

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

Monday, March 11, 2019, 5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

**Shelburne Town Offices, Meeting Room 1
5420 Shelburne Road, Shelburne**

APPROVED MEETING SUMMARY

Committee Members Present: Sen. Randy Brock, Eric Clifford, Lori Fisher, Bill Howland, Sen. Ginny Lyons, Mark Naud, Rep. Carol Ode, Jeff Wennberg

Committee Members Absent: Wayne Elliott, Bob Fischer, David Mears

Public Guests: Nancy Wennberg, Mike Schramm, Gianna Petito (Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District – WNRCD), Crea Lintilhac (Lintilhac Foundation)

Meeting summary by Bethany Sargent, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

5:00 – 6:35 pm

1. Welcome and introductions

5:06 pm – Lori Fisher welcomed the committee members and public guests. She welcomed Senator Randy Brock, a new appointment, then asked VTAC members, staff, and guests to introduce themselves.

2. Public comments

Gianna Petito mentioned the WNRCD Septic Solutions Conference to be held Thursday, May 9th, with support from the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP). The conference is open to participants statewide and is designed for homeowners along rivers and lakeshores and septic designers. It will highlight the environmental challenges, financial opportunities, and technological solutions for managing septic systems along shorelands.

Eric Clifford described the challenge of reporting phosphorus reductions from best management practices (BMPs) implemented on farms with incomplete data. He shared a handout prepared by directors of the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition (CVFC) that includes data from thirteen farms collected by UVM Extension. Graphs demonstrate a higher percentage adoption rate of conservation BMP implementation among CVFC farms compared to farms statewide and in priority watersheds.

Lori Fisher mentioned that Lake Champlain froze over completely but encouraged everyone to still use caution when going on the ice.

3. Review and vote on January 14th Meeting Summary

Carol Ode moved to approve January 14th Draft Meeting Summary; Eric Clifford seconded. Vote unanimous. Motion carried.

4. Debrief Legislative Day

Jeff Wennberg mentioned the conversation in House Agriculture went well and he felt the ag committee was very engaged. He described it as the high point of the day, along with meeting with the Lt. Gov. He also mentioned House Natural Resources has a lot of new members and time was particularly limited. He suggested that it would be prudent to take advantage of any other opportunities to reinforce the message with those members.

Eric Clifford agreed that this year, especially, there are a lot of new members in the House, with turnover in House Natural Resources leadership.

Rep. Carol Ode suggested following up with House Ways and Means to testify.

Sen. Ginny Lyons thought it would be worthwhile for LCBP to present in Room 11 for any interested committees.

Mark Naud mentioned that Senator Starr was missing at Senate Agriculture and there were two new members to update. He also had a short conversation with Senator Nitka, who was particularly interested in clean water funding.

Lori Fisher asked the legislative members to give an update on pending bills.

Sen. Brock mentioned the House is considering a bill for funding. After House Natural Resources, it would then move to House Ways and Means, then Senate Finance. He said the bill out of Senate Natural Resources does not include funding.

Rep. Ode described that new maps reduce the administrative burden of having a per parcel fee. She suggested any clean water funding proposal include water infrastructure to broaden support.

Sen. Lyons concurred that it would be great to have closure on how to fund one or both. If you add surface water and water infrastructure needs, there must be an additional \$20 million, otherwise you're fixing one issue at the expense of the other.

5. Update on 2019 Lake Champlain Action Plan Public Forum planning and discuss next steps for other public forums

Lori Fisher and Bethany Sargent gave an update on planning a public forum on the 2019 action plan. Lori explained the intention of bringing presenters to a larger audience, which was done in the fall for the State of the Lake Report.

Bethany mentioned Room 11 is not available to outside groups during the entire month of April, that state procurement policy requires soliciting three bids for contracting services (filming or moderating) and recommended at least a 6- to 8-week planning horizon to line up presenters and publicize the event.

Bill Howland was concerned about having a moderator who is a member of the media covering the event. Lori Fisher explained that coordinating with a media partner promotes broader publicity. Sen. Lyons suggested asking Eric Howe to moderate and Onion River Community Access (ORCA) Media to film.

In response to Sen. Brock's question about the VTCAC's experience with hosting public forums, Lori said they had good turnout for their forums on the State of the Lake Report in Burlington and St. Albans, but turnout in Rutland was not as strong. They had solicited sponsors and asked them

to share with their networks. She said turnout largely depended on the topic, key partnerships, and time for advance publicity.

Rep. Ode suggested hearing an update from the Lake Carmi group.

Senator Brock suggested inviting entire committees and that the later it is in the session, the less relevant it becomes and the more difficult it would be to attract a broader audience. Focusing on funding for cleaning up Lake Champlain would be relevant to the natural resources, agriculture, and money committees.

Crea Lintilhac mentioned three topics of current interest: (1) interconnectedness of on-farm viability and water quality, (2) changes to the wetland rules, and (3) payment for ecosystem services.

Lori Fisher mentioned they had originally envisioned the action plan forum would be held 4:00 – 6:00 pm; the other option would be a forum focused on recreation in May. A forum focused on agriculture would take more time to pull together.

Gianna Petito mentioned that water funding and the disbursement of it has been a big issue, and that the bill going through the senate is cause for concern.

Bill Howland asked where everyone thought the VTCAC could be most effective and advance the VTCAC's action plan. He mentioned his interest in focusing on "enforce polluter pays" in the action plan.

Senator Lyons said that advancing the VTCAC's objectives begins with leadership and the administration. At present, the administration has a great deal to say about how the money is raised and appropriated. As such, it would be difficult for a single committee or legislator to decide and push their idea through. Six to eight years ago, there was support on per parcel funding and at the last minute it fell apart because of an administrative decision. People agree that clean water funding is a priority, but nobody wants to take the responsibility of an additional tax. She suggested going through each of the VTCAC's priorities, connecting with committees of jurisdiction, and inviting them to a presentation and robust discussion.

Because of the tight timeframe to maintain relevancy with the legislature as a target audience, VTCAC members decided to focus on planning a forum on public access and recreation in late spring, a forum on agriculture for the fall, and a legislative presentation in January 2020. Laying the ground work for the fall ag forum and the legislative presentation would be priorities for the summer retreat. The April 8th meeting would be dedicated to planning the public access and recreation forum, including identifying the date, location, partners, speakers, format, and questions for forum. Lori Fisher noted she will be away for the April 8th meeting.

Below is a list of suggestions for it:

- Holding in Middlebury area would encourage greater turnout from South Lake residents
- Plan for early- to mid-June
- Mount Independence or the Maritime Museum
- Develop a list of organizations that would co-host and help publicize
- Potential topics/questions:
 - Should we broaden the funding base for fish and wildlife?
 - How can we increase participation in fishing and hunting?
 - How do we sustain fish and wildlife funding in an era of shrinking licenses?
 - How can we realize the impact of bird watching on the economy?
 - Changing the funding mechanism for fish and wildlife and public access

- Suggested speakers:
 - Mark Sherman (Outdoor Gear Exchange, Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative)
 - Mike Snyder, Forests, Park and Recreation Commissioner
 - Louis Porter, Fish and Wildlife Department Commissioner

In advance of April meeting, Bethany will solicit committee members for additional ideas on questions, venues, and speakers by Wednesday, March 27th.

The May 13th meeting will focus on planning the summer annual retreat.

Additional comments on the fall agricultural forum included:

- Increasing understanding of how phosphorus moves through the soil and the implications for lake clean-up, funding, and implementing new rules
- When scheduling, be sure to avoid UVM's water quality conference, which is typically in the fall and the North American Lake Management Society Conference in early November.
- Need to better understand the effects of implementing Act 64; the data collected has been inadequate and the ag community is not being given credit for what they're doing
- Bad data leads to bad policy
- Increase transparency on the nutrient management plans that state clean water funds have supported
- Increase regular monitoring of impaired tributaries to determine empirically the impact of best management practices
- Provide an update on the Vermont Agriculture Water Quality Partnership
- Emphasize that tactical basin planning processes are critical

6:39 Executive session: Discuss potential VTCAC nominees and identify next steps

Tabled action until April meeting due to absence of VTCAC nominee working group chairs.

Jeff Wennberg moved to adjourn; Eric Clifford seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:50 pm.