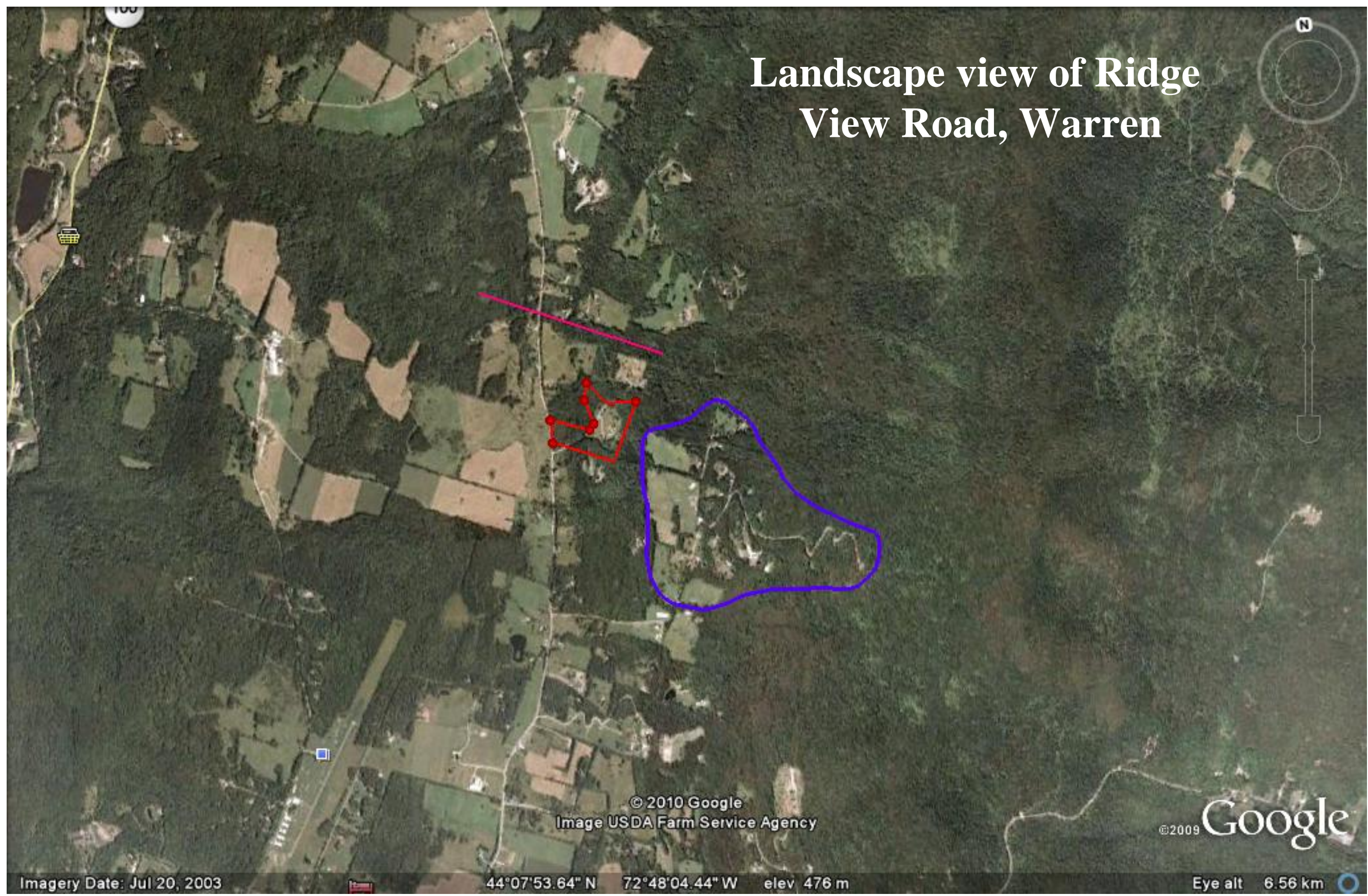


Key:  Approximate property boundary
 Possible road crossing



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Landscape view of Ridge View Road, Warren



- Key:
- Approximate property boundary
 - Possible road crossing
 - Area of existing impact



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