



# Project Impacts

NSRC-FUNDED RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

## Tracking Land Parcelization Over Time to Inform Planning and Policy in Vermont

PROJECT AWARD YEAR AND TITLE:  
**2015**

*Tracking Parcelization Over Time: Updating the Vermont Database to Inform Planning and Policy*

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VT PARCELIZATION WEBSITE

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### VT PARCELIZATION WEBSITE

Recent trends illustrate the phenomenon of parcelization (the subdivision of land into smaller and smaller pieces and multiple ownerships) is gaining momentum in Vermont.

Vermont is the third most forested of the lower 48 states with approximately 4.6 million acres of forestland. Despite being so heavily forested, for the first time in over a century Vermont is actually losing forest cover due to parcelization, subdivision, and the subsequent development of land.

When land is broken up into smaller parcels from parcelization and subdivision, the result is typically an increase in the number of parcels with housing and infrastructure such as roads, septic and utility lines. When this development occurs, it "fragments" the landscape and can affect plant and animal species, wildlife habitat, water quality and recreational access. It can also affect the contiguous ownership and management of forest parcels, and thus the viability of large tracts of forestland to contribute to Vermont's rural economy and working landscape.

In order to minimize the effects of parcelization and fragmentation, it is helpful to understand where it is occurring, and the rate at which it is occurring. To respond to this need, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers and natural resource professionals developed this website to investigate parcelization rates in Vermont between 2004 and 2016 at the town, county, Regional Planning Commission, and statewide levels. The website provides a certain focus on data related to forests, but you can utilize the tools, resources and reports on this website to better understand overall how land use change is impacting your region, county, or town.

A Blake Gardner

Parcelization, the breaking up of land into smaller and smaller parcels, typically occurs through subdivision. Subdivision, and subsequent land conversion and development, can negatively affect plants, animals, wildlife habitat, water quality, recreational access, and forests' ability to store carbon. Increasing parcelization and subdivision can affect contiguous ownership, management, and viability of forest parcels and reduce their contribution to the working lands economy. While subdivision and conversion pressures have been identified for decades in Vermont, there has been no systematic way to track trends to inform planning and resource management.

NSRC researchers tracked and analyzed parcelization trends on private land in Vermont by using Grand List (tax) data and Use Value Appraisal Program data from 2004 to 2016. Researchers established a database of parcels, compiled by size class and other metrics, with a focus on large parcels and forestland. They created a website to examine parcelization trends at town, county, regional planning commission, and state levels.

The amount of land in parcels 50 acres and larger and the number of those parcels are decreasing, while the acreage and number of parcels under 50 acres are increasing. Residential acreage is increasing, while farm and woodland acreage is decreasing, with woodland parcel acreage decreasing the fastest. The per-acre value of land nearly doubled during the study period, though increases varied depending on location. The Use Value Appraisal Program does play a role in maintaining undeveloped woodland parcels. This project provides a method for aggregating parcel data and offers a replicable approach for other states to track parcelization trends if they collect similar data.



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