



Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board

Implementing Act 59 of 2023

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VHCB & ANR Alignment with Act 59

Act 59 sets forth a vision that is aligned with VHCB and ANR core values to:

- Sustain biodiversity;
- Maintain landscape connectivity;
- Support watershed health;
- Promote climate resilience;
- Support working farms and forests;
- Provide opportunities for recreation and appreciation of the natural world; and
- Support the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas.



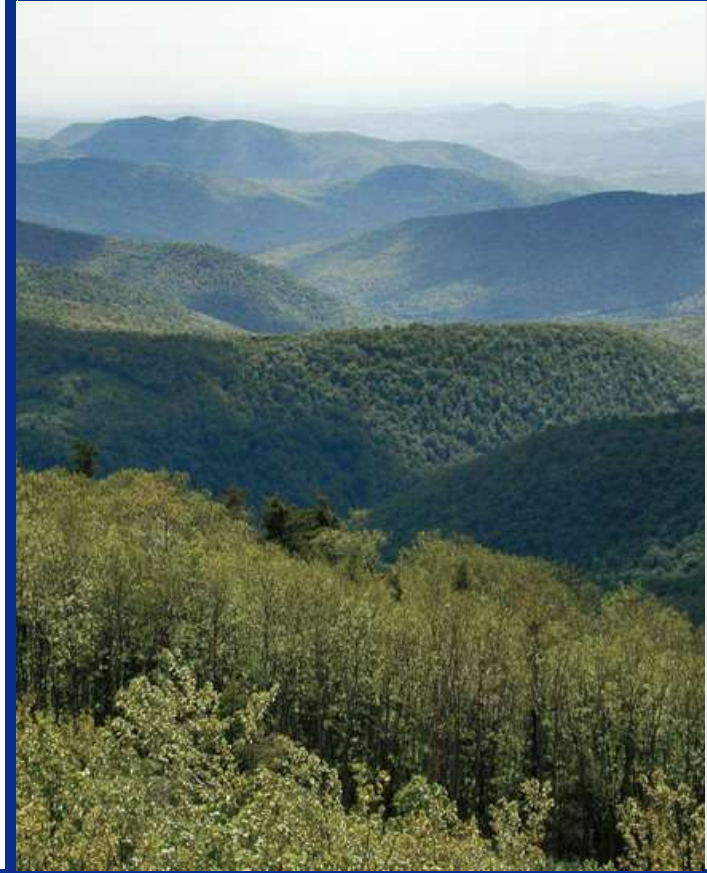
10 V.S.A. § 2802. CONSERVATION VISION AND GOALS

- (a) The **vision of the State of Vermont is to maintain an ecologically functional landscape** that sustains **biodiversity**, maintains **landscape connectivity**, supports **watershed health**, promotes **climate resilience**, supports **working farms and forests**, provides opportunities for **recreation and appreciation of the natural world**, and supports the **historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas**.
- (b) It is the goal of the State that **30 percent** of Vermont's total land area shall be conserved **by 2030**, and **50 percent** of the State's total land area shall be conserved **by 2050**.
- (c) Reaching 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050 shall include a mix of ecological reserve areas, biodiversity conservation areas, and natural resource management areas. ... [and] the approximate percentages of each type of conservation category **shall be guided by the principles of conservation science and the conservation targets within Vermont Conservation Design**.

Act 59 Implementation: Phase I Detail

Under 10 V.S.A. § 2803, by June 30, 2024:

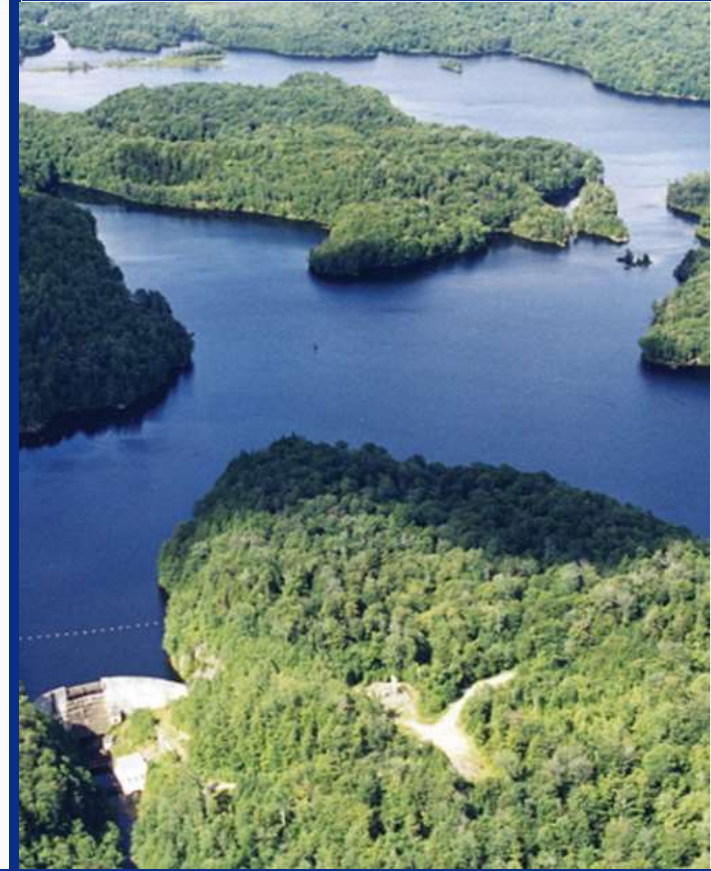
- Establish a baseline catalog, inventory and analysis of the current state and degrees of durable “conservation” in Vermont, based on existing data;
- Catalog conservation outcomes across different categories of land, acreage in different categories, tools and strategies, and different funding programs;
- Determine the types of agricultural lands that qualify as supporting biodiversity and fulfilling ecological, economic and social functions;
- Identify solutions for watershed and aquatic system health through land conservation;
- Engage diverse stakeholders across Vermont; *as well as*
- Numerous additional qualitative report deliverables related to conservation process and goals.



Act 59 Implementation: Phase II Detail

Under 10 V.S.A. § 2804, by Dec. 31, 2025, deliver a plan to:

- Increase the rate and quality of conservation work
- Build budgets and identify revenue sources for investments in land protection, as well as partner and agency capacity to acquire, hold and steward land
- Provide science- and values-based goals and priorities for land protection actions and investments in Vermont over the next thirty years
- Identify new and existing strategies and tools for conservation outcomes, climate resilience, and increased environmental justice and equitable access for recreation, renewal and community resilience
- Enhance current investments and commitments to working lands enterprises and rural landowners consistent with current conservation programs that protect agricultural lands, working forests, historic properties, recreation lands and surface waters



Phase I Process To Date: Who We've Heard From



50 Interviews

- Community members interviewed to complete inventory
- Landed: Nov - Feb

~150 Survey responses

- Open to the general public and on the VCIS website
- Landed: Jan - Feb

Four Working Groups

- Working groups to answer four specific questions posed by the legislature
- Landed: Nov - Mar

~ 20 Focus Groups

- Affinity-based focus groups
- In-flight: March 7th - Apr 5th

1 Public Meeting

- Open public meeting to review draft findings and recommendations
- June 27, 2024



Act 59 Implementation: Partners and Stakeholders

Initial partners (who have helped build the container):

- VHCB and ANR
- Nature for Justice (consultant)
- The Nature Conservancy
- Vermont Land Trust
- Trust for Public Land
- Vermont Audubon
- State Natural Resources Conservation Council

Public Stakeholders (who will drive the work):

- 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, regional planning commissions, conservation commissions, grass roots initiatives, and other groups who support and benefit from conservation investments

Act 59 Implementation: What Vermont is Doing Well

Supportive Organizations, Funding, and Frameworks. Vermont's conservation success is driven by active land trusts, large and small, like Vermont Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy, supported by strategic funding from VHCB and ANR. The state's strategic approach to conservation, guided by frameworks like Vermont Conservation Design, effectively prioritizes and implements conservation efforts.

Culture and Engagement around Conservation and Stewardship. The culture of conservation and land stewardship is deeply embedded in Vermont's identity, along with community engagement, enhancing the effectiveness of conservation initiatives. There have been effective education and awareness efforts around conservation, which have been crucial in engaging the public and stakeholders, ensuring broad support for conservation goals.

Significant Lands, Management, and Access. Public and managed lands, including state parks and forests, wildlife management areas, contribute significantly to achieving conservation targets, providing recreational access and supporting biodiversity. Infrastructure maintenance and accessibility of conserved lands ensure that these areas remain valuable and enjoyable for the public.

Act 59 Implementation: Areas for Continued Focus

1. What are the opportunities to expand biodiversity and climate resilience investments on working lands?
2. We need to grow capacity for planning, acquisition, stewardship and data management throughout the conservation network, including State, regional and local government, VHCB and in the NGO network.
3. What are the best investments in land based conservation to support aquatic system health?
4. How to balance landowner rights – the “willing seller” principle – with increased equity and access to our programs.
5. Protection versus restoration / enhancement.
6. Long term public and private funding commitments are needed – to support planning, acquisition, stewardship and data management !
7. What innovations will help us achieve the State’s quantitative protection goals?

QUESTIONS? DISCUSSION...

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