

**Testimony of Philip B. Huffman
to the House Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2017**

Good morning, Chairwoman Toll and members of the Committee. My name is Phil Huffman, and I am Director of Landscape Conservation and Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Vermont. I am here today as one of the four co-chairs of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition, a collection of about 50 organizations working to advance conservation and affordable housing efforts across the state. Together we represent tens of thousands of Vermonters who are passionate about these issues that are so central to the fabric of our communities and landscape.

Thank you for your time today and for your past strong support for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. **We ask now for your support of the Governor's FY18 request of \$16.3M for VHCB operating funds and a separate \$35M housing bond.**

Over its 30 years, VHCB has invested in 11,300 homes, 682 farms encompassing more than 161,700 acres, an additional 261,000 acres for public recreation and natural areas, and 67 historic buildings restored for community use. VHCB has invested a total of \$311 million in state funds in this remarkable array of projects, which have touched down in more than 200 communities. In turn, these investments have leveraged an additional \$1.3 billion from federal programs, foundations, private capital and charitable donations – more than 4 dollars from other sources for every dollar of state investment.

VHCB projects are in every corner of our state, both in our settlements and across our priceless landscape. They provide countless public

benefits – workforce housing, greater home ownership among lower income residents, reduced flooding, water quality protection, access for recreation, historic preservation, local food, and habitat for native plants and wildlife. They are also essential to the state’s economic vitality, our irreplaceable brand, and our quality of life.

As Vermont business leaders like Win Smith of Sugarbush, Ted Manning of Ibex, and Trevor Crist of Inntopia testified passionately about at our Legislative Day a month ago, the combination of conservation and affordable housing projects supported by VHCB is critical for the success of their businesses and others around the state – in sustaining the landscape that draws the workers, visitors, and customers they depend on, and in providing housing that is within reach for their workforce.

Conservation and affordable housing projects supported by VHCB are **developed from the ground up** by communities to address local needs. Let me give you two examples:

In Bradford, Downstreet Housing & Community Development purchased 21 affordable apartments to prevent the loss of scarce HUD project-based rental assistance for seniors and families. Downstreet is now beginning a major renovation which will vastly improve energy efficiency, extensively upgrade apartment interiors and improve common areas.

In the Mad River Valley, VHCB funding is making it possible for the Town of Waitsfield to add a critical 110-acre parcel to the Scrag Town Forest. This parcel holds the key to unlocking the full potential of the Scrag Forest as a community asset for healthy outdoor recreation and

many other benefits. Without VHCB funding, this parcel would have been lost to high-end residential development.

While the results of VHCB investments have been remarkable, the need continues to be pressing. There are many important natural areas, forestlands, farms, community open spaces, and housing projects that are in the pipeline and at risk if not funded. VHCB reports total demand of about \$50 million in the coming year – more than three times current year funding. These projects are often one-time opportunities and years in the making, and they depend upon a reliable state partner to help get them across the finish line. **That is why it is so important for this Committee and the Legislature to provide strong funding for VHCB, at least at the level of the Governor’s request of \$16.3M in FY18 operating funds and his separate but related proposal for a \$35M housing bond.**

Thank you again for your time and support. Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,
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