

Submission of Written Testimony
VERMONT Senate APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
FY 2016 Budget

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Submitted by:

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The Trust for Public Land

- Good morning, my name is Rodger Krussman. I am the Vermont State Director for The Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation organization with a mission of creating parks and protecting land for people, ensuring healthy, liveable communities for generations to come.
- In the past 20 years, The Trust for Public Land has protected over 55,000 acres of forestland across Vermont. This work has included protection of important local forests like the 355 acre LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest in Hinesburg. This town owned forest is now an asset to the local community, providing local recreation and educational opportunities, as well as helping to protect the overall quality of the Lake Champlain watershed.
- I am here today as one of the four Co-Chairs representing the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition.
- First of all, Thank you for your incredible support and sustained leadership that has allowed us – the VHCC members -- to focus on supporting communities with high value investments in conservation and affordable housing needs across Vermont.

- As you know our work is made up of land conservation and affordable housing projects that are the very foundation of Vermont's economy. The work of VHCC organizations is at the nexus of the social, economic and environmental values of our state- it is the desire to achieve this triple bottom line that makes Vermont so unique and resilient.
- **VHCB's public investments create amazing leverage** of other public and private funds and result in jobs, immediate and long term economic activity, and enrich the quality of life in our communities; and because the structure of this 25 year effort has been flexible and nimble we have been able to act quickly to take advantage of one time opportunities to conserve properties and assure their future as public assets.
- **Our projects are local.** As one example, right now we are working to create the new Jim Jeffords State Forest, a new state forest in Mendon and Shrewsbury, that will protect recreational access for a variety of uses such as hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing and snowmobiling. At 1,300 acres of forest land, it will also provide important wildlife habitat, capture carbon, and act as a natural filter for flood resiliency. (see attachment)
- Another example can be found in West Windsor with an opportunity to protect the recreational assets at Mount Ascutney. There is an incredible recreational trail system that is in jeopardy of being lost. According to the Chair of the town select board, with financial support from VHCB, the town can move ahead with the protection of over 1,700 acres, guaranteeing public access, and in turn helping to revitalize the region's economy.

“We have a unique opportunity to implement significant conservation and economic benefits all in one project. By supporting the funding request for VHCB outlined in the governor’s budget, you will be taking the first important step in conserving this ecologically important property while helping to revitalize West Windsor’s local economy.” (Glenn Seward, West Windsor Selectman)

- These are just two of many important opportunities that VHCB funding could impact in our communities across the state.
- Right now there are 74 farms in our “pipeline” of projects as well as another 70 forestland and natural area conservation projects. Thousands of acres of forestland are at risk and we’re evaluating what we have the resources to protect. The current total need is almost \$30 million.
- 75% of the farmland conservation projects funded in FY 14 and FY 15 that contained surface waters included water quality protections in the easement. AND 80% of the farms in the current VHCB pipeline have surface waters that will be protected with special easement provisions and/or through enrollment in other state or federal buffer programs. (see hand out on water quality protection)
- It is vital that we continue to protect the irreplaceable places that distinguish Vermont and enhance our quality of life and make it an important destination for travelers. The steady VHCB investments, often the first dollars committed to a project, are the key to leveraged dollars that make your appropriations go further.

Thank you for your time and your continued support for this very important program.

Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

RIGHT ON THE NUMBERS

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) was established by the General Assembly in 1987. VHCB makes loans and grants to nonprofit organizations, municipalities and state agencies that work on conservation projects and affordable housing developments in Vermont communities. VHCB is one of a few programs of its kind in the country whose mission encompasses the dual goals of conservation and affordable housing, making investments that are critical to Vermont's economic vitality and quality of life.

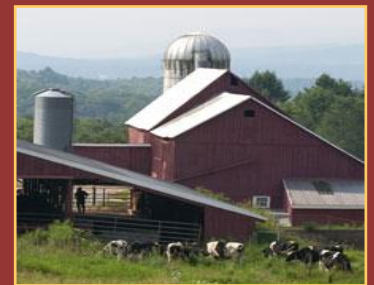
VHCB has built a national reputation as an innovative, highly effective public agency that helps community groups implement *local* plans to create affordable housing and protect farmland, forestland, natural areas, recreational lands and historic properties. Responding to local needs, VHCB leverages federal and private funds for community development and land conservation solutions ranging from creating supportive housing for veterans to redeveloping underused historic buildings as workforce housing; from conserving recreation areas on Lake Champlain to keeping farms in production and owner-operated. VHCB's bottom-up approach ensures that solutions are tailored to meet local needs and circumstances.



VHCB is a national leader in implementing the federal HOME program. From FY 1992 through FY 2014, this brought over \$75 million to Vermont for affordable housing. HUD ranked Vermont's program as first in the nation.

Over \$800 million spent on construction jobs in VHCB-assisted housing projects have created approximately 28,000 jobs in Vermont, according to federal estimates.

VHCB has funded more than 115 local developments serving Vermonters with special needs, providing community-based housing and saving the state millions of dollars that would otherwise be spent on more expensive institutional care.



~photo credit: Caleb Kenna

Every dollar spent on Vermont agriculture and forestry products generates an additional \$1.80 and \$1.70 respectively in gross state products.

A recent study of farms that donated or sold conservation easements found that all remained in productive use.

In-state expenditures by hunters, fisherman and wildlife watchers totaled \$357 million according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service's most recent report.

Conservation provides resiliency for Vermont communities because it keeps land in productive use through transfers to the next generation and to new owners with solid business plans.

VHCB'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS THROUGH DECEMBER 2014

- **Invested \$284 million** in loans and grants in **over 200 different communities** throughout Vermont.
- **Created 11,600 affordable homes and apartments** to house more than 27,600 Vermonters.
- **Conserved 644 farms** covering over 154,000 acres of land.
- **Conserved 258,000 acres** of significant recreational land, natural areas and 59 historic properties for community use.
- **Leveraged an additional \$1 billion** in federal and private funds.
- **Strengthened Vermont's** agriculture, construction, recreation and tourism **economy**.

THE NEED CONTINUES

- **34,884 lower income renter households lack housing they can afford** with **16,485 paying more than half of their income** for housing expenses. Fully **47.5%** of all Vermont renters pay more than 30% of their income for housing costs. The median price of a primary residence in 2013 was \$200,000, requiring an annual household income of \$57,897 and \$16,299 in cash at closing, while the Vermont median income was \$53,422.
- Homelessness is a growing problem. **On one day in January 2014**, Vermont's shelters and service providers counted **1,556 people who were homeless**.
- Only **10.7 percent of Vermont's best agricultural soils are protected**. Without VHCB protection, much of the rest could be lost forever.
- The **cost of open land and woodlands has jumped by 250%** since 2000.
- Vermont's forestlands are part of the Northern Forest and represent the country's largest remaining stretch of temperate broad-leafed and mixed forests. **Protection of this forestland is critical for sequestering carbon**, which helps mitigate climate change, while still providing for wildlife, recreation, wood products and other uses.
- **Eighty percent of Vermont's forestland is privately owned**, and the number of Vermont landowners owning fewer than 10 acres of land continues to grow, according to the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- According to the USDA, each year **thousands of acres of productive cropland are taken out of production** and converted to other uses. By comparison, in 2013 all 828 conserved farmland parcels with easements held by the Vermont Land Trust were in active agricultural use, except for one farm that is part of the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service wetland reserve program. NRSC funding provides at least one-half the cost of Vermont's farmland conservation projects.

VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION BOARD BEYOND THE NUMBERS

STIMULATING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

VHCB-funded affordable housing creates jobs during and after construction. According to the National Association of Home Builders, 12.2 short-term and 3.2 permanent local jobs are created for every 10 housing units constructed. Affordable housing also helps to attract and retain employers by providing sorely needed workforce housing.

VHCB's housing and historic preservation policies give priority to projects in downtowns and village centers. Rehabilitating downtown buildings helps to maintain a mix of commercial and residential uses. VHCB has invested in the redevelopment of a cinema in downtown Springfield, restoration of theaters for the performing arts in Brattleboro, Rutland and Burlington, and new facilities for a community library in Groton.

Conservation of our working lands and natural areas is an economic development engine that helps protect local farms, creates recreational access, assists with flood protection, water quality and supports tourism and rural vitality. Farm and farm-related sectors are responsible for 17% of Vermont's gross state product. The USDA reports that Vermont agriculture generates 11% of jobs in the state. The Vermont Dairy Industry brings \$2.2 billion in economic activity to Vermont annually, according to a new study funded by the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council.

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program works to enhance the economic viability of Vermont's working lands businesses by providing business planning and targeted technical assistance to farm, food and forestry enterprises. In 2013, 83 farms and 9 value-added food businesses were provided services. The program is currently enrolling its first group of forestry and forest products enterprises. The program enables business owners to make significant improvements in managing their business, generating profits, accessing financing, increasing production and implementing business expansions and ownership transitions.



—photo credit: Caleb Kenna

Brothers Jeff and Jason Boissoneault conserved 400 acres of Essex farmland that is vital to their dairy farm business. Jeff and Jason manage over 1,000 cows at their milking facility in St. Albans. As other land is being lost to development, they have to go further to find cropland to support their herd. The parcel contains 287 acres of excellent tillage and 20 acres of woods that is considered a wetland of statewide significance. With this conservation project Jason and Jeff also created riparian buffers for the Browns River, which runs through their Essex property. "We did it to stop the banks from washing out and to provide shade for trout," says Jeff.



The Environmental Protection Agency presented Housing Vermont, the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, and the Brattleboro Food Co-op with the 2012 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement for an innovative multi-use building in downtown Brattleboro. The new building provides 33,600 square feet of retail and office space for the Co-op on the first two floors and 24 affordable apartments on the top two floors. A sophisticated mechanical system recaptures waste heat produced by the store's refrigeration equipment to heat the apartments.

Many farmers use the proceeds from the sale of development rights on their property to expand their operation, reduce debt, build new barns, or transfer the farm to the next generation. Farm businesses on conserved land produce over 500 value-added products, support many Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprises and farm stands, and help to create food security for our state. Conserved farms also contribute to retail and wholesale markets, selling food both in and out of state. Protecting our forestland prevents fragmentation and secures the future for our forest and recreational industries. Additionally, conservation supports Vermont's annual \$1.5 billion tourism industry by protecting our special Vermont brand which depends upon our world-class landscape and access to natural area recreation. These investments bring additional returns by spurring economic growth, both in the agricultural sector and by encouraging outdoor recreation activities and promoting travel and tourism, maintaining Vermont's high rank as one of the world's great tourist destinations.

PROMOTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND MINIMIZING CLIMATE CHANGE



In West Rutland, the Housing Trust of Rutland County created 21 affordable apartments in three buildings, including the former St. Stanislaus Kostka School and the adjacent convent. The development is a prototype for energy efficiency in historic buildings and returning vacant buildings to productive use. A single wood-fired pellet boiler provides heat for both buildings while solar panels preheat the domestic hot water.

VHCB has been a national leader in creating energy efficient housing both in new developments and in the existing portfolio of permanently affordable housing. VHCB spearheaded the creation of a “roadmap” which describes techniques and materials we can use now to build energy efficient apartments. Notably, VHCB secured additional federal and philanthropic funding to implement the roadmap, including the installation of solar hot water and wood-pellet boilers. These upgrades will produce energy savings averaging 39% and as high as 56%.

Housing and conservation mean energy efficiency, shorter commutes, carbon sequestration in our forests, and foods coming from our local farms. Also, many Vermont farmers are at the forefront of devising new methods for creating on-farm energy through methane digesters, wind turbines, and bio-fuels. By protecting working farms and forests we are creating options for future energy independence.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS CREATED BY TROPICAL STORM IRENE

Vermonters demonstrated remarkable resilience and a renewed sense of community spirit in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene. VHCB and the network of affordable housing and conservation nonprofits that it supports helped communities meet their diverse needs.

Irene confirmed the value of conserving floodplains, which provides a cost-effective method of reducing flooding and erosion. Conserving farms and natural areas along our rivers and tributaries with river buffer enhancements helps absorb the impact of severe weather events.

VHCB provided \$2 million to help homeowners who wanted buyouts of their destroyed homes and towns that sought to convert those parcels to open space or park land. These investments along river corridors address the challenges of climate change and promote flood resiliency. VHCB’s Manufactured Housing Innovation Project responds to the loss of housing during Irene and increases the supply of quality affordable, resilient and energy efficient homes.

PROTECTING WATER QUALITY

VHCB’s investments in land protection are helping to protect and enhance water quality and reduce flood and erosion risks.

- In FY 2014 and 2015, 60% of VHCB’s farmland conservation projects included water quality protection practices in the conservation easement. 80% of the farms in the current project pipeline contain waters that will be protected.
- Conserved forested lands protect water quality by filtering sediment and nutrients from runoff before entering streams, producing the cleanest water and the greatest reductions in downstream flood flows.
- VHCB has received USDA matching funds on a 1:1 basis for all farm conservation projects. All projects include management plans to address soil conservation and water quality protection.
- VHCB Conservation and Farm Viability funding is integral to the recently awarded \$16 million grant through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to improve Lake Champlain Basin water quality. The State pledged \$6.5 million in VHCB conservation funding over the next five years to match these funds.



—photo credit: Jerry and Marcy Monkman

The Trust for Public Land worked with the Millstone Trails Association, Vermont Land Trust, and the Town of Barre to create a new community forest out of 355 acres of former quarry land. The Barre Town Forest is part of a 70-mile trail network built by volunteers with the non-profit Millstone Trails Association. The trail network provides recreational opportunities for mountain bikers, cross country skiers, hikers, hunters, and snowmobilers. A recent economic analysis estimates that the Town Forest and trail system will result in an annual economic benefit of \$640,000 from visitor spending and support 20 local jobs by 2015.

Publication of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition

The more than 50 private, nonprofit organizations which are members of the Coalition represent a wide spectrum of interests from small, community-based land trusts which secure and steward public and recreation areas to statewide developers of affordable housing.



Photo: Jerry Monkman/EcoPhotography.com

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF THE BARRE TOWN FOREST

BARRE TOWN, VERMONT



A former Quarry property in Barre Town, Vermont—already a regional destination for mountain biking and cross-country skiing—is now a

new, 355-acre town-owned forest. The Trust for Public Land worked with the Town of Barre, the nonprofit Millstone Trails Association (MTA), Vermont Land Trust, and local community members to permanently protect this property as the Barre Town Forest. A town forest for Barre helps connect local citizens to the natural landscape by expanding recreational opportunities, conserving a variety of natural and historical features, and strengthening the local economy in one of Vermont's most economically challenged areas.

An analysis conducted by the Gund Institute at the University of Vermont concluded that the creation of the Barre Town Forest will yield positive economic returns to the town and central Vermont region.

BARRE TOWN FOREST SUSTAINS OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Conserving Barre Town Forest sustains and enhances existing outdoor recreational features.

- The property contains 20 miles of Millstone Trails, a 70-mile trail network, which travels across rolling forested hills. In 2009, the Boston Globe ranked the Millstone Trails as one of the top ten mountain biking destinations in New England.
- In winter, the trails are groomed for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The trail network connects to the Cross-Vermont Trail, a multi-use path that will ultimately span the width of Vermont.
- The trail network also connects to the Barre School Forest and adjacent Barre Town Middle & Elementary School, providing recreational opportunities to more than 900 students.

An estimated 7,150 visitors from outside the local community visited the Millstone Trail Network (and

future Barre Town Forest) in 2011. Non-local visitation is conservatively estimated to grow 10 percent annually (compared to nearby Kingdom Trails in East Burke, Vermont with an annual growth rate of 18 percent since 2004), or to increase to 10,500 visitors by 2015.

BARRE TOWN FOREST WILL GROW THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Tourists visiting Barre Town Forest and the Millstone Trail Network to bike or ski spend money on local goods and services (e.g., food and lodging). According to a 2012 study by the Gund Institute at University of Vermont, approximately **\$481,000** was spent by mountain bike and winter use visitors to the Millstone Trail Network in 2011. With a conservative annual growth rate of 10 percent in the number of visitors and the protection and maintenance of the trail system, visitor spending could reach **\$640,000** by 2015.

BARRE TOWN FOREST WILL CREATE JOBS

Nearly 74 percent of visitor spending could be captured in the local economy, creating local jobs. Visitor spending is projected to bring \$269,000 as labor income, and generate **20 jobs** by 2015 through an increase in visitation of 10 percent. The restaurant and lodging sectors alone are expected to gain 13 additional jobs. Within 2 months of the creation of Barre Town Forest, a new bike shop opened up nearby.

BARRE TOWN FOREST WILL GENERATE TIMBER REVENUE

Barre Town Forest has medium-to-high value timber and sustainable timber management can generate a steady flow of revenues for the Town. The current timber value is \$143,000. A full time job can be created as a result of sustainable timber management.

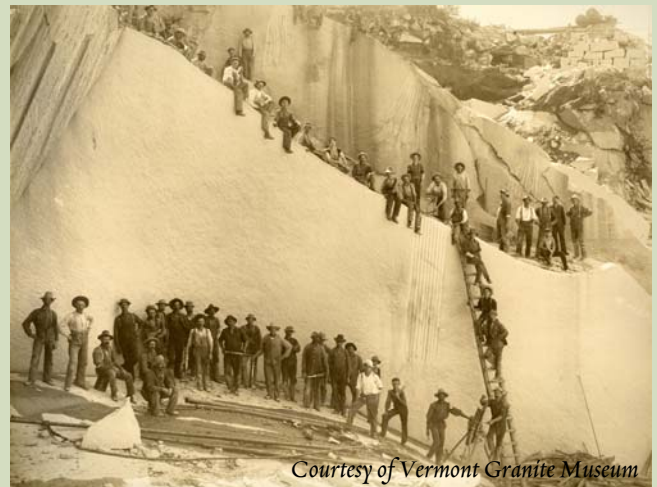
BARRE TOWN FOREST HELPS TO CURB LOCAL TAX EXPENDITURES

Protecting open space saves local governments money. Residential development imposes costs on communities in

the form of increased demand for schools, roads, and other community services—costs that usually exceed related tax revenue. The national median across 151 communities over 25 years is that for every \$1 paid in local taxes, working lands and open space require \$0.35 in services compared to \$1.16 in services for the average home.¹ In nearby Cambridge, Vermont a 2006 study found that for every \$1 in revenues residential development required \$1.25 in municipal services, while town-owned land (like a town forest) required \$0.92 in municipal services.²

Source: Posner, Steve, and Marta Ceroni. *Potential Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in the Barre Town Forest, Vermont*. Gund Institute for Ecological

EVERY \$1 INVESTED BY BARRE TOWN



Courtesy of Vermont Granite Museum

WILL RETURN \$22 BY 2015

Barre Town contributed \$100,000, and the State invested \$310,000 through the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board towards the acquisition cost of \$1.3 million to create the Town Forest. The property was going to be sold on the open market, thus threatening the entire trail network, causing a loss of the current 7,000 annual visitors and their spending of \$480,000. With the creation of the Barre Town Forest, visitorship is expected to increase to 10,500, and their spending to \$640,000, by 2015. From 2012

Economics, University of Vermont. Burlington, Vermont. Prepared for The Trust

¹ American Farmland Trust. 2010. *Cost of Community Services Fact Sheet*. Farmland Information Center, Northampton, Massachusetts

² Town of Cambridge Planning Commission. *Cost of Community Services Study For Cambridge, Vermont*. Prepared by Lamoille County Planning Commission. March, 2006

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