



# House Committee on Environment and Energy: Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative

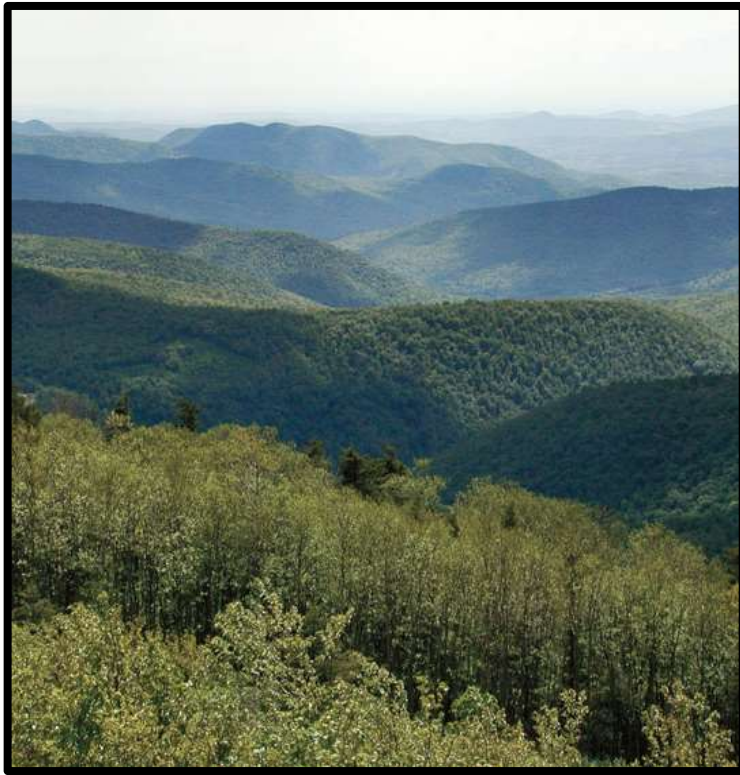
February 2, 2023



# Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

## Statutory Purpose

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**Equinox Highlands in Bennington County**  
**Among 450,000 acres conserved since 1987**

“the dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and **conserving and protecting Vermont’s agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.**”

10 V.S.A.15 §302



The Ascutney ski resort once boasted 1,800 vertical feet of skiing on over 50 trails. When it closed for the last time in 2010, it was a crushing blow to the town of West Windsor. Caleb Kenna for The New York Times

## 10 V.S.A.15 §302

### Eligible Uses:

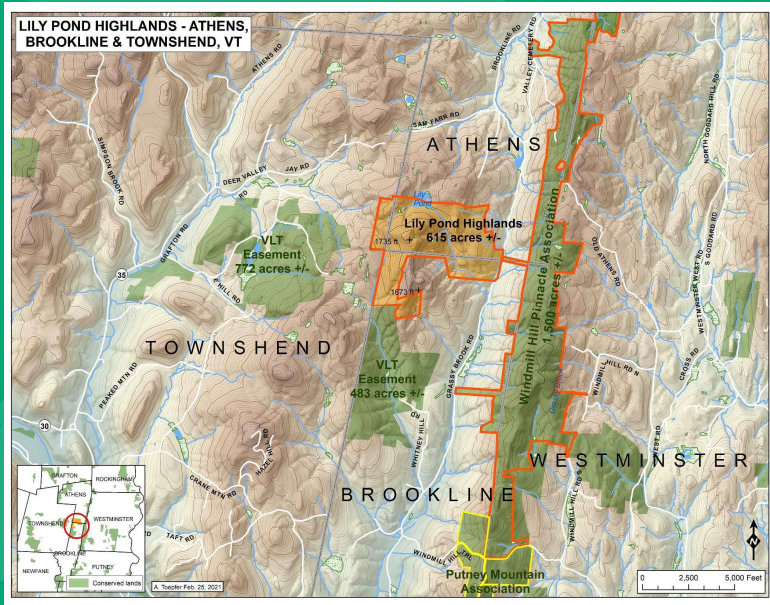
- (C) the protection of important wildlife habitat and important natural areas;
- (E) the protection of areas suited for outdoor public recreational activity;
- (F) the protection of lands for multiple conservation purposes, including the protection of surface waters and associated natural resources;

### Allocation System:

- (1) the need to maintain balance between the dual goals in allocating resources;
- (2) the need for a timely response to unpredictable circumstances or special opportunities to serve the purposes of this chapter;
- (3) the level of funding or other participation by private or public sources in the activity being considered for funding by the Board;



# Lily Pond Heights, Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association





# Morgan Street Wetlands - Bennington





# Huntington Community Forest







# Conserved Farmland and Natural Areas in Addison County





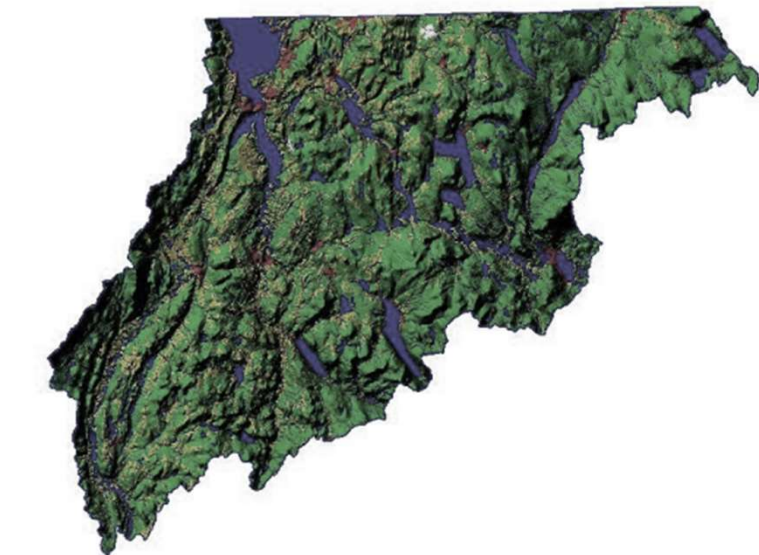


## **Farmland Conservation - Choiniere Family Farm, Highgate**

Well-managed Vermont farms are the first line of defense for clean water and climate resilience. Over 20 years, the Choiniere Family Farm in Highgate has implemented numerous conservation practices, installing buffers along the river, cattle lanes and fencing, and keeping manure under cover using bedded pack barns. In 2021, they were awarded the New England Aldo Leopold Conservation Award.



# Clean Water Service Provider for the Lake Memphremagog District



VHCB is serving as CWSP for the district, collaborating with partners to protect and improve water quality in the 687-square mile basin which straddles the Canadian border



# Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program

*Since 2003, 900+ farm, food & forest products businesses served*

In FY22:

- 154 enterprises engaged. Combined, they generate 462 jobs (FTEs) and \$34.7M in annual gross sales.
- 71% of clients reported increased gross sales
- 61% of clients reported increased net income

Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI)

- *Since 2017, \$525,000 in REDI funds has helped secure more than \$10M in grants for businesses & communities*



*Rebop Farm, Brattleboro*



# Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative: Goals

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**Brownsville Forest, Stowe, Vermont**

Working with conservation partners, public land managers, and public stakeholders

VHCB will facilitate a public process to prioritize conservation actions and investments in a statewide conservation plan

To position Vermont to maximize Federal, State and private resources and direct work over the next thirty years

**To protect, maintain and enhance a healthy, ecologically connected and functioning, natural and working landscape.**



# Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative: Partners and Stakeholders

## Initial Partners, Summer and Fall 2022:

- Vermont ANR and AAFM
- The Nature Conservancy
- Vermont Land Trust
- Trust for Public Land
- Vermont Audubon



## Public Stakeholders, 2023 – 24:

- Public and private land managers, land trusts, and funders
- Conservation policy and environmental justice advocates
- Indigenous groups and representatives from historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities
- Farm, forest and recreation land owners,
- Representatives from working lands enterprises
- Outdoor recreation organizations
- Municipalities, conservation commissions, grass roots initiatives, and other groups who support and benefit from conservation investments





# Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative: Phase I, Spring and Summer 2023

- Establish a baseline catalog, inventory and analysis of the current state and degrees of durable “conservation” in Vermont, based on existing data;
- Catalog conservation outcomes across different categories of land and water protected, acreage in different categories, tools and strategies, and different funding programs;
- Organize the data collected in a spatially explicit and shareable format;
- Identify and articulate data gaps within the catalog;
- Recommend system improvements to maintain and update data consistently and accurately into the future; and
- Outreach and education, including publication and dissemination of the work completed in Phase I.



**Observatory Knob  
St. Johnsbury, Vermont**



# Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative: Phase II, Summer 2023 to Fall 2024

Develop and adopt a statewide conservation plan, in order to:



**Donegan Farm  
Hinesburg and Charlotte, VT**

- Increase the rate and quality of conservation work
- Build partner and agency capacity to acquire, hold and steward conserved land
- Provide detailed science- and values-based goals and priorities for conservation actions and investments in Vermont over the next thirty years
- Identify new and existing strategies and tools for conservation actions, climate resilience, and increased equitable access and environmental justice.

In addition to land protection goals and priorities, the plan will identify:

- Costs of implementation
- Revenue options and funding opportunities



# Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative: Existing Strategies are the Foundation

- Vermont Conservation Design
- Vermont Climate Action Plan
- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources' Forest Action Plan and Wildlife Action Plan, and Forest Future Roadmap Initiative
- The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Landscapes Tool
- Trust for Public Land's Return on Investment Study
- TMDLs, Basin Plans and other water quality planning tools



**Hughs-Muse Farm  
Pawlet, VT**

**Trey Martin**

Director of Conservation  
and Rural Community  
Development

