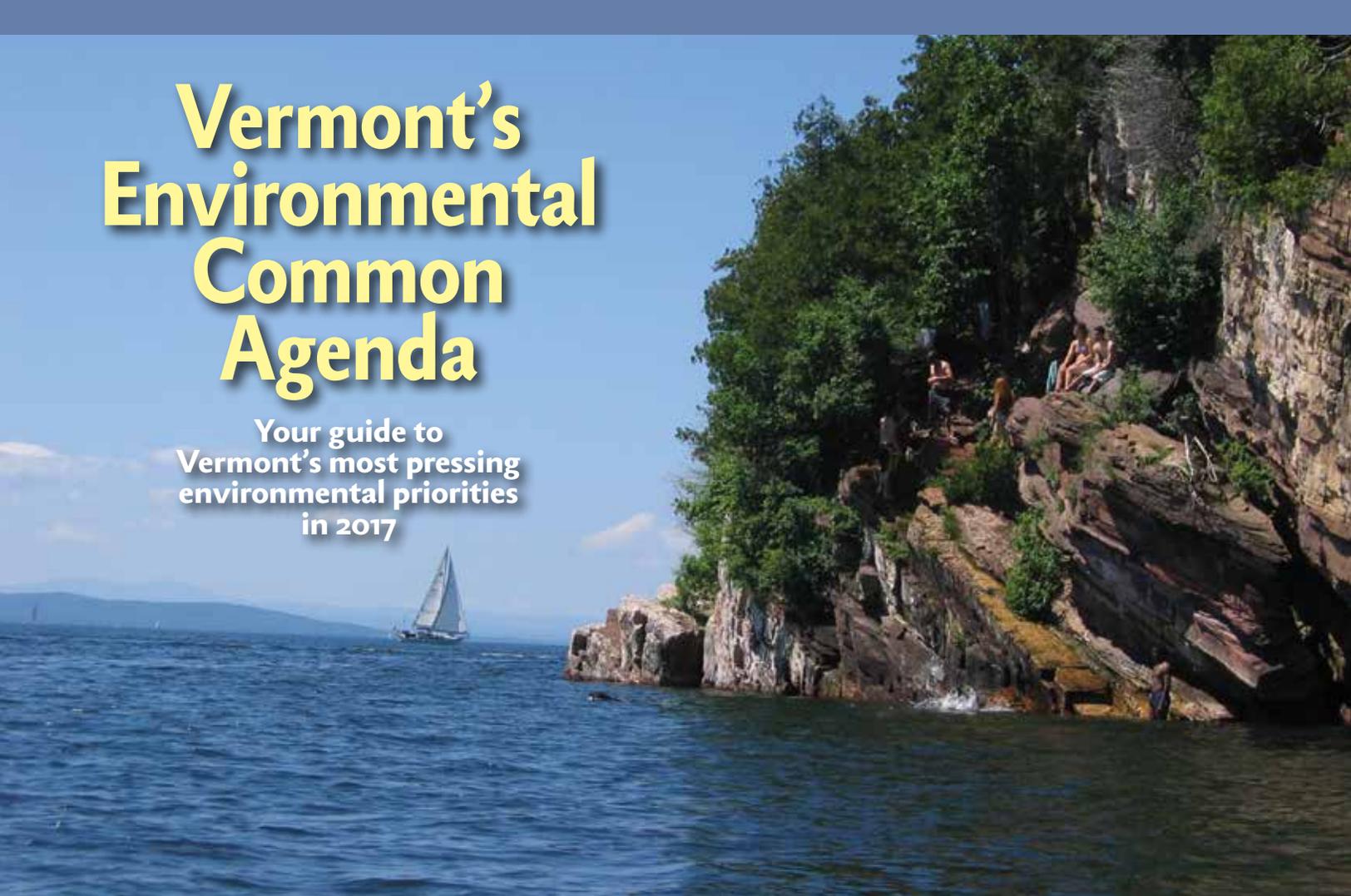


Vermont's Environmental Common Agenda

Your guide to
Vermont's most pressing
environmental priorities
in 2017



The Vermont Environmental Common Agenda serves to focus attention on the top environmental priorities and proposed solutions for the 2017 legislative session. This Agenda represents priorities of a range of environmental organizations across Vermont who are working to engage policy makers and the public on important issues affecting our shared natural resources, the character of our communities, and the health of Vermonters.

Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) and partner groups will advocate for the following priorities in the 2017 legislative session. These will also be focal issues on which VCV will assess lawmakers' actions in the Environmental Scorecard. VCV will educate voters on their elected officials' leadership, support, or opposition to these goals. As environmental safeguards are threatened at the federal level, the Vermont environmental community will be calling on Vermont lawmakers to remain vigilant in protecting our fundamental right to a healthy environment.

Top environmental priorities for 2017:

Goal: Enact Robust, Sustainable Clean Water Funding

Goal: Protect Public Health by Reducing Exposure to Toxic Chemicals

Goal: Action on Climate Change and Growing Our Clean Energy Economy



Partner organizations consulted in compiling the Environmental Common Agenda for 2017:

Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV)
Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC)
Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG)
Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)
Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club
Toxics Action Center (TAC)
Audubon Vermont
Lake Champlain Committee
Lake Champlain International
Preservation Trust of Vermont



The Environmental Common Agenda is a project of Vermont Conservation Voters.

Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) is the non-partisan political action arm of Vermont's environmental community. Since 1982, our mission has been to defend and strengthen the laws that safeguard our environment. We work to elect environmentally responsible candidates. We then hold legislators accountable for the decisions they make affecting our air, water, communities, land, and wildlife.

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Goal: Invest in Clean Water

The Problem:

Lake Champlain and other state waters provide incalculable value for the state, supporting everything from tourism and recreation to commercial uses to drinking water. Unfortunately, degraded water quality is resulting in problems including extensive and pervasive blue-green algae blooms, which hurt local economies via decreased recreation, tourism, property values, and overall quality of life.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) required Vermont to enhance its efforts to clean up Lake Champlain. Vermont had to provide the EPA with a serious cleanup proposal – including stricter regulations on major sources of pollution, and new funding to implement and enforce these regulations. Due to this requirement and water quality concerns across the state, in 2015 the Vermont Legislature responded by passing the Vermont Clean Water Act (Act 64). This legislation included stronger regulations and requirements on farms, forests, developed lands, roads, and more.

Fundamental to the success of the Vermont Clean Water Act, and meeting our legal obligations required by the EPA, is the sufficient investment of resources needed to implement on-the-ground projects to reduce pollution. Vermont Treasurer Beth Pearce, in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Conservation, produced a detailed report on potential funding sources, which provides a good baseline for discussions. To meet our obligations and safeguard the health of our communities and families and the Vermont brand, we need to enact long-term, stable funding that appropriately invests in our water cleanup efforts.



Proposed Legislative Solutions:

- ✓ **Enact sustainable long-term revenue sources for clean water investments that will be of sufficient magnitude to meet our economic, legal, and moral obligation to ensure healthy, safe water for all Vermonters**
- ✓ **Enact policies building on the Vermont Clean Water Act (Act 64) to improve water quality, including setting a 0.5-acre threshold for stormwater permitting**

For more information on water initiatives, contact these experts at partner organizations:

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Goal: Protect Public Health by Reducing Vermonters' Exposure to Toxic Chemicals

The Problem:

In the winter of 2016, the toxic chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) was discovered in water supplies in Bennington County, Vermont. Subsequent testing has shown contamination in other regions of Vermont. This chemical was used to make a variety of products, including Teflon, and persists in the environment for decades. PFOA exposure is correlated with high blood pressure, thyroid disease, kidney and testicular cancer, and other health problems.

The PFOA contamination highlighted a broader problem, where tens of thousands of chemicals are registered for use in the U.S. without adequate health and safety testing, and with inadequate federal laws to regulate their use. To address this gap, Vermont has enacted a number of laws through the years to ban harmful chemicals in consumer products, and to require reporting of chemicals of high concern in children's products (Act 188). In 2016, the federal government updated the Toxic Substances Control Act, but those new regulations will take years to implement, and will leave thousands of chemicals of concern on the market.

To examine existing state programs and identify gaps in our ability to protect public health, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 154 in 2016. This law established a Chemical Use Working Group, which recommended a series of policy improvements to better protect our families and communities from exposure to toxic chemicals. These policy recommendations include those highlighted in the Proposed Legislative Solutions, and can be found in full at: http://anr.vermont.gov/about_us/special-topics/act-154-working-group.

Proposed Legislative Solutions:

- ✓ **Enact improved tools to collect information on where chemicals are being used, make that information publicly available, and enhance programs to help companies reduce their use of toxic chemicals**
- ✓ **Restrict the use of toxic PFOA and similar chemicals in food packaging and dental floss**
- ✓ **Update the Toxic-Free Families Act (Act 188) to collect more information on toxic chemicals being used in consumer products, and improve the process for restricting the use of harmful chemicals in products**
- ✓ **Strengthen legal remedies available to Vermonters if they've been exposed to hazardous chemicals**

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Goal: Action on Climate Change and Developing our Clean Energy Economy

The Problem:

The effects of global warming are already being felt in Vermont, and scientists predict these impacts will worsen over time. We have a responsibility to ourselves and future generations to do our part to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We also have an economic opportunity. The transition to a low-carbon economy has and can continue to spur the fastest-growing job sector in Vermont. Vermont can reduce the threat – and the significant costs – of increasingly destructive weather events like Tropical Storm Irene and other negative impacts of climate change by increasing our commitment to climate action. Simultaneously, this commitment can continue to grow good-paying jobs, putting Vermonters to work weatherizing homes, installing heat pumps and solar and pellet boilers, building bike, pedestrian, and electric vehicle facilities, and more.

The State of Vermont has taken positive steps, including enacting an innovative Renewable Energy Standard (Act 56) in 2015, and establishing strong goals to dramatically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and increase the amount of energy generated from renewable sources. A 2014 Department of Public Service analysis, the Total Energy Study, shows these goals are not only feasible but can be done in a manner that maintains or helps our state's economy. However, that study also shows that our efforts to date still fall far short of what is needed to meet our climate and clean energy goals.

We will continue working to ensure the deployment of renewable energy and efficiency measures are undertaken in smart, affordable, and equitable ways. To that end, the Act 174 renewable energy siting planning process is rolling out statewide so we can improve how and where energy projects are deployed. We support the thoughtful siting of renewable energy, but we do not support policies that undermine recent efforts to balance planning and local input to energy siting, or that will create roadblocks to achieving our renewable energy goals.

The state will also need to explore additional policies like carbon pricing to help Vermonters invest in solutions and transition away from fossil fuels. The legislative proposals we support will give our state a healthier economy by helping Vermonters save energy, reduce their energy bills, and curb our dependence on fossil fuels.

Proposed Legislative Solutions:

- ✓ **Commit to Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan goal of 90% renewable energy by 2050**
- ✓ **Maintain progress on renewable energy development in a thoughtful way that is accessible to all Vermonters, and oppose road blocks to well-sited renewable energy development or rollbacks to investments in our successful energy efficiency programs**
- ✓ **Continue exploring climate solutions for all sectors, including carbon pollution pricing paired with tax cuts to spur job creation, keep more energy dollars local, and foster greater energy independence**



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Additional Environmental Priorities for 2017

Goal: Protect our working landscape and encourage smart growth development

Vermont's working landscape and the economic vitality of our downtowns and villages set Vermont apart from other states. Our compact centers also enable us to meet other important state goals: such as helping save energy by providing transportation choices other than driving, and offering vibrant spaces for small businesses. A variety of regulatory programs and financial incentives help us maintain our distinctive character – with a healthy environment alongside vibrant communities. These programs should be protected, and in some instances, strengthened.

Legislative Priorities:

- ✓ Maintain current policies and regulations, such as Act 250, that help discourage sprawling development patterns, protect our natural resources, and support the economic vitality of historic villages and downtowns.
- ✓ Authorize full statutory funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and strong funding for Downtown and Village Tax Credits, and the Working Lands Enterprise Fund

Goal: Dam Safety

There are more than 1,200 aging dams in Vermont, many of which provide no cultural, recreational, or energy benefits to the public. Currently, the state does not require regular safety inspections, so we do not know the condition of many dams across the state, and which ones might pose a potential threat to public safety.

Legislative Priority:

- ✓ Enact a dam registration and inspection program

Goal: Forest Integrity

Vermont's forested landscape is central to our state's identity and economy. From traditional jobs in the woods, to recreational opportunities for hunters, birdwatchers, hikers and anglers, to helping filter and clean our waters, and providing a home for iconic wildlife – healthy forests

are an essential asset for Vermont. Unfortunately, recent studies show our forests are being fragmented, which reduces their overall health and habitat quality, resulting in reduced biodiversity, more invasive species, reduced water quality, reduced recreational and hunting access, and smaller tracts that can't support a working forest economy. In response, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 171 in 2016 to put in place proactive measures to maintain healthy, intact tracts of forest for current and future generations to enjoy, and to provide a base for our working forests. We support building on this work by implementing recommendations contained in the Act 171 follow-up studies.

Legislative Priorities:

- ✓ Update existing Act 250 criteria to better address forest fragmentation, the maintenance of intact forest blocks, and habitat connectivity
- ✓ Implement tax incentives to encourage the maintenance of intact tracts of forest as land changes hands, particularly in priority habitat blocks

Goal: Zero Waste

Improving how we manage waste, and implementing strategies to reduce the amount of waste we generate, can help the state break out of disposal patterns that are inefficient, expensive, and produce harmful pollution – including greenhouse gas pollution. In 2012, in response to stagnating recycling rates in the state, the Vermont Legislature enacted Act 148 that phased in mandatory recycling and composting over a number of years.

Legislative Priorities:

- ✓ Maintain our commitment to mandatory recycling and composting
- ✓ Invest in these programs so they are successful with funding sources that include an expansion of the "Bottle Bill" to cover a wider range of beverages while authorizing the state to collect unclaimed nickels, and putting a fee on disposable plastic bags



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