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**VNRC**

VERMONT NATURAL  
RESOURCES COUNCIL



**VERMONT**

Legislative Bulletin



**VCV**

VERMONT  
CONSERVATION  
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ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATES FROM VNRC & VCV

# Fighting Rollbacks to Protect Vermont's Future

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Voters



lawmakers were calling to roll back climate action and undermine smart growth principles and land conservation initiatives. We fought back, and

action this year – including new restrictions on toxic PFAS chemicals and better protections for amphibians, reptiles and other wildlife. We also made it faster and cheaper to install some solar projects, secured key funding to implement the Climate Superfund Act, and took initial steps to better regulate farm pollution.

Dear Friend,

**W**hen we walked into the State House this past January in our new roles as Executive Directors, it was quickly made clear that it was going to be a different kind of year. We had a new federal government who ran on an anti-environment platform, and there was a lot of turnover in the state legislature. We knew early on that we would need to defend and protect the foundational environmental bills that were enacted in Vermont in recent years. In particular, at the start of the legislative session, some

we won, with your help.

Unsurprisingly, Vermonters showed up for this fight: they called, they sent emails, they used whatever tools they had to defend the critical policy progress we have made these last few years. They came to the State House for days of action, week after week, led by Youth Lobby, businesses, faith leaders, public health officials, town energy committee leaders, and more. In just one morning, when a lawmaker was threatening to force a vote to gut a key climate law, more than 600 Vermonters called the State House to oppose it. This engagement and activism paid off.

We were able to secure forward

These achievements were also made possible from the support from a number of dedicated elected representatives who tirelessly showed up to speak up and speak out. At an Earth Day event highlighting the range of legal, financial, and democratic steps they were taking to protect Vermonters, VNRC and VCV were joined by Attorney General Charity Clark, Treasurer Mike Pieciak, Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Senate President Pro Tem Philip Baruth, and Speaker of the House Jill Krowinski. They were loud and clear that Vermont leaders are ready to defend and protect

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### Fighting Rollbacks *continued from page 1*

Vermonters, our environment, and our rights.

And while protecting recent progress this year might not feel as exciting as some of the big legislative wins we've achieved in recent years, maintaining our commitments and funding for these initiatives is just as crucial as getting them passed in the first place. Outside of the legislature, we are working on stakeholder groups, weighing in on new rules and policies, and educating and engaging Vermonters in the implementation of laws to hold polluters accountable, foster smart growth housing development, plan for biodiversity conservation, and ensure flood safety. These processes and rule-makings are critical to ensuring the legislation we helped pass benefits Vermont for years to come.

For two years in a row, we've witnessed our communities experience devastating flooding

that has wiped out homes and businesses. Seeing the waterlogged wreckage of personal belongings piled on the sidewalk and local business owners struggling to rebuild, drives home the painful human toll that a climate disaster takes on a community - well beyond the damage to our roads, bridges, and buildings. We know firsthand that, more than ever, we can't afford to wait to act on climate, ensure healthy water, build resilience, conserve our critical natural resources, hold polluters accountable, reduce toxic chemicals, and address the housing crisis through comprehensive planning.

With unprecedented federal threats, it's a challenging time to be new executive directors. But the expertise of our teams and the activism of our members - you all - has buoyed us and shown that we can make a big impact, even in difficult times.

Thank you, as always, for standing with us!

- Lauren and Dan



## Sometimes the Best Offense is a Good Defense

Successfully defending our environmental laws and putting a stop to damaging rollbacks was the headlining win for the 2025 legislative session. These wins were made possible in large part because of collaborative efforts with coalition members and community leaders who doggedly opposed the dismantling of climate, energy, smart growth, and toxics legislation that was hard won in past legislative sessions.

### We fought for climate action and communities...

In 2025, an essential budget appropriation for the Climate Superfund (Act 122) was on the chopping block. The Climate Superfund Act put Vermont at the forefront of the fight against adapting to climate change and ensured that companies like ExxonMobil and Shell are held accountable for the damage their climate disrupting products have caused. Act 122 stipulates that Big Oil needs to pay a fair share of the cleanup costs of this degradation, but the prospect of slashed funding this past session called into question the future implementation of this law. Without sufficient funding, the state wouldn't have the foundational resources necessary to make it successful, including for an assessment of the cost of disaster response and adaptation projects such as nature-based solutions and flood protections, upgrading stormwater drainage systems, and making proactive upgrades to roads, bridges, and other essential infrastructure. These are key steps in holding polluters accountable for those damages and we were at risk of losing them.

**...And We Won.** The budget that lawmakers ultimately adopted carved out funds for the implementation of the Climate Superfund Act to the order of \$350,000. This means that, combined with some funding from their



own coffers, the Treasurer's Office will have the necessary financial support to assess the historical and projected costs Vermont will face because of changes to the climate attributable to certain greenhouse gas emissions. More funding will be needed next year, but this funding was a critical step forward.

And in a small but important win for solar, S.50 will make it faster and cheaper for Vermonters to adopt climate-friendly technologies like solar. This legislation makes it easier for Vermonters who are electrifying their lives – buying electric vehicles, installing heat pumps, and adopting other climate-friendly technologies – to go solar at home. The policy will allow ground-mounted net metered systems up to 25kW (instead of the current 15kW limit) to use an expedited registration process, and also allows for increased solar development at existing sites.



### We fought for the continued elimination of PFAS...

Last year, the Legislature unanimously passed legislation (S.25) to ban PFAS (per- and polyfluorinated substances) and other toxic chemicals from personal care products and menstrual products, and to ban PFAS “forever chemicals” from apparel, cookware, artificial turf, and children's products. Chemicals like PFAS are linked to cancer and other harms to human health, and passing this bill was a major step in decreasing Vermonters' unnecessary exposure to dangerous chemicals.

**...And We Won.** This year, we made headway and were successful in extending the ban on PFAS to include firefighting gear, dental floss, cleaning products, and fluorinated containers. This is another big step towards keeping Vermonters safe from harmful substances.

## We fought for the successful implementation of smart growth land use...

Act 181, the landmark Act 250 modernization law passed in 2024, is a key piece of legislation that supports smart growth housing development while better protecting critical natural resources. Implementation is underway to map areas for new housing where Act 250 will be relaxed. Other initiatives are focused on identifying high priority, sensitive ecological areas to protect through Act 250 review, and implementing a new Act 250 criterion to protect intact forests and habitat connectivity areas against fragmentation. We recognized the need for additional staff to do the work of making these new policies a reality, and this part of the budget was up for debate during the 2025 legislative session.

**...And We Won.** Through our efforts and with the help of many partners, we were able to fight back measures to weaken the conservation achievements in Act 181, while helping to secure funding for a position to provide increased, long-term capacity to conduct natural resource mapping and additional Act 250 regulatory review work necessitated by Act 181.

## We fought for the protection of threatened and endangered species...

Before the legislative session, we met with the Fish and Wildlife Department and interested stakeholders, including Representative Satcowitz of the House Committee on the Environment, to support improvements to Vermont’s threatened and endangered species law. Over the course of the session, the Legislature worked on several wildlife related bills, including H.230 and H.231, which included provisions to improve wildlife regulations in the state.

**...And We Won.** With our support, and through the excellent testimony of other experts, as well as leadership from the Fish and Wildlife Department, and



House and Senate environmental committees, the Legislature passed a final bill that adds necessary protections for reptiles, and amphibians. Based on the new law, it will be illegal to deliberately take a reptile or amphibian unless authorized for specific uses. The new law also protects the location of threatened and endangered species when a project is going through the permitting process.

## We fought for clean water...

This legislative session, VNRC supported a policy to decrease the amount of road salt we use, which will reduce harmful chloride pollution. Excess chloride can lead to changes in Vermont’s aquatic environments and at heightened levels, can have a negative impact on sensitive species. Language defining the need for reduced levels of chloride was adopted by the House, and was considered by



the Senate in H.319, a miscellaneous Agency of Natural Resources bill, but ran out of time. The bill will pick up where it left off next year.

We also worked hard to shape legislation that would help regulate water pollution on farms to bring farms into compliance with the Clean Water Act. That bill was signed into law.

And in a different bill relating to Vermont farms, we worked to inform updates to our state’s “right-to-farm” law that outlines how and when neighbors can hold a farm accountable if they harm a nearby property – such as contaminating their water supply – and ensuring that rights of Vermonters are not unfairly limited. This bill (S.45) was also signed into law.

**...And We Won.** While policy aiming to decrease road salt was not enacted this session, we made important progress this year, and the bill is in good shape to be adopted by the legislature early next year.

We also know that when it comes to providing clear and consistent regulation of pollution from Vermont farms into our shared waterways, the legislation that passed is a good first step, but we will need further action on this issue. A stakeholder group will be convened to continue discussing additional steps to fix our broken regulatory system that is allowing illegal water pollution discharges from farms to go unaddressed.

And the right-to-farm legislation

struck a fair balance to allow farms that implement good practices to be protected against nuisance lawsuits brought by neighboring property owners, while providing adequate protection for neighbors from harmful impacts from things like water pollution coming onto their property. VNRC advocated that the bill focus on protecting farms from lawsuits related to nuisances like odors and dust and not issues that involve waters entering and harming neighboring property, which constitutes a legal trespass - invasion of property.

### Looking Ahead

We now look forward to doing the hard on-the-ground work to make these policies a reality for Vermonters. The long game of management and implementation is just as critical as passing legislation to move the needle for the health and wellbeing of Vermont communities. That is why we are thankful to have such a robust and talented network of collaborators and coalition partners that spend many hours not just fighting for policy wins, but for achieving policy outcomes.

Next year we will throw our weight into continuing to fight for chloride policy and working to reduce plastic pollution and toxic chemicals. We will also work

to find solutions to help more Vermonters transition to clean, affordable energy options, continue ensuring a commitment to smart growth housing, and to implement biodiversity conservation strategies.

## Intern and Partner Thank yous

### Thank you to our incredible interns:

We are truly grateful for our legislative interns, who supported our work in a multitude of ways.

Helena Zuckerman joined as a legislative Intern in January of 2025 and was an outstanding member of the team, working hard to relay time-sensitive policy updates and decisions from the State House floor to the staff at VNRC and VCV.

### With gratitude for our partners:

The work of VNRC and VCV is immeasurably strengthened by the coalitions we work with, including Act on Climate Vermont, the Forest Partnership, Transportation for Vermonters, the Water Caucus, the Toxics Coalition, and the Dam Task Force. We thank all our partners for their collaboration on these critical issues, and look forward to continuing to expand our partnerships to engage more Vermont voices.

## VNRC & VCV Events

Over the session, we helped support or organize several advocacy days alongside key partners, including Youth Lobby, Vermont Interfaith Power & Light, Vermont Climate and Health Alliance, town energy committee members, a UVM & Third Act Lobby day, and Water Caucus tabling.

- **Environmental Common Agenda press conference/reception**  
January 16th, 2025
- **Transportation for Vermonters Coalition Lobby Day**  
January 30th, 2025
- **Transit Equity Day press conference and rally**  
February 4th, 2025
- **Smarter Growth Summit**  
March 10th, 2025
- **T4VT Transit Petition at the State House**  
March 18th, 2025
- **Earth Day press conference and rally**  
April 22th, 2025
- **VCV Lifetime Environmental Achievement Awards**  
Apr 28, 2025
- **Day for Democracy**  
June 1st, 2025

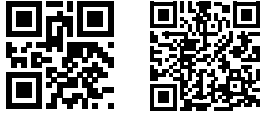


VNRC Executive Director Lauren Hierl speaks out about shoring up protections for our Environment, Democracy and Civil Rights at Earth Day 2025.



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## Events VNRC and VCV Helped Organize



**Top left:** VCV and partnering organizations and supporters showed up at the T4VT event on January 30, 2025, to lobby for more and better energy efficient transportation solutions for Vermonters. **Top right:** This year's Lifetime Environmental Achievement Award recipients, Dick McCormack and Mark MacDonald stand with representatives past and present, including Don Hooper, former Vermont Secretary of State. (Left to right: Evelyn Seidner, Dan Flngas, Sen. Alison Clarkson, Sen. Becca White, Sen. Joe Major, Dick McCormack, Mark MacDonald, Don Hooper, Justin Marsh.) **Bottom left:** VNRC and VCV gathered key stakeholders at the Smarter Growth Summit on March 10, 2025 to dive into discussions about sustainable, equitable land use in Vermont. **Bottom right:** VCV and Vermonters banded together for a Day for Democracy at the Alchemist Brewery in Stowe on June 1st in defense of the constitution, human rights and free speech.

