4.7 ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION

Metropolitan Transportation Plans must include a discussion of environmental mitigation activities. "A discussion of types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that may have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the metropolitan transportation plan. The discussion may focus on policies, programs, or strategies, rather than at the project level. The discussion shall be developed in consultation with Federal, State, and Tribal land management, wildlife, and regulatory agencies" (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, 2007).

Since MPO transportation planning is regional this discussion focuses on broad environmental issues and strategies.

Mitigation in Federal regulations include:

- Avoiding the impact by not taking an action or part of the action,
- Minimizing impacts by minimizing the sized of the action,
- Repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected resource(s),
- Reducing, or eliminating the impact, by preservation and maintenance operations during the action, or
- Replacing or providing substitute resources or environments. (Source: 40 CFR 1508.20)

Sequencing is an ordered approach to mitigation that involves:

- Understanding the affected environment,
- Assessing effects on the environment during project development, and
- Developing mitigation strategies as an integral part of the alternative's development and analysis.

FHWA's mitigation policy states: "Measures necessary to mitigate adverse impacts will be incorporated into the action and are eligible for Federal funding when the Administration [FHWA] determines that:

- The impacts for which mitigation is proposed result from the Administration action; and
- The proposed mitigation represents a reasonable public expenditure after considering the impacts of the action and the benefits of the proposed mitigation measures.

In making this determination, the Administration will consider the extent to which the proposed measure(s) would assist compliance with a Federal law, Executive Order, Administration regulation or policy. (Source: 23 CFR 771.105(d))

IDENTIFYING SENSITIVE AREAS

There are numerous environmentally sensitive areas found throughout the Piedmont Triad region. Many areas are too small or too numerous to map at a regional level and can only be clearly identified through a project level analysis. Some areas are yet to be identified and will only become known once a project level analysis is completed, such as caves, sinkholes, and wetlands. When a project is ready to move from the Metropolitan Transportation Plan into the design / engineering phases, the project sponsor will conduct any necessary analysis as required by state and federal regulations to determine the type and location of environmentally sensitive areas within the project study area.

In developing project lists for the MTP, the High Point MPO conducts top level analysis to determine the potential need for future environmental mitigation. Specifically, the MPO looks at proposed project locations throughout the region to determine their proximity to natural or socio-cultural resources. That analysis provides early guidance to project sponsors to develop mitigation strategies.

ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION ACTIVITIES

The High Point area is committed to minimizing and mitigating the negative effects of transportation projects on the natural and built environments in order to preserve our quality of life. In doing so, the MPO recognizes that not every project will require the same type and/ or level of mitigation. Some projects such as new roadways and roadway widenings involve major construction with considerable earth disturbance. Others like intersection improvements, street lighting, and resurfacing projects involve minor construction and minimal, if any earth disturbance. The mitigation efforts used for a project should be dependent upon how severe the impact on environmentally sensitive areas is expected to be. The following three step process is used to determine the type of mitigation strategy to apply for any given project:

1. Identify environmentally sensitive areas throughout the project study area;
2. Determine how and to what extent the project will impact these environmentally sensitive areas; and
3. Develop appropriate mitigation strategies to lessen the impact these projects have on the environmentally sensitive areas.

To the extent possible, transportation projects are minimized off-site disturbance in sensitive areas and develop strategies to preserve air and water quality, limit tree removal, minimize grading and other earth disturbance, provide erosion and sediment control, and limit noise and vibration. Where feasible, alternative designs or alignments are developed that would lessen the project's impact on environmentally sensitive areas.

The three-step mitigation planning process is designed solicit public input and offer alternative designs or alignments and mitigation strategies for comment by the environmental review agencies, MPO and local governments. For major construction projects, such as new roadways, or for projects that may have a region-wide environmental impact, a context sensitive solutions process is considered in which considerable public participation and alternative design solutions are used to lessen the impact of the project.

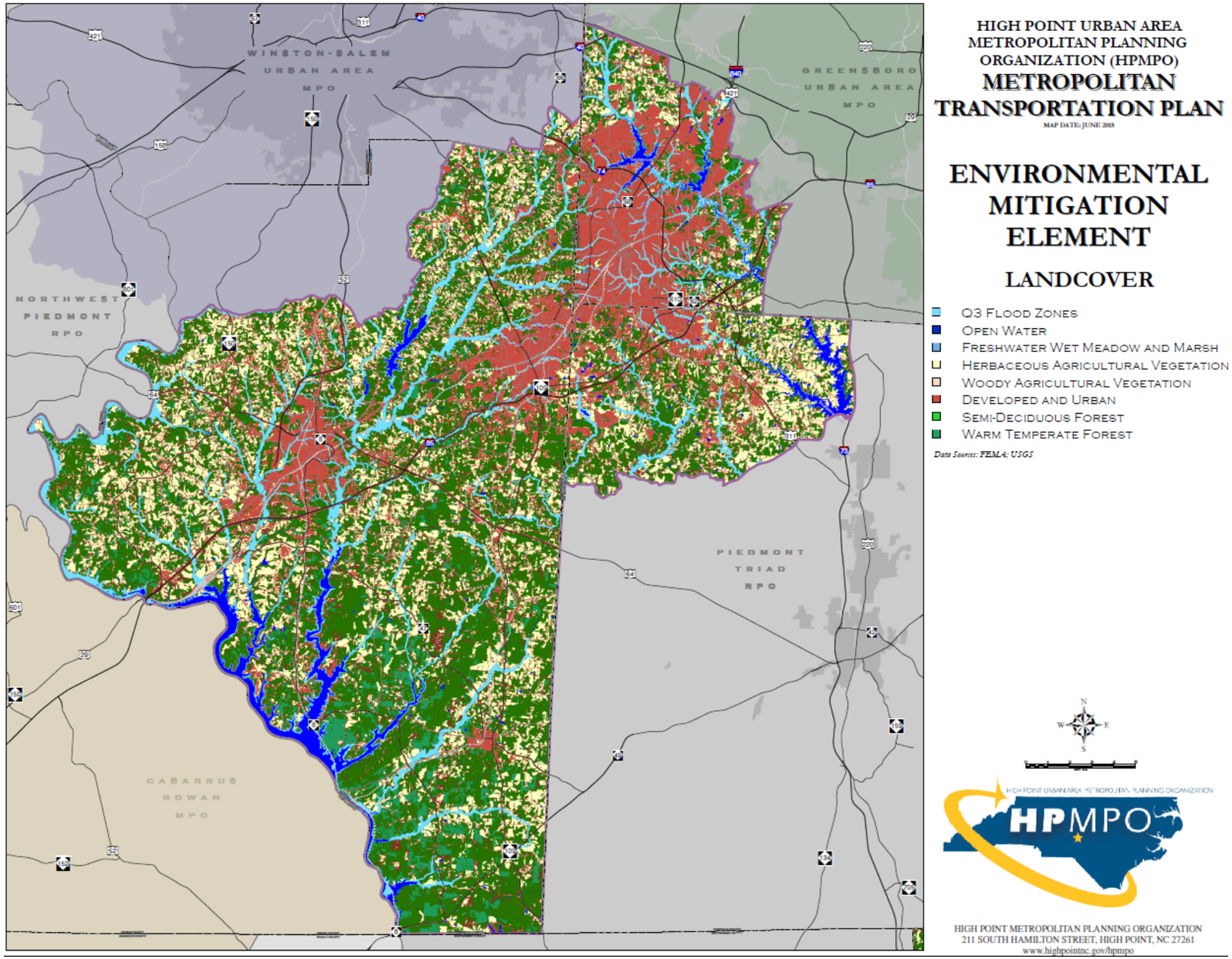

Figure 4.7-1 Landcover

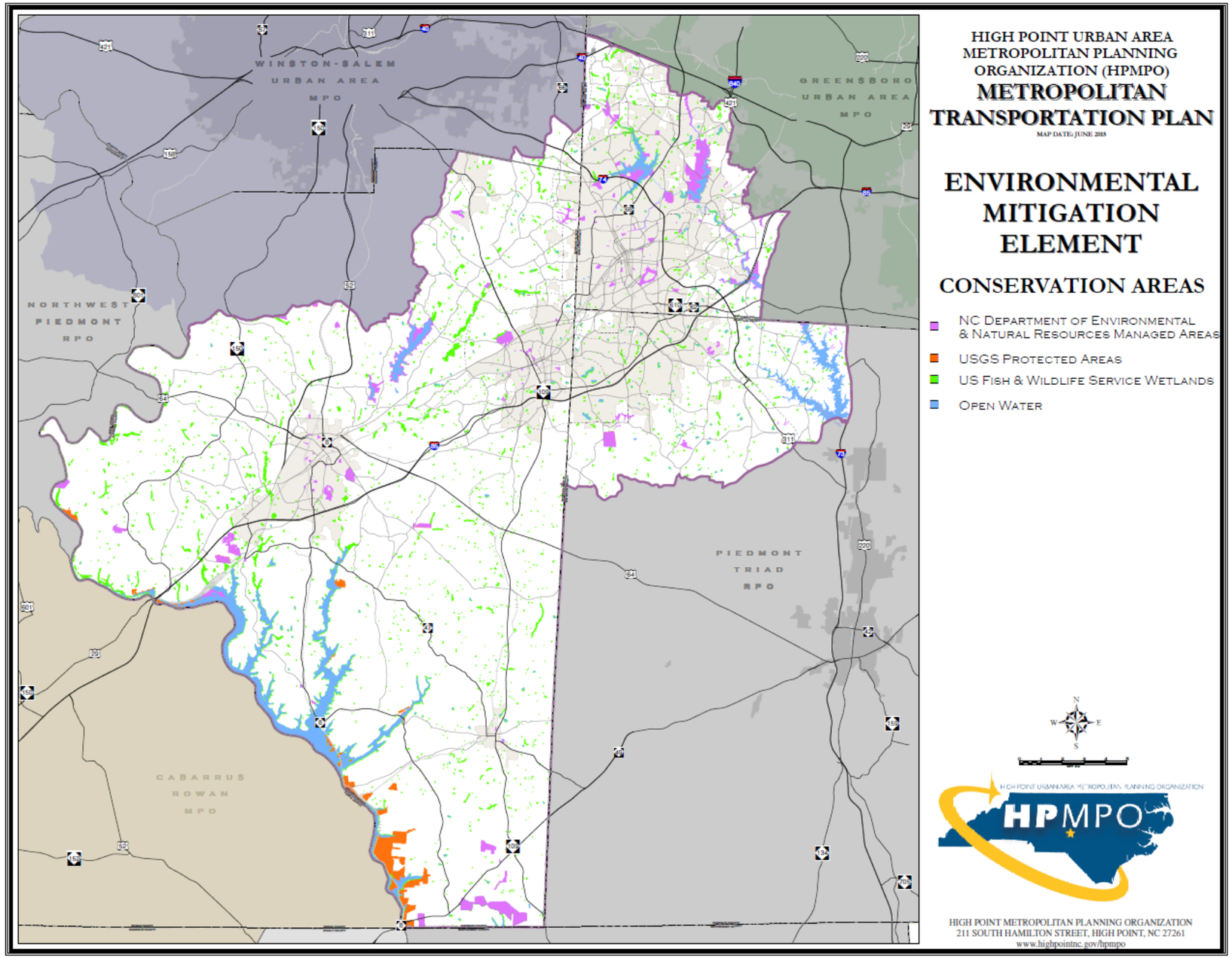

Figure 4.7-2 Conservation Areas