Southwest Region Planning Commission
37 Ashuelot Street Keene, NH 03431 603-357-0557 Fax 357-7440

DATE: **June 28, 2019**

TO: **Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail Project Advisory Committee**

FROM: **SWRPC Staff**

RE: **Existing Conditions Assessment - Trail Condition Assessment**

Background

Trail condition is a fundamental consideration for all users of the Ashuelot Rail Trail. As condition deteriorates, so does its utility as a transportation and recreational asset. Every trail user has their own expectations about what constitutes acceptable condition. This is also influenced by an individual's sensitivity to defects in the trail and how they plan to travel (on foot, by bike, horseback, snowmobile, etc.). Whereas an individual on vacation seeking an experience in the outdoors may tolerate ponded water, erosion, and uneven terrain; these same features are a barrier to individuals with mobility needs, less capable bicycles, etc. Another aspect to trail condition is the snow surface, which is maintained by area snowmobile clubs. Wintertime users likewise have similar preferences when it comes to their comfort and safety when walking, riding their bike, snowmobile, skiing, mushing, etc. The focus of the trail condition assessment task in the context of this project is to understand the existing conditions of the former rail bed ballast and improved (gravel and paved) segments. Wintertime maintenance may be discussed during Project Advisory Committee meetings or later in the project and is not the subject of this memorandum.

Unlike assessments of paved roads, trail assessment methods are less sophisticated and there are fewer examples. However, Keene State College, through its Department of Geography, Outdoor Recreation, and Planning developed and implemented an assessment in 2014 of the Ashuelot Rail Trail in consultation with SWRPC staff, town officials and others[1]. The trail condition assessment results and findings of this project were part of SWRPC's rationale for conducting additional planning activities in this area.

Methods

As part of the 2014 assessment, trail condition was surveyed by bicycle and compiled using a Geographic Information System (GIS). The trail itself was attributed based on points where there was a change in surface type (stone dust, gravel, dirt, sand, and grass), moisture (wet or dry), or texture (smooth to rutted). Rankings based on the observed attributes included seven categories: excellent, very good, good, average, needs improvement, poor, and impassable.

[1] Fournier, J., Gaudette, S., Johnson, M., & Lapsley, J. (2014). *The Ashuelot Rail-Trail: The ART of Commuting.* Keene: Keene State College Department of Geography. Retrieved from http://sites.keene.edu/geography/files/2015/04/2014_SeminarFinalReport_AshuelotRailTrail.pdf

Findings

- The Ashuelot Rail Trail was found to be underutilized as a commuter pathway, despite its good condition.
- The Keene portion of the Ashuelot Rail Trail was found to be in excellent condition, in part because much of the surface is paved or maintained with gravel or stone dust. It was also observed that the shoulders are regularly cleared of brush and there was clear signage for identifying road crossings and hazards. Culverts appeared to provide adequate drainage.
- The majority of the Swanzey portion of the trail was found to be in excellent condition. At the time of the assessment, a four-mile section of trail was newly resurfaced with stone dust. The areas closest to Winchester were found to need improvements to surface condition. Standing water and washouts were observed in this area.
- Winchester surface condition was described as varied (ranging from very good to average condition), with a need to remove brush and improve drainage.
- Hinsdale was found to have even more varied surface condition and relative rideability.
- The project identified trail condition as the least common reason why the trail was not utilized for commuting.

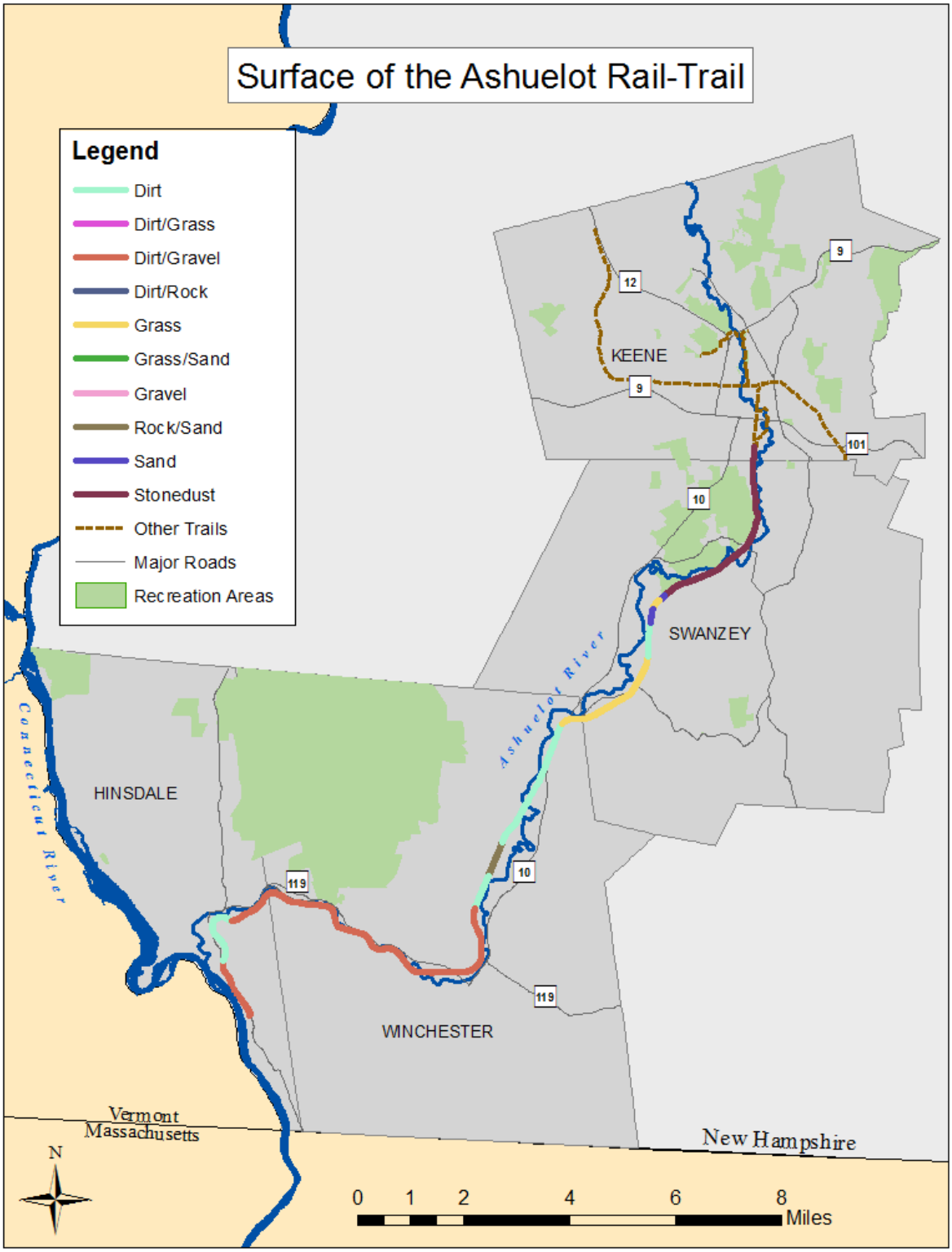
Please see the attached excerpt from the 2014 assessment for maps of the trail based on surface type, texture, moisture, and overall rideability.

Recommendations

- Compile feedback relative to the strengths and weaknesses of the condition assessment for future use.
- Consider applicable funding options that may be used to support improvements to trail condition, including those that have already been utilized by regional partners as well as those with the potential to be used.
- Review and identify inconsistencies between the results of the 2014 project and existing conditions.

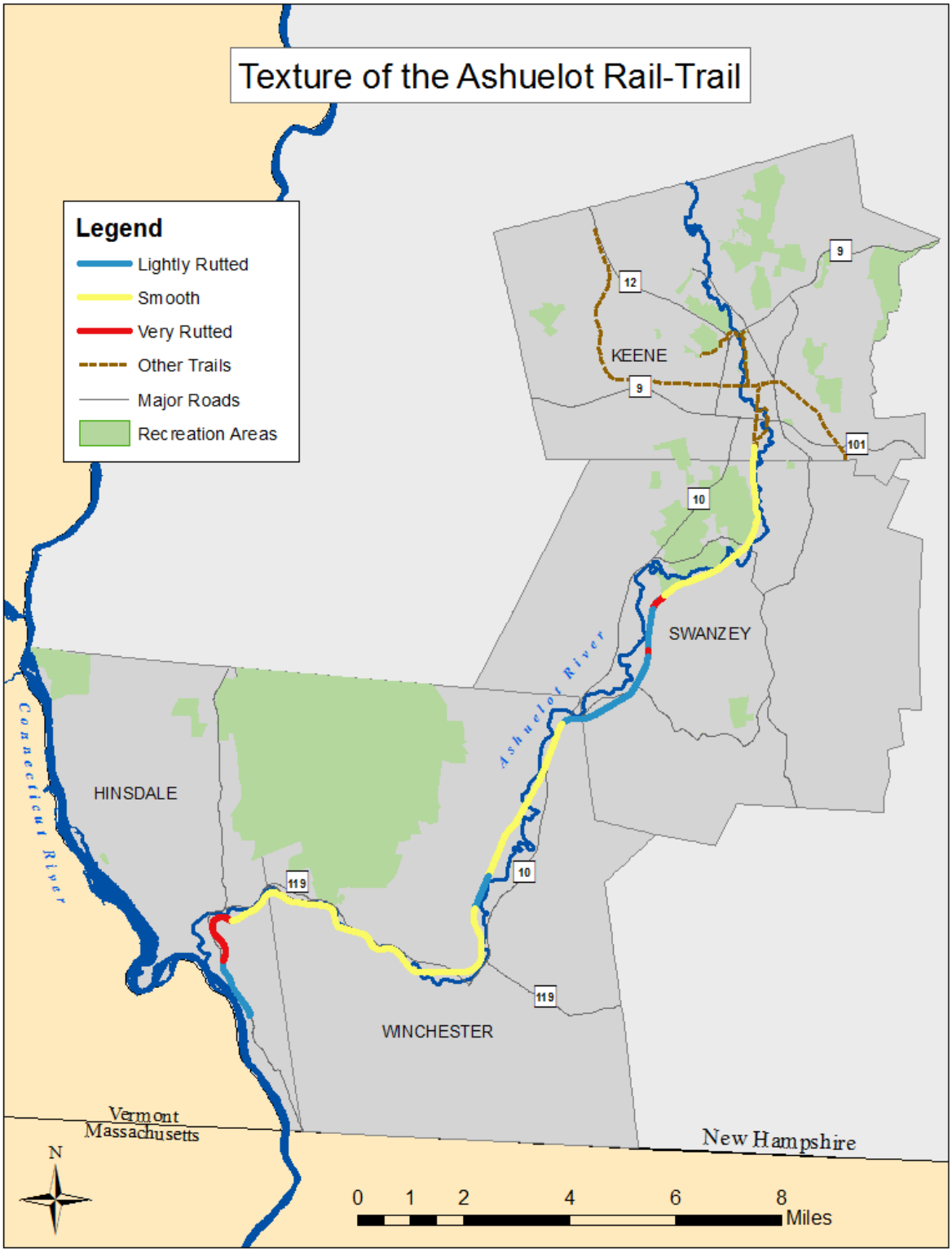
Excerpt

Appendix C-2: Map of Surface Material on ART



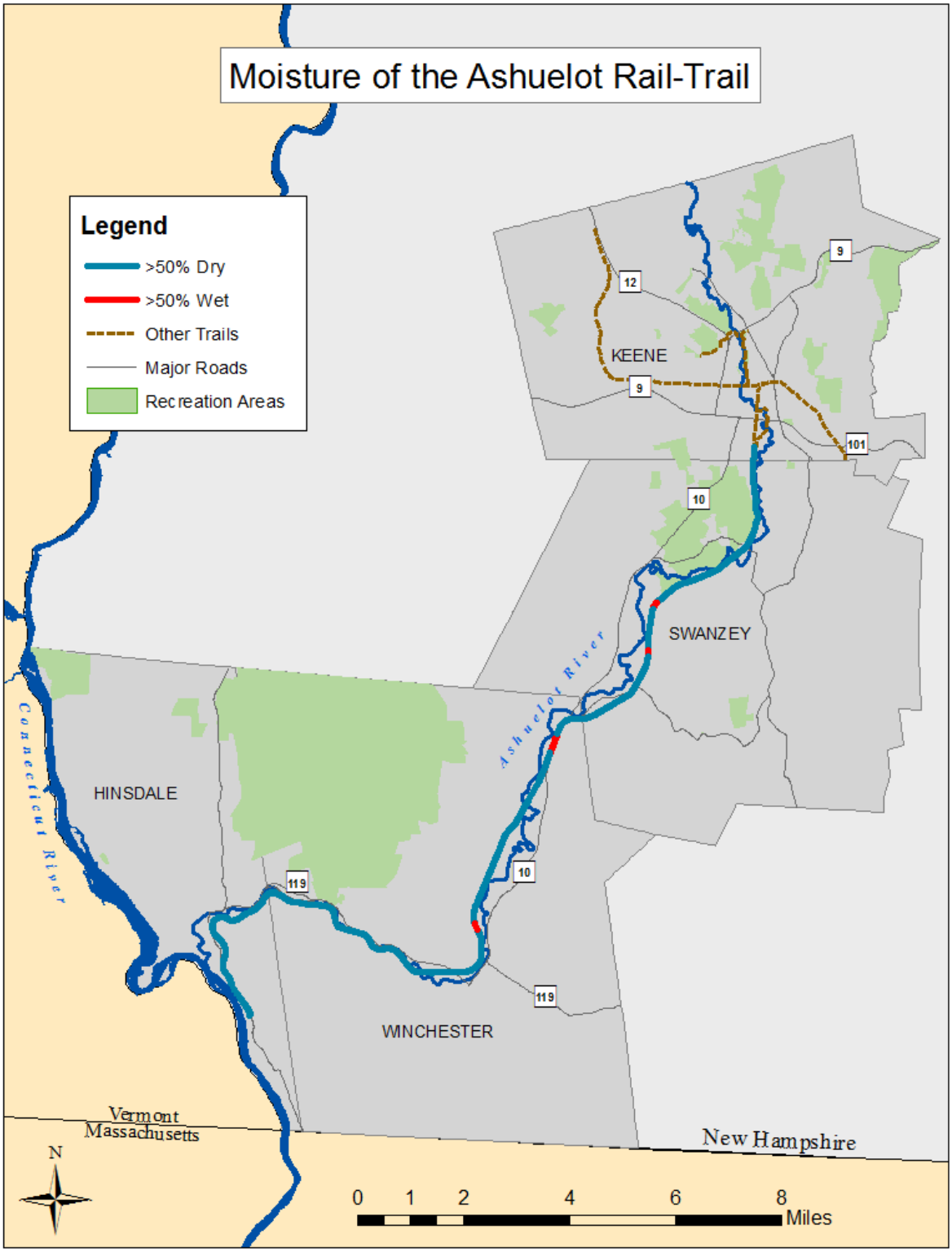
Excerpt

Appendix C-3: Map of Surface Texture on ART



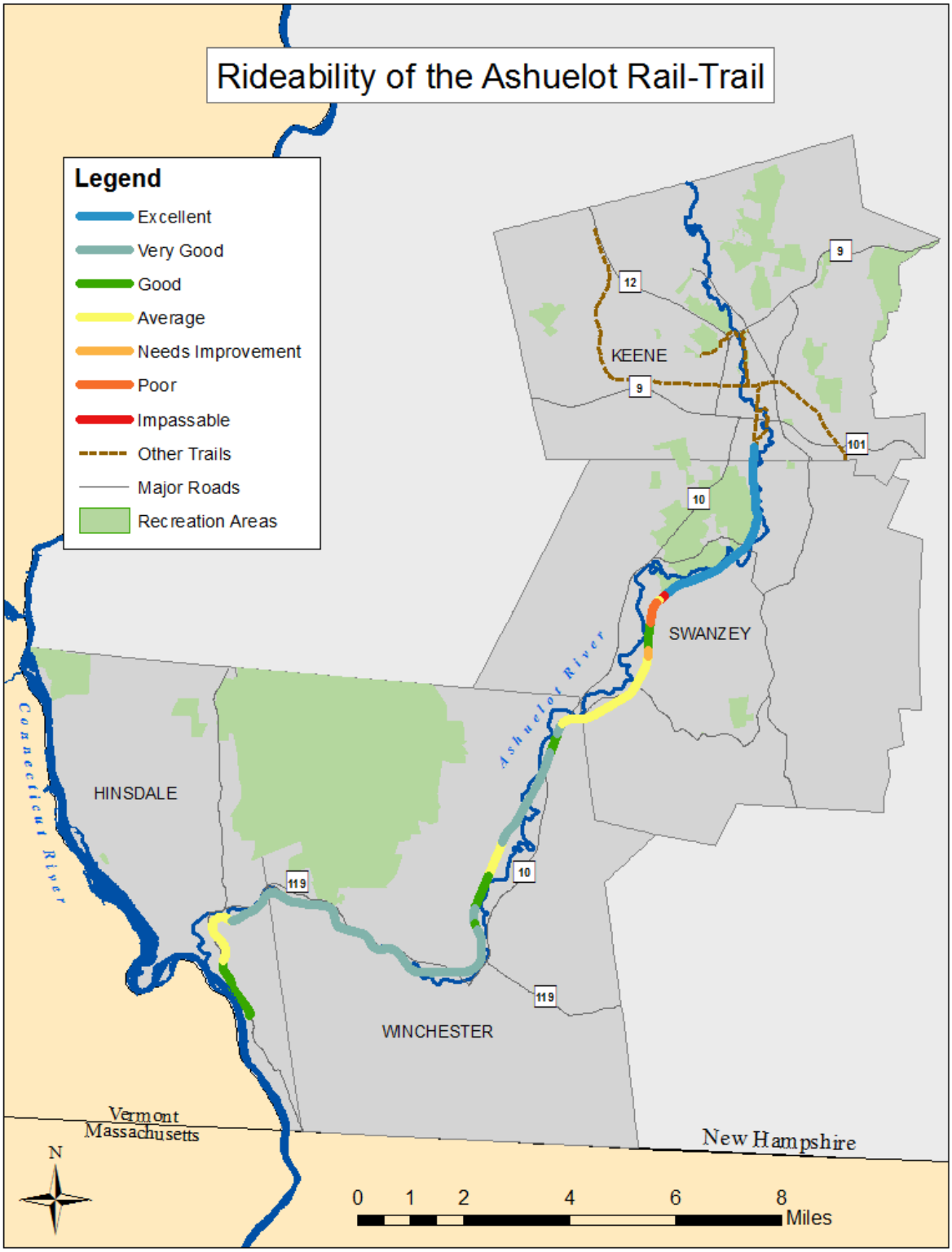
Excerpt

Appendix C-4: Map of Surface Moisture on ART



Excerpt

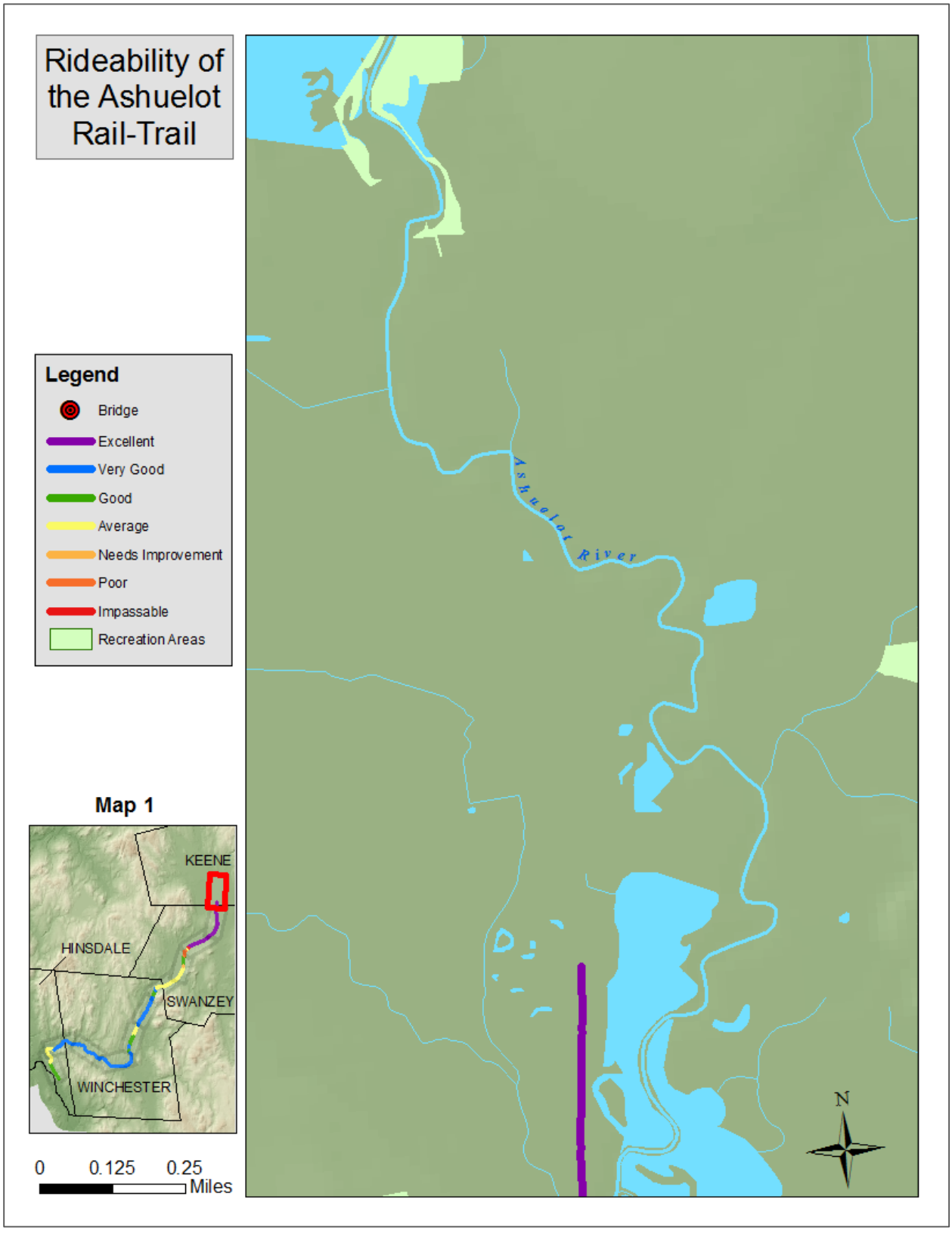
Appendix C-5: Map of Overall Rideability on ART



Excerpt

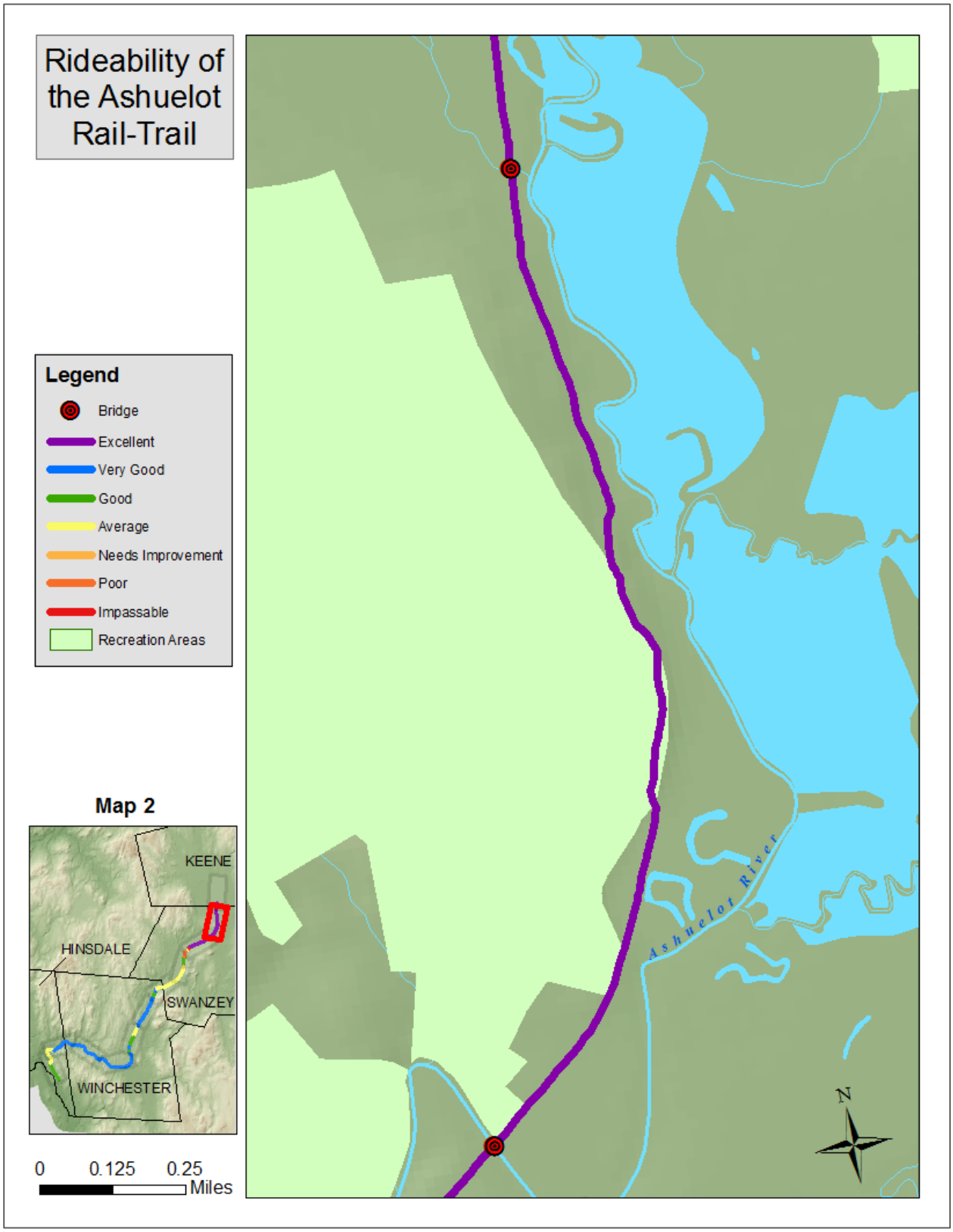
Appendix C-6: Strip Map of Rideability on ART

Map 1



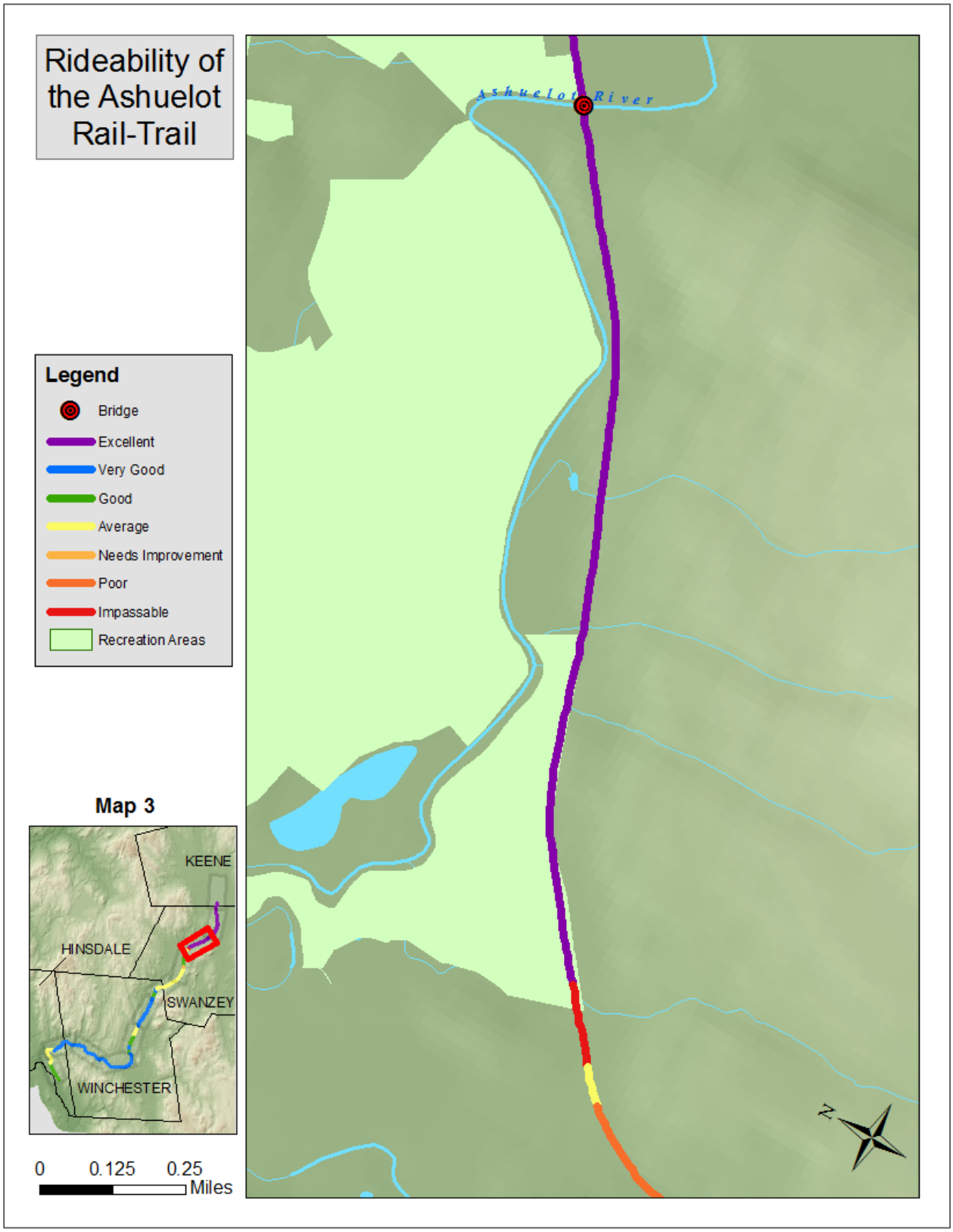
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 2



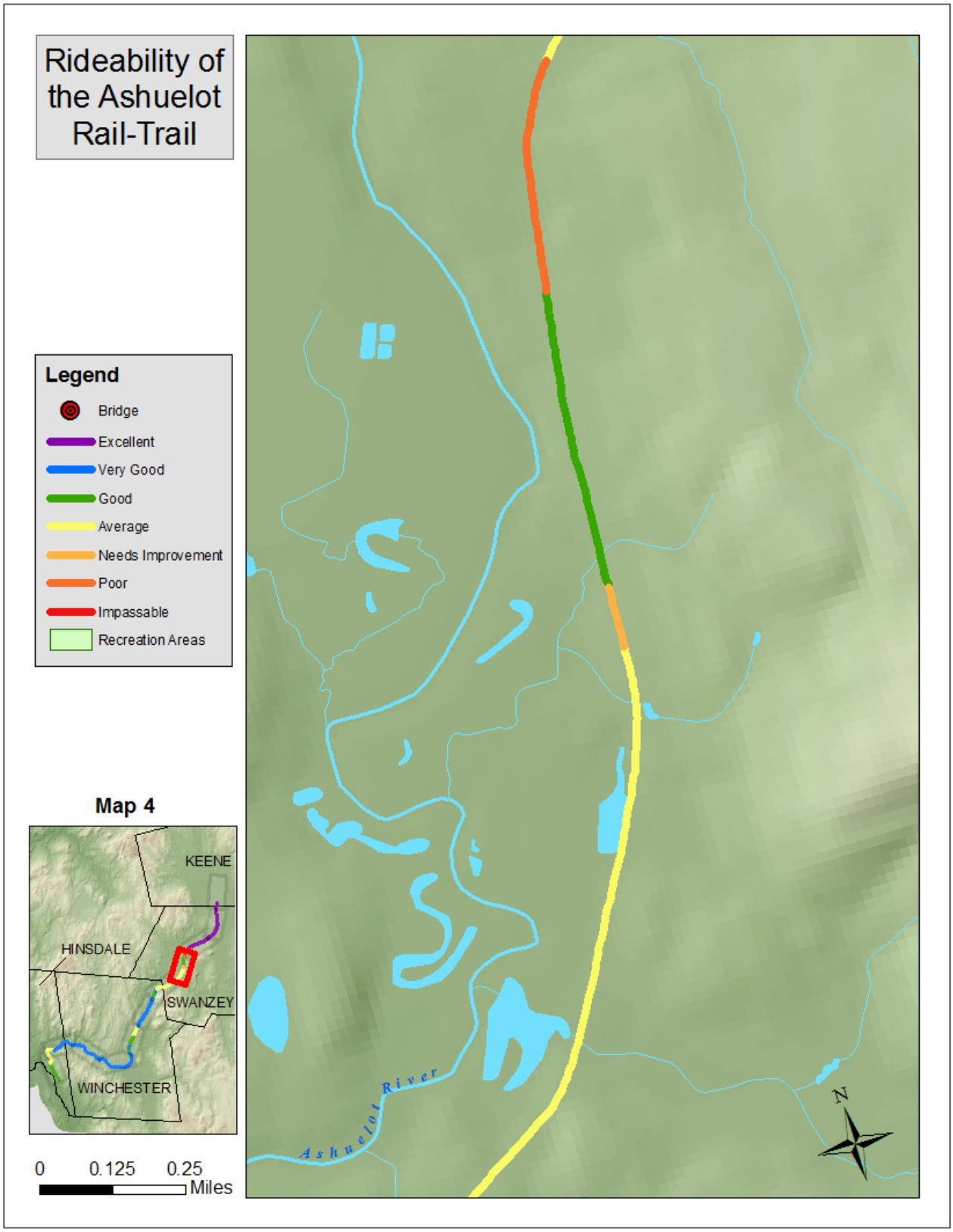
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 3



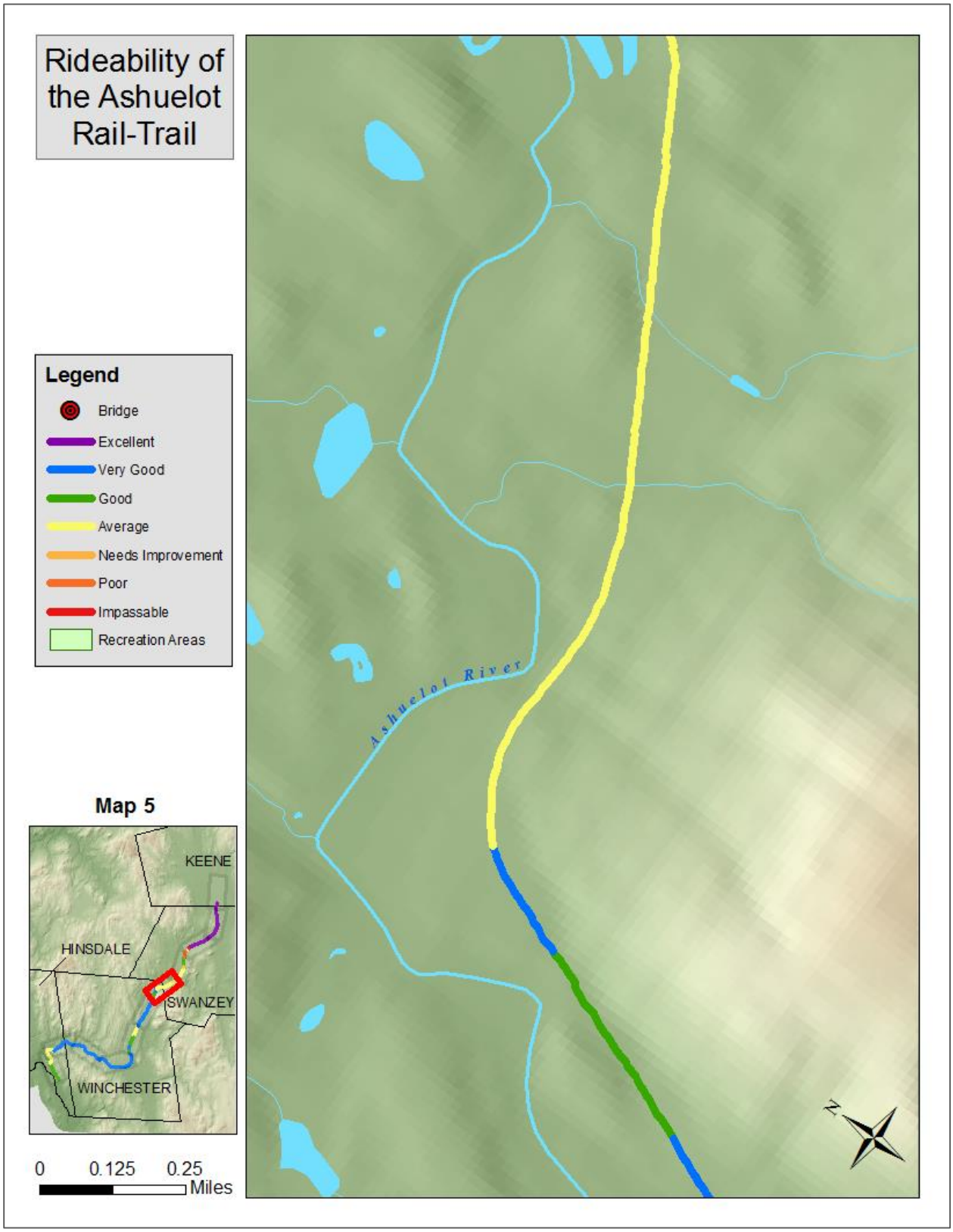
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 4



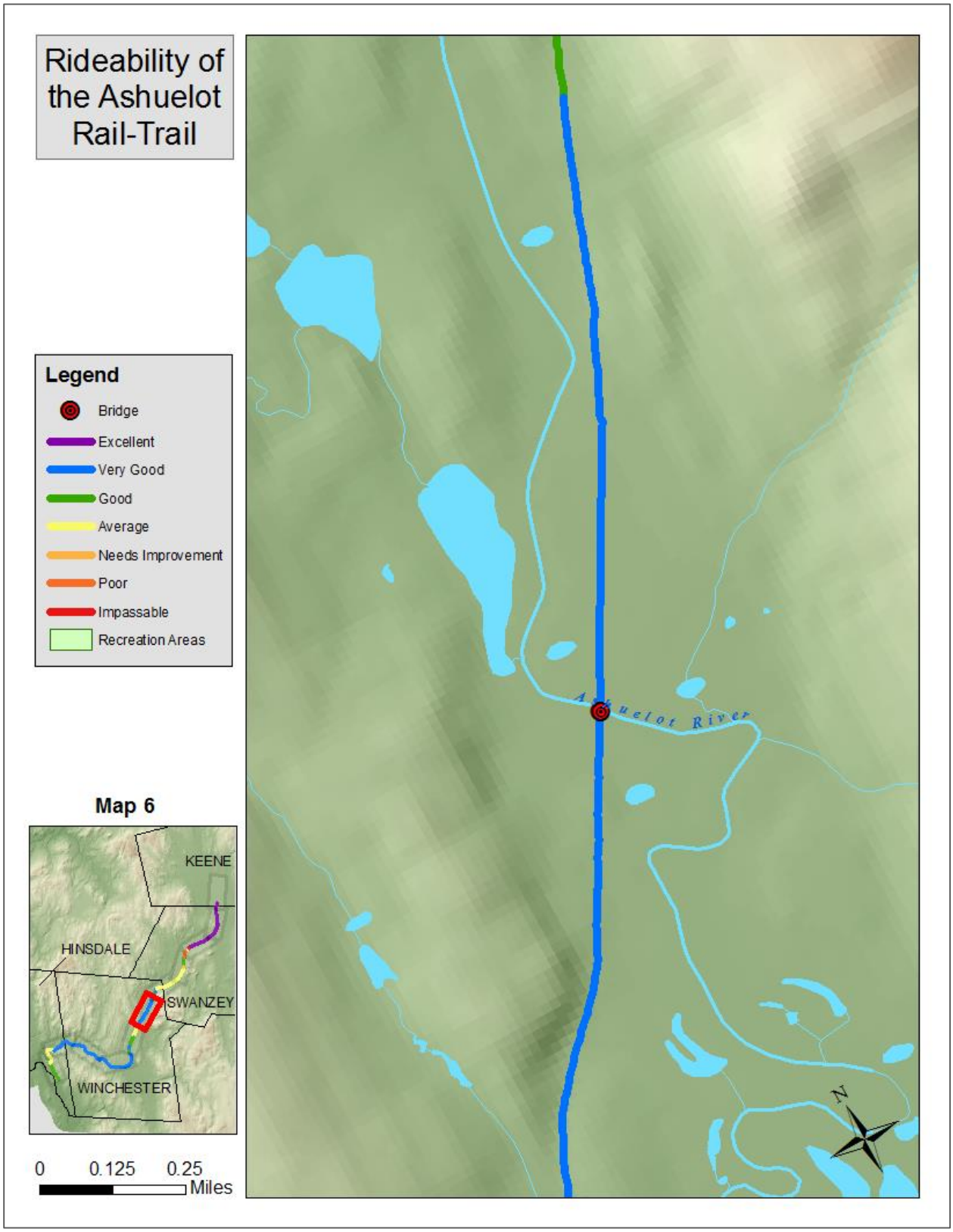
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 5



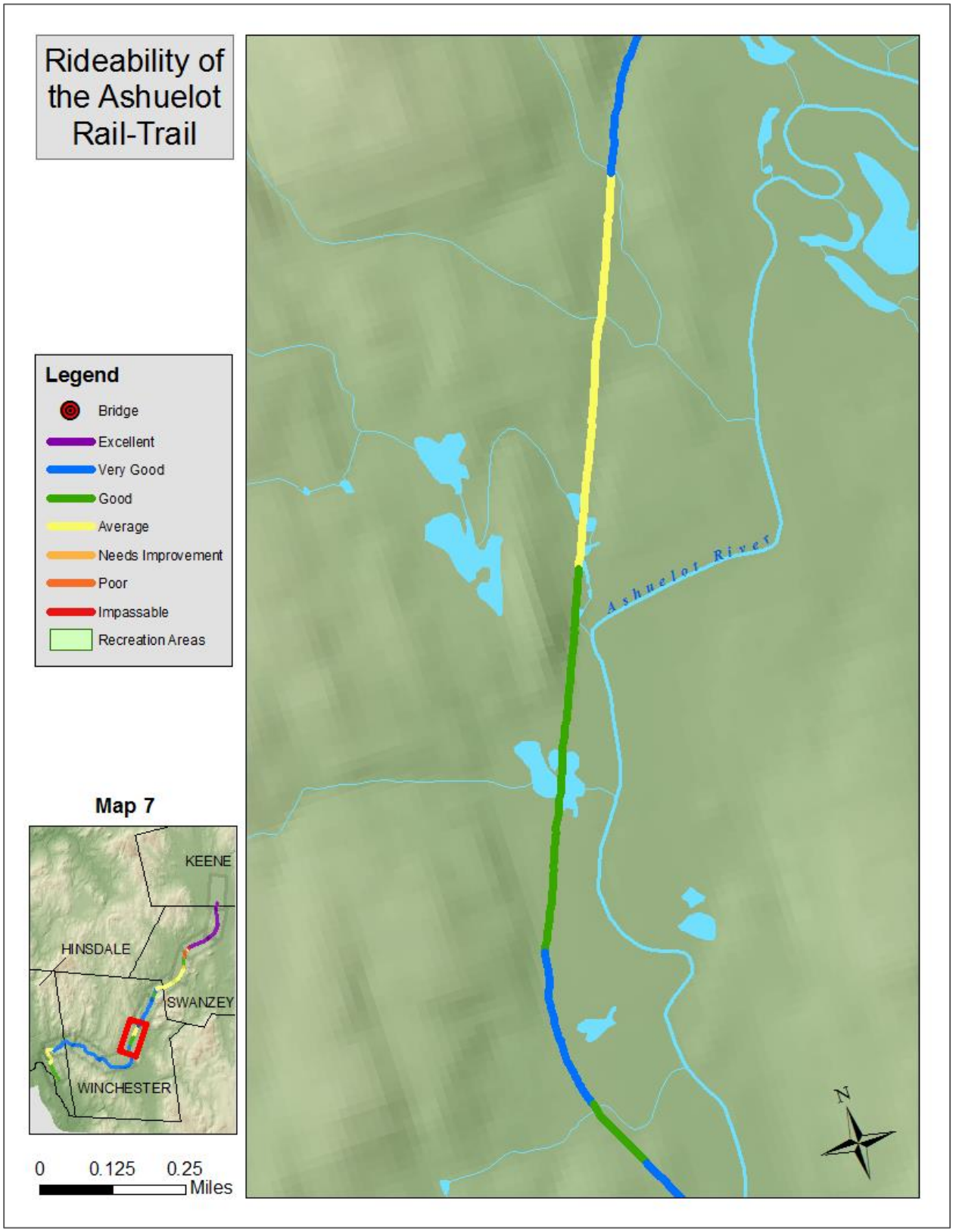
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 6



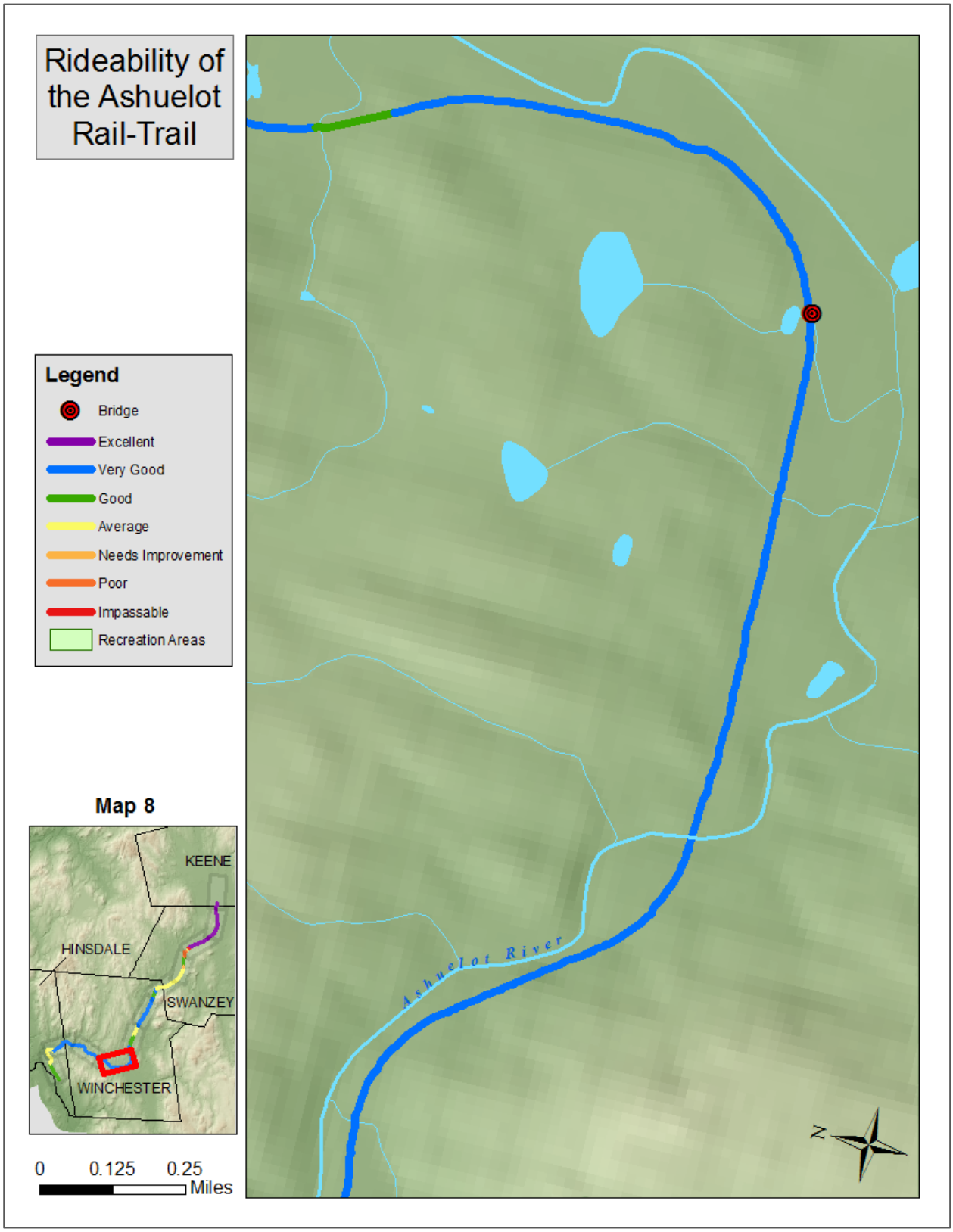
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 7



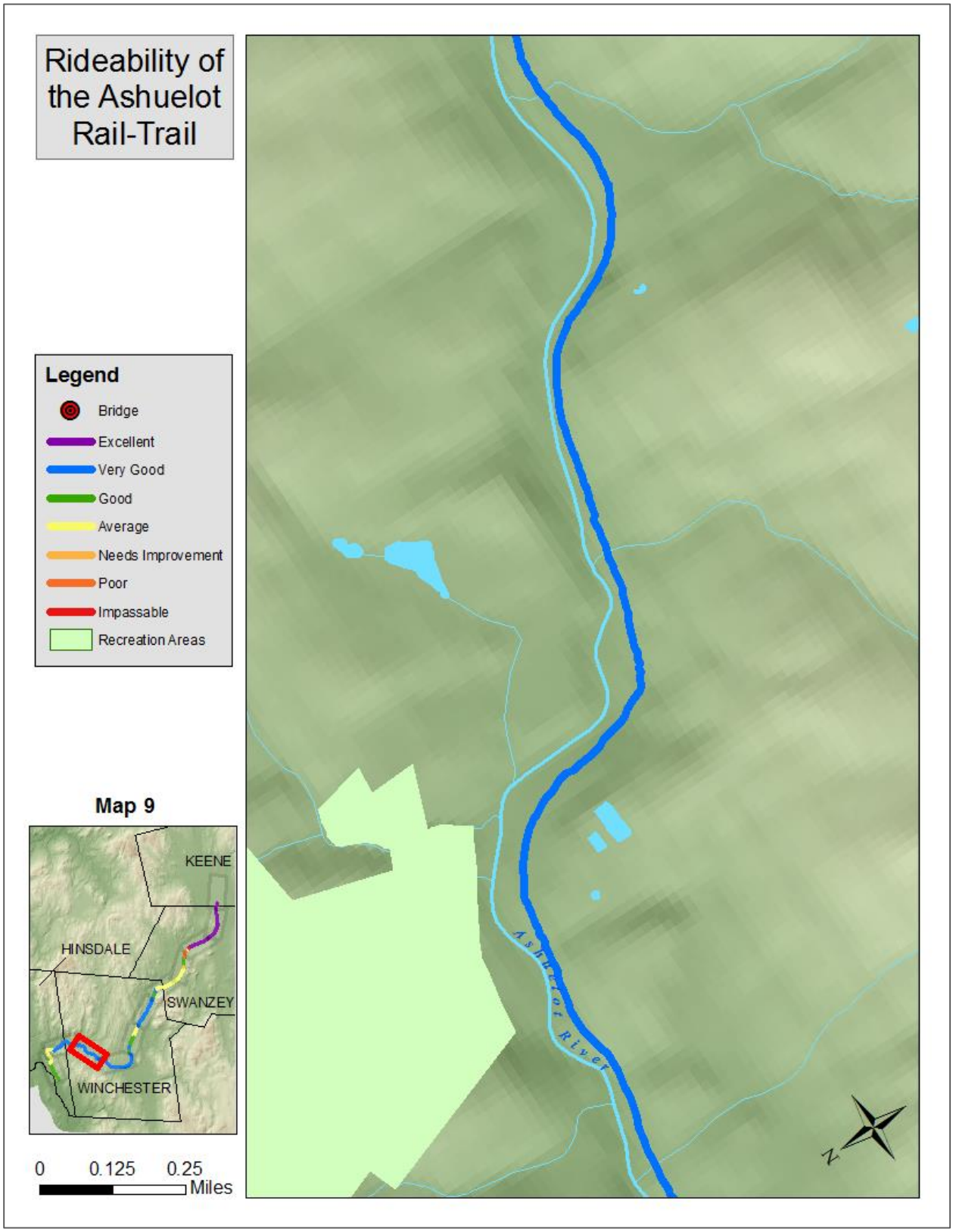
Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 8



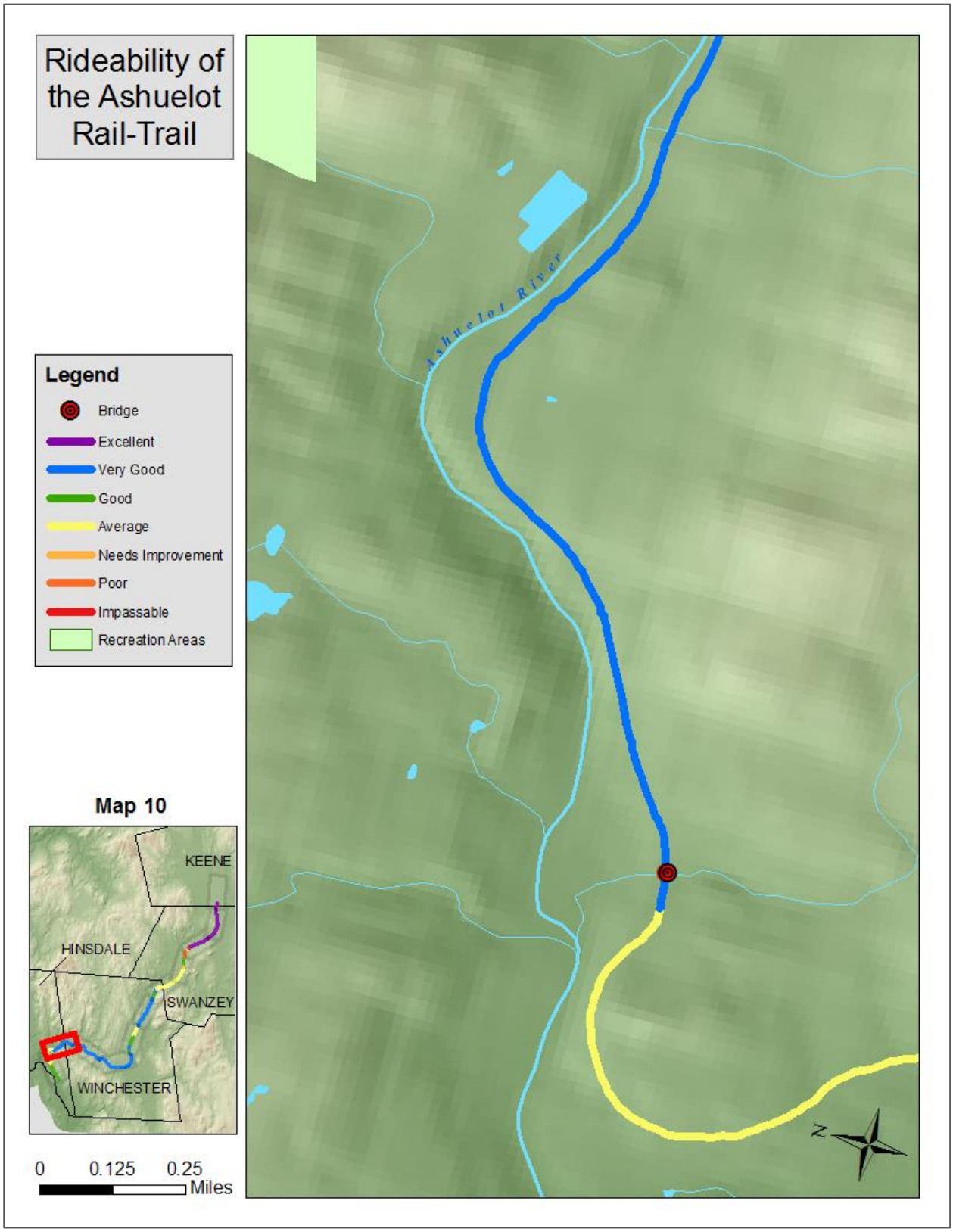
Excerpt

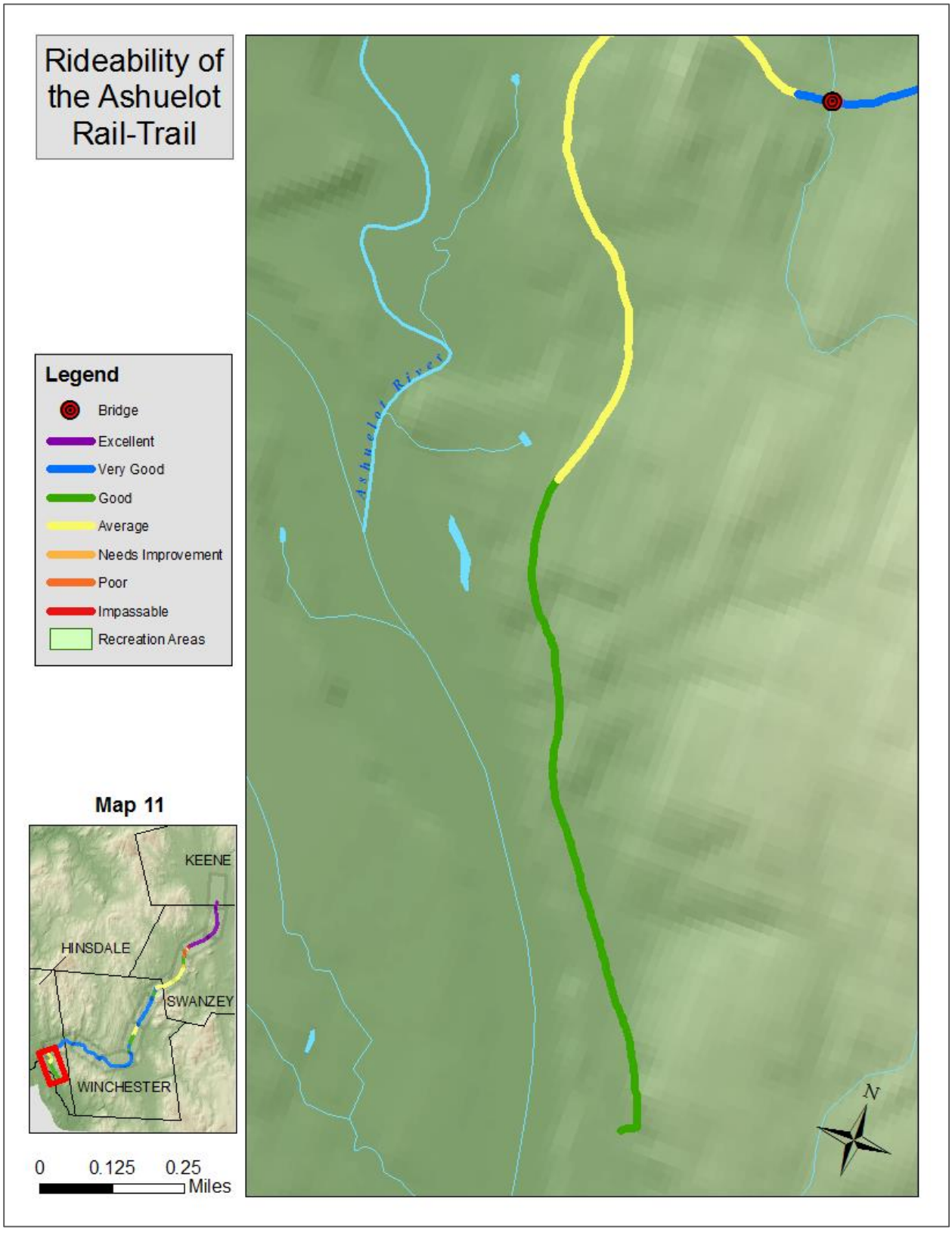
Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 9



Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 10



Excerpt

Strip Map of Ashuelot Rail Trail: Map 11