

Vermont's 2022 Environmental Common Agenda

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

We are in a time of profound challenges and historic opportunities. Our communities are being stressed by the ongoing pandemic, which is exacerbating problems and inequities in many systems we rely on, including public health, education, and childcare. These strains are further contributing to the housing crisis, food insecurity, workforce shortages, racial injustice, and more. At the same time, due to an influx of federal funding, Vermont has unprecedented resources that we can invest in rebuilding healthier, more equitable, and more resilient communities in all corners of our state.

The policy priorities identified in this year's *Environmental Common Agenda* seek to address many systemic challenges we face, and put us on a path to a more sustainable, healthy, and prosperous future. We must build on the hard work put into developing the Climate Action Plan. Many of the steps identified in the plan can help Vermonters and local businesses save on their energy bills, build more equitable communities, reduce pollution, invest in natural solutions, protect wildlife habitat, improve public health, strengthen our communities' resilience to extreme weather, and train a workforce for the 21st century.

Specifically, we are calling on lawmakers to:

✓ **Move forward the Climate Action Plan, with equity prioritized:**

- Implement strategies to **dramatically reduce climate pollution**, including investing at least \$150 million in FY23 in climate solutions; enacting the Transportation Innovation Act; and advancing a Clean Heat Standard and weatherization for all.
- **Adopt an Environmental Justice law** that would take steps to ensure that no segment of the population should suffer disproportionate environmental harm or lack access to environmental benefits.
- Implement strategies to **improve our communities' climate resilience**, including incentivizing additional housing in smart growth locations while better protecting our forests, farms, wetlands, waters and other vital natural resources.

✓ **Protect public health by reducing people's exposure to PFAS and other toxic chemicals in cosmetics, hold toxic polluters accountable, and cut plastic pollution.**

✓ **Promote a healthy democracy.**



Partner organizations supporting the 2022 Environmental Common Agenda:

Audubon Vermont
Community Action Works Campaigns
Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC)
Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)
Lake Champlain Committee (LCC)
Preservation Trust of Vermont
Rights & Democracy

The Vermont Climate & Health Alliance
Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club
Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV)
Vermont Interfaith Power & Light (VTIPL)
Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC)
Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG)
350VT

The Vermont environmental community's vision for a bright future includes working to advance and defend policies that protect the environment; promote health, civil rights, social, racial and economic justice; bolster strong communities; and strengthen our democracy.



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

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
lhierl@VermontConservationVoters.org
(802) 552-0769

www.VermontConservationVoters.org

Moving Forward the Climate Action Plan: Creating a more just and affordable clean energy economy

In 2020, the Vermont Legislature created the Climate Council and required them to develop a Climate Action Plan. The initial plan was released in December 2021, and lays out a suite of investment and policy initiatives necessary to drive down climate pollution and meet our Global Warming Solutions Act targets; strengthen our communities' resilience; and ensure equity is front and center in how we prioritize and shape policies and investment strategies.

Vermont has both a legal and moral obligation to cut climate pollution in a just way, and at a pace that recognizes the scale and severity of the climate emergency. While the Climate Action Plan requires additional refinement and input — particularly from historically marginalized Vermonters — the Legislature has clear direction on what we need to do to transform our energy systems. There is also an enormous opportunity to create thousands of good-paying union jobs and keep billions of dollars flowing in our local economies.

With unprecedented federal funding available, we have a historic opportunity to get to work implementing the solutions laid out in the Climate Action Plan, which will help all Vermonters benefit from the clean energy economy.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Invest at least \$150 million in FY23 in climate initiatives.**
 - These investments will help people and local communities access more equitable and clean energy solutions. With combined resources from the American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds, and General Fund revenues, we must make long-overdue, historic investments in climate action, take full advantage of federal programs, invest in capacity of state government and partner organizations, invest in grid modernization and electric service upgrades, and build the workforce necessary to transform our economy.
- ✓ **Adopt the Transportation Innovation Act.**
 - By investing approximately \$75 million above baseline annual spending in clean transportation solutions, we can help more Vermonters — particularly low and moderate-income folks — access electric and higher-efficiency vehicles, strengthen programs like Complete Streets and our transportation networks to make it easier to get around without a vehicle, continue fare-free public transportation, and ultimately transition to a truly clean, ultra-low-carbon transportation system.



✓ **Enact an Environmental Justice law.**

- This bill, among other important components, requires State agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their work, establishes an Advisory Council on Environmental Justice within the Agency of Natural Resources, and requires the creation of an environmental justice mapping tool. This bill will be an important step towards achieving meaningful community engagement in environmental decisions – particularly among overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. With this bill, we also have the opportunity to prioritize state investments to these communities. Lawmakers will also need to advance additional policies and investments being developed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders, including Green Justice Zones, the BIPOC Land Access and Opportunity Act, and other climate justice initiatives.

✓ **Advance clean, affordable, and efficient heating solutions.**

- **Advance a Clean Heat Standard.** This may be the single most impactful policy to reduce climate pollution in the Climate Action Plan. If it is designed to accurately and transparently reduce greenhouse gas emissions, this may be the single most impactful policy to reduce climate pollution in the Climate Action Plan. The Clean Heat Standard could play an essential role in transitioning our heating sector to clean and affordable solutions.
- **Weatherization for All.** The Climate Council established a goal of weatherizing 90,000 additional homes over the next nine years. This will require a significant increase in funding for incentives for low-

and moderate-income Vermonters, as well as workforce development.

- **Incentivize electrification.** While the state develops a Clean Heat Standard, we should provide additional incentives to help more people access technologies like cold climate heat pumps and heat pump water heaters.
- **Invest in clean energy and efficiency for municipalities.** We should provide support and award grants and loans to municipalities to improve their energy efficiency and replace fossil fuel heating systems with low-carbon and efficient heating systems.

✓ **Update the Renewable Energy Standard to require far more new renewable energy.**

- To fully realize the benefits of a transformed energy economy, Vermont must overhaul our Renewable Energy Standard to significantly accelerate our transition to new renewable energy – especially renewables built right here in Vermont. We need to dramatically increase requirements for new and local renewable energy generation, phase out polluting energy sources, ensure greenhouse gas emissions are fully and accurately accounted for, make clean energy accessible to all, and invest in energy storage and grid resilience.

✓ **Invest in workforce development for the clean energy sector.**

- By investing in programs now, we can build the workforce we will need to ramp up weatherization programs, upgrade electrical systems, install heat pumps and other clean heating solutions, and modernize our transportation system.

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
- Chase Whiting, Conservation Law Foundation, (802) 622-3009, cwhiting@clf.org
- Ben Edgerly Walsh, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, (802) 223-5221, 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
- Lauren Hierl, Vermont Conservation Voters, (802) 552-0769, lhierl@vermontconservationvoters.org
- David Mears, Audubon Vermont, (802) 434-3068, dmears@audubon.org
- Jordan Giaconia, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, (860) 304-2251, jordang@vbsr.org
- Dan Reilly, VEIC, (802) 735-4430, dreilly@veic.org
- Peter Sterling, Renewable Energy Vermont, (802) 595-5373, director@revermont.org
- Kiah Morris, Rights & Democracy, (802) 288-0165, kiah@radvt.org
- Hayley Jones, Community Action Works, (971) 400-5197, hayley@communityactionworks.org
- Vanessa Rule, 350VT, (802) 356-0205, vanessa@350vt.org

Moving Forward the Climate Action Plan: Improving our communities' climate resilience and addressing the housing crisis

The Vermont Climate Council adopted a Climate Action Plan that highlights the importance of advancing clean energy solutions that are accessible for all Vermonters, and also supports smart growth development and better protections for our forests, wetlands, farms and waters as core climate pollution reduction and resilience strategies.

Smart Growth and Climate-Resilient Housing

The housing crisis is a nationwide, multi-faceted issue with numerous, complex underlying causes. Accordingly, it demands a multi-faceted response. We can and must address our housing needs while simultaneously protecting our environment. Advancing smart growth housing solutions supports Vermonters' quality of life, resilience to economic, social and environmental change, and protects ecological systems. Smart growth allows people to more easily access jobs and services, increases transportation options, and lowers transportation costs. It also reduces municipalities' infrastructure costs, and cuts climate pollution by reducing how far people need to travel to jobs and services.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ Expand funding and eligibility for downtown and village tax credits, and increase funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to build more smart growth housing.
- ✓ Increase investments in water and sewer infrastructure in compact community centers to allow for additional housing development in these locations. Water and sewer facilities make land more attractive and affordable for housing development, while allowing for greater density and a mix of uses.
- ✓ Update Act 250 to encourage housing in smart growth locations while improving protections for important natural resources.

Healthy Forests and Clean Water are Vital to Climate Resilience

By investing in smart growth development, we can simultaneously protect the lands and waters that Vermonters love, and that our wildlife depend upon – including our forests, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. Reducing the fragmentation of intact forests, actively restoring rivers and wetlands, and leaving areas of land and water undeveloped improves climate resilience. Intact forests and wetlands help to absorb excess rainfall, reduce flooding risk from extreme climate events, create carbon sinks to mitigate climate change, provide wildlife habitat, and help to maintain recreational opportunities and our rural economy.

Healthy forests

We need policies that help make our communities more resilient to a changing climate, and forests are a central climate solution. Forests are the lungs of the planet. They store carbon, clean our air and water, provide habitat for plants and animals, and provide important economic and ecological functions for our state. Unfortunately, we are losing forestland every year. We need to slow the rate of forest loss and fragmentation so we can maintain our highest value forest blocks, and maintain the critical functions that forests provide on our landscape. To accomplish this goal, we must use a suite of policy tools and investment strategies to conserve and restore forestland.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ Better protect intact, healthy forests by updating Act 250 criteria and jurisdiction.
- ✓ Improve the ability of landowners to maintain forests by enrolling wild and old forests in the Current Use Program.
- ✓ Develop a plan for conserving 30% of our lands and waters by 2030, aligning Vermont with the national 30x30 initiative, and Vermont Conservation Design.
- ✓ Maintain increased investments in the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Working Lands Enterprise Fund to support the transition of farm and forest enterprises, and invest in forestland conservation, particularly in areas that connect or add to large blocks of forestland, forests that contain headwater streams, or high priority watersheds.



Clean water

Vermont lawmakers made a historic commitment to funding clean water initiatives in 2021, and we must build on that progress. New federal funding creates an opportunity to address a generational backlog of projects to ensure clean drinking water for all, expand water and sewer infrastructure in our downtowns and villages, address toxic contamination of water systems, and better protect our rivers, streams, wetlands, lakes and ponds, and the biodiversity they support. Through policy initiatives and increased investments, we can better protect and restore our natural systems like wetlands and river corridors. This will help restore water quality for the benefit of all Vermonters, support our tourism and outdoor recreation economies, protect high-quality habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife, mitigate climate change by sequestering and storing carbon, and reduce flood risks.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ Invest at least \$135 million in FY23 in clean water initiatives including:
 - Addressing combined sewer overflows, village drinking and wastewater systems, mobile home park drinking and wastewater system upgrades, flood hazard mitigation via land acquisition, dam removal, and culvert replacement.
- ✓ Adopt better protections for riparian areas and river corridors.
- ✓ Establish a “net gain” policy for wetlands and support conservation and restoration strategies for these important resources.
- ✓ Authorize ANR to create a program to address the impacts of water withdrawals from Vermont’s lakes, ponds, streams and rivers.



Ember photo

For more information on climate resilience strategies including smart growth, healthy forests, and clean water, contact these experts at partner organizations:

- Kati Gallagher (smart growth), Jamey Fidel (forests), Jon Groveman (water), VNRC, (802) 223-2328, kgallagher@vnrc.org, jfidel@vnrc.org, jgroveman@vnrc.org
- Kate Wanner, The Trust for Public Land, (802) 922-0180, kate.wanner@tpl.org
- David Mears, Audubon Vermont, (802) 434-3068, dmears@audubon.org
- Lauren Oates, The Nature Conservancy in Vermont, (802) 229-4425 ext. 192, loates@tnc.org
- Lori Fisher, Lake Champlain Committee, (802) 658-1421, lorif@lakechamplaincommittee.org
- Kathy Urffer, Connecticut River Conservancy, (802) 258-0413, kurffer@ctriver.org
- Elena Mihaly, CLF, (802) 622-3012, emihaly@clf.org

Protecting Public Health: Reducing exposure to PFAS and other toxic chemicals, holding polluters accountable, and cutting plastic pollution.

P FAS and other toxic chemicals harm our bodies' immune systems, cause diseases like cancer, and contaminate our environment. Last year, lawmakers unanimously enacted nation-leading legislation that banned PFAS and other chemicals from a range of consumer products. This year, Vermont must build on this work by banning PFAS and other dangerous chemicals from personal care products — shampoos, lotions, cosmetics and other products that we rub, pour and sprinkle on our bodies each day. We should also ban the use of PFAS in artificial turf fields.

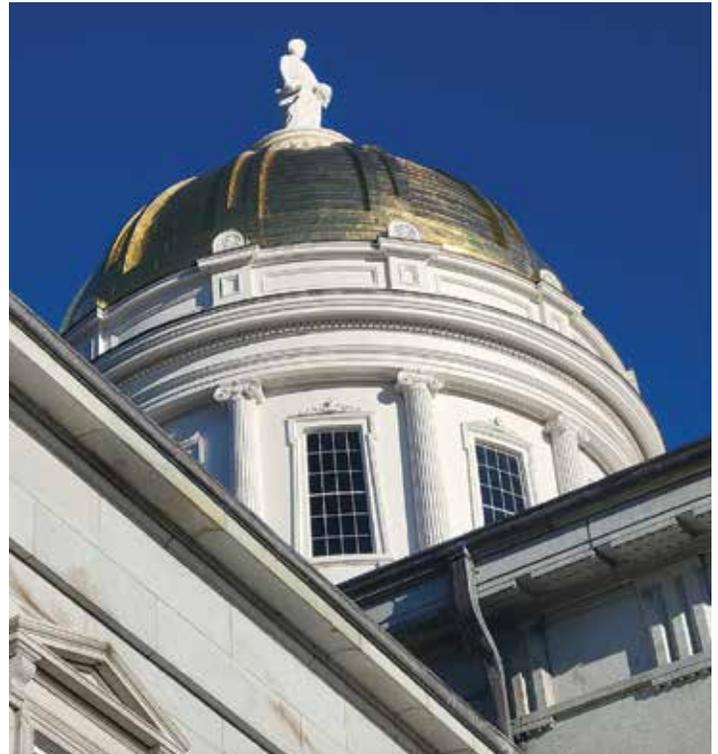
Legislators should also enact legislation to ensure corporate polluters pay for the harm they cause — rather than taxpayers or victims. By allowing Vermonters to access medical monitoring for diseases linked to toxic contamination, we can ensure people exposed to harmful chemicals can catch diseases as early as possible. The burden of paying for that medical care should be covered by the entity that caused the chemical exposure.

Further, lawmakers must provide strong oversight to ensure the Administration requires pre-treatment of PFAS-contaminated leachate before sending it to wastewater treatment facilities; explores better ways to handle PFAS-contaminated sludge; and prioritizes public health in how they regulate PFAS chemicals in Vermonters' drinking water and surface waters.

We must also continue to develop and implement strategies to reduce the amount of waste we generate, and improve how we manage our waste. Our current use and disposal of plastics and other materials is inefficient, expensive, and produces harmful pollution — including climate pollution and toxic contamination. We must pursue policies to reduce our reliance on single-use plastics and harmful alternatives, and modernize our successful Bottle Bill.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ Protect public health by restricting the use of PFAS and other harmful chemicals from personal care products and artificial turf fields.
- ✓ Hold corporate polluters responsible for paying the medical monitoring costs for victims of toxic contamination.
- ✓ Modernize the “Bottle Bill” by covering a wider range of beverages to reduce waste, cut plastic pollution, and increase recycling.



Promoting a Healthy Democracy

The health of our environment is inextricably linked to the health of our democracy. Right now, we are seeing unprecedented attacks on our democracy — from the storming of the US Capitol last year, to a flurry of state legislation that aims to make it harder for certain people to vote. Further, Supreme Court decisions have opened the floodgates of political contributions from wealthy special interests and gutted key voter protections. In contrast, Vermont has become one of the most voter-friendly states in the nation with policies like universal mail-in voting, same-day voter registration, and automatic voter registration. We must continue to be a model for a healthy democracy, and can do so by giving voters a stronger voice and more choices with ranked choice voting, and by banning corporate contributions to candidates.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ Ranked choice voting for presidential primaries and federal races beginning in 2024.
- ✓ A ban on corporate contributions to candidates for public office.



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

