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2016 Lake Champlain Action Plan

The Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future vigorously recommends increased state investments in clean water to support a vibrant economy.

Sediment and phosphorus-laden stormwater flows over Otter Creek falls into Lake Champlain.

Clean Water Fund

Act 64, Vermont's 2015 Clean Water Act, validates that healthy waters are essential to our economy, health, property values, recreation, fisheries and wildlife, and the Vermont brand. As this new law is implemented, there must be clear reporting requirements to track our continued investments in clean water and increase accountability and transparency to the public for expenditures from the Clean Water Fund.

The state must: Establish new, immediate, perpetual, and dedicated funding sources for the Clean Water Fund.

This stand-alone fund must be sustained by not less than \$25 million new dollars annually in state resources to implement water quality improvement projects and strengthen regulatory, enforcement and technical assistance. Clean Water Fund revenues, generated as a portion of the property transfer tax, are unpredictable and insufficient to provide long-term resources.

The state must: Restructure the Clean Water Fund Board to include a majority of members from outside state government.

Current Board membership is limited to state agency secretaries and commissioners with their respective programmatic agendas that may diverge from public priorities for action.

Agricultural Compliance and Enforcement

The state must assure that agriculture on highly erodible or sensitive lands employs best agronomic practices to eliminate water quality impacts, or the state must require conversion of these marginal lands to natural riparian functions.

The state must: Invest in more agricultural enforcement.

While the Accepted Agricultural Practices (AAPs) are being replaced with Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) under Act 64, enforcing RAPs requires additional staff dedicated to compliance assistance and on-farm inspections.

The state must: Prohibit manure or phosphorus fertilizer application on fields with excessive soil test phosphorus (STP) levels.

Research has shown a direct relationship between STP levels and phosphorus concentrations in field runoff. Excessive STP levels indicate there is no added agronomic value to manure or phosphorus fertilizer application.

The state must: Expand the pool of experts providing agronomic assistance in anticipation of future Nutrient Management Plan requirements.

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Public Access and Recreation Opportunities

Creating opportunities for citizens to connect to waters and watersheds enhances their desire to protect water quality. While state regulations emphasize phosphorus levels and targets, the public relates better to beach closures, protecting their homes and communities from floods, and conserving fish and wildlife as recreational assets and resources.

The state must: Provide more opportunities for public access to Lake Champlain, particularly in southern Vermont, and also designate more river access opportunities.

Investment in new facilities, improvement of existing facilities, and addition of staff, for management and maintenance, are necessary.

The state must: Invest in natural infrastructure and riparian buffer acquisitions, accelerate dam removal, and substantially increase aquatic organism passage.

These vital components are needed to conserve and restore our fish and wildlife assets to include nongame and endangered species.



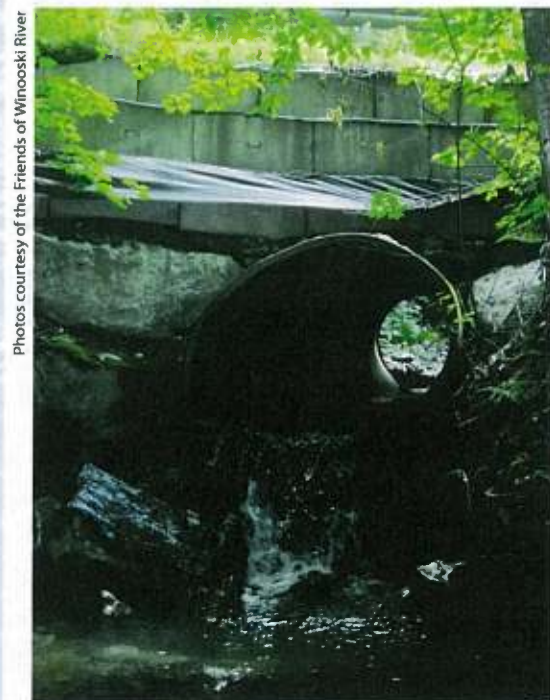
Lake Champlain Basin Program

Stormwater washes sediment and phosphorus off fields and roads into tributaries to Lake Champlain.

VTACAC Members

Julie Moore, Chair, Middlesex, Water Resources Engineer
 Lori Fisher, Vice-Chair, Williston, Lake Champlain Committee
 Eric Clifford, Starksboro, Dairy Farmer
 James Ehlers, Colchester, Business Executive
 Robert Fischer, South Burlington Water Quality Superintendent
 Paul Hansen, Alburgh, Business Owner
 Rep. Bob Krebs, South Hero
 Sen. Ginny Lyons, Chittenden County
 Alex MacDonald, Lincoln, Builder
 Mark Naud, South Hero, Attorney
 Denise Smith, St. Albans, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain
 Rep. Kate Webb, Shelburne
 Sheri Young, Orwell, Septic Design & Environmental Consulting
 Vacant Senator

While far-reaching, Act 64 faces significant challenges. The 13 new positions envisioned at the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) for Act 64 compliance, enforcement and outreach were offset by workforce reduction budget decisions by the administration and legislature. Inadequate staffing at ANR and lack of citizen representation on the Clean Water Fund Board hinder the ability to move funds quickly and effectively to implement priority water quality projects.



Photos courtesy of the Friends of Winooski River

This undersized and "perched" culvert blocked passage of aquatic organisms such as fish.

This cross-road culvert failed during Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and was hastily replaced with an undersized culvert that also blocked aquatic organism passage to fish and other species. As the undersized culvert posed a risk for future catastrophic failure, Friends of the Winooski River, with partners including US Fish & Wildlife Service, led a project to design a safer road crossing also allowing for aquatic organism passage.



This open bottom culvert allows stream flow and aquatic organism passage (note people working by huge culvert).



The completed project with natural substrates.