

2024 | Lake Champlain Action Plan

Achieving a Thriving Lake Champlain Basin Ecosystem

Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee on Lake Champlain's Future

The confluence of climate change impacts, contaminants pollution, and the under-resourcing of critical programs poses a serious threat to water quality, public health, and community and environmental resilience in the Lake Champlain Watershed. The severe flooding this past summer reinforced the critical role of resilient ecosystems and infrastructure for Vermont's economy, agriculture, community well-being, and climate disaster prevention.

The Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) calls on the State of Vermont to make urgent investments to restore Lake Champlain, increase resilience within its watershed, and ensure that its communities will thrive.

INVEST IN NATURAL AND DEVELOPED INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESILIENCE

Climate change is causing more variable precipitation and severe flooding, posing risks to public safety, infrastructure, property, and water quality. Restoration and protection of Lake Champlain's headwaters, river corridors, floodplains, wetlands, and riparian buffers are cost-effective resilience strategies that also help to achieve clean water and ecological health co-benefits. Failing wastewater facilities and septic systems threaten water quality and public health. To counter these threats, the State needs to improve failing municipal systems and provide more proactive education, oversight, and outreach to homeowners about their septic systems.

PRIORITIES

- ! Invest in infrastructure, programs, and practices that **BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE** impacts and restore ecological function.
- ! Increase and improve **EQUITABLE PUBLIC ACCESS** with priority for non-motorized recreation on Lake Champlain and on waters throughout the Lake Champlain Basin.
- ! Provide **SUPPORT AND RESOURCES TO FARMERS** to facilitate the agricultural transition to sustainability and ensure consistent regulatory enforcement, including review of the 2017 MOU between ANR and VAAF.
- ! Fund **ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION OF CONTAMINANTS POLLUTION** including pesticides and chlorides.
- ! Invest in **AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES** education and management.

The CAC encourages the State to *explore an emergency response loan fund as a means to help cover costs related to wastewater failures and fully support funding of the State Revolving Loan program.*

The CAC endorses *expanded capacity of the Vermont Rivers Program and organizations working to implement river restoration and protection.* In addition, the State *must prioritize investments that support adaptive, resilient, and compact settlement and help Vermont communities,* particularly those vulnerable to climate-related severe weather events.

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INVEST IN AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES SPREAD PREVENTION

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are a significant threat to Lake Champlain and the state's waterways. AIS have the potential to compromise aquatic ecosystem integrity and cause billions of dollars in damage to recreation, water quality, infrastructure, and property values. To mitigate and prevent further AIS damage, Vermont must increase investment in staffing and funding for its AIS programs. The State should consider: *a new funding source involving a mandatory boat decal for motorized and non-motorized craft; a mandatory watercraft inspection and certification program; a high-profile inspection station; and a live bait ban similar to Quebec.*

JULY 2023 FLOOD IMPACTS

In the seven-day period following the storm:

- **more than 200 billion gallons** of water was delivered to Lake Champlain
- the amount of phosphorus delivered to Lake Champlain was likely **more than half of the combined annual Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)** for phosphorus
- **33** municipal wastewater systems were impacted, including devastation of Johnson and Hardwick's facilities, and **18** community water systems were on boil water or do not drink notice

EXPAND EQUITABLE PUBLIC ACCESS & RECREATION

Access to Vermont's healthy lands and clean waters are crucial to the health and wellbeing of Vermonters and to the State's \$1.5 billion outdoor recreation economy. Vermont needs to allocate resources to expand shoreline and water access for all. Expanding access and outdoor education opportunities will foster greater experiences with and stewardship of the State's natural resources. The CAC particularly recommends strategies to *improve access in the South Lake and for marginalized and historically disenfranchised communities. Continued investments in outdoor recreation businesses* will bolster public access opportunities and Vermont's recreation economy.

VTCAC Members

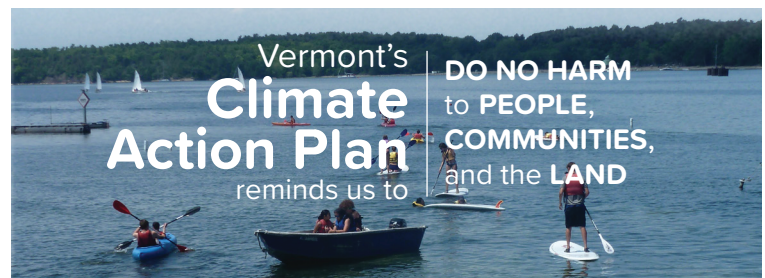
Denise Smith Chair, Population Health Director
Karina Dailey Vice-Chair, Environmental Scientist
Eric Clifford Dairy Farmer
Wayne Elliott Engineer
Robert Fischer Water Facility Operator
Lori Fisher Nonprofit Executive Director
Mark Naud Attorney/Business Owner

SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND CONSISTENT REGULATORY ENFORCEMENT

State leadership is needed to encourage Vermont agriculture to be sustainable-- with an emphasis on significant reductions of nonpoint source water pollution. Vermont must *accelerate its diversification of value-added agricultural products* to protect its farmers, farm economy, and environment. The Legislature must *support farms through investments in specialized equipment, full funding of programs offered to the agricultural community, enhanced infrastructure for local distribution of agricultural products, and resources* to small farms that enable effective implementation of best practices. Technical and educational support is needed to help farmers leverage available funding opportunities. To support farmers and protect water quality, Vermont needs to *ensure the enforcement of required agricultural practices and clean water laws is consistent and efficient.* The State must *revisit the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding* between the Agency of Natural Resources and the Agency of Agriculture Farm and Markets to update expectations, clarify responsibilities, improve communication and establish accountability metrics between agencies to restore the agricultural community's and the public's trust.

DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR CONTAMINANTS POLLUTION

Chemical contaminants in the environment pose health risks to the public. Eliminating toxic contamination is essential to protect health and avoid long-term environmental damage. Vermont must continue to *monitor, assess and mitigate the risk of chemical contamination in our surface and groundwater especially pesticides and chlorides.*



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