

2001 CHAMPLAIN

LAKE



PLAN

ACTION

Annual Report of the Vermont Citizens
Advisory Committee on Lake Champlain's Future





VERMONT CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN

Michaela Stickney

Vermont Coordinator
Lake Champlain Basin Program
PO Box 204
54 West Shore Rd.
Grand Isle, VT 05458
800-468-5227 (VT&NY)
802-372-3213
michaela.stickney@
anrmail.anr.state.vt.us

VTCAC Members

Sen. Jean Ankeney
Robert Beach
Eric Clifford
Art Cohn
Lori Fisher
Buzz Hoerr, Chair
Peter Kreisel
Ralph Montefusco
Chris Pierson, Vice Chair
Sen. Elizabeth Ready
Rep. Mary Sullivan
A. Gould Susslin
Kathy Sweeten
Rep. David Zuckerman

Dear Friends of Lake Champlain,

This year has been exciting and interesting for your Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC). The Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) is in the midst of its first five-year review of *Opportunities for Action*, the long-term management plan for Lake Champlain endorsed by Vermont, New York, and Quebec. As a member of the Lake Champlain Steering Committee, the VTCAC will work diligently toward making needed adjustments in this flexible and non-regulatory plan.

In response to consistent public input, accelerating the phosphorus reduction timetable remains our highest priority. The VTCAC, with support from the non-profit Lake Champlain Committee, advocated compressing the timeline from 2016 to 2009, the 400th anniversary of European arrival to the lake. As a result, the LCBP commissioned a special study to assess progress made toward reducing phosphorus to Lake Champlain. Preliminary results indicate that we will exceed and nearly double our first five-year phosphorus reduction goal.

The special study uncovered some other, more sobering news. Because land development is influencing phosphorus load generation more than originally anticipated, Vermonters will need to focus on urban and suburban nonpoint source pollution more aggressively. Due to the velocity of these changes, we may actually see some of our pollution reduction progress eroded in the near term. The VTCAC is engaged in debating strategies to address these difficult issues and include them in the revised *Opportunities for Action*.

We want to thank three outgoing, long-term members for their substantial efforts over many years. Dr. Susslin has served on the VTCAC since its inception in 1988. He leaves us but will continue working on other lake initiatives. Senator Elizabeth Ready and Representative Mary Sullivan, who have served as two of our legislative representatives, are leaving also. We wish them well in their new careers!

Sincerely,

Buzz Hoerr, Chair

Overview

INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) continued to demonstrate its strong commitment to protecting Lake Champlain and its environs during 2000. As a voice for the Champlain basin's citizens, our actions were allied with legislators, public resource management agencies, and citizen groups. Recommendations in this report represent our annual guidance to lawmakers and state agencies in their decisions regarding Lake Champlain and its basin.

Since last year, significant progress was made toward achieving the three priority initiatives listed above. The phosphorus timetable reduction initiative resulted in the commissioning of the *Preliminary Evaluation of Progress Toward Lake Champlain Basin Program Phosphorus Reduction Goals*. This report assessed progress and investigated methods and costs of accomplishing the next levels of phosphorus reduction. Preliminary results suggested that achieving phosphorus targets in *Opportunities for Action*—Lake Champlain's long-term management plan—may cost \$60 to \$80 million. The report also suggested that if Vermonters rely on existing pollution prevention programs alone, the phosphorus targets may not be reached within the original 20-year timeline. Furthermore, steadily growing urban and suburban pollution sources may negate phosphorus reductions made in the agricultural sector. On a brighter note, the report highlighted that phosphorus reduction targets for the first five years of the 20-year program have been surpassed.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES FOR 2001

1. Achieve phosphorus reduction targets by 2009—the 400th anniversary of explorer Samuel de Champlain's arrival to the lake.
2. Reduce or prevent infestations of aquatic nuisance species such as water chestnut, Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, and alewives.
3. Reduce human health risks from toxic pollution to Lake Champlain and its basin, including airborne sources.

In response, Governor Dean announced in June that he will request \$1.2 million from state reserves to reduce agricultural run-off. Additionally, he will seek \$750,000 for a revolving loan fund to reduce stormwater pollution, restore rivers, and study mercury. Last fall, Congress passed a \$20 million authorization to

the US Army Corps of Engineers for nonpoint source pollution control in the Champlain basin over a ten-year period. These tools and resources will increase Vermonters' ability to protect and improve conditions in the Lake Champlain basin.

Actions to Improve Water Quality

PREFACE

Vermont communities got a head start creating municipal stormwater management plans last year. The Vermont Legislature passed a stormwater bill directing the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (VTANR) to develop a program that enables communities to customize their local basin management plans. The bill was supported by an alliance of environmental organizations, ski areas, businesses, and the VTANR. The forthcoming *Vermont Stormwater Management Handbook* will represent a tremendous asset for Vermonters. Expanding technical assistance to communities and increasing funding for water quality improvements are crucial to safeguard Lake Champlain's health.

2000 Year in Review

In 2000, the VTCAC pursued several initiatives that yielded many positive results. The VTCAC selected 21 projects to receive \$61,000 in Lake Champlain Basin Program Partnership Program grants to communities and non-profit groups (see photo, page 4). In collaboration with New York and Quebec counterparts, the VTCAC hosted three public meetings for citizens to voice their concerns about lake management.

ACTION

The VTCAC continued to champion **phosphorus timetable reduction** by reviewing the phosphorus reduction report and initiating funding discussions with the VT Agency of Natural Resources (VTANR) and legislators.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

The Vermont, New York, and Quebec CACs were jointly recognized with an Environmental Merit Award from the EPA for their tireless pursuit of accelerating the phosphorus reduction timetable and overall effort to involve citizens (see photo, page 5).

ACTION

The VTCAC was a major sponsor of the **international "LakeNet" conference**. Nearly 30 representatives from 12 lakes worldwide visited Vermont to learn about the Lake Champlain basin. The annual joint meeting of all three CACs was a prominent feature of the conference and demonstrated community organizing and public involvement in action (see cover photo).

ACCOMPLISHMENT

Community partnership aspects of LakeNet have been proposed as a policy feature at the International Lakes Environment Conference in Japan 2001. The conference will have a week-long public involvement component that was inspired by Lake Champlain's CACs.

ACTION

The VTCAC was a leader in introducing a **new nutrient management technology**—Super Soils—to a Vermont farm. The technology reduces water pollution by accelerating animal waste composting, so that the resulting product can be exported as a marketable commodity.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

The Super Soils technology was installed on a Vermont farm as a pilot study to determine its effectiveness in a cold weather environment. Super Soils technology will be featured at the International Lakes Environment Conference tradeshow in Japan in 2001.

ACTION

The VTCAC held several discussions with the Quebec CAC and residents on both sides of the border about phosphorus migration and reduction issues associated with potential removal of the **Missisquoi Bay causeway**.

ACCOMPLISHMENT

In direct response to letters from the VTCAC, a dialogue was opened between VTANR and VT Agency of Transportation about finding a creative solution to disagreement surrounding removal of the Missisquoi Bay causeway.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

- **Expand funding for CREP.**

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) provides financial incentives to farmers who take riparian land out of agricultural production for a 10-15 year period. The current program targets 1000 acres in the Lake Champlain basin. The VTCAC supports expanding the program to include additional acreage, and proposes incorporating conservation easements to ensure long-term riparian protection beyond the 10-15 year period.

- **Maintain funding for wastewater treatment facility upgrades.**

Wastewater facility upgrades may offer the most cost-effective, technically reliable, and immediate way to reduce phosphorus pollution to Lake Champlain. Two facilities remain in the basin that need to reach the statutory phosphorus discharge limit of 0.8 mg/l—Northfield and Richmond. It is extremely important that capital funds be committed to complete these upgrades.

VERMONT STATE AGENCY ACTIONS

- **Complete the Lake Champlain TMDL in 2001.**

The State of Vermont is under a federal mandate to develop Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) assessments for impaired Vermont waterbodies. The assessments will support restoration of impaired waters to healthy conditions by identifying pollutants entering them. A restoration plan establishes a schedule for accomplishing the pollutant reductions. The Lake Champlain TMDL is currently underway and will be an important component of the phosphorus reduction process, especially since nearly half of Vermont is in the basin.

- **Increase technical assistance to towns for watershed planning.**

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VTDEC) has initiated a statewide Watershed Improvement Project (WIP) for Vermont's 17 major river basins. The 17 river basin communities are scheduled to complete local watershed plans by 2006 with assistance from new watershed coordinators. To fully implement the WIP, two more watershed coordinators need to be hired for a total of five statewide.

- **Increase monitoring and compliance with AAPs.**

The Vermont Department of Agriculture helps farmers comply with Acceptable Agricultural Practices (AAPs) that protect water quality. The VTCAC supports a proposal by the Vermont Natural Resources Council to hire additional staff for AAP outreach coordination and compliance to reduce the backlog of farm visits.

- **Continue monitoring for *toxin-producing blue-green algae*.**

Human health problems associated with *toxin-producing* blue-green algae are poorly understood. In 2000, the State of Vermont, University of Vermont, and other partners joined forces to study blue-green algae in Lake Champlain with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and the LCBP. This important work should be continued so that the public has a better understanding of risks. A quick response system to alert the citizens about *toxin-producing* blue-green algae blooms is vital.

- **Establish a statewide library for microbial source tracking data.**

The VTCAC proposes that the VTDEC serve as a statewide library and information clearinghouse for microbial source tracking data, also known as "DNA fingerprints." Conducting this work can be extremely expensive without a centralized database, and therefore is cost prohibitive for many Vermont

towns. The VTCAC believes this new technology will help towns and state agencies better direct funds for nonpoint source runoff reduction by better understanding pathogen sources.

Actions to Control Aquatic Nuisance Plants & Animals

PREFACE

The recent spotlight on aquatic nuisance species (ANS) has attracted additional funds for control and prevention. The *Lake Champlain Basin ANS Management Plan* was approved in July 2000. Shortly thereafter, \$100,000 in federal funds were

received for water chestnut harvesting, law enforcement of ANS sale or transport, and public service announcements. For the second year in a row, \$400,000 of US Army Corps of Engineer funds will be available for aquatic nuisance species control—\$300,000 for water chestnut harvesting and \$100,000 for a follow-up study of a Eurasian

A Partnership Grant activity to handpull nuisance plants from a wetland.

watermilfoil chemical control application. Strong public reaction to the spread of watermilfoil has also identified the need to find short-term solutions in addition to long-term strategies.

Winooski Valley Park District



LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

- **Support funding to study and control invasive aquatic nuisance species.**

The US Army Corps of Engineers will renew its \$400,000 commitment to the VTDEC for water chestnut and Eurasian watermilfoil control. Funds earmarked for water chestnut control need a 50/50 match, and Army Corps funds may not be used for personnel salary. The State of Vermont will contribute up to \$300,000 toward these efforts. A State of New York contribution is under discussion. The VTCAC recognizes that State commitment to this project is vital to its success.

VERMONT STATE AGENCY ACTIONS

- **Continue supporting long-term sea lamprey control.**

This control effort is undergoing an Environmental Impact Statement review as it moves to become a permanent program. While chemical treatments have resulted in past successes, non-chemical approaches and physical barriers are extremely important for long-term control. The VTCAC advocates continuing the sea lamprey program, and proposes nonchemical treatment for the Poultney River, due to threatened and endangered native mussels, and other sensitive areas.

- **Control alewives in Lake St. Catherine before they enter Lake Champlain.**

Since alewives were discovered in Lake St. Catherine (30 miles from Lake Champlain) two years ago, the State has yet to identify a preferred management protocol. The VTCAC endorses quick and decisive action to prevent the spread of alewives to other waterbodies, excluding the use of rotenone, which recently has been linked to Parkinson's disease in humans.

Actions to Enhance Recreation & Cultural Heritage Resources

PREFACE

Interest in recreation enhancements and cultural heritage protection continued to soar last year. Lake Champlain Bikeways received a 54% increase in information requests. The program offers 17 bicycle theme loops in New York and 9 in Vermont. The Lake Champlain Committee expanded the Paddlers' Trail to 26 sites. Due to discoveries from the underwater survey, more than 20 shipwrecks in Vermont and New York are candidates for the Lake Champlain Underwater Historic Preserve System. Progress in these areas slowed down last year with the unexpected loss of funding from the National Park Service. Although funding was restored for 2001, long-term funding is not guaranteed.

VERMONT STATE AGENCY ACTIONS

• Increase public access to Lake Champlain.

The VTCAC endorses State programs which acquire and develop additional access sites to Lake Champlain, especially areas designated for low-impact and non-motorized uses, such as additional paddling sites and SCUBA diving access. The VTCAC also encourages State agency support to develop more bicycle theme loops around Lake Champlain.

• Encourage bi-state management of the underwater preserve system.

The Lake Champlain Maritime Museum jointly manages the Lake Champlain Underwater Historic Preserve System with the State of Vermont. Recent

inclusion of a New York site and future sites call for bi-state management. The State of New York is currently developing a management study to evaluate this bi-state, public-private effort. The VTCAC encourages the State of Vermont to provide funding to expand the preserve system and continue implementing the plan.

• Fund the underwater survey.

The VTCAC supports acceleration of LCBP partners' efforts to identify, manage, and protect underwater heritage resources. Submerged cultural heritage resources are vulnerable to destruction from zebra mussels and protecting them entails cooperation of many management entities.



The CACs receive EPA Environmental Merit Awards.

• Discuss Celebration Champlain and the proposed heritage corridor.

Celebration Champlain and the proposed Champlain Valley Heritage Corridor represent opportunities to protect historical resources and support the local economy by attracting visitors to the lake's historic sites. Celebration Champlain is planned for 2003-2009 and will focus on ecotourism and heritage tourism. The heritage corridor offers the possibility to invest funds into heritage protection and tourism. The VTCAC supports these discussions and exploring how they may be planned and managed by local organizations in collaboration with the LCBP.

Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future

The VTCAC is a diverse group of citizens, lake advocates, business representatives, farmers, and legislators united through their interest in a clean, healthy Lake Champlain. The VTCAC members are appointed by the Governor or by the Vermont Legislature for two or three year terms. They are charged with submitting an annual report to the Vermont Legislature that maps out recommended actions to protect the future integrity of the lake. The Vermont, New York, and Quebec CAC chairs each hold a seat on the Lake Champlain Steering Committee, the governing board for the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP). The VTCAC members help guide the development of the LCBP's annual budget and outreach programs, and select recipients of the annual Partnership Program grants.

Buzz Hoerr, Chair

Business Owner
Colchester
Hoerrfam@msn.com

Senator Jean Ankeney

Chittenden County
Jankeney@leg.state.vt.us

Robert Beach

Business Owner
Vergennes
Bob@basinharbor.com

Eric Clifford

Dairy Farmer
Starksboro
Clifford@together.net

Art Cohn

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum
Vergennes
Cohn@lcmmm.org

Lori Fisher

Lake Champlain Committee
Burlington
Lorif@lakechamplaincommittee.org

Peter Kreisel

CPA/Business Consultant
South Burlington
Peter@kreiselsegear.com

Ralph Montefusco

Environmentalist
Colchester
Rmontefu@yahoo.com

Chris Pierson, Vice Chair

Business Representative
Essex
Chris@highlandsugarworks.com

Senator Elizabeth Ready

Addison County
Eready@leg.state.vt.us

Representative Mary Sullivan

Burlington
Msullivan@leg.state.vt.us

A. Gould Susslin

Resident
St. Albans
gsuss@earthlink.net

Kathy Sweeten

Business Representative
Burlington
Kasweeten@aol.com

Representative David Zuckerman

Vegetable Farmer
Burlington
Dzuckerman@leg.state.vt.us

Michaela Stickney
Vermont Lake Champlain Coordinator
Lake Champlain Basin Program
(802) 372-3213

For More Information
Lake Champlain Basin Program
(800) 468-LCBP (VT & NY)
(802) 372-3213, www.lcbp.org