



Vermont's 2020 Environmental Common Agenda

Your guide to this year's top legislative priorities for the environment

Colin Keegan

The Vermont Environmental Common Agenda highlights the top environmental priorities and proposed solutions for the 2020 legislative session. This Agenda represents the priorities of a range of environmental organizations across Vermont who are working to engage policymakers and the public on important issues affecting our water, air, land, wildlife, communities, and health.

Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) and partner groups will advocate for the following priorities in the 2020 legislative session. Votes on these issues will likely be included in VCV's Environmental Scorecard, and VCV will be educating voters on their elected officials' leadership, support, or opposition to these goals.

At a time when action is needed, and state leadership is more important than ever, the environmental community is calling on Vermont lawmakers to enact policies and make investments that will ensure our environment, public health, and marginalized communities are protected.

Top environmental priorities for 2020:

- ✓ **Reduce Vermonters' exposure to toxic chemicals and hold polluters accountable.**
- ✓ **Implement climate change policies that drive down our climate pollution, create jobs, and help Vermonters across the state access clean, affordable solutions.**
- ✓ **Modernize Act 250 to better protect natural resources, wildlife, and working lands, while encouraging development in walkable and livable community centers.**



Partner organizations supporting the 2020 Environmental Common Agenda:

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

The Vermont environmental community's vision for a bright future for Vermont includes working to advance and defend policies that protect the environment and promote health, while advancing civil rights, social and economic justice, and strengthening our democracy.



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, land, wildlife, communities, and health.

For more information contact:

Lauren Hierl, *Executive Director*
Vermont Conservation Voters
P.O. Box 744, Montpelier, VT 05601
lauren@vermontconservationvoters.org
(802) 224-9090

www.VermontConservationVoters.org

Goal: Better protect Vermonters from toxic chemicals and hold polluters accountable.

The Problem:

Toxic PFAS contamination of Vermonters' drinking water has continued to devastate communities, while highlighting systemic problems with how we regulate chemicals. This class of chemicals, PFAS (per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances), have been dubbed "forever chemicals" because they persist in the environment indefinitely. They are correlated with numerous harmful impacts on human health — including high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and kidney and testicular cancers. PFAS contamination is also associated with harm to fish and wildlife. As more water supplies are tested, PFAS contamination is being found in more places - including recently in the Mount Holly Elementary School, with levels 16 times above Vermont's proposed PFAS drinking water standard.

Unfortunately, PFAS chemicals are not the only toxic chemicals in use. Tens of thousands of chemicals are registered for use in the U.S., despite inadequate health and safety testing. Even after public health concerns are identified, our federal laws fail to regulate the use of known toxic chemicals. 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). Vermont must continue working to improve protections for our families' health and the environment, including our birds, fish, and wildlife.

Last year, legislation was enacted that aims to improve the process for identifying chemicals of high concern to children's health, and to consider restricting the use of the most harmful chemicals in our children's products. Bills were also enacted to require testing of drinking water in all schools and childcare providers for lead contamination; testing of all public drinking

Proposed Legislative Solutions:

- ✓ **Override the Governor's veto of legislation (S.37) to hold large toxic polluters responsible for providing medical monitoring for victims of toxic contamination.**
- ✓ **Ban toxic PFAS chemicals from firefighting foam, food packaging, and residential carpets and rugs.**

water supplies for PFAS contamination; and establishment of drinking water standards for PFAS.

Despite these measures, toxic PFAS chemicals continue to be used in a variety of products imported into Vermont, increasing people's exposure when using those products, and creating further problems when those items are disposed and chemicals leach into water supplies. By banning the unnecessary use of PFAS chemicals in firefighting foam, food packaging, and residential carpets and rugs, we can start to turn off the tap of bringing these harmful "forever chemicals" into Vermont's environment and impacting its people.

Further, a bill passed by the Legislature in 2019 would allow Vermonters to recover costs for medical screening due to toxic chemical exposure from the corporation that used and profited off the chemicals, rather than the costs being borne by Vermonters who were harmed, or by taxpayers. However, this bill (S.37) was vetoed by Governor Scott. We urge the Legislature to override this veto in 2020.

For more information on toxic chemical reform, contact these experts at partner organizations:

- Lauren Hierl, Vermont Conservation Voters (802) 224-9090 • lauren@vermontconservationvoters.org
- Jon Groveman, Vermont Natural Resources Council (802) 223-2328 ext. 111 • jgroveman@vnrc.org
- Paul Burns, Vermont Public Interest Research Group (802) 223-5221 ext. 12 • paul@vpirg.org
- Shaina Kasper, Toxics Action Center Campaigns (802) 223-4099 • shaina@toxicsaction.org
- Elena Mihaly, Conservation Law Foundation (802) 622-3012 • emihaly@clf.org
- David Mears, Audubon Vermont (802) 434-3068 • dmears@audubon.org
- Lori Fisher, Lake Champlain Committee (802) 658-1421 • lorif@lakechamplaincommittee.org

Goal: Implement climate change policies that drive down our climate pollution, create jobs, and help Vermonters across the state access clean, affordable solutions.

The Problem:

Vermonters know that global warming is our largest threat and climate action is our greatest opportunity. We share a responsibility to reduce the pollution that is driving global warming while strengthening our economy, protecting public health, and advancing equity.

Calls for urgent action to reduce climate pollution have been issued by the world's climate scientists, all levels of government, business leaders and medical professionals, religious communities and low-income advocates - and most clearly of all, by young Vermonters who will either live with the costly consequences of a forever altered planet or prosper in a transformed, resilient future.

The stakes could not be higher. Vermonters are already experiencing the negative impacts of a warming world. Mild winters and early springs are straining our economy, putting our farming, forestry, maple sugaring, and winter sports economies at risk. More frequent and intense storms are causing costly damage. Warmer average temperatures are diminishing water quality, degrading critical wildlife habitat, and dramatically increasing the number of tick and mosquito-borne diseases while invasive plant species thrive, affecting crops and forests.

The public health consequences of global warming have led the World Health Organization to declare climate change as "the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century."

We must advance equity by investing in our clean energy future. The injustice of the climate crisis is that those least responsible for pollution are the most susceptible to the dangers of an

Proposed Legislative Solutions:

- ✓ **Enact a Global Warming Solutions Act to give state government the authority and responsibility to meet our climate commitments, including the Paris Climate Accord targets in 2025, and net zero in 2050.**
- ✓ **Institute a 100% Renewable Energy Standard and significantly increase the requirement for newly built renewables in-state.**
- ✓ **Modernize our energy efficiency utilities, including Efficiency Vermont, by continuing to invest in electric efficiency to save all Vermonters money while expanding their scope to focus on climate pollution, helping Vermonters reduce energy use and switch to efficient, electric heating and transportation.**
- ✓ **Participate in a strong, equitable Transportation & Climate Initiative, and invest in programs to incentivize electric vehicle adoptions, development of charging facilities, and clean transit to ensure all Vermonters can access clean transportation options.**

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

- Johanna Miller, Vermont Natural Resources Council (802) 223-2328 Ext.112 • jmiller@vnrc.org
- Lauren Hierl, Vermont Conservation Voters (802) 224-9090 • lauren@vermontconservationvoters.org
- Sandra Levine, Conservation Law Foundation (802) 223-5992 • slevine@clf.org
- Ben Edgerly Walsh, Vermont Public Interest Research Group (802) 223-5221 Ext. 23 • bwalsh@vpirg.org
- Robb Kidd, Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club (802) 505-1540 • robb.kidd@sierraclub.org
- Lori Fisher, Lake Champlain Committee (802) 658-1421 • lorif@lakechamplaincommittee.org
- David Mears, Audubon Vermont (802) 434-3068 • dmears@audubon.org
- Dan Quinlan, Vermont Climate & Health Alliance (802) 760-7400 • contact@vtcha.org
- Lauren Oates, The Nature Conservancy in Vermont, (802) 229-4425 x124 • lauren.oates@tnc.org
- Jordan Giaconia, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility jordang@vbsr.org • (860) 304-2251

unhealthy planet. Around the world and in Vermont, climate catastrophes often affect marginalized communities first and worst — as we saw when mobile home parks across the state were devastated in Tropical Storm Irene. We can protect those most vulnerable to climate change by strategically investing in clean energy solutions and public infrastructure — and by harnessing the power of our natural systems both to sequester and store carbon and to foster climate resilient communities.

We cannot afford inaction. A continued reliance on fossil fuels will lead to increasing damage and more costly consequences in the future. There are clean, local, affordable energy solutions available now. Investing in these solutions will put Vermonters to work in 21st-century clean energy jobs, and retain far more of the \$1.5 billion that Vermont sends out of state every year to pay for imported fossil fuels. In doing so, we can also build on the success of existing programs we have long benefitted from, like Low Income Weatherization. We can expand workforce

opportunities, lower cost burdens, improve building efficiency, and more.

Vermont has a responsibility to do our part on global warming. While we have made some progress, we are far from meeting our own statutory climate action commitments. In fact, recent studies show that Vermont is the only state in New England whose climate emissions remain above our 1990 levels. State leaders from every political party have said they support Vermont meeting the 2025 climate pollution reduction targets established in the Paris Climate Accord, and hitting Vermont's 2050 climate pollution targets.

We can and must make serious steps to reduce climate pollution emissions and hit these targets. We need to look to both local and regional solutions. Doing so will create more energy independence, enhance public health, improve the lives of low-income Vermonters, and sustain our farms and forests.



Tim Newcomb

Goal: Modernize Act 250 to better protect natural resources, wildlife, and working lands, while encouraging development in walkable and livable community centers.

The Problem:

The Vermont we know and love today wouldn't exist without Act 250. Yet despite the valuable role Act 250 has played, it was enacted 50 years ago, and is no longer meeting the needs of Vermonters. It is failing to address some of the environmental challenges of the day, such as the loss of our state's forests, the incremental fragmentation of our working lands and natural areas, and climate change — an issue that was not widely understood fifty years ago. Further, changes made to the law over time have made aspects of the process more difficult and expensive for citizens to navigate.

We support a package of changes that we believe will better serve the state in the years ahead, building on the Legislature's Commission on the Future of Act 250 established by Act 47 in 2017, and legislative and stakeholder work undertaken since then.

Policy proposals include enhancing protections for intact forest blocks to prevent forest fragmentation and protect wildlife habitat; updating criteria related to transportation to promote a range of travel choices; redefining the way river corridors are protected; ensuring that large developments are built in a way that conforms to energy standards; promoting compact smart growth development to enhance our downtowns; assisting businesses that help maintain our working lands; and more.



Bob LoCicero

Proposed Legislative Solutions:

- ✓ **Update Act 250 criteria to better address climate change, address forest fragmentation, and improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure.**
- ✓ **Update Act 250 jurisdiction to encourage more smart growth development by exempting Act 250 jurisdiction in designated downtowns and neighborhood development areas, while balancing greater review for development that fragments intact undeveloped forests and working lands, and address the impact of commercial and industrial developments around interstate exchanges.**
- ✓ **Improve the Act 250 process by creating an Enhanced Natural Resources Board (E-NRB) that will be more independent, offer diverse expertise, and provide a mix of both regional and statewide review of Act 250 applications.**

We also support updating the Act 250 process to ensure that the system works efficiently and effectively, that decisions are made by an independent board that ensures access to the process for residents in affected communities, and that regional input into the process is maintained.

As Act 250 turns 50, meaningful improvements will mean the law can better serve Vermont by safeguarding and promoting our environment, economy, and communities and effectively addressing the challenges of our time.

For more information on Act 250 initiatives, contact these experts at partner organizations:

- Brian Shupe, Vermont Natural Resources Council (802) 223-2328 Ext. 120 • bshupe@vnrc.org
- Shelby Semmes, The Trust for Public Land (802) 223-1373 Ext. 19 • shelby.semmes@tpl.org
- David Mears, Audubon Vermont (802) 434-3068 • dmears@audubon.org
- Phil Huffman, The Nature Conservancy In Vermont, (802) 229-4425 x109 • phuffman@tnc.org

Additional Environmental Priorities for 2020

Goal: Invest in our downtowns and villages, working lands, and natural areas

Vermonters have long worked to maintain a vital working landscape and thriving downtowns and villages. Compact centers enable us to meet important state goals, including helping save energy by providing transportation choices, offering vibrant spaces for small businesses, protecting and enhancing habitat for birds, fish and wildlife, and providing an appealing setting and variety of housing choices for people at all stages of their lives. A variety of regulatory programs and financial incentives help us maintain our healthy environment alongside vibrant communities. These programs should be robustly invested in, as important drivers of rural economic development.

Legislative Priorities:

- ✓ **Appropriate full statutory funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.**
- ✓ **Appropriate full statutory funding for the Municipal and Regional Planning Fund, which enables communities and Regional Planning Commissions to meet various statutory goals related to maintaining healthy forests, meeting our climate and energy goals, and providing affordable housing and transportation options for Vermonters.**
- ✓ **Increase funding for Downtown and Village Tax Credits.**
- ✓ **Increase funding for the Working Lands Enterprise Fund to support the transition of farm and forest enterprises and ensure a dynamic future for the working lands that help define Vermont.**
- ✓ **Maintain or improve protections for wetlands, resulting in no net loss.**

Goal: Zero Waste

Building on the important work done in 2019, we must continue to explore and implement strategies to reduce the amount of waste we generate, and improve how we manage waste. As explored by the Single Use Products Working Group in the fall of 2019, our current use and disposal patterns are inefficient, expensive, and produce harmful pollution – including greenhouse gas pollution and toxic chemicals that leach into state waters. The Vermont Legislature enacted Act 148 that phased in mandatory recycling and composting over a number of years. We must maintain our commitment to this important legislation, while seeking complementary policies to reduce our reliance on single-use plastics and harmful alternatives, continue to work to improve statewide recycling and composting rates, and modernize our successful “Bottle Bill.”

Legislative Priorities:

- ✓ **Update the “Bottle Bill” to cover a wider range of beverages available on the market, and increase the deposit from a nickel to a dime.**
- ✓ **Explore policies to reduce the use of single-use products.**
- ✓ **Maintain our statutory commitment to mandatory recycling and composting.**



Bob LoCicero



Vermont Conservation Voters
P.O. Box 744
Montpelier, VT 05601

