

March 9th 2026 CAC Meeting

CAC Members Present: Karina Dailey, Denise Smith, Eric Clifford, Carol Ode, Bob Fischer, Evan Fitzgerald

Public: Crea Lintilhac, Karen Bates (DEC), Jim Carrier

Presenters: Trey Martin VHCB, Stacy Cibula VHCB

Meeting Summary

Introductions

Presentation from VHCB

- VHCB is a statutorily created instrumentality of the state
- Mission driven organization to achieve affordable housing and conservation and rural development
- Act 59 – Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act
 - Maintain a ecologically functional and connected landscape, 30 x 30 and 50 x 50 came out of Committee on biodiversity protection from UN set those goals that the Biden Harris admin adopted through America the Beautiful.
 - The 30 x 30/ 50 x50 goals are not numbers based on Vermont, it is the broader vision that is shared through. The Vermont Conservation Design tool is where the Vermont specific details come in
- Shootsville connections mount Mansfield to CC Putnam state forest – example of this work, providing necessary corridor for organism passage between natural areas
- VT has seen a 200,000-acre shift between natural lands and development in the last 20 years

- Lost farms and forests
- Many farms are also forests; many farms include lands outside of production that are part of farm parcel
- Flooding, climate change, storms increasing, Act 59 is part of the climate action plan to address impacts
- Biden Harris admin passed BIL and IRA to fund these big initiatives, but all that money is gone now, have had to pivot to find new funding to innovate with what is available now
- Started in 2023, VHCB is going to be delivering a report to the legislature this summer
 - Phase 1 – an assessment of existing data, practice, programs equity and funding
 - Phase 2 – strategy for achieving the vision and goals of Act 59, recommendations to provide and increase equitable access to conserved lands, an enhancement to working lands and rural landowners

§ Getting feedback on the strategy includes 3 main objectives

- Phase 1 overview
 - Currently 27% conserved

Carol Ode- Do we have enough Clean Water funding to fill in for the lost federal dollars?

- VT funds a lot of activities through the Clean Water Board, clean water funding and conservation funding are often mutually beneficial
- Clean Water Board and VHCB are level funded this year, more concerned about future years like 2028. If big programs are cut, then there is concern that conservation funding would be lost

Carol – Should we divert any funding from Clean Water to solid waste?

- I didn't know that was on the table, really appreciate the bond dollars that funds CHVB, losing the bond funding would be a big deal.
- Do 10-15,000 acres of conservation a year, so if we follow that pattern we are 10-20 years away from the 30 x 30 goal
- It's getting more expensive to conserve land

Carol – what about UVA?

- UVA is extremely successful and durable, holding millions of acres there. But it is not permanent. 30 x 30 is a permanent goal, and UVA is long term, and durable, but not permanent. The 50 x 50 goal is “mostly” permanent goal, but does not say how much is ‘mostly’
- If we counted UVA we’d be at 57%, which doesn’t seem to be what the intention of Act 59 was to get permanent conservation

Phase 2 Conservation Plan

- Act 59 directs,
 - o Conserve Vermont’s’ ag land, working forest, historic properties and surface waters
 - o Develop implementation methods for achieving VCD goals
 - o Provide equitable access to protected and conserved lands and land based enterprises
 - o Implement the vision and goals while enhancing current investments in working lands enterprises
- These are the goals while meeting the conservation benchmark numbers

Three Objectives

- Center VT Conservation Design – strategies to implement the design, ANR did that and put it into a paper. ANR lays out strategy to incentivize conservation in the underrepresented biophysical regions, 3 of the 9 bioregions are well conserved. Corridors are also really important, have 10 hot spots for these corridor places
- Support Conservation in Communities
 - o Connect people to conserved lands through 6 pathways
- Strengthen Conservation Capacity
 - o Strengthen conservation community ability to conserve land

These objectives, designs and strategies are linking intent to action

VCD

- About 2 thirds of the state are ranked as highest priority for conservation
- Agnostic to how something is protected, just identifies where function lives

Coordinating with other plans, climate action plan, RIS, wildlife action plan, forest futures roadmap, move forward together Vermont, ag and food system plan, many of these plans hinge on protecting the lands that are used for ag, recreation, clean water, wildlife, forest products, climate mitigation services

Asking for input,

- What is missing?
- What's working now?
- What should we prioritize? This is important, because there may be 80 actions, so prioritizing what should be done first is important.

Looking for input by the 31st, but there are other opportunities to provide feedback, mid may will release final draft after regional listening sessions, then there will be another round of feedback

Denise – how are you getting the word out? How would a Vermonter get involved?

- Worked through the network of conservation groups, holding many regional meetings, granted to groups to do outreach in various local places
- Gotten feedback that it is hard to understand if you are outside the conservation field, tried to use plain language, but there is a lot of information, and it is technical so it can be difficult for a broader audience.

Karina – What does water conservation look like in act 59?

- Ongoing conservation. During phase 1 there was a working group focused on water; there are several actions in objective one and two that have to do with water. Using water as a priority area to strategically support connectivity. In objective two, projecting lands that are connected to water offers the most resilience. Think about connectivity, where does conservation fit in to connecting waters, in objective two that comes up particularly with wetlands, floodplains that align with community protection.

Discussion Questions for CAC

- How can permanent and long-term conservation support the water goals of TMDL TBP and RIS?
- How should conservation interact with and support regulatory structures and land use laws that protect clean water?

- What are the most effective conservation tools to protect clean water from the impacts of development and land use.

Denise – 30 x 30, and 50 x 50, where does the 50% fit in, is it part of the plan now, or is that aspirational?

- If we think of the 50% goal as a mix of permanent and long-term conservation, we are in a good place to achieve that with long term, durable solutions, through things like wetlands rules, UVA, long term carbon contracts, with those in place we will achieve the 50%. Permanent conservation is the harder thing to cross, it is expensive to conserve, and stewardship is unending.
- There is a patchwork of small parcels for future conservation, which is another part of the challenge
- 30 x 2030 is optimistic, 2035 is more realistic.

Jim Carrier – putting together a package of stories about the lake, trying to show that the lake is has so many different facets, the history, the different recreational uses. The further away from the lake, the less visible it is, the less people think about it, which is a challenge to watershed scale approaches. Are you finding that people are connecting their life to the lake?

- It depends! Many people who are well resourced and have their needs met, the lake is more front of mind. There has been a long history of working on public outreach and education about the whole watershed impact on the lake itself. Could always be doing more outreach and education to steward your land for water quality and biodiversity.

Jim - Is the lake accessible? How accessible is the lake?

- Recreational access is paramount to the plan and the why. A big part of the plan is approaches to access and improving access. State lands and fishing points are managed for access.
- Karina – Access is a priority in the action plan, particularly in the south lake and for non-fishing access like swimmers, kayaking, etc.

Crea – In Waterbury, buying the Stanley-Watson site for housing, is VHCB involved in that or is there any advice to the town? Building in a flood prone site, but downtown on sewer and water, building it “flood safe”, but wondering in VHCB is involved?

- Don't think that CHVB is involved with that place.

We are almost always talking about water when discussing conservation. Huge part of the work that VHCB does. At an upcoming board meeting, every project being discussed has a element of water resource protection.

How do we bring multiple funders for water quality together? VHCB is a CWSP for Lake Memphremagog, trying to bridge between the many different goals, plans, and funders. Hopefully federal funding will reappear for this work.

- Evan – I work with municipalities a lot, there is not much or any awareness of clean water funding within municipal staff who are trying to deal with infrastructure needs and challenges, there are some areas of overlap between that and clean water goals, but not enough awareness. WSPR is a way to bridge that potentially.
 - o Municipalities are eligible for VHCB funding, in conservation not really restoration. Having a clearing house of information that explains all the options for funding, VCD in your area. Oftentimes there isn't enough capacity to keep up and stay on track of everything.

Karen – as a basin planner has regional planning meetings with partners to develop relationships and identify project funding or make connections. Enhancing relationships between partners that do projects, making sure there are connections to towns. Towns can be a big source of knowledge on flood resilience. We have a lot of networks and relationships we can enhance.

- Coordination between leaders at the regional level. Conservation collaboratives try to align groups under a collective strategy, hoping that plan and strategy can help propel the existing resources we have now.

Karina – one project that came to mind is a dam removal project on conserved land on both sides of the river, plus a municipal park and water line.

Securing land, secure long-term management and stewardship, then work with funders to invest in the resilience of the property. Restoring is so expensive, it can be handled separate from the conservation.

Scheduling

- Scheduling legislative and executive meetings, still trying to get in touch with senate environment and the gov.

- Denise will try to get in touch with Sen. Watson this week when in the state house to try to get in committee.
- Not sure what is going on with the gov, make sure Sec. Moore is included.

- Set aside June for the retreat, going to send out doodle poll for Fridays in June. Denise can't do the 19th.
- If anyone has thoughts on location, or presenters would be helpful.
 - Denise,
 - § Michelle Monroe, ED of VT Conservation Districts
 - § Vermont Farmers Alliance – Addison County or Franklin County or both, Heather Darby could be leading it through extension.
 - § It would be really useful to hear from farmers. I want to get a sense of what is actually happening with phosphorus loads in Lake Champlain, presentations in the past have been very hard to follow.
 - Eric
 - § Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition new ED could give a good presentation on how the coalition does outreach to farmers to involve them in all the different programs available to them for funds. Kate something.

- Heard a lot of great presentations are the Lake Champlain Research conference that could overlap with the work of the CAC
 - Floodlines, role play game on conservation and watershed planning, could be fun activity to do as CAC.
 - § Denise – would like to do more activities like that at the retreat.
 - Rebecca Diehl, fisheries research hat is going on in Lake Champlain. Pathogens in perch is a emerging issue in Lake Champlain. UVM is trying to track and assess the pathogen, which could be good topics to hear presentations on in the future.
 - Two presentations per meeting could be helpful.

Updates on the MOU

- MOU subgroup has been meeting, drafted an alternative MOU and Memo, the SAC has their own draft, right now trying to fit those two drafts together. They are very different but address the same question of the relationship between LCBP and NEIWPC.
- SAC planning to bring something to the steering committee in April
- Met with Sec. Moore last week, this week meeting with NEIWPC ED Susan Sullivan.
- The MOU that Mark Naud has led pro bono, huge thank you due to him for that, that draws from the existing founding documents is very different from the SAC's draft, so doing a side-by-side comparison is difficult. One big contention point is the HOAC, that is in the SAC's draft, but not the CAC's draft. That function is covered by the executive session, so the HOAC is not necessary from CAC's perspective.

Recruiting

- Eric working on filling his position, has expressed interest. She's been ECHO chair of board, used to be a lobbyist, president of Champlain Valley Expo, on the board of Vermont woodlands association, beef producers' association, president of Lake Iroquois association, very knowledgeable on ag issues.
- She will reach out with bio or have a phone call with Karina
- Bob endorses the idea
- Following up on the appointment renewals and appointing Evan

Evan Introduction and Get to Know You

- Know and worked with several of the CAC members
- Grew up on Mallets Bay in Colchester, family history there.
- Personal and family connections to the lake and land in the area, working professionally on water and water quality is connected to that
- Worked with Breck in grad school
- Background in ecology and engineering, own an engineering firm with 10 scientists and engineers focused on water quality restoration.
- Work on stormwater projects, floodplain restoration,
- Works on phosphorus accounting and happy to be a resource on those questions or issues.

Karina – might be good for you to do a presentation of phosphorus accounting

Denise – Need a plain language explanation of the phosphorus accounting, needs to be shared more widely, think the 30 x 30 plan could also use more outreach to people outside of conservation. In September there was a Basin Program Steering Committee meeting with a zoom presentation on phosphorus accounting, but it was really hard to understand.

Karina – Even if you could do a 15-minute presentation on it that would be helpful. Still haven't heard from the CWSPs, Hilary could be involved in that.

Evan – could look at the Clean Water Report. Feels momentum building around the CWSPs and there are still many policy questions but feels like there is momentum building and getting more projects out.

- Karina – getting more flexible to fund for co-benefits
- Denise – Hear more about the Lake Carmi alum treatment project. Did it because of the phosphorus input went down, but don't know where the data is or how that decision was made. How was the determination made to do a alum treatment? What was the scientific/political reasoning? There weren't a lot of press or site visits.
 - o Karina – could ask the Lake Carmi watershed association about it.

Meeting adjourned.