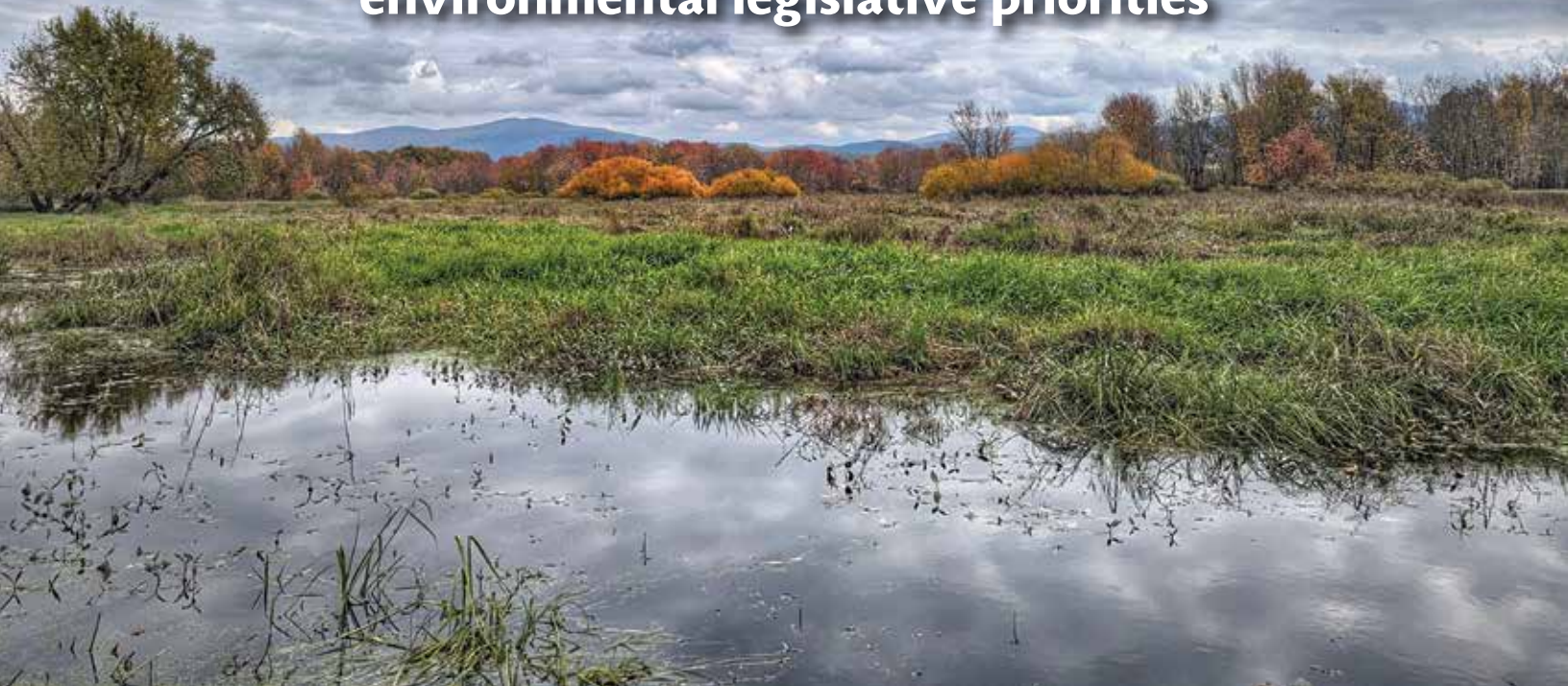


Vermont's 2026 Environmental Common Agenda

Your guide to this year's top
environmental legislative priorities



Vermont is facing unprecedented times. Federal funding and bedrock environmental laws that help ensure a healthy environment and resilient communities are at risk. These threats could have significant impacts on our state budget and our ability to fund core programs that protect our environment and invest in our communities. When policies like the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Endangered Species Act are undermined, it could leave holes in critical protections that Vermont must fill to protect our water, air, forests, wildlife, and public health.

There is so much our state leaders can do to help make lives better for all Vermonters. In this year's *Environmental Common Agenda*, we highlight a range of solutions to continue working toward a healthy democracy, smart growth housing and conservation solutions, better transportation options, toxic-free communities, and affordable clean energy.

We are calling on Vermont lawmakers to:

- ✓ **Protect and expand Vermont's free, fair, and accessible democracy.**
- ✓ **Build resilient communities through strategic conservation and development to encourage smart growth housing and transportation, flood resilience, and food security.**
- ✓ **Reduce Vermonters' exposure to toxic chemicals and cut plastic pollution.**
- ✓ **Advance an affordable clean energy future.**

Friends,

As we enter 2026, we are in unprecedented times as a country and as a state. Creating an *Environmental Common Agenda* does not happen in a vacuum. To do our work as an environmental community means to engage and interact with those outside of our area of expertise doing critical work for Vermonters.

We know that Vermonters still care about having clean air and clean water and want to have beautiful, wild places to hike, bike, swim, and enjoy. But we know that many are also worrying about where their next meal will come from, how they will pay for housing and ever rising healthcare costs, if we will have free and fair elections, and if their families, friends, and neighbors will be ripped apart by federal attacks on new American communities.

We won't stop advocating for the policy solutions that balance the range of needs facing all Vermonters with the ongoing importance of environmental protections that we rely on for clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, communities protected from floods, renewable energy, and everything that makes Vermont the state we love to live in. We will show up as a community in solidarity with those working in food security, healthcare justice, protection of our civil liberties, and our democracy. Most Vermonters don't have the luxury of thinking about these issues separately and independently. In these moments of political upheaval and fear for the future, we need to meet Vermonters where they are and show support for all our needs to survive and thrive in this great state.

We are all in this together, and we will stand in solidarity.

Dan Fingas, *Executive Director*
Vermont Conservation Voters
(802) 578-6272

dfingas@vermontconservationvoters.org
www.VermontConservationVoters.org



VCV
VERMONT
CONSERVATION
VOTERS

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

VCV works to elect pro-democracy and environmentally-friendly candidates to public office, and then holding elected officials accountable for the decisions they make affecting our air, water, wildlife, land, communities, and democracy.



Protect and Expand Vermont's Free, Fair, and Accessible Democracy

A healthy environment requires a healthy democracy. When people can participate fully and freely in their government, our policies better reflect the needs of our communities, our natural resources, and the lives of future generations. That's why strengthening democratic access is foundational to protecting Vermont's environment.

Democracy can't wait. Across the country, we are witnessing coordinated attempts to strip away voting rights, transparency, and trust in our democratic institutions. While the federal government and many states are moving backward, Vermont has an opportunity and a responsibility to move forward — not just stand still.

Vermont is already a national leader in free, fair, and accessible elections. We've expanded vote-by-mail, increased transparency, and ensured our elections are safe and secure. Now is the time to protect and enshrine these successes and also expand access. We must provide improvements like increased language access and better information for voters, ensure elections remain free from intimidation, and safeguard every Vermont voter's right to participate.

By building on our strong foundation, Vermont can continue to demonstrate what a thriving democracy looks like, even as threats to voter rights grow elsewhere. Protecting and expanding democratic participation isn't just good governance, it is essential to a resilient, equitable, and sustainable future for Vermont.



Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Protect Vermont voters by passing a Free and Fair Elections Act** to expand definitions for lobbying and campaign finance disclosure and close existing loopholes, require state and federal agents to display identification, and implement elements of a Voting Rights Act.
- ✓ **Ensure Vermont continues to have a healthy democracy by** banning corporate contributions in campaigns, and pursuing Ranked Choice Voting for the 2028 Presidential Primaries.



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

- Justin Marsh, Vermont Conservation Voters, (802) 730-2383, jmarsh@vermontconservationvoters.org
- Paul Burns, VPIRG, (802) 223-5221 ext. 12, paul@vpig.org

Build Resilient Communities Through Strategic Conservation and Development

Vermonters deserve to live in thriving and economically secure communities. Forward-looking land use planning through Act 181, the HOME Act, and the protection of healthy forests, habitat connectivity, and biodiversity through the conservation planning in Act 59 are critical to achieving that goal. We must balance the needs of our environment, our neighbors, and our local economies by enabling housing development in our downtowns and rural village centers where we've invested in public infrastructure like water services, sidewalks, and transit. By implementing smart growth principles like supporting compact, walkable, and mixed-used town centers, we can reduce sprawl and increase access to housing, while ensuring that critical natural areas are protected to help foster climate resilience, clean air and water, and intact wildlife habitat.

Encourage Smart Growth Housing in Vermont

All Vermonters should have access to safe and affordable housing. We recommend investing in permit navigators — staff people at the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) who can help developers understand which permits they need, and how to acquire those permits efficiently. We also recommend reforming the Act 250 appeals process to provide more timely, consistent and clear outcomes. We recommend moving appeals of municipal and Act 250 permits for housing projects to the Land Use Review Board (LURB), and ensuring that the LURB has adequate resources to successfully implement an improved appeals process.

We also must robustly fund critical housing initiatives, including the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and Land Access and Opportunity Board that work to provide permanently affordable, accessible housing options. We should also expand the Downtown and Village Tax Credit program. Further, we must look at areas impacting

the availability of housing where the legislature hasn't yet acted — such as short-term rentals that are taking homes off the market.



Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Continue to support housing initiatives**, including successfully implementing the HOME Act and Act 181, improving the Act 250 appeals process, investing in “permit navigators” to help housing developers, and addressing short-term rentals.
- ✓ **Fully fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Land Access and Opportunity Board**, and continue to invest in smart growth through new affordable housing, land conservation, and historic preservation.
- ✓ Expand funding and eligibility for **Downtown and Village Tax Credits** to revitalize community centers and create and retain smart growth housing.
- ✓ Promote compact, well-connected development that reduces vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by **establishing a statewide VMT reduction target**.
- ✓ **Maintain funding for public transit, active transportation, and multi-modal programs**, specifically, Mobility Transportation Innovation grants, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and the Downtown Transportation Fund.
- ✓ **Pass the Restore Waters for Improved Resilience bill** to improve the health of our rivers and protect our communities.
- ✓ **Fund local food security programs** (3SquaresVT, CropCash, Farm Share) **and pass the Farm Security Fund (S.60)** to support our farmers and ensure that all Vermonters have access to fresh, local food.

Advance a Transportation System that Serves all Vermonters

Transportation emissions in Vermont are responsible for about 40% of our state's climate pollution. As a rural state, this high percentage isn't surprising, but it shows we need a transportation system overhaul.

It is critical that Vermont promotes and builds compact housing to reduce the distance people travel while maintaining funding for public transit and multi-modal solutions that help more people walk, bike, and carpool. Investing in income-based incentives for cleaner, electric vehicles and EV charging infrastructure is another vital strategy in reducing emissions and supporting all Vermonters to get where they need to go. We must ensure that people can access medical care, work, and other critical needs and services. We must also build and maintain bike and pedestrian infrastructure. To do this, helping municipalities leverage programs like the Downtown Transportation Fund is essential so that we can build safer streets in our communities. (See below for more transportation policies in the Clean Energy Section.)



some communities, this means facing impossible decisions to ensure the safety of residents.

Effectively implementing recently-enacted laws including the Flood Safety Act (Act 121), Act 181, and Act 59 is critical. Together, these laws will ensure that development is not placed in harm's way and will reduce flood

impacts by protecting headwater streams and wetlands, as well as promoting healthy forests and habitat connectivity. Wetlands play a major role in flood resiliency, since they capture and slow flood waters. Protecting these critical resources is a crucial line of defense to reduce the impacts of climate disasters in our communities. We must also pass the Restore Waters for Improved Resilience bill to promote ecological restoration projects that help create healthier, more resilient riverine, floodplain, and wetland ecosystems that are better equipped to slow and store floodwaters.

Support Resilient and Food Secure Communities

Climate change is having profound impacts on our communities, wildlife species, food systems, and ecosystems. Maintaining intact forests, promoting natural infrastructure, strengthening food security, and reducing flood risk across Vermont is necessary to ensure the safety of our communities. Reducing flood risk across Vermont is critical to ensuring that Vermonters are safe and their basic needs are being met. Flood-related disasters are becoming more frequent and more severe as Vermont averages nearly two major flooding disasters annually. For

Safety also comes in the form of food security. Access to nutritious local food is something that all Vermonters deserve. The Vermont Farm to Plate Network, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund created the Food Security Roadmap to 2035 to strategize how we can create food security for Vermonters. The roadmap has three main goals: for the Government to ensure food security for all in Vermont with programs like 3SquaresVT, that Vermont farms have the resources to be resilient, and communities have the tools to support food security.

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

Smart Growth

- Ben Doyle, Preservation Trust of Vermont, (802) 839-9914, ben@ptvermont.org
- Christina Erickson, Local Motion, (802) 861-2700 ext 108, christina@localmotion.org
- Kati Gallagher, Vermont Natural Resources Council, (802) 223-2328, kgallagher@vnrc.org
- Robb Kidd, Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club, (802) 505-1540, robb.kidd@sierraclub.org

Climate Resilience

- Emily Anderson, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, (802) 649 1431 ext 227, eanderson@vtecostudies.org

- Jared Carpenter, Lake Champlain Committee, (802) 356-3666, rjaredcarpenter@gmail.com
- Karina Dailey, Vermont Natural Resources Council, (802) 223-2328 ext 123, kdailey@vnrc.org
- Kathy Urffer, Connecticut River Conservancy, (802) 258-0413, kurffer@ctriver.org

Food Security

- Johanna de Graffenreid, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, (802) 870-0868, johannad@vbsr.org
- Autumn Moen, Hunger Free VT, (802) 341-5715, amoen@hungerfreevt.org

Reduce Vermonters' Exposure to Toxic Chemicals and Cut Plastic Pollution

All people deserve clean water, fresh air, safe products, and healthy food. That's why it's critical that we reduce toxic chemicals like pesticides and plastics that pollute our environment and harm Vermonters' health.

Reduce the amount and toxicity of plastics

We continue to learn more about the dangerous implication of microplastics in our environment and bodies. We are calling on lawmakers to ban intentionally-added microplastics, which are additives that manufacturers use in products like cosmetics and cleaning products. We are also working to phase out the use of toxic phthalates in medical IV bags. Phthalates like DEHP are associated with severe health impacts like organ damage and increased risk for certain cancers.

Additionally, we are looking to pursue updates to the Bottle Bill to make the system more convenient for consumers, easier on small retailers, and improve the overall recycling process. We are also working to ban so-called "chemical recycling," a process that is costly, environmentally hazardous, and contributes to the release of harmful toxic chemicals at concerning levels.

Reduce exposure to toxic chemicals

No Vermonter should be unknowingly exposed to chemicals that can make them sick. This year, lawmakers should ban the toxic pesticide paraquat. Paraquat is linked to Parkinson's disease, and more than 70 other countries have already taken steps to ban this highly toxic substance. Most farmers do not rely on paraquat, and alternatives are available. We should also reduce our reliance on pesticides in lakes and ponds to deal with aquatic nuisances.

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Reduce the amount and toxicity of plastics** by banning intentionally added microplastics, banning toxic phthalates in IV medical bags, improving the bottle redemption system, and banning so-called "chemical recycling."
- ✓ **Reduce exposure to toxic chemicals** by banning the highly toxic pesticide paraquat, reduce our reliance on pesticides in lakes and ponds to deal with aquatic nuisances, and cut harmful water pollution by passing the Chloride Reduction Bill.

Finally, we must pass the Chloride Reduction Bill. Chloride-containing salt is heavily used to de-ice roads, which is then transported through runoff into our rivers and streams. Chloride can be toxic to aquatic life and is also responsible for compacting soils and accelerating the corrosion of vehicles, road surfaces, and bridges. The legislature should pass a bill to reduce this harmful pollution.



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

- Paul Burns, VPIRG, (802) 223-5221 ext 12, paul@vpig.org
- Jared Carpenter, Lake Champlain Committee, (802) 356-3666, rjaredcarpenter@gmail.com
- Jon Groveman, Vermont Natural Resources Council, (802) 223-2328 ext 111, jgroveman@vnrc.org
- Justin Marsh, Vermont Conservation Voters, (802) 730-2383, jmarsh@vermontconservationvoters.org

Advance an Affordable Clean Energy Future

We've reached a tipping point where solar and wind energy is the most affordable energy to bring online, and electric vehicles and heat pumps are cheaper clean solutions for Vermonters long-term. Our state government can play a pivotal role in helping people access these beneficial technologies through well-crafted policies and incentive programs. In Vermont's Climate Action Plan, there are a range of climate solutions for lawmakers to consider.

In contrast, our federal government is doubling down on fossil fuels – which is driving up energy prices across the country, particularly when paired with spiking electricity demand from data centers. The fossil fuel industry – including groups like Americans for Prosperity – are investing heavily in trying to convince Vermonters that it's better for us to stay dependent on their products. But Vermonters are already feeling the harm and costs of climate disruption and we know that oil, gas and other fossil fuel products are expensive, polluting, and unpredictable. Thankfully, clean energy options in the electricity, heating, and transportation sectors can improve our resilience while being more affordable over their lifespan.

This year, it's imperative that lawmakers protect our existing climate statutes, including the Global Warming Solutions Act, Renewable Energy Standard, and Climate Superfund. We must work to make it easier for Vermonters to go solar, particularly as federal actions are making it harder. We must not roll back energy efficiency standards or core incentive programs like electric vehicle and e-bike incentives. Vermont must better collect, track, and analyze fuel usage data. And we must advance steps to look at how we can protect lower-income Vermonters'

Proposed legislative solutions:

- ✓ **Shore up Vermonters' ability to go solar** by authorizing portable “plug-in” solar technology, allowing for greater co-location of solar by updating the single plant law, and directing the PUC to ensure residential net metered solar remains accessible to Vermonters.
- ✓ Safeguard energy affordability in Vermont by creating a **statewide low income electricity rate, increasing shutoff protections, and creating robust standards and requirements for data centers.**
- ✓ Ensure we maintain forward progress on **appliance energy efficiency standards.**
- ✓ **Reinstate low-income electric vehicle and e-bike incentives, and adopt a Right to Charge law** to ensure all Vermonters can access reduced electric vehicle rates.
- ✓ Fund and support the capacity needed for ANR to **establish a greenhouse gas emissions data collection and reporting program.**

ability to pay their electric bills, and ensure they have power during extreme weather conditions.

Increasing access to climate solutions like weatherization, heat pumps, thermal energy networks, electric vehicles, and e-bikes will help Vermonters transition off of expensive, polluting, and unpredictable fossil fuels.

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

- Johanna de Graffenreid, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, (802) 870-0868, johannad@vbsr.org
- Robb Kidd, Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club, (802) 505-1540, robb.kidd@sierraclub.org
- Elena Mihaly, Conservation Law Foundation, (802) 622-3012, emihaly@clf.org
- Johanna Miller, Vermont Natural Resources Council, (802) 371-9611, jmiller@vnrc.org
- Debbie New, Vermont Community Thermal Networks, (802) 498-4714, debbie@vctn.org
- Mieke Riddlebarger, 350VT, (740) 475-7466, mieke@350vt.org
- Peter Sterling, Renewable Energy Vermont, (802) 279-6840, peter@revermont.org
- Ben Edgerly Walsh, VPIRG, (802) 734-7680, bwalsh@vpig.org

Partner Organizations Supporting the 2026 Environmental Common Agenda

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, and social, racial and economic justice; bolster strong communities; and strengthen our democracy. This agenda speaks to this vision, while respecting that individual partner groups have missions that only allow them to endorse specific priorities within the agenda.

