

Report on House Bills for June 14th VTCAC Meeting

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES, FISH & WILDLIFE

Updating Vermont's Bottle Bill

An update to Vermont's 50-year-old bottle bill passed the House this session. [H.175](#) will expand the types of containers subject to deposits and will now include water bottles, wine bottles, hard cider and tea containers, and others. This bill will also increase the handling fees paid to vendors, which will encourage the opening of more redemption centers. Containers recycled via the deposit system are cleaner and more valuable than if they go through the general recycling stream, and a greater percentage of them will be made into new containers. Glass, in particular, is much easier to manage as a recycled material if it goes through redemption centers versus a curbside bin.

Old Growth Forests

Old growth forests are particularly rich in biodiversity because they are more complex, and this complexity grows over long periods of time. They provide unique habitats during a time when habitat loss is the biggest driver of diminishing animal and plant populations. Old forests are one of the most cost-effective ways of removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it. The related issue of forest fragmentation occurs when forests are split up by roads and developments, and animals that require large areas to roam can be severely impacted. The committee is working on a bill to encourage and protect old forests through an expansion of the Use Value program.

Vermont's Water Quality Standards

[H.108](#) - An act relating to Vermont standards for issuing a Clean Water Act section 401 certification, passed overwhelmingly in both bodies of the General Assembly. This bill puts in place evaluation tools that the state needs to assess large projects that require federal licensing or permits, such as proposed oil or gas pipeline projects. The bill also clarifies the long-time interpretation and practice that Vermont's water quality standards apply to all of our surface waters: rivers, streams, lakes, ponds and wetlands.

[H.446](#) An act relating to miscellaneous resources and development subjects. Attached is this bill. This [bill passed the House](#) and has to do with water quality monitoring and whether the phosphorus load from new development permitted by the Secretary of ANR in the Lake Champlain Watershed in the previous calendar year is achieving at least at 70 percent phosphorus load reduction.

HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES

Prohibiting "Forever Chemicals" from Consumer Products

PFAS chemicals were found to contaminate drinking water in Bennington and North Bennington in 2016. PFAS are known as "forever chemicals" because they do not biodegrade in the environment and accumulate within our bodies over time. This exposure leads to a number of adverse health effects, including an increased risk of cancer. Research is showing that you don't need to live in a contaminated area to be exposed to PFAS, because these chemicals are used in many consumer products.

Rather than limiting our solutions to downstream clean-up, [S.20](#) addresses this issue upstream by preventing these toxic substances from entering our state. S.20 prohibits manufacture and sale of

PFAS from four products that pose the highest risks to Vermonters' well-being, including food packaging, fire extinguisher foam and firefighting PPE, rugs and carpets, and ski wax. S.20 takes comprehensive steps to protect Vermonters from toxic chemicals and prevent future harm to the environment and public health.

HOUSE AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY

Big Book of Ag Launches

Eighteen months in the making with input from more than 1,500 Vermonters, the "Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021-2030" debuted this session. It is a collaboration between the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets. It is made up of 54 product, market and issue briefs. For the next decade, this go-to resource will serve policymakers and stakeholders, select boards and planning commissions.

Strategic goals, priority strategies, and credits are all available online: vtfarmtoplate.com/plan/ or in hard copy.

Food Scraps as Chicken Feed - or Not?

For almost two decades, Vermont has been trying to solve this riddle: why can't food scraps be used as chicken feed? Isn't that farming? The Agency of Natural Resources said that food scraps are solid waste. The problem was that if food residuals are considered food for animals, that triggers all sorts of requirements under the USDA, the FDA, and the Food Safety Modernization Act for "commercial feed" to limit pathogens. After much back-and-forth between the Agency of Natural Resources and the Agency of Agriculture, here's the solution: in [S.102](#): don't call food scraps chicken feed, call it an "agricultural input"—like horse manure—that our poultry sift through as it becomes a soil amendment called compost. Rules and regulations will add guardrails to these compost-making, chicken-farming operations that will exempt them from Act 250 solid waste permitting, but subject them to Ag's Required Agricultural Practices (known as RAPs). Now that food scraps aren't supposed to go in our trash (per Act 148, Vermont's Universal Recycling law), they can be redirected to chickens.

New Agricultural Innovation Board Created

On its way to the Governor, [H.434](#) is a bill that creates the Agricultural Innovation Board (AIB). It will take on the tasks of the Vermont Pesticide Advisory Council and the Vermont Seed Review Committee, as well as tackle areas of concern such as pesticide use and how to reduce it, and the use of agriculture plastic and how to transition to more biodegradable materials. Vermont is the only state that has a Seed Review Committee that allows for the review of the seed traits of a new genetically engineered seed proposed for sale, distribution, or use in the state. The legislature created this committee last biennium in response to the use of Dicamba (pest-controlling herbicide) in other parts of the country. The AIB's approach will be a more holistic approach to soil health and pesticide use.