

**Testimony of Rose Paul, Director of Critical Lands and Conservation Science**  
**The Nature Conservancy in Vermont**  
**House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife February 14, 2017**  
**on the Water Quality Blueprint for the Lake Champlain Basin**

- TNC in Vermont wanted to apply our science to the challenge of improving Lake Champlain's water quality through investments in nature based solutions.
- We wanted to create a prioritization of sites in a way that would align the work of many partners to really ADD UP. We received a corporate donation from Keurig Green Mountain to support this work.
- Our TNC scientists created a WATER QUALITY BLUEPRINT, a map-based prioritization of SITES where forests and wetlands could either be permanently protected from development, or restored and protected, to benefit water quality. Nature based solutions create positive impact for flood resilience, fish and wildlife habitat, scenery and tourism as well.
- Our scientists worked with an advisory committee of 20 experts, including staff of state and federal agencies, other conservation organizations and two engineering firms, to develop a robust set of criteria for prioritizing places for conservation focus.
- Our prioritization takes into account data and information from many of these partners: Where has the Department of Environmental Conservation identified places with impaired waters and sources of pollution? Where is the river likely to flood or create erosion? Where will cleaning up the waters benefit fish (such as lake sturgeon, sand darters and brook trout)?
- We have made the Water Quality Blueprint available to anyone with an internet connection. It is available as an interactive web map (you may be familiar with the ANR Natural Resources Atlas, it works like that.) Users can zoom in and out to places they want to explore and look for highest priority places to focus their efforts. In this way, we hope to align local watershed organizations and public agencies to engage in conservation actions in a more focused, strategic way.
- One way that this will align partners and resources is that our WQ Blueprint is being incorporated into ANR's Clean Water Roadmap. This will be released in March. Our Blueprint is part of a broader roadmap of sites where best management practices can be used to improve water quality. Our Blueprint will highlight nature-based solutions in the Roadmap. The Roadmap will consider other kinds of practices as well, such as contour plowing and cover cropping on farms and green stormwater installations such as rain gardens in downtowns.
- The state's Clean Water Roadmap, and our Blueprint in it, will help grant seekers find high priority places and help grant makers to know that their funds are being used in the most strategic places. Example: ANR's Ecosystem Restoration Funds process may give extra points to applications that work in higher priority places as identified in the Blueprint.
- You can read about and view the Water Quality Blueprint at [www.nature.org/vtcleanwater](http://www.nature.org/vtcleanwater)
- TNC has sponsored a two-year study at the Gund Institute for Ecological Economics at UVM to really quantify the role of forests and wetlands in removing phosphorus from Lake Champlain. Results in July of 2018.