

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

April 15th, 2024

5:00 – 7:00 pm

Zoom

Approved Meeting Summary

View Recording [here](#)

Committee Members Present: Denise Smith (Chair), Karina Dailey (Vice-Chair), Sen. Randy Brock, Breck Bowden, Eric Clifford, Wayne Elliot, Bob Fischer, Lori Fisher, Sen. Martine Laroque Gulick, Mark Naud, Rep. Carol Ode

Committee Members Absent: Rep. Kari Dolan, Hilary Solomon

LCBP Staff in Attendance: Mae Kate Campbell, Sarah Coleman (VTANR), Katie Darr, Meg Modley

Presenters: Mike Wichrowski (VTFW), Jackie Dagger (VOREC), Mae Kate Campbell (LCBP)

Public Guests: Alison Spasyk, Vic Putman, Rep. Sarita Austin

Meeting summary prepared by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Update on the Otter Creek Fishing Trail – Mike Wichrowski, Vermont Fish & Wildlife

Mike provided an update on the Otter Creek fishing trail which sees to provide more opportunities for motorized and non-motorized access. The presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)). The project began in 2018 with a UVM intern that laid out trips and marked portage points, historical, and natural features. Since 2022, 4 new access improvements have been completed: Neilson Access (Mt. Tabor), Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area (Mt. Tabor), Kingsley Access (Pittsford), and Middlebury Access (Middlebury). There is a goal to create staircases at each access site. The next steps include working with private landowners to secure leases or purchase land, work with municipalities to improve access, and create a map to support public access.

Discussion

- Karina asked if there is anything the CAC can do to help move this work forward. Mike noted contacts with municipalities and Green Mountain Power would be helpful. VTFW have met with some people at Green Mountain Power. Related to municipalities, he's not sure how much of a priority this has been for them. It might be a funding issue or they may have too many other things going on, the flooding last summer was a big distraction. If funding for recreation is a challenge, VTFW does have some funding it can provide to municipalities through the state motorboat registration fund and federal dollars. The access improvements are not massive projects, ~\$10-20,000. It would be helpful to connect with municipalities and impress the importance of the access projects.
 - Karina shared the CAC would be happy to share outreach and communication materials through their respective organizations and the CAC.
- Meg noted the CAC is interested in access in the Southern parts of the Basin and asked Mike to share details on the new fishing access area on Lake Champlain. Mike shared VTFW has acquired land adjacent to Larrabee's point. It is currently going through the historic preservation process. A few sites

have been identified in the three acre field, VTFW is working to set up meetings to review results of the survey and figure out next steps to be sensitive to the historic resources at the site. The goal is to provide about 60 additional parking spaces for access to Larrabee's Point.

3. Public Access and Vermont's Recreation Economy – Jackie Dagger, Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative

Jackie provided an overview of the economic impact of outdoor recreation in Vermont, VOREC's grant program, and VOREC's work with the [Move Forward Together Vermont Initiative](#) to create a shared vision for Vermont's outdoor recreation future, and set priorities action steps for the next five years. The outdoor recreation industry's contributions to Vermont's economy have been growing. In 2022, outdoor recreation accounted for 4.6% of Vermont's GDP (up from 4.1% in 2021). Vermont is second in the nation of percentage of GDP from outdoor recreation behind Hawaii. Outdoor recreation accounts for 15,000 jobs of 4.8% of all employees in Vermont. VOREC's community grant program has received 4 one-time allocations of State General Funds to grant out to municipalities across Vermont to be used to strengthen their outdoor recreation economy. The program started in FY19 with \$100,000 and two grant recipients. Since then, the program has grown tremendously. In FY22, the program received a \$6 Million allocation that has been awarded to 51 grant recipients in 2024. In the most recent grant cycle, the program was restructured to include different tracks: flood recovery, implementation, outdoor equity, and project development.

Discussion

- Wayne asked about the funding source for the \$6 Million in grant funds and whether it was at risk for the upcoming fiscal year. Jackie noted that was from State General Funds. The grant funds are one-time allocations and VOREC has not received another one-time allocation for the upcoming year. Right now, VOREC's focus is on the Move Forward Together Vermont visioning process to see what funding priorities exist.
- Wayne asked for examples of project proposals focusing outdoor equity. Jackie shared the goal with the outdoor equity category is to prioritize funding to projects in municipalities that would increase access and inclusivity. Some of the work and projects that were proposed were around accessibility in parks-creating a space with walking trails that was a quiet place for people with disabilities; saw proposals around how to create more inclusive spaces – how to invite underserved communities into municipalities and feel comfortable recreating outdoors, for example putting on outdoor skill workshops for affinity groups.
- Lori asked for clarification on funding and whether there will be an additional round of grants in 2024. Jackie confirmed there will not be another round of grants in 2024.
 - Lori expressed concern about this, particularly as there is an increase in recreational demand and no identified funding source to carry the momentum of the planning process forward.
 - Jackie noted that although there is not currently a funding allocation, the Move Forward Together Vermont process is an opportunity to pause and plan for future investments. There has also been conversation about conducting an economic impact assessment of the outdoor economy. Jackie confirmed that the earliest there might be additional grant opportunities would be in 2025.

- Sen. Brock asked why Franklin County has had no funds sent to it. Jackie noted there were not enough projects submitted in previous rounds, but there were this year and they have invited a recipient forward into the grant phase.
 - Sen. Brock asked whether people were unaware of the opportunity or just didn't apply. Jackie noted it's possible they didn't have enough information about it, but her assumption is it's a small county and there might not have been enough recreation-focused organizations that were organized to submit those programs.
 - Sen. Brock asked how the program was publicized. Jackie shared the grant opportunity goes out through a number of channels including several email lists. They have improved outreach over the last several rounds of grants.
 - Sen. Brock asked if there is a relationship between the recreational GDP of a county and the number of grants awarded? It would be good to look into that relationship. Jackie noted outdoor recreation economy data is currently available at a state level, but not by county. An economic impact study would provide more insight into those numbers.

4. Fishing Education Workshops: Equity Access Initiative – Mae Kate Campbell, Lake Champlain Basin Program

Mae Kate Campbell provided an overview of the fishing education workshops, an equity access initiative done in partnership with the Lake Champlain Basin Program, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, Vermont Fish and Wildlife, and VT LEND. In Vermont, the program has focused on fishing education and access for New American communities. The presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)).

Discussion

- Breck asked whether communities have the capacity to access the online resources that have been created and translated (translated water safety videos, language assistance for fishing). Mae Kate shared the team worked with the Health Disparities and Cultural Competence Committee to figure out the most effective way to distribute this information. They felt that QR codes were familiar and could be accessed easily by community members. One of the New American communities does not have a written language so the visuals and oration of the videos are especially important.
- Karina asked if the upcoming workshop dates could be shared and if they are open to others beyond New American communities. Mae Kate noted each workshop is generally tailored to a different New American community as there are a lot of logistics involved including hiring translators. There will be more workshops later this year, but they are not scheduled yet. She will keep the CAC informed.
- Karina shared that May 25th is World Fish Migration Day. There is a group of folks working on activities for that day and it would be great to highlight this work. Mae Kate was interested in learning more.
- Lori asked how the workshops are publicized. There is a lot of shared expertise around some of these topics and it would be good to share opportunities for partners to get involved in these efforts. Mae Kate shared that coordination and numbers have been the most challenging part of organizing the workshops. Generally, they try to limit the workshops to 30-40 participants and

most of the outreach is word of mouth through the respective cultural communities. The team develops a poster that is translated and distributed primarily through whatsapp groups. Once that outreach starts, it's hard to get concrete participation numbers. Last year at one event, there was a target for 30 participants and 70 came. At the first 2024 workshop, 30 were targeted and 54 participated. Making sure there is enough funding between sponsoring organizations to have the capacity to support the workshops equitably between the different communities is an important consideration for the future.

- Breck asked if there is anything related to the workshops that should be on the VTCAC's radar for the 2025 Action Plan. Mae Kate noted that funding has not been a problem so far and the Lake Champlain Steering Committee has been very supportive. The bigger issue is staff capacity to grow the program. It is not specifically in anyone's job description though it hasn't been a challenge to get staff volunteers.
- Wayne asked how the license costs are covered. Mae Kate shared the license cost of \$28 per participant is currently supported through LCBP in a budget line item for the fishing equity access initiative, but license costs have previously been covered by other partners like Lake Champlain Sea Grant.
- Lori commented on the issue of staffing capacity for the workshops. There may be an opportunity to engage LCBP grantees in the program, particularly as LCBP is focusing more on DEI issues and metrics. This could open opportunities for broader engagement and reduce capacity burdens on staff. Mae Kate noted there is a balancing act between face recognition and trust with the current partners organizing the workshops, but it is worth thinking through the logistics of a partnership model with other organizations.

5. Public Comments

Mark shared Rozalia project is hosting an earth day clean up at the waterfront including a public art display in front of city hall on April 20th.

6. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on draft March 11th meeting summary

- Motion to approve the meeting summaries by: Lori Fisher
- Second by: Rep. Ode
- Discussion: None
- Abstentions: Wayne Elliot
- Vote: All in favor

7. Membership Update – Karina Dailey, Vice-Chair

The nominating committee endorsed two candidates for membership based on the identified gaps in expertise on the committee, Sarah is working with Secretary Moore to advance the appointments of the new members and the re-appointment of existing members operating under expired terms. Mark Naud shared his resignation letter with the meeting materials, he is stepping down after 12 years of service to the VTCAC to make space for

new voices on the committee. The committee thanked Mark for his service and longstanding commitment to the VTCAC and Lake Champlain. Mark plans to stay engaged with the committee.

8. Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion

The VTCAC discussed the timing of the retreat, the originally select May 21st date did not work for several members. The retreat has been rescheduled to June 13th at the Gordon Center House at 54 West Shore Rd, Grand Isle. Suggested agenda items included:

- Chloride- reconnect with Kris Stepenuck and/or Matt Vaughan, update on the legislative initiatives related to chloride
- Agriculture
- Review of existing action plan and opportunities for refinement
 - The committee is targeting September for a meeting with VTANR and VTAAFMSecretaries to review action plan priorities.
- PFAS and the new EPA regulations
- Legislative post-mortem including a summary of what has happened with respect to flooding and community resilience, what needs more attention?
- Fall forum focus- State of the Lake?
 - Bob suggested hosting this meeting at other locations in the watershed. Barre might be a good location if the meeting is focused on flood resilience.

Katie distributed the new form for per diem requests via email, it is also available at www.lcbp.org/vtcac. Per diem requests for meetings attended between January – March 2024 are due to Katie on April 22nd.