

Testimony to the House Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife Committee

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1. The scope of public services provided by the Rivers Program is summarized in the 2016 Annual Report of the Watershed Management Division as presented yesterday by the Division Director, Pete LaFlamme. A key take home from the Report is that Vermont river engineers, scientists, and floodplain managers provided technical assistance, in the 2016 calendar year, on over 2,400 river and floodplain activities – 85% of which resulted in projects or actions that restored or protected the natural stream processes we've learned are so important to stream channel stability, flood hazard avoidance, water quality, and riparian ecosystems.
2. The report also highlights our Rivers and Roads Training Program. In 2012 this Committee started the conversation and later passed statutory changes requiring ANR to train people who often work in rivers after floods (e.g., our transportation workers). I brought with me today copies of the executive summary of our 5-year progress report. Around 350 people have taken our 2-3 day field training course to date, most of whom are VTrans and municipal roads people. The overwhelming feedback we get is that people plan to use what they've learned in daily and post-flood work. The full 5-year program report is available online.
3. In 2010, the bill that would become Act 110 originated in this Committee. Act 110 touched many of the statutes that govern the Rivers Program, but one of the primary achievements was recognizing in state policy the importance of mapping river corridor to identify fluvial erosion hazards and assisting Vermont communities in the adoption of river corridor protection bylaws. After Irene, the legislature went on to pass Acts 138, 16, and 107 that established state regulation of any floodplain and river corridor developments exempt from municipal regulation, as well as establish further ANR directives to assist municipalities in the river corridor and floodplain planning and protection.
4. The committee has been provided our 2017 Act 110 report. Some of the highlights from this report are the ongoing municipal bylaw adoption and the increased inter-agency cooperation in developing the Food Resilient Communities Program. Since reporting began, in 2011, we've seen, on average, five municipalities per year adopt river corridor bylaws – we up to 42 towns. If you include enhanced floodplain protection bylaws (those that exceed the NFIP requirements) then 29% of VT municipalities are actively pursuing flood resiliency through their land use regulations (and thereby qualify for the 17.5% state cost share during declared flood disasters). There is also notable progress in our efforts to develop municipal incentives (i.e., interagency project siting requirements and resiliency planning).
5. The final piece, I would like to leave you with is an Indicator Report that will be a part of the Department's Results Based Accountability Report. The Program has delineated river corridors for all streams and rivers with drainage areas greater than 2 square miles. Of the 324 square miles encompassed by these larger corridors, over half enjoy moderate to robust protections. The seemingly incremental progress that is made each year is bolstered by the knowledge of how much corridor and floodplain protection has been accomplished over the years.