

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

Monday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

## DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

**Committee Members Present:** Mark Naud (Chair), Sen. Randy Brock, Eric Clifford, Lori Fisher, Wayne Elliott, Rep. Carol Ode, Denise Smith, Hilary Solomon, Jeff Wennberg

**Committee Members Absent:** Sen. Chris Bray, Rep. Kari Dolan, Bob Fischer, Denise Smith (Vice-chair)

**LCBP Staff in Attendance:** Sarah Coleman (VTANR), Katie Darr, Colleen Hickey, Lauren Jenness, Elizabeth Lee

**Speakers:** Matthew Vaughan, Jackie Dagger, Karrie Thomas, Jim Brangan

**Public Guests:** Haley Pero (Sen. Sanders' Office)

Meeting summary by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

### **5:00 – 5:15 pm**

#### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Mark welcomed attendees.

#### **2. Public Comments**

Haley Pero from Sen. Sanders' Office provided a brief update on activity in the Senate. The infrastructure Bill has passed the Senate and contains provisions related to water infrastructure and the Civilian Climate Corps. The Senate Committee on Appropriations put out a bill for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies. Haley can send along highlights from this appropriations bill, bill summary available [here](#).

#### **3. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on draft September 13<sup>th</sup> VTCAC Meeting Summary**

There was not a quorum to vote on this item, it will be added to the November 8<sup>th</sup> agenda.

### **5:15 – 5:30 pm**

#### **4. LCBP Real-Time Data Website and Science Blog – Matthew Vaughan**

Matt Vaughan, LCBP Chief Scientist, reviewed the new [data.lcbp.org](http://data.lcbp.org) website that has a real-time data portal and serves as a home for all real-time data being collected in the Lake Champlain Basin. Most of the data is currently pulled from the USGS. Real-time buoy data from the Lake Champlain Monitoring Program will also be incorporated. Part of the new upgrade to the program includes the deployment of two additional buoys in Malletts Bay and the Lamoille River. The site will be continuously updated. If you have feedback about ways you wish to use the website or data you would like to see incorporated, email [mvaughan@lcbp.org](mailto:mvaughan@lcbp.org).

- Wayne asked why the water level at White Hall is lower than the other locations. Matt did not know a definitive reason but shared that it could be impacted by wind direction and wind speed pushing water north.

Matt also introduced the LCBP Science Blog ([www.lcbp.org/news-and-media/news/science-blog/](http://www.lcbp.org/news-and-media/news/science-blog/)). The intent is to make it easier for partners to digest and use key findings from research on Lake Champlain and its tributaries. The primary audience is practitioners. The Technical Team is happy to take requests for studies that the VTAC and others would like to see summarized.

- Lori requested a summary of the toxics study.

### **5:30 – 6:30 pm**

#### **5. Public Access and Vermont's Recreation Economy – Jackie Dagger and Karrie Thomas**

Jackie Dagger, Program Manager of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) provided an overview of VOREC's work and grant program. Karrie Thomas, Executive Director of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, provided an overview of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail's work to foster connection with waterways, partnership to provide recreation access on Otter Creek, and her involvement in the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative. Their presentations are included with the meeting materials, highlights and questions are included below.

#### ***VOREC – Jackie Dagger***

VOREC was established by Executive Order 11-17 in June 2017. VOREC builds partnerships and networks to grow Vermont's outdoor recreation economy. The steering committee engages with businesses, government, the non-profit sector, and the public to identify outcomes that promote business opportunities, increase participation opportunities, and strengthen the quality and stewardship of recreational resources. The VOREC community grant program started in 2018 and funds community projects that leverage outdoor recreation with one-time state general funds. There are no match requirements which lowers the barrier to entry for smaller communities. From 2018-2020, VOREC distributed 9 grants and \$300,000 in funding. In 2021, there is \$5.1 million in grant funding available, largely allocated from COVID relief funding.

- Lori asked if the deadlines for 2022 applications have been determined. Jackie shared the deadlines will depend on next year's allocation of funding and recommended checking the [VOREC website](#) for updates.
- Mark asked for an estimate of the breakdown between non-profit, municipal, and for-profit applicants. Jackie clarified that for-profit entities are not eligible for VOREC grants, but they can be part of a project team with municipalities or non-profits. She estimated a 50/50 split between non-profit and municipal applicants, though would need to check the data to be sure.
- Mark asked if there was a theme across the applications. Jackie noted there was not one particular lead goal, though there were many projects looking to connect communities to rail trails. Proposed improvements included signage to draw people into communities from the rail trail and access to water bodies from the rail trails for paddling or angling among others.

#### ***Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT) – Karrie Thomas***

VOREC is one of 17 state outdoor recreation offices in the country. The Outdoor Industry Association has [reports](#) on Vermont's outdoor economy from the US Bureau of Economic Activity. Vermont's performance as the # 5 skiing state demonstrates that we have the potential to benefit greatly by expanding our capacity. Vermont's near bottom of the list status in all other categories suggests that we have a long way to go to be competitive in this sphere nationally. With the current funding available through the VOREC Community Grant Program, we have the unprecedented opportunity to help communities implement their vision to develop local outdoor recreation economies. Like each project NFCT completes to improve access to our waterways, developing the infrastructure of our towns - both downtown and on the trail - will enable visitors to enjoy their

particular brand of outdoor fun. Vermont has always had tourism, but if we want outdoor recreation to benefit the whole state, we need to develop a diversity of experiences accessible to different tastes and budgets. By dispersing visitors across the state, we spread the economic benefit and also prevent the existing places from being loved to death. Karrie thanked the elected officials who helped make this funding possible. While the current level of funding is not likely to continue, the grant program has real value for helping build our capacity to expand the outdoor recreation economy and it should be part of future economic development plans. In addition to funding, many communities need technical support to develop their vision and a plan to take advantage of their particular resources without sacrificing the health and character of their people and place. The degree to which private landowners and volunteers form the foundation of the Vermont outdoor recreation economy is a potentially precarious place to start from. With this in mind, we need to foster the existing culture of permission to use private land for public enjoyment, educate users about a stewardship ethic that respects and cares for the resource or everything we are working for will crumble.

With proper attention, outdoor recreation is aligned with maintaining natural resources and water quality. Emotional attachment leads people to prioritize protection and builds a community of stewards. The NFCT is a network of water trails that maintain a history of access and interconnectedness and cultivates a community of people and organizations to care for these shared resources. Businesses are critical to the ultimate goal of getting people on the water. Without outfitters, it is difficult for many to access these resources. Some municipalities have developed boat lending programs. NFCT has 25 landowner agreements to allow public access on private lands. Partnerships are key to building, maintaining, and establishing infrastructure and allowing public access on private land. Since 2013, 25 projects have been implemented in the Lake Champlain Basin. NFCT is working in partnership with Vermont Fish and Wildlife to formalize and improve several existing access points on Otter Creek. Otter Creek has a large diversity of fish. VT F&W has a vision to create the Otter Creek Fishing Trail with access points every 3-5 miles to enable short and long trips on this watershed.

- Lori asked if the agreements with landowners were handshake agreements or if the NFCT owned any land. Karrie clarified that the NFCT does not own any land. They defer to the Vermont River Conservancy when it comes to easements. The NFCT tries to choose relationships with folks who are willing to carry on the legacy of access. The NFCT also has landowner agreements in New York, but there is more public land in New York than anywhere else on the trail.
- Mark asked about the lack of livery services and what the barriers to that may be. Karrie believed this has to do with the seasonality of the business, physical labor and people skills required, and other factors like low water levels in the Missisquoi. Guide and outfitter availability is an issue industry-wide, not just in Vermont.

### **6:30 – 6:45 pm**

#### **6. Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Network Film – Jim Brangan, Katie Darr**

*Connected, A Journey Through the Champlain Adirondack Biosphere* is a film that celebrates partners working to build a more sustainable future for communities across the Champlain Basin and the Adirondack Mountains. The film was directed by Lia Nydes and produced in partnership with the National Park Service and the Center for Environmental Filmmaking, American University. It can be viewed on the CABN website:

<https://champlainvalleynhp.org/heritage/champlain-adirondack-biosphere-reserve/>

- Lori asked how CABN is integrating with other initiatives and processes in the basin. One of the reasons it didn't take off after designation was because the Lake Champlain Basin Program came into being. Jim noted that LCBP is providing resources to CABN. CABN is not looking to supersede anything LCBP is doing. Currently, CABN's focal issues are youth involvement and climate change. CABN has a youth board that provides input to the CABN Steering Committee and youth board members that sit on the U.S. Biosphere Network's Steering Committee. There is a proposed climate change atlas underway,

spearheaded by Emanuel Carter at SUNY ESF, to better plan for climate change impacts across the Champlain-Adirondack region. Katie added that as CABN is experiencing a revival, so is the national network of Biosphere Regions. Nationally, there is a large focus on working with gateway communities to capitalize on this international designation to support responsible tourism and sustainable development.

- Rep. Ode asked about working with the Agency of Education to develop a curriculum focused on outdoor activities and education to be picked up by schools or added to Vermont’s educational standards for learning. Jim clarified that this is not currently in CABN’s purview but may be better addressed by the Champlain Basin Education Initiative. Colleen Hickey and Stephanie Larkin have developed a high school stewardship program to get students outside for experiential learning. Colleen added that the CBEI runs an 11-day course for teacher trainings to teach teachers how to get kids out in the field including water quality training in the Adirondacks, farm visits in Vermont, wastewater treatment plants, and more. 117 teachers have come through the program.

**6:45 – 7:00 pm**

**7. Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion**

The next meeting is on **November 8th** and will be a joint meeting with the NYCAC. The theme will be climate change and soils. An action plan meeting will be organized prior to the November CAC meeting.