

# VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #7

December 18, 2025, 9:30am to 1:00pm EST

## MEETING PACKET



### **Annie Decker**

*Associate Director of Resource  
Development & Resiliency; VHCB*  
802-661-8958

[a.decker@vhcb.org](mailto:a.decker@vhcb.org)

### **Rebecca Washburn**

*Director of Lands Administration  
& Recreation; VT FPR*  
802-793-3432

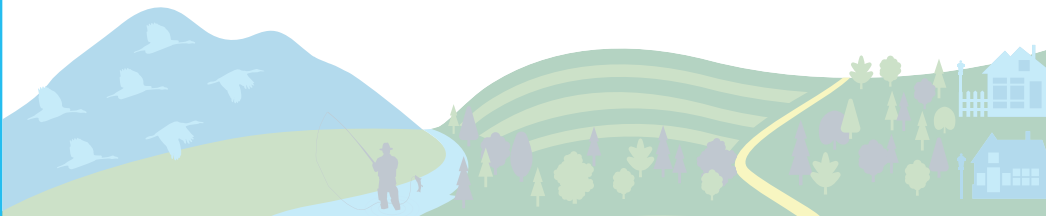
[becca.washburn@vermont.gov](mailto:becca.washburn@vermont.gov)

### **David Beurle**

*Chief Executive Officer*  
Future iQ  
612-757-9190

[david@future-iq.com](mailto:david@future-iq.com)

FOR MORE INFORMATION



### **Tensions and Visioning Exercise**

- Looking back at the visioning exercise from November (below), or reviewing the prompts if you weren't there, what ideas or themes feel most important to you right now?
- From the tensions survey, which tension feels most alive or unresolved for you at this point, and why?
- As we move toward reviewing draft actions, what feels most important for this group to hold onto, even if it remains unresolved?

### **Visioning Exercise (11/13/25 TAC Meeting)**

- If you are optimistic about the Vermont Conservation Plan, what do you imagine it can accomplish for Vermont or for the communities you represent?
- What would it look like if the plan truly meets its vision goals – for your work, for your organizations, and for the communities that you serve?
- What do you hope this plan makes possible?

Q2 Land Use, Housing and Landscape Integrity Comments on this point of tension include: “Housing vs. conservation” isn’t zero-sum—but alignment requires great care. Conservation is consistent with housing development, yet translating that into maps/bylaws/investments is nontrivial. How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	In my mind it's about prioritizing critical areas for conservation while being realistic about housing needs when looking at parcels with lower conservation value and useful development attributes, namely proximity to community centers.	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	The Conservation Plan should recognize the need for robust housing development in Vermont and acknowledge the interplay of Act 59 with Act 181, the Home Act (Act 47), and other laws focused on housing. Land conservation is only accomplished when a private landowner decides to conserve their land. From a property rights perspective, this is a landowner's prerogative. Act 59 aims to advance VCD, which is centered on trying to maintain a certain percentage of undeveloped land for ecological integrity. Act 59 aims to conserve a portion of VCD lands in a durable fashion, which means a sizeable portion of the lands identified in VCD will still be available available for housing, as will land that is not identified in VCD. The goal in Vermont is to implement our land use statutes and land use planning in a way that can accomplish development in smart growth locations. There is a room to advance both conservation and housing through a holistic approach.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	By recognizing that it isn't one over the other. Both are important issues that require careful consideration of each requirement. Understanding that "affordable" housing will require land in rural and working land areas which will require careful consideration.	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	I think Act 181 which as I understand it revises Act 250 is a good step in the right direction and will help to navigate this.	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	Some paradigmatic shifts in language (intention & value) can be helpful; for example, the statement above: "Conservation is consistent with housing development" doesn't gesture toward alignment but is oppositional by its choice of words. Housing can be "provided" or "integrated" rather than developed... we need to think in terms of circles rather than lines... e.g. housing as a "given" should include other-than-humans as well.	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	By clearly articulating that we have enough space in this state to both meet our affordable housing needs and to protect our natural resources. There are appropriate places to develop housing and we as a conservation community support that. We can point to the recent Act 250 changes that support development in designated downtown areas. With that focus in place, this plan can then focus on protecting the lands around those designated downtowns to provide residents with the many services provided by nature. I also think we need to stress that we don't have a housing shortage; we have an affordable housing shortage. If you look at the housing market, expensive houses and properties are still coming up for sale and selling quickly. New houses are still being built in certain communities. Higher income individuals are not struggling to find housing in Vermont. What we are struggling with is affordability for everyday Vermonters. We have an economic system that makes it hard for middle and low income individuals to afford to live here. This is an important distinction to make.	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
7	I think you call this out already in 3.4 "coordinating with related Vermont planning efforts". Under actions, the plan can highlight/support consideration of housing needs and community planning in conservation decisions (ie - avoiding where water and sewer are, where a community has zoned for growth, etc). Encouraging a development plan that more clearly designates areas for growth could also be called for.	11/4/2025 3:15 PM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

8	Show precedent and highlight case studies and, critically, show visual examples - master plans, before and afters, conservation designs, examples of conservation subdivisions. Fewer words and more images. Can draw from beyond VT's borders, or even New England for that matter.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
9	Promote sustainable forest management in natural resource management areas defined under Act 59. Support forest products industry. Housing needs wood which needs a forest products industry. Support the benefits of well managed forests balanced with passive management.	11/3/2025 6:21 AM
10	I think being honest that housing is both important AND development that is typically at odds with conservation. The statement "conservation is consistent with housing development" is perplexing, as it seems a way of 'sweeping the conflict under the rug." We need to be honest that housing will be prioritized, as is suggested by Act 181 and Tier 1 Act 250 areas, but that conservation will, effectively, identify areas where housing (or other development) should not happen. The plan could emphasize the fact that it will not impair the critical strides VT is making towards more and more affordable housing, but optimizing for those things is NOT part of the target outcomes of a conservation plan.	11/2/2025 7:20 PM

### Q3 Investing in Working Lands Viability to Support Conservation

Investments Comments on this point of tension include:- Keep forests/farms working vs. accelerating protection: Stakeholders stress that viability, new markets, and workforce are prerequisites to “keep forests as forests and farms as farms”; otherwise protection alone can feel misaligned with rural livelihoods.- Affordability & succession on farms and private working forests: Even with conservation investments, easements, and tools like the OPAV, equitable access still requires updated affordability tools and finance. How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It's important to acknowledge that our conservation goals are not viable without substantial private landowner buy-in; and this largely means that forest-related industries must remain profitable enough to keep them out of development. The state needs to do what it can to support those industries, particularly the timber products industry in light of our increased consumption of such products.	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	Act 59 should acknowledge that the Forest Future Roadmap exists to address the first bullet. Conservation is only one strategy to address working lands viability and Act 59 can be a complimentary piece to maintain intact forests. It is not the exclusive means to do it, and the Conservation Plan can speak to the diverse strategies that are needed to ensure working lands remain viable over time.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	Continued investment in our rural communities that are based around working lands by the state and local governments. Support our technical centers and their commitment to training the next generation of working land employees. Low cost financing for new and local businesses.	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	I think by increasing housing density and therefore increasing our population and workforce we will be providing more income opportunities for farmers and those working the land. Also encouraging Food Hubs such as the Center for Ag Economy which transports VT products out of state.	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	these investments should be based on circular, hyper-local regenerative systems rather than extractive, free-market, endless-growth illusions. These are policy aspirations of the highest order.	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	Personally, I don't believe this is an issue that this plan will solve. This plan is about permanently protecting 30% of Vermont, and about protecting 50% of Vermont through other durable mechanisms. It is not about solving economic problems. This problem is tied to our economic system and corresponding markets and economies of scale. This Plan is not going to solve that. What this plan can focus on is preserving the land base for those working lands enterprises. With that land base preserved, we can then develop other plans, pass other legislations, and come up with other solutions to solve the economic issues of farming and forestry in Vermont. If we lose the land base, we lose those sectors. By preserving the land base, we at least give ourselves the chance to come up with economic solutions down the road.	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
7	This doesn't feel like a tension to me - it feels like a "yes and" situation - yes, we need to protect the underlying land to ensure its availability for the future, and yes we need to continue to support working lands viability via market development, technical assistance, workforce development etc. The same for affordability and succession - we have some tools and we	11/4/2025 3:15 PM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

need to add more. These efforts should be alongside and simultaneous with 30x30 goals, including support for some of the other other Vermont planning efforts and also could be integrated into specific 50x50 actions.

8	Call for the development of farm and woodlands economic development strategies to complement the conservation plan. Here's one I led in NY: <a href="https://www.orangecountygov.com/DocumentCenter/View/1425/Agricultural-Economic-Development-Strategy-2004-PDF">https://www.orangecountygov.com/DocumentCenter/View/1425/Agricultural-Economic-Development-Strategy-2004-PDF</a> This is not the same as Farm to Plate. These are more local/regional in nature and are focused on actual farms and markets, or working forests and the local forest products businesses.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
9	Help landowners understand benefits of active forest mnagement.	11/3/2025 6:21 AM
10	The plan should be explicit in acknowledging that working lands "count" and will be leveraged as important elements of the final plan. I think there is concern that the KPIs / outcomes associated with working farms and forest are absent in Vermont Conservation Design and will therefore be lost. Conservation serves purposes other than biodiversity preservation, including (but not limited) to productive forests, agriculture, and outdoor recreation. These outcomes, which in part define the "Community Resilience" element of Act 59	11/2/2025 7:20 PM

**Q4 Equity & Access Comments on this point of tension include:- Who benefits from conservation? We have heard recurrent asks to name and address historic exclusion and to embed equity explicitly (EJ standards, shared benefits) in the plan and decisions. There have been calls to surface these tensions plainly in the conservation plan, not just in appendices.- Beyond “science-only” framing: There has been pushback on presenting VCD as solely “science-based” without dialog with Indigenous and other cultural frameworks; requests to expand science to be in dialogue with those ways of knowing. How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?**

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	This is a tough one. Ultimately I don't think the issue is the science itself, but with figuring out a way to present it to folks so that they don't feel talked down to and are comfortable "buying in." Meet people where they are- use social media, Front Porch Forum, local meetings etc to get residents in on the conversation and help them feel like they are an important part of the process.	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	The Conservation Plan (CP) should strive to integrate equity principles to the greatest degree possible; not in an appendix, but as part of the plan. There should be a filter for considering equity as the strategies and actions are developed. There should be a robust discussion around this topic, and the Conservation Plan and process should support inclusive perspectives as part of the discussion. The CP should also recommend that there will need to be ongoing work on this topic to give it the attention it deserves.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	Continued public engagement to explain the importance of both science based and cultural definitions that the general public has for "conservation".	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	I think we can encourage conservation of Indigenous sacred lands, such as we have seen in Brattleboro and elsewhere, consider allowing hunting on public lands, as well as re-iterate our goal to have one BIPOC owned farm in every town. Also, the market is responding to growing indigenous plants, perhaps encouraging that. Also invest in access through education: getting local food in schools and also getting local kids onto land.	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	Policy and aspirations need to be up front, not buried in footnotes; they are formative and will guide the work, rather than simply comment or critique. Indigenous knowledge and principles are specific to place, and for Vermont to completely omit this is a repetition of the colonizing principles that have gotten us into this tough spot in the first place. This recognition and a deliberate re-engagement of Native land relationship ethics is critical to our shared future (all of our relations, in a traditional sense) or we will repeat this scenario until we cannot.	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	We need to ensure that our conservation work is equitable and accessible. Historically, conservation work has not always been equitable. But, this plan is not about the past, this plan is about the future. I would suggest that we focus on how conservation can create greater equity and access across Vermont. Land Conservation is a valuable tool for achieving equity. I see this as an opportunity. The plan should identify opportunities to use the tool of land protection to increase equity in our communities and access to conserved lands. Yes, VCD is a science-based analysis, but that is just one conservation value of many that we protect. We also need to protect land for many social and cultural values as well. The plan should identify where and how we invest in these needs. The plan could suggest that we perform an analysis	11/5/2025 10:22 AM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

to identify priorities for how to advance equitable and accessible land protection across Vermont.

7	<p>Could the plan better address this tension at the forefront - the historical inequities and frameworks that conservation works within and can re-enforce (and in some cases works to push against, though imperfectly)? Can it address TEK (not sure how not to address the continuing indigenous identity issues in Vermont however)? Could this be it's own section of acknowledgement for context of what we are working within - this tension and these questions? In addition, every pathway should have EJ and equity specific actions called out.</p>	11/4/2025 3:15 PM
8	<p>I would again explore and present precedent that these communities at the table feel are good examples to be highlighted that have been done here or could be done here.</p>	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
9	<p>I think a science-based framework and approach to identifying conservation priorities makes sense. Taking action, i.e. what lands to conserve and under what management framework, legal status, and jurisdiction s where we need to involve all relevant stakeholders and make consensus-based decisions.</p>	11/3/2025 6:21 AM
10	<p>Regarding who benefits - I think a preamble to the plan that describes who has not historically been involved in conservation decisions or benefitted sufficiently from conserved lands would be valuable, along with a description of how this plan will not suffer the same shortfalls. Concerning the pushback on 'science-only' framing - I struggle with this complaint, as we do need to make fact-based decisions and not ones rooted in opinion or emotion. That said, the value of lands from a cultural standpoint is a factual input that should inform the plan and falls outside what many would call "science-only" framing. Similarly, lands have value for purposes beyond those identified in VCD, e.g. working landscapes, outdoor recreation, and cultural value. Perhaps spending some time flushing out what 'Community Resilience' means and how it will be incorporated in the plan would be worthwhile - VCD provides a 'science-based' tool for the biodiversity aspect of Act 59, and we need an equally clear and rigorous way of building in the other considerations for conserving land.</p>	11/2/2025 7:20 PM

**Q5 Resource Limitations and Scope of Ambition** Comments on this point of tension have included:- Easements are expensive and stewardship is resource-intensive: Listening sessions flag reliance on easements as costly and capacity-heavy; many urge new tools and funding models.- Stewardship funding gap: Strong sentiment that “simply conserving land” is insufficient; long-term stewardship and restoration resources are essential to actually meet Act 59 outcomes.- System capacity limits: Phase I feedback summarized in the framework notes that without expanded staffing/system support, goals can become “inactionable.”- Scale of funding: Parallel recommendations to substantially increase land-protection and implementation funding to realistically hit 2030 targets. How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I think this whole project comes down to figuring out how to leverage decreasing funds into increasing conserved acres, and using state money to lessen the financial burden on people doing charitable things is paramount. Create a fund to ease the cost of people creating easements, perhaps?	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	This is an important part of the Act 59 plan. I don't see this as a tension point, as much as a practical issue that needs strategy development and attention.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	I agree with all of these tensions and have more questions than answers to these issues.	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	A great point to bring up. Difficult to fundraise for "stewardship" versus land acquisition, but without proper and thorough stewardship, conservation has no teeth. Perhaps a hospitality or a real estate sale/transfer tax to go towards stewardship of our conserved lands?	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	Vermont is small. We need to actively engage and influence what happens on the Federal level, provide exemplary leadership. This will have a broader positive effect which will "come home."	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	This is the reality we live within. There is no way around this and it is not changing. We have a public system that does not invest in land protection and stewardship. On the NGO side we rely on private philanthropy, which is not enough to address the many needs of the conservation community. The plan is not going to solve either of these issues. I think we need to accept this reality. Once we accept this reality, the plan can identify ways or new sources of funding to work within it. What can we do to better resource stewardship? What can we do to increase funding for land protection?	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
7	Easements are generally substantially cheaper than land ownership. New funding models, tools and funding mechanisms that bring more efficiency, cut bureaucracy and support stewardship (of easements and of land) is critical. This is a tension, but a healthy one - it is the tension that pushes us to prioritize the most impactful land conservation opportunities, to seek to streamline, collaborate and modernize and to make the case to grow resources for this work.	11/4/2025 3:15 PM
8	Consider presenting a "transect" or continuum of pathways and actions based upon intensity of resources required for each. Visual representation might help communicate practicable actions that are best suited to resource availability and scarcity.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

9	Support ANR to manage conserved lands. Acknowledge that 30% permanently conserved by 2030 will be difficult or impossible without more resources.	11/3/2025 6:21 AM
10	The best way to address the resource limitations tension is to clearly articulate both a) the resources and capacity currently available and b) estimate what the needs of the proposed actions will be early on in the process. There will need to be some back and forth in honing in on what is actually pursued based on the capacity it will require and our collective expectation around investment. There is also a clear need to be as efficient as possible with resources at all stages, which should be kept in mind throughout the development of the plan. Perhaps adding some realism - the estimated cost if we simple try to close the 3% gap with Easements - would also help, as would estimates as to stewardship costs. As long as there is clear recognition that this plan won't be a 'wish list' or a 'money-no-object' approach to reaching our goals, I think this point of tension can be navigated.	11/2/2025 7:20 PM

**Q6 Balancing Recreation Access and Ecological Protection** Comments on this point of tension include:- “Loved to death” sites and shared-use conflicts: As interest in outdoor access grows, the core tension is where and how to add trails, access points, and amenities without degrading sensitive resources. Vermont has emerging siting and design guidance (e.g., the Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit, Town Forest Trail Design Guide, and ANR’s Guidelines for Minimizing Recreational Impacts to Ecological Resources), but questions remain about which standards to use when, who applies them, and how much impact is acceptable in different settings. How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I personally favor trail-less woods with nobody in in it, but if we are serious about our goals we need everybody in the tent. Try to accommodate the access needs of interested groups whenever possible.	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	I guess I am not sure Act 59 is supposed to address standards for management, versus strategies for conservation. If there is a desire to develop appropriate standards for any one issue, this feels like a recommendation that should be made in the CP for future work. Act 59 recognizes that we should track the progress of conserving lands in different categories, which means we want a spectrum of lands conserved, from those that have less recreational impacts to those that are well suited for recreation of all kinds.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	Use current recreation sites to promote stewardship and best practices to help ease the conflict. Use the Vermont Forest and Parks guidelines as standards.	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	Seems to me that "too much use" should be our rallying cry to increase public access to more land! Basic "supply and demand" scenario: if the demand is outpacing the supply then increase the supply. Can we put a dollar amount to the activity that public lands encourages? As someone who has attempted to park and hike Camel's Hump on a given summer Saturday, I certainly understand the risks of over-traveled trails, but there is no putting the proverbial cat inside the bag, so we just need to bolster our inventory is my feeling. Again, perhaps the Chambers of Commerce can recognize the value and businesses can sponsor local trails, etc.	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	we need less exoticization of places and pursuits, and find ways to make connection with land and water a part of everyday life; this will help address issues of equity and access also.	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	We need to continue to point to this balance and the tools we have to make decisions in these instances. We need our conserved lands to both offer recreational access and to protect our natural resources. There is space in the state to accommodate both, and it is up to our conservation community and land managers to adequately navigate this tension. Similar to housing, we can stress that there are appropriate places to encourage recreation, and inappropriate places.	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
7	The more land is made accessible, the more varied types of accessibility are sought and developed, the more we reduce "loved to death" sites. Additionally, in 50x50 actions, support for consistent standards, technical assistance and sustainability could be added	11/4/2025 3:15 PM
8	Again, show precedent. What has worked where and what would be well-suited to the VT context.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
9	Continue to develop open access to forest and waters to disperse impact from recreation.	11/3/2025 6:21 AM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

---

10	<p>I think it needs to be made loud and clear that recreation is an acceptable purpose FOR conservation and is, itself, a positive impact. The idea of 'recreation vs. conservation' is along the lines of half-earth thinking, and the reality is that well-built trails are by far the most sustainable, lowest environmentally impactful way for humans to access conserved lands. That said, it's also clear that some lands are so environmentally sensitive that we, generally, want to discourage (or at least not promote) human visitation. However, some of these same areas are places people will want to - and perhaps deserve - to visit. If we applied the pure "minimize environmental impact" approach, we would not have the long or Appalachian trails, many ski areas, etc... In terms of addressing this tension, I think we can both be clear about recreations impacts while also noting that it can be both a driver of and a huge boost to conservation, rather than simply work to 'minimize harm.'" Additionally, lower-value recreational projects should be distinguished from higher-value ones, which can help guide decision making on whether and where to include, for example, trails as part of conserved piece of land.</p>	11/2/2025 7:20 PM
----	--	-------------------

---

Q7 Language, Culture & Goals Comments on this point of tension include:- Half-Earth skepticism (may focus too much on protected areas and neglect other necessary measures) & cultural framing: Concerns that exclusionary framings can replicate colonial dynamics; requests to define “resilience” and to center economic justice alongside ecological goals so communities can actually prioritize conservation.- Clarity about “conservation work”: Calls to define what counts as conservation activity and who is included as “conservation organizations.”How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Honestly I think these particular tensions aren't going anywhere. We have a lot of decades of mistrust around "Conservation" to work through because people feel as though they are excluded by the process, and all we can do now is prove that wrong at every opportunity by musing the process as inclusive as possible.	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	Conservation organizations should be defined broadly to be inclusive of diverse approaches and perspectives. What counts as conservation activity for meeting the goals and vision should be part of discussion. While the conservation goals are focused on more permanent and durable options, the CP is supposed to include strategies to meet the broad vision of the act as well, which can include many diverse conservation strategies. Half earth or VCD science driven targets have a place for consideration in the plan. Focusing on meeting the needs of biodiversity is a worthy goal, and it need not be advanced at the exclusion of economic justice or other considerations. These can be done in a compatible way.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	Good Luck!	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	Yes, understood that who are we to say "conserved forever", and alter the accessibility to land, etc. However, I would rather have land conserved and held in perpetuity by a public Trust with the greater community in mind (and than means access) than bought up by a private equity group that is beholden to no one. This is the very real scenario unfolding.	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	This: Half-Earth skepticism (may focus too much on protected areas and neglect other necessary measures) & cultural framing: Concerns that exclusionary framings can replicate colonial dynamics; requests to define “resilience” and to center economic justice alongside ecological goals so communities can actually prioritize conservation. I don't particularly like the phrase "half-earth skepticism" since it skews the point, but I understand what is being suggested.	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	I think the plan needs to be as open and inclusive as possible. We need to ensure that people see themselves within it.	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
7	I would name this tension along with #4 in it's own page. In terms of what counts as conservation could be addressed via 50x50 actions, since 30x30 actions are pretty subscribed by the legislative language.	11/4/2025 3:15 PM
8	Again an opportunity to show precedent of how to protect resources not only by conserving it, but how we live in it and how we relate to it.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
9	Promote natural resources management.	11/3/2025 6:21 AM
10	Clearly, the plan needs to include more plain-language definitions or who, what, etc... As noted above, there is also a need to lay out a more specific definition for Community Resilience and how it will be measured/improved. Emphasizing that this is half of Act 59 - and what it actually	11/2/2025 7:20 PM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

means - will go a long way towards disarming concern that this plan is just a tool to implement of VCD and ignore other conservation priorities. This is relate to the tension that the plan is too "science-based".

---

**Q8 Governance, Roles & “Who Decides?”** Comments on this point of tension include:- Representation & roles: Requests to expand the “conservation community” to reflect Vermont’s diversity and to integrate Environmental Justice perspectives in decision-making (not just as commenters).- Coordination across plans: Multiple state strategies are in play (Climate Action Plan, Forest Future Roadmap, Act 121/181). The tension is avoiding duplication and ensuring VCP clarifies “who leads” and “how pieces fit.” How do you think we can best address this tension point in the further development of the VCP pathways and actions?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 4

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	We need as many groups and people in as big a tent as possible if 50x50 is going to be a reality.	11/7/2025 7:08 PM
2	My perception is the TAC includes Environmental Justice perspectives and they should be considered and valued in the decision making process of the CP. I agree that there needs to be coordination across plans and the CP should acknowledge the interrelationship of different plans while avoiding duplication.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
3	Duplication is one issue but more importantly conflicts can and will occur between state strategies. State funded efforts like WLEI, and Forest Roadmap are fast at work and there is a potential for these programs to expand working lands that will fly in the face of expanding conservation community. Educating the conservation community to the importance of working lands to the smaller communities is a must if we are to succeed.	11/7/2025 12:50 PM
4	Do our best to be accessible and have as many folks at the table as possible. How do we do this? By keeping our language non-intimidating. By overcoming distance and economic barriers by offering a zoom link to every conversation and reimbursing folks for mileage who choose to travel to meetings. By encouraging boards and organizations that make decisions to do the same. And yes, work across state lines for sure.	11/6/2025 10:29 AM
5	Definitely need more voices, especially "indigenous" perspectives. I use parentheses because categorization is a part of the problem. To exclude the land relationship worldviews that have evolved here, in place over thousands of years - sustainability in a word - is completely missing the opportunity to systemically examine the root causes of our current challenges.	11/6/2025 8:00 AM
6	I see the plan as suggesting a set of principles and actions to follow, with anyone being able to provide input. Will the plan define the conservation community, or who makes decisions? I do think the plan should reference, build upon, and work with other plans when possible. But with the number of plans out there it would be impossible to coordinate with all of them. I would ensure that this plan is solidly focused in its Land Protection lane, which will ensure that it doesn't drift into the territory of other plans.	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
7	The legislation dictates some of this, and creates or perpetuates that tension. This could be named as well and some actions drafted to address it over the long term, to last through the duration of the plan in terms of developing a big tent, seeking diverse and broad input, increasing the accessibility of these conversations and encouraging communities to participate and lowering barriers, etc. Specific actions that will work on this going forward would be a good addition - to every pathway.	11/4/2025 3:15 PM
8	I'm feeling like this is similar to #7.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
9	Focus on land conservation and preventing conversion of forest land to other uses	11/3/2025 6:21 AM

## VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

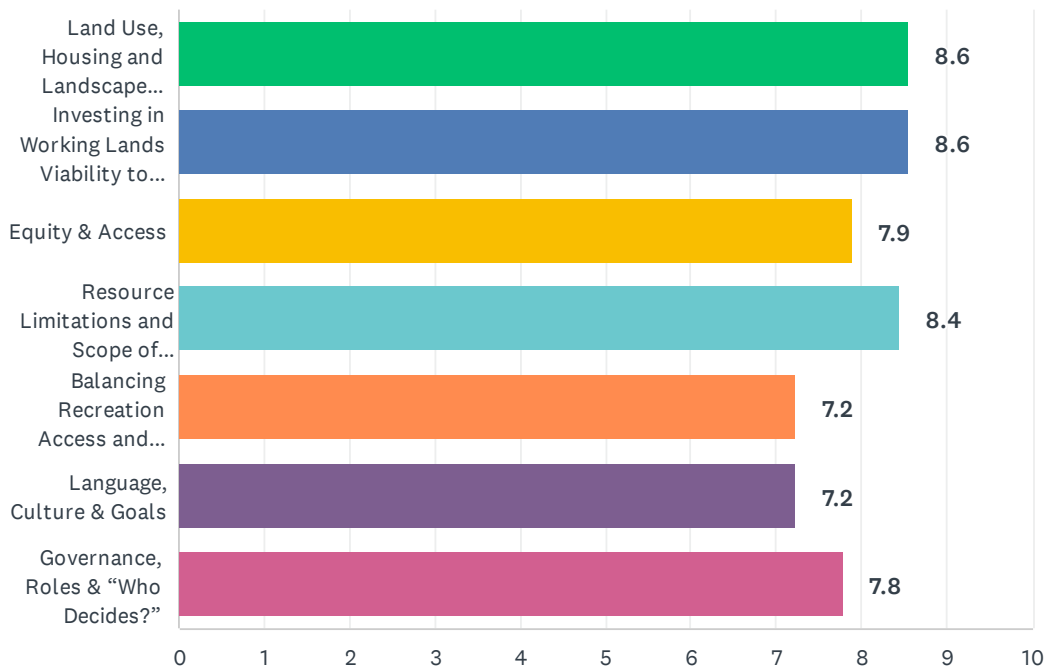
10 Regarding other plans - it would be worth dedicating a portion of the report to how the VCP will interface with the other relevant plans, especially regarding prioritization and how decisions will be made where there is conflict. Transparency as to how these situations will be resolved should address much of the tension here. In terms of decision-making - clarity here as to how decisions will be made and by whom is important, both at the level of the individual priorities / activities and overarching objectives. This should go beyond having a simple 'public comment' on proposals that can be addressed or ignored, and bake in some involvement from key groups and the public, as appropriate, into decision making.

---

11/2/2025 7:20 PM

### Q9 IMPORTANCE OF EACH 'TENSION POINT' How important do you think these stakeholder identified 'tension points' are to the development of the Vermont Conservation Plan? SCALE: 1 = Not Important; 10 = Critically Important

Answered: 9 Skipped: 5



VCP - TAC Members - Points of Tension Survey

	1. NOT IMPORTANT	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10. CRITICALLY IMPORTANT	DON'T KNOW
Land Use, Housing and Landscape Integrity	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	33.3% 3	33.3% 3	22.2% 2	0.0% 0
Investing in Working Lands Viability to Support Conservation Investments	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	22.2% 2	11.1% 1	44.4% 4	0.0% 0
Equity & Access	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	11.1% 1	22.2% 2	22.2% 2	22.2% 2	0.0% 0
Resource Limitations and Scope of Ambition	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	22.2% 2	33.3% 3	22.2% 2	22.2% 2	0.0% 0
Balancing Recreation Access and Ecological Protection	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	22.2% 2	22.2% 2	22.2% 2	11.1% 1	0.0% 0
Language, Culture & Goals	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	22.2% 2	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	22.2% 2	0.0% 0	33.3% 3	0.0% 0
Governance, Roles & "Who Decides?"	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	22.2% 2	11.1% 1	0.0% 0	33.3% 3	0.0% 0	33.3% 3	0.0% 0

## Q10 What other key 'tension points' do you think we need to consider?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 9

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	As mentioned above I don't think the process should focus on a debate about how conserved lands should be managed. I interpret Act 59 as supporting strategies for land conservation under diverse categories of land management (passive and active), but the act does not dictate how the land should be managed (it more focuses on how to track land under different management categories). If the debate centers on whether public lands should be harvested, for example, we will miss a critical opportunity to talk about land conservation strategies at large. Let's first focus on the broad strategies that we need to advance conservation for diverse values without getting side tracked over a debates about how conserved land needs to be managed.	11/7/2025 6:07 PM
2	These tension points are all content-related. I think the larger tension point is process-related, and we can't address the content tensions until we address the process tensions. Since the beginning of the TAC, members have raised questions and concerns about how to engage the public in an authentic way to make sure the pathways and objectives are inclusive of all Vermonters. Members have also sought clarity on roles, timelines, and milestones. Repeatedly, these questions and concerns have gone un-addressed. I have not heard about any substantive plan for public engagement. I also do not understand what to expect from the process, as it appears to change every month. I was surprised and disappointed that the meeting on 9/25 made no mention of any of the issues that TAC members have repeatedly raised--it presented the process as if it were going perfectly smoothly. I am serving on the TAC in a volunteer capacity, so I don't have a lot of extra time to dedicate to this, but I'm concerned that the TAC is being used to rubber-stamp the VCP. I see an opportunity to hire a different facilitator or to bring in additional facilitators to get the process back on track. I think the combination of unclear process and TAC members not feeling heard has led to an erosion of trust in the facilitator.	11/7/2025 12:20 PM
3	the tension of the timeline dictated by the legislation and the ideal timeline to move through the most equitable and expansive conversation about these complicated topics; the tension between the intersectionality of our challenges as a society and what conservation can successfully address in isolation; the tension of the many demands on our limited resources.	11/4/2025 3:15 PM
4	Be explicit in what this plan does and does not do. I think many assume it's far more prescriptive than what it is.	11/3/2025 10:14 AM
5	There also feels to be some tension around the original legislation and what can actually be done within the scope of Act 59. I think it could be made more clear what is mandated by law and that desires to go beyond or seek alternative outcomes require legislative actions - not things VHCB/ANR can accomplish through the current plan.	11/2/2025 7:20 PM

## Q11 Other comments What additional thoughts do you have about these Points of Tension, or any other areas of tension in the VCP Objectives, pathways and process?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 12

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	these are all points of tension, but they are inherent to doing this work. I would encourage us not give into a polarized / binary way of looking at these issues and to appreciate the nuance and spectrum that these tensions exist upon.	11/5/2025 10:22 AM
2	My perspective is that tensions are namable but often not immediately resolvable. Naming them is really good, but I am not sure if we can address them in this plan in a way that resolves them or satisfies the varied perspectives on them. I struggled to rank them therefore - as I think all are important to name, and all important to address, but I also think the plan can and will do that to the extent it can under the timeline and with the legislative language that we are working with. So I could therefore have ranked them all as high or all as low. The more actions can be named as addressing either side of a tension, or both, the better I think, in the pathways. I ranked all as high in the end - but wanted to explain why.	11/4/2025 3:15 PM

## Objective 1: Conservation for Communities

Objective #: Objective Title

### Pathway #: Title

Brief description of pathway and how it relates to Act 59 goals.

#### **Contribution toward Act 59 Vision, Goals and Equity Considerations:**

**Vision:** Description of how this pathway advances the set of values articulated in the vision statement of Act 59.

**Goals:** Description of how this pathway advances the 2030 and 2050 goals articulated in Act 59, including with respect to increased protections for the three land categories.

**Equity Consideration:** Description of the public interest benefits that will result from pursuit of this pathway for all Vermonters. Indication of, where applicable, work under this pathway that also benefits more vulnerable communities and any resulting need/opportunity to coordinate with those communities in this pathway's implementation.

#### **Complementary Initiatives and Programs:**

Existing plans and programs and other key efforts related to this pathway with which this work will be coordinated. How does this pathway support those initiatives and vice versa?

### Actions to [Name of Pathway]

**Action 1: Bold title of action.** Description of purpose of action and what it accomplishes.

**Sub-action #: Bold title of sub-action.** Specific, actionable tasks and responsible lead agency/party. In addition to that description, purpose of action should be clear/delineated.

**Sub-action #: Following sub-actions follow format above.**

**Targets and Metrics:** What are the qualitative and quantitative targets and metrics that will be used to measure progress on this action towards the 2030 and 2050 goals of Act 59? This includes progress with respect to the three land categories as well as progress towards other key, improved conservation outcomes. Describe targets after this heading and then set off metrics with a set of bullets.

- Metric
- Metric

#### **Lead Implementers: ANR and VHCB**

- **Key Partners:** Essential partners and participants that will need to be engaged for successful implementation of this action. Name these partners/participants by category (tie back to Act 59 legislation list as possible).

## Objective 1: Conservation for Communities

- **Resource Considerations:** What's possible with current capacity? What are the capacity and resource gaps that need to be addressed to meet 2030 and 2050 goals? Additionally, are there new efficiencies and innovations that could also help scale up this work?

**Action #:** [Leaving this blank to indicate that there will be additional actions under this pathway.]

## Objective 1: Conservation for Communities

### Pathway \_\_\_: Strengthen Climate Resilience

This pathway will identify conservation actions and investments to make Vermont's communities and conserved lands more resilient in the face of climate change, promoting flood resilience, habitat connectivity, improved water quality and critical resource protection. Investments will protect lands where conservation helps to leverage restoration and enhancement of degraded wetlands, floodplains and river corridors, as well as protecting habitats and resources whose conversion would increase the impacts of climate change.

#### **Contribution toward Act 59 Vision, Goals and Equity Considerations:**

**Vision:** This pathway supports multiple elements of the conservation Vision in Act 59 with investments intended to bring about multiple co-benefits and outcomes. The conservation and restoration of floodplains and river corridors not only protects built infrastructure and downtowns, but also promotes habitat connectivity and improves water quality. Likewise, the permanent protection and buffering of riparian corridors and wetlands on our working lands supports rural enterprise as well as reduces impacts from agricultural and silvicultural land use.

**Goals:** This pathway will expand the network of conserved wetlands, riparian corridors, floodplains, headwaters and upland forests that strengthen the state's climate resilience and contribute towards the Act's 2030 and 2050 conservation goals. The most significant contribution of investments under this pathway for the 2030 and 2050 goals will be to increase lands protected under the ERA and BCA categories, but these investments will support the resilience of conserved lands in the NRMA category as well.

**Equity Consideration:** This pathway is focused on investments to protect the forests, wetlands and sensitive areas for climate resilience, protecting infrastructure, downtowns while also promoting ecological connection and function around our waters. Resilience focused investments protect all Vermonters, especially our most vulnerable neighbors, those who work on the landscape, and all whose homes and jobs are threatened by climate change impacts. It will be important to coordinate this work with community focused organizations and partners who work with vulnerable communities to align these investments with Vermont's goals for environmental justice.

#### **Complementary Initiatives and Programs:**

This pathway will be coordinated with Vermont's Climate Action Plan and Resilience Implementation Strategy, the Environmental Justice Program, as well as watershed-based and community led initiatives and planning, Tactical Basin Plans and Clean Water initiatives. This pathway helps these initiatives succeed by directing land conservation and restoration dollars toward the wetlands, river corridors, floodplains, headwaters, and upland forests that are most important for reducing climate risk while also supporting biodiversity, working lands, and community well-being.

## Objective 1: Conservation for Communities

### Actions to Strengthen Climate Resilience

**Action 1: Protect and Restore Vermont's Natural Resilience Infrastructure.** Identify, protect and restore the natural areas that safeguard Vermont's natural and human communities from climate impacts, including resilience-focused public and private conservation investments for wetlands, riparian corridors, floodplains, headwaters and upland forests.

**Sub Action 1: Expand Floodplain and Wetland Conservation.** VHCB will identify opportunities to fund easements and strategic purchases of frequently flooded lands and intact river corridors along Vermont's rivers and streams with. VHCB's will coordinate with hazard mitigation programs (e.g. FEMA floodplain buyouts) to maximize flood resilience benefits, and ensure easements include riparian buffer protections. Work with willing landowners in flood-prone areas to restore and reconnect historic floodplains and wetlands.

- **Sub Action 2: Integrate Restoration into Conservation Projects.** VHCB will screen new land conservation projects for opportunities to restore natural hydrology and ecosystem function (wetland, river corridor, or floodplain restoration) and identify opportunities to fund conservation efforts on properties with significant restoration potential and landowner willingness to implement resilience measures.

**Targets and Metrics:** This action will be tracked using a small set of portfolio-level indicators that show whether Vermont is steadily increasing resilience-focused conservation investments under all three land categories. Metrics include:

Acres of wetlands, floodplains, river corridors, riparian buffers, headwaters and upland forests conserved annually.

- Acres of wetlands, floodplains, river corridors, riparian buffers, headwaters and upland forests restored annually through public or private funding.
- Restored connectivity of river systems, wetlands and floodplains.

#### Lead Implementers: ANR and VHCB

- **Key Partners** – State Agencies and quasi-public entities, conservation organizations, landowners and working-lands partners, Federal agencies, philanthropic foundations and mission-aligned lenders.
- **Resource Considerations:** Current investments should be augmented to include additional capacity at VHCB, ANR and key partner organizations (e.g., land trusts, watershed groups, conservation districts, and regional planning commissions) to provide guidance and technical assistance to landowners and communities, and to identify high-impact resilience projects. Additional capital funding will be needed through ANR, VHCB, and other state, federal, philanthropic, and private funders to increase the pace of protection and especially restoration, as well as to cover the added costs of planning, design, and long-term stewardship associated with resilience-focused conservation.

## Objective 1: Conservation for Communities

**Action 2:** [Leaving this blank to indicate that there will be additional actions under this pathway.]



# 5.0 | THE VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN – DRAFT FRAMEWORK



The mandate of The Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (CRBPA – Act 59) is to produce a conservation plan that will prioritize conservation investments that help to protect healthy forests, habitat connectivity, biodiversity protection, outdoor recreation, sustainable forestry, public health and climate resilient communities.

## THE VISION OF THE VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN

CRBPA - Act 59 of 2023 states that the vision of the State of Vermont is to maintain an ecologically functional landscape that sustains biodiversity, maintains landscape connectivity, supports watershed health, promotes climate resilience, supports working farms and forests, provides opportunities for recreation and appreciation of the natural world, and supports the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas.

### VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN FRAMEWORK - KEY OBJECTIVES

The Vermont Conservation Plan will be based on three key objectives, each of which has a set of pathways, or key focal areas, which will drive the identification of a set of actions that helps advance conservation in ways that are thoughtful, strategic and pragmatic, setting Vermont on a course to a healthier and more resilient future.

**OBJECTIVE ONE**

**SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN COMMUNITIES**

This objective is focused on how to better connect people and communities to the land, and to advance conservation in ways that benefit people and protect natural and working lands.

**OBJECTIVE TWO**

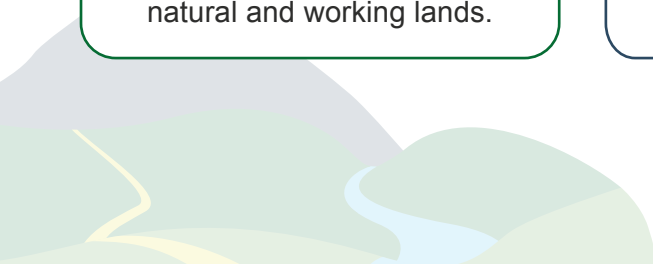
**CENTER VERMONT CONSERVATION DESIGN**

This objective is focused on how to protect, restore and maintain an ecologically functioning and connected natural and working landscape.

**OBJECTIVE THREE**

**STRENGTHEN CONSERVATION CAPACITY**

This objective is focused on expanding the conservation community’s ability to sustainably protect and steward land.





**Objective 1:  
Support  
Conservation in  
Communities**

## 5.1 | OBJECTIVE ONE: SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN COMMUNITIES

**This objective is focused on how to better connect people and communities to the land. It aims to advance conservation in ways that benefit people and communities by protecting natural and working lands, enhancing recreation, and supporting equitable access.**

Conservation investments benefit people and communities and make our lands and watersheds healthier. The conservation of natural and working forests and agricultural lands and the expansion of recreational and educational opportunities all connect people with the land. All these benefits help fulfill the overall vision of CRBPA - Act 59.

**Objective One reflects both the spirit and substance of Act 59 by positioning thriving communities, farms, and forests as integral to long-term conservation success.**



### Connection to CRBPA - Act 59 and Phase 1 Outcomes

- Phase 1 participants stressed the need for conservation efforts that are not only ecological but also social, including access to nature, cultural relevance, recreational opportunities, and fairness in how conservation benefits are distributed.
- Phase 1 outputs from the Agricultural Lands Working Group strongly advocated for the ecological value of conserved farmland, pasture, and soil systems. This is directly reflected in the pathways, which aim to ‘lift-up’ the Food Resilience and Forest Future Roadmaps.
- Focus groups, particularly with farmers, loggers, and recreation advocates, emphasized that conservation cannot succeed without recognizing community resilience and land use traditions.



**Objective 1:  
Support  
Conservation in  
Communities**

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN

The following is an initial list of implications associated with this objective. These implications will be considered more fully as the pathways and actions are built-out as part the development of the Vermont Conservation Plan.



Working forests and agricultural lands are important cornerstones of Vermont’s landscape and conservation future. It is more important than ever to **protect the lands that produce the food and forest products upon which we and our economy depend** by conserving these lands in perpetuity and making ecologically oriented land management practices more viable for landowners.



**Access to outdoor recreational opportunities**, from hunting and fishing to hiking and biking to walking and wildlife watching, is **essential to the health and well-being** of Vermonters and visitors alike.



*Photo Courtesy of VTF&W*



Act 59 calls for the Conservation Plan to make “recommendations to **provide and increase equitable access** to protected and conserved lands and land-based enterprises.”



Vermont is experiencing **more frequent and intense climate-related events**, including heat waves, drought, flooding, and forest disturbances. Meeting these challenges will require **scaling up strategic land conservation efforts** and implementing nature-based climate solutions that will make landscapes and communities more resilient.



Vermont’s conserved lands are **living classrooms and laboratories that support myriad educational opportunities**. From a town forest adjacent to an elementary school, to university research on state land, to a master naturalist program visiting the local nature reserve, our conserved lands support educational opportunities that **help Vermonters form lasting connections to the natural world**. At the same time, conservation organizations need to help landowners and communities understand how they can benefit from land conservation.





## Objective 1: Support Conservation in Communities

### POTENTIAL PATHWAYS

These potential pathways are an initial starting point to developing the Vermont Conservation Plan. These will be further refined shaped by stakeholder input.



#### PROMOTE NATURAL AREAS AND SUSTAINABLE WORKING LANDS

This pathway will identify strategies and investments to make conserved working lands more resilient, ecologically functional and healthy. We need more technical and financial supports to make ecologically beneficial land management practices viable for landowners. This pathway will ‘lift up’ related work under Vermont’s Forest Future Roadmap, Food Security Roadmap and other related plans.



#### INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS

This pathway aims to identify investments and programmatic opportunities that will expand and improve equitable access to conserved lands, land-based enterprises and recreational opportunities.



#### SUPPORT OUTDOOR RECREATION

This pathway will promote diverse outdoor recreation opportunities through strategic investments in land protection and management. We need to identify ways to improve recreational access while protecting ecological values as well. This pathway’s actions could be coordinated with the implementation of the state’s blueprint for outdoor recreation, Move Forward Together Vermont, aimed at strengthening outdoor recreation opportunities across the state.



#### STRENGTHEN CLIMATE RESILIENCE

This pathway will identify actions and investments in nature-based solutions that make Vermont’s communities and conserved lands more resilient in the face of climate change. These actions will yield multiple benefits, including community resilience, habitat connectivity, improved water quality and critical resource protection. This pathway will be coordinated with Vermont’s Climate Action Plan and Resilience Implementation Strategy.



#### EXPAND PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

This pathway will promote educational opportunities that connect Vermonters to the natural world, and expands cultural empowerment that promotes human-earth connections. It will also help communities, landowners and land managers understand why, how and where to conserve lands.



## 5.2 | OBJECTIVE TWO: CENTER VERMONT CONSERVATION DESIGN

**This objective is focused on how to protect, restore and maintain an ecologically functioning and connected natural and working landscape.**

This objective is guided by Vermont Conservation Design (VCD), a science-based framework to protect the lands, waters, plants and wildlife that are most critical to an ecologically functional landscape. Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) allows us to identify where we can build upon our existing network of conserved lands in ways that advance the ecological goals envisioned by Act 59. The VCD framework highlights the need to promote conservation at all scales – from large forest blocks and riparian corridors to rare natural communities and species with specific habitat needs – to ensure we maintain and enhance ecological function and connection.

CRBPA Act 59 calls for using Vermont Conservation Design to prioritize and guide the 30x30 goal, recognizing VCD as a strategic science-based framework to sustain Vermont's ecologically functional landscape.



### Connection to CRBPA - Act 59 and Phase 1 Outcomes

- This objective aligns directly with Act 59's directive to use Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) as the backbone for identifying priority conservation areas.
- Phase 1 stakeholders repeatedly endorsed the need for science-driven conservation strategies. The Aquatic and State Lands working groups (2024) both affirmed that planning tools like VCD are critical to ensuring ecological integrity across both public and private lands.
- Stakeholder interviews and focus groups also noted a gap in representation of low-elevation ecosystems, which Objective 1 seeks to correct through pathway on Ecological Representation.
- Conservation Categories Workgroup (2024) recognized the value of permanently protected natural systems and emphasized minimal interference management strategies.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN

The following is an initial list of implications associated with this objective. These implications will be considered more fully as the pathways and actions are built-out as part the development of the Vermont Conservation Plan.



Vermont's **conserved lands are not equally distributed across Vermont's nine biophysical regions**. In terms of acreage, more of Vermont's major forest blocks, connectivity blocks and important habitats have been conserved in the Northern Green Mountains, Southern Green Mountains, and Northeastern Highlands than in the other six biophysical regions. **Each biophysical region has its own ecological context, with characteristic natural communities and species**, but a significant percentage of Vermont's currently conserved lands protect high-elevation mountain natural communities and their species.



Ecological connectivity among large, protected forest blocks is important both for wide-ranging species like black bear, moose, and American marten, and to accommodate the long-term shifts of plant and animal distributions in response to climate change. **Protecting the corridors for plants and animals to naturally shift and redistribute is perhaps the single most important step we can take to ensure Vermont's biodiversity is resilient to climate change.** A network of connected forest blocks can provide this connectivity, both across the state, and across the region. Vermont is also an important ecological linkage between the Adirondacks, the Berkshires, and the mountains of New Hampshire, Maine, and Quebec.



Both young and old forests are rich in biodiversity, and both conditions are underrepresented in Vermont. **Vermont Conservation Design identifies targets for restoring old and young forest** in order to balance forest age and structure, increase biodiversity, sequester and store carbon, and increase resilience to climate change. **Additional investments to establish Ecological Reserve Areas** in the biophysical regions outside the Northern and Southern Green Mountains will help support each region's characteristic natural communities and species.



Connected aquatic and riparian systems are critical to maintaining biodiversity and ecological function. **Land conservation supports healthy aquatic systems** when it protects riparian functions or mitigates surface runoff and improves water quality within a watershed. However, **land conservation by itself is not always sufficient** to fully maintain and restore aquatic systems, and the water quality, flood resilience, and biodiversity benefits they provide.



**An ecologically functional landscape needs all its parts.** The fine-scale mix of rare and uncommon plants and animals, significant natural communities, and important habitats (such as grasslands and vernal pools) are the biodiversity gems of Vermont's landscape. Many of these occur in small, specific settings, and will not be conserved unless they are specifically sought out.



## POTENTIAL PATHWAYS

These potential pathways are an initial starting point to developing the Vermont Conservation Plan. These will be further refined shaped by stakeholder input.



### EXPAND ECOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION

This pathway is focused on better representing all nine biophysical regions, and places additional focus on the six under-represented biophysical regions, ensuring that these places and their biodiversity will be conserved.



### PROTECT CONNECTIVITY CORRIDORS

This pathway identifies ways to protect landscape-scale corridors within Vermont's regional connectivity network that are conservation priorities, promote overall forest health and function, and keep corridors connected.



### IMPROVE FOREST STRUCTURE

This pathway addresses the biophysical regions and their forest types that have been underrepresented in Ecological Reserve Areas, as well as locations for establishing Biodiversity Conservation and Natural Resource Management Areas. Actions taken under this pathway will improve representation of both old and young forests as well as the complexity and diversity of forest structure across the landscape.



### SUPPORT AQUATIC SYSTEMS

This pathway identifies the actions needed to steward, manage, and restore riparian areas and aquatic systems on both existing and new conserved lands.



### PROTECT RARE AND SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL FEATURES

This pathway highlights the need to enhance and increase the protection of rare and uncommon species, significant natural communities, and the important habitats of Vermont Conservation Design.



## 5.3 | OBJECTIVE THREE: STRENGTHEN CONSERVATION CAPACITY

**This objective is focused on expanding the conservation community's ability to sustainably protect and steward land.**

This plan's success is dependent on having the people, programs, funding and innovations needed to successfully implement Act 59 in years to come. This work includes strengthening the whole conservation community, including the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Agency of Natural Resources, conservation organizations, municipalities, landowners, and the many public and private organizations that support community-level conservation. Phase 1 input reported concerns about underfunding and limited access to financing tools. Stakeholders requested streamlined, permanent funding mechanisms and equitable access to technical support.

Phase 1 Inventory Report acknowledged that without expanded staffing and system support, the goals of Act 59 are "inactionable," especially for state land planning, management and protection.



### Connection to CRBPA - Act 59 and Phase 1 Outcomes

- Objective Three squarely addresses the major barriers raised across Phase 1, especially in the Funding and Capacity work and interviews with NGOs and landowners. The call for tripled investment in land protection aligns with the pathways, which include proposing expanded funding for planning, acquisition, and stewardship.
- Many focus groups, including those involving BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) stakeholders, noted that conservation success depends on who has access to resources.
- Act 59 was clear in its finding that resilient ecosystems require resilient management and support systems. Objective Three answers that call by proposing stronger public-private collaboration, financial innovation, and expanded support networks.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN

The following is an initial list of implications associated with this objective. These implications will be considered more fully as the pathways and actions are built-out as part the development of the Vermont Conservation Plan.



To meet Vermont's immediate and long-term conservation vision and goals, we will need a **significant increase in conservation funding at each stage of the conservation process**. Resources are needed for planning, conservation easement and land acquisition, long-term management and protection, restoration and land and easement stewardship. In the Phase 1 work to develop the initial Act 59 Inventory Report, the Funding and Capacity Workgroup recommended that **Vermont would need to triple current funding for land protection alone to meet the 2030 goal**.



Sustainable land conservation is not only about legally protecting land. It also requires **continued long-term care for the land and its values**. Given the need to restore degraded wetlands, streams, floodplains, and other habitats, we need stewardship capacity for the long-term health of conserved lands. And **the need for stewardship capacity will only grow** as we conserve more lands to meet the goals of Act 59.



To meet our long-term goals for a connected and functioning landscape, **we need to advance conservation efforts at multiple scales**. We need to support the statewide conservation organizations who focus on large parcels and conservation at the landscape-scale. We also need the local organizations that are working to address community priorities, as well as regional groups collaborating within and between counties.



**Land conservation organizations rely on skilled professionals and highly engaged community members to perform their work**. They need surveyors, appraisers, attorneys, ecologists and foresters, as well as select board and conservation commission members, to protect Vermont's lands and waters, forests and fields.



If we are to meet our conservation goals, we need to **develop and implement new conservation programs and tools**. Existing tools, such as fee ownership and conservation easements, are very effective, but require significant funding and resources to implement and steward. Given federal cuts to programs and funding for this work, **we need to ensure that our conservation tools are as efficient and effective as possible**.



## POTENTIAL PATHWAYS

These potential pathways are an initial starting point to developing the Vermont Conservation Plan. These will be further refined shaped by stakeholder input.



### INCREASE AND OPTIMIZE FUNDING AND FINANCING

This pathway will propose ways to increase funding and financing to support the land protection, stewardship, and capacity of the conservation community.



### SUPPORT STEWARDSHIP AND RESTORATION

This pathway will identify the actions, innovations and new partners needed to better support the sustainable stewardship and strategic restoration of lands and their natural functions.



### PROMOTE CONSERVATION AT DIFFERENT SCALES

This pathway will identify systems and investments to support conservation organizations operating at local, regional, statewide, and transboundary scales.



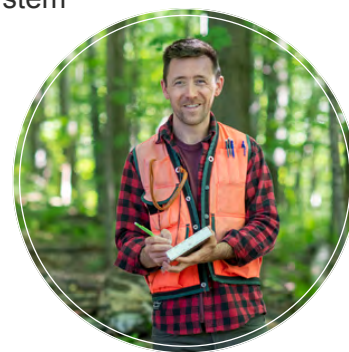
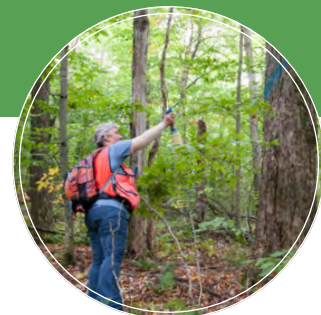
### EXPAND THE SUPPORT SYSTEM AND CONSERVATION COMMUNITY

This pathway will identify strategies and investments that will grow the support system of practitioners, natural resources management contractors, and community leaders needed to support conservation efforts into the future. This pathway will also expand the conservation community to be representative of Vermont's diverse communities and viewpoints.



### DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

This pathway will identify new programs and tools that help increase the pace, quality and impact of our conservation investments to expand our ability to meet our conservation goals.



### **Vision and Goals of Act 59: Community Resilience & Biodiversity Protection Act**

- The **vision** of the State of Vermont is to maintain an ecologically functional landscape that sustains biodiversity, maintains landscape connectivity, supports watershed health, promotes climate resilience, supports working farms and forests, provides opportunities for recreation and appreciation of the natural world, and supports the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas.
- **It is the goal of the State that 30 percent of Vermont’s total land area shall be conserved by 2030, and 50 percent of the State’s total land area shall be conserved by 2050.** The Secretary of Natural Resources shall lead the effort in achieving these goals. The land conserved shall include State, federal, municipal, and private land.
- **Reaching 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050 shall include a mix of ecological reserve areas, biodiversity conservation areas, and natural resource management areas.** In order to support an ecologically functional and connected landscape with sustainable production of natural resources and recreational opportunities, **the approximate percentages of each type of conservation category shall be guided by the principles of conservation science and the conservation targets within Vermont Conservation Design**, prioritizing ecological reserve areas to protect highest priority natural communities and maintain or restore old forests.

### **Key Definitions**

- **“Ecological reserve area”**: an area having permanent protection from conversion and that is managed to maintain a natural state within which natural ecological processes and disturbance events are allowed to proceed with minimal interference.
- **“Biodiversity conservation area”**: an area having permanent protection from conversion for the majority of the area and that is managed for the primary goal of sustaining species or habitats. These areas may include regular, active interventions to address the needs of particular species or to maintain or restore habitats.
- **“Natural resource management area”**: an area having permanent protection from conversion for the majority of the area but that is subject to long-term, sustainable land management.
- **“Sustainable land management”**: the stewardship and use of forests and forestlands, grasslands, wetlands, riparian areas, and other lands, including the types of agricultural lands that support biodiversity, in a way, and at a rate, that maintains or restores their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and their potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic, and social functions at local, State, and regional levels, and that does not degrade ecosystem function.
- **“Conserved”**: permanently protected and meeting the definition of ecological reserve area, biodiversity conservation area, or natural resource management area as defined in this section for purposes of meeting the 30 percent goal in subsection 2802(b) of this title.

### **Stakeholders as defined by Act 59**

Private owners of forestlands and agricultural lands, land trusts, conservation organizations, environmental organizations, working lands enterprises, outdoor recreation groups and businesses, Indigenous groups and representatives from historically marginalized and

disadvantaged communities, watershed groups, municipalities, regional planning commissions, conservation commissions, and relevant State and federal agencies.

**Equity Considerations**

- **Legislative finding** recognizes that Vermont is the traditional and unceded home of the Abenaki people; that BIPOC Vermonters and others from historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities have not had equal access to land and land-based enterprise; and that conservation planning process must address strategies for equity of access.
- 10 V.S.A. § 2803 requires initial conserved land equity to include an **equity assessment** of Vermont’s existing land protection and conservation programs and strategies.
- 10 V.S.A. § 2804 requires VHCB and ANR to lead **inclusive outreach** to inform conservation plan development.

**Phase 1: Conservation Inventory – Completed June 30, 2024**

An assessment of existing and potential conservation data, practices, programs, equity, and funding with recommended next steps (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)

<b>Final Inventory Results for 2024</b>	
Ecological Reserve Areas	240,060 acres
Biodiversity Conservation Areas	235,950 acres
Forestland & Natural Cover	927,398 acres
Agricultural & Open Land	173,380 acres
Uncategorized Conserved Land (not included)	47,595 acres
<b><i>Total of Conserved Land is 1,576,788 acres of 5,889,121 total acres (~27%)</i></b>	

**Phase 2: Conservation Plan – Due December 2025**

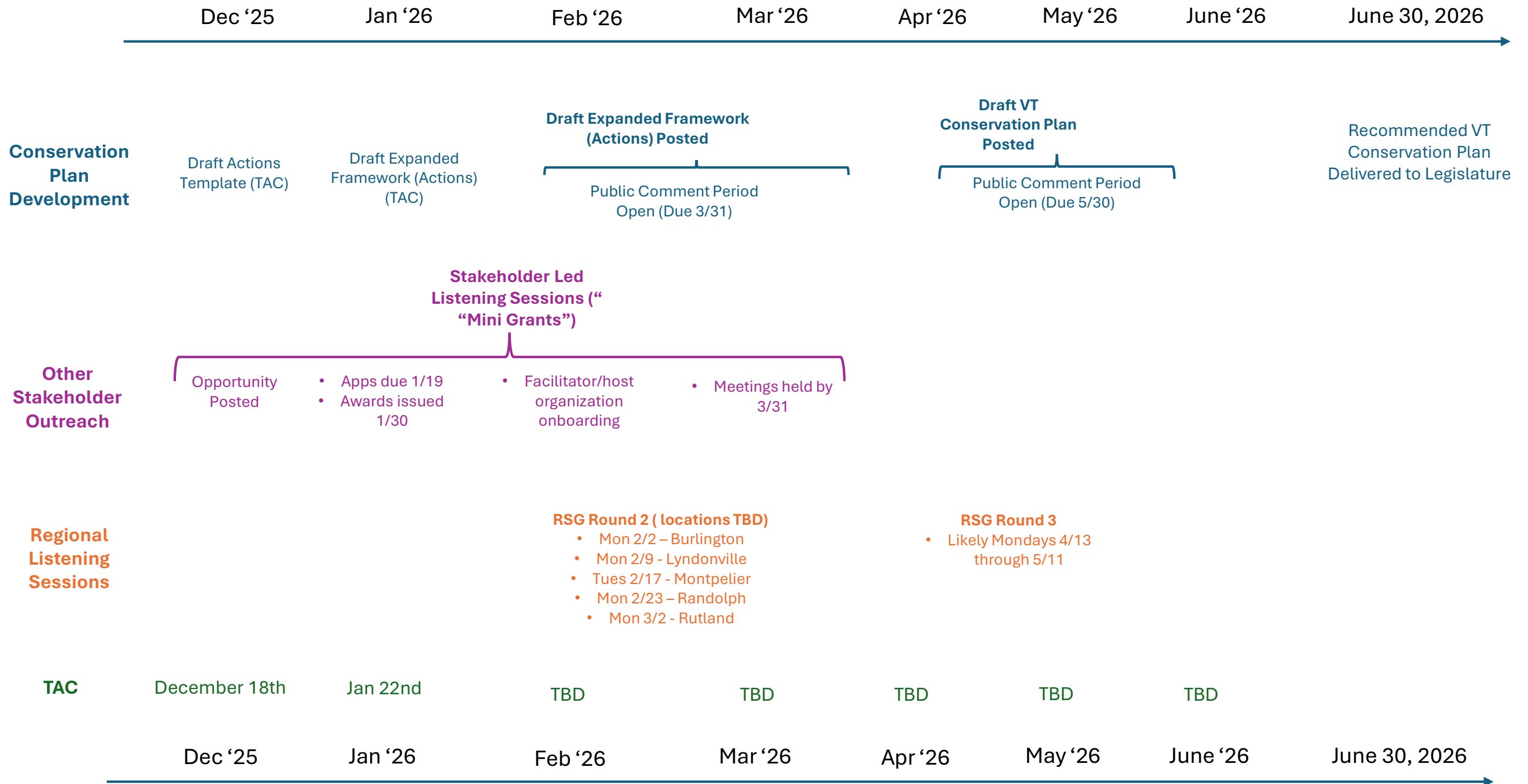
A comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (July 1, 2024 – December 31, 2025), including, per Act 59:

- (1) a comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of section 2802 of this title while continuing to conserve and protect Vermont’s agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters;
- (2) the implementation methods for achieving the vision and goals of this chapter using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide;
- (3) recommendations to provide and increase equitable access to protected and conserved lands and land-based enterprises, including recreational access to and use of conserved lands; and
- (4) recommendations to implement the vision and goals of this chapter while also enhancing the State of Vermont’s current investments and commitments to working lands enterprises, rural landowners, and the broad conservation mission implemented by the Secretary and VHCB, including conservation of agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters.

**Actions Template Exercise**

- What feels missing from this template?
- What works well, and what is unclear or confusing?
- Does this template provide a workable structure for responding to the planning mandate and tracking progress toward the plan's goals and vision, while also supporting related initiatives?

## Vermont Conservation Plan Proposed Timeline (December 18, 2025)



# Vermont Conservation Plan (Act 59) Stakeholder Led Listening Sessions “Mini-Contracts”

## Request for Proposals (RFP)

### Support for hosting a stakeholder led community listening session on the draft Vermont Conservation Plan

#### Program Overview

Vermont’s Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act ([Act 59](#)) calls for a statewide conservation plan, developed by the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board in consultation with the Agency of Natural Resources, that solicits input from communities, landowners, and partners across Vermont. To continue to support that engagement, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) will provide mini-contracts of up to \$4,000 for eligible groups, as defined below, to host community meetings for interested members of the public to review and respond to the draft Act 59 conservation plan. Meetings must be held between February 1, 2026, and 31, 2026, and a summary of input, in a format that will be provided, must be submitted to VHCB by the same date. VHCB will provide clear guidance, background materials, and templates for meeting facilitation and documentation. Applicants are not expected to design meeting content or reporting formats independently.

#### Eligible Applicants

Contracts may be issued to any organization or entity representing the stakeholder groups identified in Act 59, including:

- Organizations representing private owners of forestland or agricultural land
- Land trusts
- Conservation organizations
- Environmental organizations
- Working lands enterprises
- Outdoor recreation groups and businesses
- Indigenous groups and Tribes, and organizations representing historically marginalized or disadvantaged communities
- Watershed groups
- Municipalities, including Conservation Commissions
- Regional Planning Commissions
- Relevant State or federal agencies
- Other community-based organizations able to convene participants from one or more of the statutory stakeholder groups

Applicants will be asked to indicate which statutory stakeholder category they represent.

### **Purpose of Funding**

Funding supports a single meeting designed to:

- Review draft Act 59 conservation plan content (objectives, pathways, and proposed actions)
- Provide structured input back to VHCB and ANR

Organizations subject to Vermont's Open Meeting Law (OML) will need to certify that meetings funded by VHCB are compliant with OML, and otherwise organizations must ensure that members of the public are broadly welcome and that meeting notes are made available in a timely manner.

Consistent with OML requirements for public access, VHCB will help to provide notice for all meetings by posting them on our web portal, and VHCB will provide a note taker, if requested, to ensure that notes from the meetings can be posted on the VHCB portal.

VHCB staff may be available to facilitate meetings upon request, however VHCB staff facilitation will require hybrid access (in person and online) for OML compliance.

### **Funding Amount & Disbursement**

Each contract will be up to \$4,000.

#### Payment 1 – \$1,500

Issued after:

- A contract has been awarded and executed
- The host has secured a date, time, and location for the meeting and submitted this information to VHCB.
- VHCB confirms the meeting

#### Payment 2 – Remaining Contract Amount (up to \$2,500)

Issued after:

- The meeting is held on or before March 31, 2026
- The host submits meeting notes and a concise summary of input received on the draft Vermont Conservation Plan, using a format and guidance provided by VHCB. More guidance will be provided on the type of feedback to submit in the post meeting summary report if awarded a contract.

### **Allowable Uses of Funds**

Hosts manage all logistics and costs directly, including:

- Venue rental
- Food and non-alcoholic beverages
- Outreach and communications
- Childcare or transportation assistance
- Interpretation/translation
- Participant stipends
- Facilitators or note-takers (if not utilizing VHCB support)
- Other reasonable meeting-related costs (to be described in applicant's interest form)

### **Application Process & Timeline**

- Initial Proposal (Interest Form) Due: January 19, 2026
- Awards Announced: January 30, 2026
- Meetings Held: By March 31, 2026
- Final Deliverables Submitted: By March 31, 2026

### **Selection Criteria**

If requests exceed available funding, VHCB will prioritize proposals that:

- Engage underrepresented or high-impact communities
- Represent a diversity of Act 59 stakeholder groups
- Contribute to geographic diversity across Vermont
- Demonstrate a realistic plan to host a public meeting (location, timing, and logistics)
- Describe a reasonable outreach approach to encourage participation
- Support organizations that would otherwise not have the resources to host this type of engagement

### **How to Apply**

1. Submit the completed Interest Form by email to: [vcpadmin@vhcb.org](mailto:vcpadmin@vhcb.org)
2. Subject line: Act 59 Mini-Contract Application – [Organization Name]
3. Questions:

Please direct questions to [vcpadmin@vhcb.org](mailto:vcpadmin@vhcb.org). If needed, you may also contact VHCB staff:

- **Annie Decker** – [a.decker@vhcb.org](mailto:a.decker@vhcb.org) | 802-661-8958
- **Trey Martin** – [t.martin@vhcb.org](mailto:t.martin@vhcb.org)
- **Isaac Bissell** – [i.bissell@vhcb.org](mailto:i.bissell@vhcb.org)

**Vermont Conservation Plan (Act 59)  
Stakeholder Led Listening Sessions  
“Mini-Contract”  
Interest Form & Proposal**

**Deadline:** January 19, 2026

**Section 1 — Applicant Information**

Organization Name:

Primary Contact Name & Title:

Email:

Phone:

Mailing Address:

Type of Organization (check one or more):

- Municipality
- Regional Planning Commission
- Conservation Commission
- Land Trust
- Watershed Group
- Working Lands / Agricultural Organization
- Forest Landowner Organization
- Outdoor Recreation Group / Business
- Indigenous Group or Tribe
- Community-based Organization
- Other (describe):

**Section 2 — Proposed Meeting Information**

Proposed Meeting Date(s):

Proposed Time:

Location (Town):

Venue (if known):

Will VHCB facilitation be requested? Yes / No

Will note taking support be needed from VHCB staff? Yes / No

Is your organization subject to Vermont’s Open Meeting Law? Yes / No

**Section 3 — Meeting Feasibility & Approach**

Please briefly describe (2–3 sentences) how you would plan and host an Act 59 listening session, focusing on logistics and participation (e.g., identifying a location and timing, accessibility considerations, and how participants would be invited and supported; bullet points or short phrases are fine). *VHCB will provide clear guidance, background materials, and templates for meeting facilitation and documentation; applicants are not expected to design meeting content or reporting formats independently. Final meeting objectives and materials will be provided by the Act 59 team prior to the meeting.*

#### **Section 4 — Stakeholder Group(s) You Will Engage**

Check all that apply:

- Private forest landowners
- Farmers / agricultural enterprises
- Land trusts / conservation organizations
- Environmental organizations
- Working lands businesses
- Outdoor recreation groups or businesses
- Indigenous groups / Tribes
- Watershed groups
- Municipalities / RPCs / Conservation Commissions
- Historically marginalized or frontline climate communities
- Environmental and Land Justice stakeholders
- General public
- Youth
- Other:

In 2-3 sentences, briefly describe why these groups are important to engage and how you would encourage their participation.

#### **Section 5 – Outreach & Recruitment Plan**

Briefly describe how you would publicize the meeting and encourage attendance (e.g., direct outreach, partner networks, listservs, social media, stipends, etc.).

#### **Section 6 — Funding Request**

Total contract amount requested (up to \$4,000):

Briefly describe how you anticipate using the funds (venue, food, stipends, outreach, etc.):

Would this Act 59 outreach and engagement work be possible without these additional funds?:

Yes / No

#### **Section 7 — Deliverables Acknowledgement**

Should our entity receive a contract award, I acknowledge:

- \$1,500 will be paid after meeting date, time, and location are submitted to VHCB and the contract is executed.
- The remaining funds will be paid after meeting notes and required documentation are submitted by March 31, 2026. VHCB will provide clear guidance, background materials, and templates for meeting facilitation and documentation. Applicants are not expected to design meeting content or reporting formats independently.

#### **Section 8 — Signature**

Name:

Date:

Signature: