

# Vermont's 2023 Environmental Common Agenda

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

The policy priorities identified in this year's Environmental Common Agenda aim to help address some of the most critical challenges facing Vermont. By advancing these policies, lawmakers can put us on a path to a more resilient, just, and prosperous future. We must address the climate crisis by implementing the state's Climate Action Plan as swiftly and equitably as possible. Policies identified in the plan will help Vermonters and local businesses have cleaner and more affordable alternatives to heat and power their buildings and get where they need to go. Further, the Plan identifies action steps to shape land use and development that store carbon, enhance our climate resilience – and, critically, to help address the housing shortage using smart growth solutions. This year, we are also calling on lawmakers to continue our nation-leading efforts to reduce our families' exposure to toxic chemicals, and continue to take steps to ensure a healthy and accessible democracy for all.

*We are calling on Vermont lawmakers to:*

- ✓ **Implement the Climate Action Plan to cut pollution, save Vermonters money, protect public health, and create good-paying union jobs by:**
  - Adopting an equitable and accountable Affordable Heating Act;
  - Updating the Renewable Energy Standard to achieve 100% renewable energy and ensure development of significantly more new renewables; and
  - Investing in clean transportation and mobility solutions, environmental justice, and other critical climate initiatives.
  
- ✓ **Build a more climate-resilient Vermont by implementing smart growth housing solutions, while better protecting our valuable forests, waters, and wetlands.**
  
- ✓ **Promote a healthier Vermont by:**
  - Banning toxic chemicals like PFAS from personal care products and textiles;
  - Reducing plastic waste by modernizing the Bottle Bill; and
  - Promoting a healthy democracy.



## Partner organizations supporting the 2023 Environmental Common Agenda:

Audubon Vermont  
 Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC)  
 Connecticut River Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
 Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)  
 Lake Champlain Committee (LCC)  
 Preservation Trust of Vermont  
 Renewable Energy Vermont (REV)  
 Rights & Democracy (RAD)  
 Slingshot

The Trust for Public Land (TPL)  
 Third Act Vermont  
 350VT  
 Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR)  
 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)

*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](http://www.VermontConservationVoters.org)**

# Swiftly and Equitably Implement Vermont's Climate Action Plan

## Goal 1: Ensure clean and affordable heating, transportation, and electricity for all Vermonters

**T**he climate crisis is the most pressing issue facing our state, nation, and world. Vermont has a moral obligation to do our part to reduce pollution, and the good news is that climate action will also help cut energy costs, protect public health, create jobs, and build more resilient communities. Climate solutions can and must be structured in ways that help ensure all Vermonters can participate, and in ways that will create a more just and equitable Vermont.

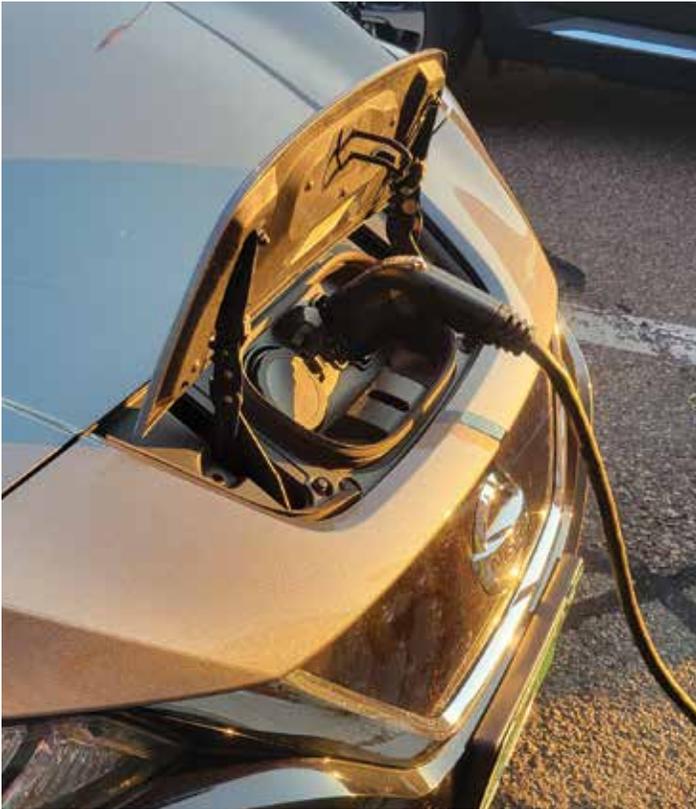
After enacting the Global Warming Solutions Act in 2020, the Vermont legislature established and appointed the Climate Council that developed and adopted Vermont's first required Climate Action Plan. This Plan lays out a suite of strategies necessary to drive down climate pollution and meet our Global Warming Solutions Act pollution reduction targets; cut energy costs; strengthen the resilience of our communities and natural and working lands; and ensure equity is front and center in how we prioritize and shape policies.

### Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Affordable, Cleaner Heat:** Adopt a climate accountable standard to deliver more affordable heat, and ensure stepped, certain, and equitable pollution reduction in the fossil fuel heating sector to help more Vermonters stay warm with cleaner heating solutions.
- ✓ **Cleaner Electricity:** Update the Renewable Energy Standard to require 100% total renewable energy by 2030 and far more new, renewable energy generation, especially from right here in Vermont – while prioritizing lower-income, historically overburdened Vermonters in accessing that clean energy.



The majority of Vermont's greenhouse gas pollution (about 74%) comes from transportation and thermal – in other words, how we get around, and how we heat our homes and buildings. We need to ensure our electric grid is powered by local, clean, renewable energy, and we need to establish regulatory tools to ensure significant pollution reduction in our transportation and thermal sectors.



✓ **Cleaner Transportation:** Expand cost-cutting and pollution-reducing transportation investments and enact policies that help all Vermonters access more efficient and electric vehicles and other needed transit, micro-transit, bike, and pedestrian solutions. The Legislature should also create the authorizing environment for Vermont to participate in a cap-and-invest or similar regulatory program to build a rural transportation system that is less polluting, more cost-effective, and accessible to all Vermonters.

✓ **Climate Investments:** Vermont will need a FY24 budget that continues to increase investments in climate and clean energy programs, in particular those that prioritize access for lower income and other historically marginalized communities. Lawmakers must also provide oversight to ensure the unprecedented FY23 investments in climate are expended effectively and equitably. The state should focus and prioritize investments to help Vermonters access clean, efficient and affordable heating and transportation solutions, address environmental justice, expand our commitment to low-income weatherization and efficiency, and invest in programs that will help build more resilient communities.

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

- David Mears, Audubon Vermont, (802) 464-3068, [david.mears@audubon.org](mailto:david.mears@audubon.org)
- Chase Whiting, Conservation Law Foundation, (802) 622-3009, [cwhiting@clf.org](mailto:cwhiting@clf.org)
- Lori Fisher, Lake Champlain Committee, (802) 658-1421, [lorif@lakechamplaincommittee.org](mailto:lorif@lakechamplaincommittee.org)
- Peter Sterling, Renewable Energy Vermont, (802) 595-5373, [director@revermont.org](mailto:director@revermont.org)
- Dan Fingas, Rights and Democracy, (802) 578-6272, [dan@radvt.org](mailto:dan@radvt.org)
- Vanessa Rule, 350VT, (802) 356-0205, [vanessa@350vt.org](mailto:vanessa@350vt.org)
- Jordan Giaconia, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, (860) 304-2251, [jordang@vbsr.org](mailto:jordang@vbsr.org)
- Robb Kidd, Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club, (802) 505-1540, [robb.kidd@sierraclub.org](mailto:robb.kidd@sierraclub.org)
- Lauren Hierl, Vermont Conservation Voters, (802) 552-0769, [lhierl@vermontconservationvoters.org](mailto:lhierl@vermontconservationvoters.org)
- Peter Walke & Dan Reilly, VEIC, (888) 921-5990, [pwalke@veic.org](mailto:pwalke@veic.org), [dreilly@veic.org](mailto:dreilly@veic.org)
- Richard Butz, Vermont Interfaith Power and Light, (716) 536-9912, [butzrao42@gmail.com](mailto:butzrao42@gmail.com)
- Johanna Miller, Vermont Natural Resources Council, (802) 223-2328 ext.112, [jmiller@vnrc.org](mailto:jmiller@vnrc.org)
- Ben Edgerly Walsh, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, (802) 223-5221, [bwalsh@vpirg.org](mailto:bwalsh@vpirg.org)

# Swiftly and Equitably Implement Vermont's Climate Action Plan

## Goal 2: Build more climate-resilient communities by adopting smart growth housing strategies while better protecting our waters, forests, and wildlife

**T**he Climate Action Plan recognizes that the changing climate is already impacting our communities, and we need policies and investments to promote smart growth housing, while safeguarding our natural and working lands.

### Smart Growth Housing

Supporting and creating more affordable housing in thriving, walkable communities is key to strengthening Vermont's climate resilience. By advancing smart growth policies, we can simultaneously invest in our downtowns and village centers, and support the economic and ecological vitality of our working and natural lands. Poorly planned development and growth pressures in our rural lands are likely to be exacerbated in the coming years due to increasing trends such as telecommuting, online shopping, climate migration, and the housing shortage.

Developing housing in smart locations - where the public has invested in infrastructure and amenities - allows people to live closer to jobs, services, and affordable transportation options. It also lowers municipalities' infrastructure costs, cuts climate pollution, and reduces the environmental impacts of sprawl.

#### Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Smart Growth Housing:** Adopt a housing equity bill that makes it easier to develop, rent, and purchase smaller homes in downtowns and village centers, that are closer to jobs, services and affordable transportation.
- ✓ Expand funding and eligibility for **downtown and village tax credits**, and **increase funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)** to build more smart growth housing.

### Protect Forests & Wildlife

As the Green Mountain State, forests are an important part of what makes Vermont special. They are vital to our economy and improve our air and water quality, offer flood resilience, provide a home for wildlife and help mitigate climate change by sequestering and storing carbon. While Vermont is rich in forests, we are unfortunately losing thousands of acres of forestland every year, resulting in a steady decline in carbon sequestration, according to an analysis conducted for the Vermont Climate Council. If that trend continues, it makes it significantly harder to meet our 2050 net zero target. To meet both our climate mitigation and resilience goals, we must do more to maintain the critical functions that our forests provide by using a suite of policy tools and investment strategies to conserve and restore forestland.

#### Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Adopt a goal of conserving 30% of our lands and waters by 2030, and 50% by 2050, utilizing Vermont Conservation Design** as a guide for conservation planning efforts, and aligning Vermont with these national and international goals.
- ✓ **Explore a "no net loss policy" for critical natural resource lands**, as recommended in the Climate Action Plan, by creating a working group to define these lands and identify appropriate conservation strategies. Further, we must fund the development of tools to track the rate of forest loss and fragmentation, and land conservation efforts.
- ✓ **Maintain robust investments in the Working Lands Enterprise Fund and fully fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board** according to the statutory formula to support farm and forest enterprises, and invest in landowner planning and forestland conservation.

It's also worth noting that several legislative studies are being performed in 2023 which will inform how to address location-based jurisdiction in Act 250, and strengthen designation programs that promote development in Vermont's existing mixed-use, compact centers. As part of any comprehensive Act 250 reform this biennium, Vermont should add criteria to Act 250 to avoid, minimize and mitigate the fragmentation of intact forest blocks and essential habitat connectivity areas, and strengthen jurisdiction to review projects that are likely to fragment forests.

## Better Protect Rivers, Streams, and Wetlands

Clean water is essential to Vermonters' health, well-being, and quality of life. By adopting policies to better protect and restore our river corridors, riparian buffers along streams, and enhance our wetlands, we will improve water quality, increase species biodiversity, support our tourism and outdoor recreation economies, address stormwater,

### Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Adopt better protections for our rivers** by implementing a flood hazard, river corridor, and riparian protection program.
- ✓ **Increase conservation and restoration of wetlands**, as recommended in the Climate Action Plan, by establishing a "net gain" policy, that includes improved wetland data collection as to location, size, and function; and provide ample compensation when impact is unavoidable.

filter groundwater, and restore the cold-water habitat for which Vermont streams are renowned. Importantly, the Climate Action Plan also recognized that these policies are essential for Vermont to create climate-resilient communities by maintaining access to clean water for all, sequestering and storing carbon, and reducing flood risks.



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

- David Mears, Audubon Vermont, (802) 464-3068, david.mears@audubon.org
- Kathy Urffer, Connecticut River Conservancy, (802) 258-0413, kurffer@ctriver.org
- David Deen, Connecticut River Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited, (802) 869-3116, strictlytrout@vermontel.net
- Mason Overstreet, Conservation Law Foundation, (802) 299-1317, moverstreet@clf.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
- Kate Wanner, The Trust for Public Land, (802) 922-0180, kate.wanner@tpl.org
- Lauren Hierl, Vermont Conservation Voters, (802) 552-0769, lhierl@vermontconservationvoters.org
- Kati Gallagher (smart growth), Jamey Fidel (forests), Jon Groveman (water), Vermont Natural Resources Council, (802) 223-2328, kgallagher@vnrc.org, jfidel@vnrc.org, jgroveman@vnrc.org

# Goal 3: Promote a healthy Vermont

## Protect Vermonters' Health

PFAS and other toxic chemicals harm our bodies' immune systems, cause diseases like cancer, and contaminate our environment. In 2020, Lawmakers unanimously enacted nation-leading legislation that banned PFAS and other chemicals from a range of consumer products. This year, Vermont must continue to build on this work by banning PFAS and other dangerous chemicals from personal care products— such as shampoos, lotions, and cosmetics – and textiles. These additional steps will reduce our exposure to these harmful chemicals while using these products in our homes, and also reduce the amount of contamination that eventually ends up in our air, water, and soil.

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 the Bottle Bill.

### Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Protect public health by restricting the use of PFAS** and other harmful chemicals from products including textiles and personal care products.
- ✓ **Modernize the “Bottle Bill”** by covering a wider range of beverages to reduce waste, cut plastic pollution, and increase recycling.



## Promote a Healthy Democracy

The health of our planet is inextricably linked with the health of our democracy. At the federal level, Supreme Court decisions have opened the floodgates of political contributions from wealthy special interests and gutted key voter protections. Fortunately, Vermont has taken steps to reduce the influence of outside spending, and to increase access to the ballot box via policies like same-day voter registration, automatic voter registration, and vote-by-mail for all general elections. The Vermont Legislature must continue to adopt policies that will protect the health and access of our democracy for all.

### Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Ban corporate contributions** to candidates for public office.
- ✓ **Adopt ranked choice voting for presidential primaries** beginning in the 2024 elections.





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

