

Current Conservation Investments Mean Protecting Water Quality

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), the Vermont Land Trust (VLT), and their conservation partners, including the Vermont River Conservancy, have been actively engaged in surface water protection for many years. They have also recently responded quickly and effectively to the State of Vermont's concern with the quality of water entering Lake Champlain.

Urbanization, wastewater treatment plants, agriculture, and streambank erosion are sources of phosphorus to our state's surface waters, and ultimately the causes of water quality issues such as algae blooms in Lake Champlain.

Through the protection of river corridors, establishing and maintaining river buffers, targeted floodplain protection, and upland forest protection, VHCB's investments in land protection are protecting and enhancing water quality, and reducing flood and erosion risks. Conservation lands serve as green infrastructure, helping avoid the costs of development related to impervious surfaces and resulting runoff.



Farmland along the Winooski River in Essex.

VHCB's and VLT's Conservation Work Has Responded to the Need to Protect Water Quality

VHCB's investments result in projects that enhance water quality and promote flood resiliency.

- In fiscal years 2014 and 2015, 75% of VHCB's farmland conservation projects containing surface waters included water-quality protection practices in the conservation easement.
- 80% of the farms in VHCB's current pipeline of projects contain surface waters that will be protected with special easement provisions or through state or federal buffer programs.

In Highgate, a 240-acre dairy farm converted to organic production and now produces grass and hay. The farm has a 50-foot forested buffer on a half mile of the Rock River, an impaired waterway that has been targeted for cleanup.

In Enosburgh, a river corridor easement was placed on a farm in conjunction with a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program buffer to reduce local flood and erosion risks, allowing the Missisquoi River to re-establish its natural meandering course.

Conserved forestland protects water quality by slowing runoff and by holding soils in the forest that filter sediment and nutrients. Forested land typically contributes less surface water pollution than other types of land uses.

VHCB's Farm and Forest Viability Program is committed to helping farmers and forestland owners plan for water quality investments. Enrollees receive technical assistance and financial planning for implementing pollution control measures.

An Investment in VHCB Means More Money in Match

VHCB receives matching funds from the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on a 1:1 basis on all farm conservation projects. As a requirement of NRCS funding, all farms must abide by a comprehensive resource management plan prepared by NRCS, a component of which is water quality.

VHCB Conservation and Farm Viability funding are integral to the \$16 million grant that Vermont was recently awarded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to improve water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin. The State pledged \$6.5 million of VHCB conservation funding over the next five years to match funds for RCPP, an innovative partnership including Vermont's state agencies of agriculture and natural resources, watershed groups, conservation organizations, and businesses.

Prepared by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition and the Vermont Land Trust