

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

July 8th, 2024
5:00 – 7:00 pm

Approved Meeting Summary

Committee Members Present: Denise Smith (Chair), Sen. Randy Brock, Breck Bowden, Eric Clifford, Wayne Elliot, Bob Fischer, Rep. Carol Ode

Committee Members Absent: Karina Dailey (Vice-Chair), Rep. Kari Dolan, Lori Fisher, Sen. Martine Laroque Gulick, Mark Naud, Hilary Solomon

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

Presenters: Mae Kate Campbell (LCBP)

Public Guests: Michael Bard, Ricky Laurin, Andrew Milliken, Alison Spasyk
Meeting summary prepared by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program

1. **Welcome and Introductions** (5 min) – Denise Smith, Chair

2. **Public Comments** (5 min) – Denise Smith, Chair

3. **Chair's Update** (5 min) – Denise Smith, Chair

As Chair of the VTCAC, Denise sits on the Executive and Steering Committees for the Lake Champlain Basin Program. The Executive Committee generally meets monthly and the Steering Committee meets quarterly. There have not been any meetings since the last VTCAC meeting, but moving forward Denise will bring updates from these committees to the CAC.

4. **ACTION ITEM:** Review and vote on Draft June 13th meeting summary (5 min) – Denise Smith, Chair

Katie made an edit to the meeting summary that was distributed with the meeting materials, correcting H.176 to H.76.

- Motion to approve the meeting summary as amended by: Breck Bowden
- Second by: Wayne Elliot
- Discussion: None
- Abstentions: None
- Vote: All in favor

5. **Discussion of LCBP FY25 Research Priorities** – Mae Kate Campbell, Associate Scientist – Lake Champlain Basin Program

Mae Kate Campbell provided an overview of the process to identify research priorities and facilitated a discussion to include CAC priorities in the Technical Advisory Committee's discussion and decision. The goal is to fill existing gaps and support research that informs policy and management decisions. Applicants can submit proposals for research related to one of the priorities or any of the items in Opportunities for Action.

Discussion:

- Sen. Brock asked if the audience that the RFP is shared with is broad enough to do the work that is prioritized, especially if it is outside of the scope of work that is normally covered under the RFP. Mae

Kate shared the audience for the RFP includes academics, consulting firms, NGOs, research organizations, and others in New York, Vermont, and Quebec. For the public access priority, it may make sense to put in a separate RFP.

- Sen. Brock asked how many proposals are received annually. Mae Kate shared it is a two step process, generally 15-25 preproposals are submitted and a subset of applicants are invited to submit a full proposal for projects up to \$300,000 with a few million dollars in funding available.
- Wayne asked if there was a shortlist available that includes what other groups and committees have suggested. Katie will share the previously priority tracks and previously funded projects with the meeting follow up materials.

Suggested Research Topics:

- Breck noted that the per acre delivery of phosphorus from developed parts of the Lake Champlain Basin are higher than the per acre delivery from agriculture. Studies from other areas show that ex-filtration from sewers is a source, but there has not been comparable research done in the basin. This is an interesting research question that could inform future investments and infrastructure updates.
- Andrew provided some additional context related to the discussion of neonicotinoids and the Lake Champlain Basin that came up at the June Retreat. Vermont, Quebec, and New York now all have neonicotinoid bans. With the bans in place, there might be an opportunity to track and monitor those chemicals and their downstream impacts in the basin.
- Wayne suggested being more specific to public access opportunities in the South Lake which is consistent with the CAC's focus.
- Breck shared the VT Climate Council is currently revising the Climate Action Plan for the state. One big part of that is an initiative to try to quantify the social cost of GHG emissions in Vermont. There is a complex and interesting tool that has been adopted and modified by EPA, developed by Resources for the Future group that takes an expansive look at all the elements that might be contributing to social costs of carbon emissions. There are many things that are not included in that model at the moment, but are important to Vermont including water storage and distribution, animal and livestock health and productivity, fishery production, timber production, tourism, and more. These all affect Vermont broadly and Lake Champlain specifically. There might be an opportunity for research on the co-benefit of factors that could be affecting Lake Champlain but would have a broader impact on reducing the social cost of Green House Gases in Vermont.
 - Andrew agreed understanding the co-benefits of these items is critical to the Lake Champlain Basin related to understanding the intersection of carbon mitigation, flood resilience, and biodiversity.
- Breck suggested there might be research opportunities associated with the ongoing Environmental Sensitivity Index Mapping work.
- Breck suggested research to benefit the CABN initiative as another possibility.

Next Steps: Send Katie any additional research priorities **by August 15th**. The Technical Advisory Committee will discuss the priorities at their September meeting.

6. 2025 Lake Champlain Action Plan – Denise Smith, VTCAC Chair

The committee reviewed the priorities that were identified at the June Retreat and discussed combining some and which order they should appear in, including whether climate change should be the first item on the list.

Content Discussion

- Breck noted that climate change is the context that affects all other items on the list and rather than listing it separately suggested placing the other priorities under the umbrella of this overall challenge.

- Sen. Brock added that the issue of climate change is polarizing among some people, but flood mitigation is not. He asked whether or not there should be something in the action plan regarding measurement and accountability.
 - Breck noted that a major responsibility of ANR and VAAF is to do exactly that. There are sophisticated systems developed over the last 10 years, especially in relation to the TMDL, with EPA ensuring accountability to meeting those objectives. The TMDL is specifically about phosphorus, but it is tied to other topics like runoff and chloride. There may be additional reporting requirements the CAC can advocate for, but it's not absent.
- Sen. Brock added that if this reporting needs to be communicated in a way that is direct and understandable. Sending pages of numbers is not helpful, we need to answer the question - is the Lake getting better? If we look at Lake Carmi, that's an example of things getting worse. We need to communicate the steps we need to take to prevent the lake from getting worse.
 - Michael agreed with Sen. Brock, examples of direct impacts to the lake, steps that will be taken to address impacts to the lake, and goals the CAC hopes to achieve should be outlined.
- Andrew suggested having Jane Lazorchak or someone from the Climate Office brief the VTCAC at an upcoming meeting. They are thinking of the same questions like how do we measure greenhouse gas mitigation? We can collaborate to understand how we can build on the Climate Action Plan and tie in our priorities for Lake Champlain. It's a huge report, so it's hard to provide direction without that clear understanding.
- Denise noted that the government is accountable to the citizens and measurement and accountability could be a direct ask in the action plan, number of flood plains restored, TMDL progress, etc. Last June, Secretary Moore and Nathalie Provost, director general of the Quebec Ministry of Environment, presented about the work Vermont and Quebec have been doing to clean up Missisquoi Bay, including the TMDL, investments that have been made, and measurements of reductions in phosphorus load.
- Wayne commented on FEMA programs in relation to floodplain restoration. FEMA will fund bringing something up to current standards but are not always factoring in climate change. That's a challenge. He was also curious about the cyanobacteria priority. From a research perspective, we monitor it and know what conditions lead to it and where it's occurring but it's not a targeted issue we can solve directly. It is an outcome of phosphorus loading.
- Michael commented on the recreational access piece in the action plan, particularly the focus on non-motorized users. There is increased pressure at angling access sites from non-motorized users which is causing issues for the hunting and fishing communities. When there are a lot of canoers and kayakers, it creates jams at accesses. Hunters and anglers technically have priority at fishing access sites. Motorized users need to have access opportunity too.
 - Katie provided some context about that item in the action plan. There are not a lot of specific accesses for non-motorized users which contributes to this issue. More non-motorized access points would reduce the pressure and congestion at these sites.
- Breck suggested including woodland owners and managers as a complement to the support and resources to farmers. Woodlands can contribute a lot of phosphorus.
 - Denise asked if there is a program that helps owners keep wooded areas protected.
 - Michael shared the culvert program does that and Forest Legacy.
 - Breck added the Current Use Program and Better Back Roads.
 - Denise suggested the CAC learn more about these programs.
- Breck suggested a way to format the action plan for the coming year, starting with an upside down triangle. The broader piece is climate change. The list of priorities may be longer than what can be accomplished in a single year, but we should remind folks that these challenges exist and we need to be aware of them on look out for opportunities to address them. The pointy end of the triangle would be the things the CAC thinks is critical to address in the next year.
- Eric commented on the agriculture priority. Without some defined actions, it doesn't go very far. It needs to be more specific than just "support". Related to the transition to sustainability, that smaller farms and dairy farms in particular can't keep up with the necessary practices and are closing.

- Denise asked if the term “regenerative agriculture” is better than sustainable.
- Eric did not think so. The practices that farmers need to be doing and should be doing are not affordable, the smaller the farm the harder it is to meet those regulations.
- Katie commented that Eric’s comments are in line with the CAC’s response from the Senate Ag Committee.
- Denise commented on the importance of meeting with the Agency of Ag for recommendations before going to the legislature.
- Wayne suggested focusing on pesticides and chlorides as the contaminants of concern for next year. It would be great to see something similar to what was being done in NY by ADK Action so we can start making positive impacts to salt reduction. The legislature banned use of PFAS last session, not sure what the ask for Lake Champlain would be to the legislature.
 - Mae Kate noted that the legislature only banned the use of certain PFAS compounds.

Process Discussion

- Breck noted there’s a balance in this document between a higher-level, aspirational delivery to the legislature and being more specific about actions we are recommending. Does the CAC have the capacity to get more specific? If we were to do that, we should consult with agency heads on each bullet point to get their priorities and then select what we think are the most relevant to us. Is this document intended to be educational to the legislature, not only about what’s important but also how to use the list?
 - Denise clarified that we’d like to ask for those specifics, but don’t have the time or resources to meet with all those people. This action plan is what we believe is the best thing for Lake Champlain based on our backgrounds, knowledge, and connections in the community. We want to get this into legislators’ hands before the session so they have this background. When we get more specific it gets us in a little hot water because we don’t have all the answers - we are not experts or lobbyists.
- Sen. Brock commented that the game plan is to get this before legislators prior to the session to identify allies who can take our ideas to the next step and introduce legislation that advance our priorities.
 - Breck agreed with the importance of developing advocates, but noted the CAC has to give them something to advocate for. Can the agency heads or policy directors can be linked in? If we could develop a relationship with policy directors and ask their priorities and bring those back to this group so we can advocate for what we’d like to see move forward, we can then take those priorities, identify advocates, and move things forward. Each member could volunteer to meet with someone and discuss with the group.
 - Sen. Brock agreed and suggested identifying who in the group that has relationships with policy heads for agencies we are concerned about to talk about the future of the next legislative session to identify what they are considering for next year.
 - Eric agreed with Sen. Brock. Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition is meeting with agency reps 4x/year and that is the way to do it. If we could develop a strategy like that as this committee, we could give them some meaningful, concrete proposals.
 - Denise shared that the CAC named bills when we went in with our comments recently, and that was effective. Working to figure out how to make these calls, who’s calling who?
 - Sen. Brock suggested those who are here who have relationships with key people in the agencies that you’d be willing to call, send the names of those people and your names to Katie. Katie can screen to ensure we aren’t calling the same people, then we divvy up and go do it.
 - Katie added that in the past the committee has discussed creating opportunities for agency leads to provide input on the action plan but not letting agency priorities drive the plan, ensuring it’s still aligned with the community voices you represent.
 - Denise agreed with centering community voices in the action plan. This approach flips the timeline a little. Last year, the CAC drafted the plan and then met with Secretary Moore for input before the release. Phone conversations can happen in the next couple of weeks, but meetings are less likely in this timeframe.

- Sen. Brock added the CAC may want input from non-profits and other organizations, not just agency heads. Seeing what their agendas are could be useful.
- Katie shared that this process has started, she met with Vermont Federation of Lakes and Ponds to get their feedback on the last action plan and identify possible areas of alignment. Katie is happy to facilitate the outreach to other citizen and community groups.

Next Steps: Katie will begin a draft of the 2025 Action Plan, contact spreadsheet, and script for action plan outreach and send them to the committee. Committee members should add comments and suggested edits to the Action Plan Google Doc.

7. Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion

The VTCAC is scheduled to meet next in September. The agenda will feature Action Plan work and a presentation from the Climate Office.