

Implementing VHCB's Water Quality Mission

- VHCB has invested in protecting and enhancing the quality of Vermont's waters since its inception. In 2012 the VT legislature made water quality protection explicit in VHCB's enabling statute. Policies recently adopted by the Board elevate further in project selection the conservation of properties that enhance water quality and flood resiliency, and that demonstrate affirmative action taken to improve water quality.
- VHCB conservation and farm viability funding/work is integral to the \$16 million grant that Vermont (and New York) was recently awarded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to improve water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin. RCPP is an innovative partnership with VAAFM, DEC, watershed groups, conservation organizations, businesses and others. VHCB pledged \$6.5 M of conservation funding over the next 5 years to match the RCPP federal funds, with \$2.5 M of that amount from VFFVP, of which a portion are privately leveraged funds from Commonwealth Dairy.
- 80% of the farms in the VHCB pipeline contain surface waters which will be protected with special easement provisions and/or through enrollment in other state or federal buffer programs. Pipeline also includes projects that will conserve large blocks of forestland and upland headwaters, and ensure careful environmental stewardship, which are crucial components of state's effort to protect water quality.
- VHCB's Farm and Forestry Viability Program (VFFVP) resources are proactively deployed to assist landowners in identifying business costs and resources needed to enhance water quality resource management. 50% of enrolled farms are dairy farms, mostly small and medium operations, and half of the 360K in grants for dairy infrastructure investments made through a partnership with Commonwealth Dairy focuses on soil and water health.
- VHCB has matched state funding 1:1 on all farm conservation projects with federal NRCS funding, for which NRCS-prepared management plans are required. The plans now require both soil conservation and water quality components, addressing the state's Accepted Agricultural Practices, and water quality more broadly. VHCB-funded non-profit and municipal conservation projects also require management plans. Management plans required on VHCB projects enhance the collective efforts in the state to achieve greater environmental stewardship through land conservation.
- 75% of the farmland conservation projects funded in FY 14 and FY 15 that contained surface waters included water quality protections in the easement.
- Examples: Bernard and Susan Rainville Farm in Highgate, a 240-acre organic grass/hay based farm, has 50' forested buffer on a half mile of Rock River, an impaired waterway that contributes significantly to the health of Missisquoi Bay and Lake Champlain. Whitcomb Family (North Williston Cattle Co.) conserved 271 acres in Essex Junction, has 1.5 miles Winooski River frontage protected with wooded buffer and special protection of floodplain forest. Additionally, about half of the stormwater runoff from the Village runs through the farm's extensive network of ditches and culverts.
- VHCB's conservation funding is a capital investment that conserves and stewards the resource and resource management practices in perpetuity. The Board's investments contribute significantly to Vermont's "green infrastructure", helping to protect and enhance water quality, attenuate flooding, and promotes best management practices such as maintaining vegetative buffers between waterways and working lands. It avoids costs of urban/suburban development related to impervious surfaces and associated runoff.