



Testimony to Vermont House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife
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Thank you, Representative Deen and members of this committee.

I am the Director at Friends of the Mad River, which is a non-profit organization that works for Healthy Land, Clean Water, and Vibrant Community in the Mad River watershed towns of Warren, Waitsfield, Fayston, Duxbury, and Moretown.

I would like to talk with you today about one initiative that Friends of the Mad River has led over the last several years and how we've relied on state agency capacity and state clean water project funding to accomplish important work and to leverage significant private funds.

Predictions outlined in climate reports for the Northeast are hitting home in the Mad River Valley. We all know that rains are becoming more frequent, intense, and damaging to our communities and waterways. We feel it in our town road budgets, our eroding or blown-out driveways, our silted farm fields, our turbid swimholes, and our own pocketbooks. *Our community wrestles with how we can take steps to minimize our vulnerabilities.*

With this question in mind, Friends of the Mad River brought together a group of twenty people from the Mad River Valley at the Leahy Center Environmental Summit in 2015 to brainstorm ways to strengthen the community's resilience to future floods. Participants coalesced around the concept that stormwater management is one of our biggest opportunities. If we can sink water into the ground and slow it as it enters the steep mountain streams, we have less water causing flooding, it has less erosive power, and it carries fewer nutrient and sediment pollutants on its way to Lake Champlain.

Emerging from the Summit and supported by a subsequent High Meadows Fund grant, the Ridge to River Initiative was born. With leadership from Friends of the Mad River, selectboard and planning commission representatives from all five watershed towns, a representative from Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, the Mad River Valley Planning District, Sugarbush Resort, as well as other interested community members have served on the Ridge to River taskforce.

Meeting as a group monthly and in smaller working groups, the taskforce investigated three core arenas – our landscape, the planning and policy context, and the community's engagement – in order to draft a plan for action. We had the help of many experts from private, non-profit, and agency sectors.

I'd like to quickly summarize what we learned:

- 1) We have many roads.
 - ➔ There are 437 miles of public roadway are in the MRV
 - ➔ 1/3 of those are private roads and driveways with few construction and no maintenance standards
 - 40% of these are on steep slopes
 - ➔ 1/2 of Mad River sub-watersheds have high road densities like outer Chittenden County towns
- 2) We have many trails.
 - ➔ There are 300 miles of managed trails, and many more that are unmanaged.
- 3) Healthy forests are important, but we're losing intact forest cover.
 - ➔ Between 2001 and 2011, 500 acres of "forested" cover were downgraded to "developed" or "herbaceous" (this is geospatial data; we don't yet know what contributed to this loss)
 - ➔ 3 sub-watersheds currently have less than 65% forest cover, which has been shown to be a threshold under which stream erosion and habitat problems occurs downstream
 - 5 additional sub-watersheds are near this threshold
 - ➔ On-the-ground interviews suggest that minor, unregulated land disturbing activities are a major source of erosion, sedimentation, and flooding in the watershed, like too-small driveway culverts, view clearing, residential soil moving, and so on
- 4) Most Mad River Valley development doesn't trigger state and local permitting for stormwater.
 - ➔ Most MRV development is 1 or 2-family structures, which most often does not trigger state stormwater permitting
 - ➔ Local, municipal regulations address construction site erosion controls, but are limited in their enforcement and over the long-term, they do little to mitigate impacts of new impervious surfaces

Why does all this matter?

- 1) Roads and trails (which we have a lot of) can be an avenue for dirty runoff, if poorly constructed or poorly maintained.
- 2) Forest cover and related healthy soil (which we're losing) are assets that help slow water down and alleviate downstream problems.
- 3) Good regulation (which doesn't address most of our development) and enforcement can prevent long-term cumulative impacts.

Because stormwater runoff is a collective problem across the landscape, it necessitates collective action. Ridge to River thinks that neighbors and towns working together across town lines with agency and non-profit partners can develop innovative solutions for our rural Vermont watershed. And, that is just what we're doing.

In 2017, the Ridge to River taskforce drafted an Action Framework that identifies priority strategies for strengthening clean water and resilience.

We have facilitated stormwater planning and upgrades at problematic road sections and developed areas. We gathered all five town road crews together to discuss challenges and share solutions, created educational materials, presented at municipal meetings, and hosted well-attended Community Forums.

The Ridge to River taskforce has secured funding for high priority projects identified in our action plan, like:

- ➔ Helping homeowners address stormwater runoff on their homesites and driveway, as part of our new “Storm Smart” program launching this spring;
- ➔ Conducting Valley-wide stormwater planning and engineering at high priority sites;
- ➔ Constructing green stormwater projects to retrofit existing development;
- ➔ And supporting continued collaboration as a watershed, across town borders.

This is important and time sensitive work. It takes everyone – local community members, municipalities, watershed groups, non-profit partners, RPCs, NRCDs, and state agencies. We each serve a role in accomplishing clean water goals. For every state dollar that has contributed to this Initiative, we have leveraged 2 additional dollars in support of Vermont’s clean water.

We have been planning and acting for clean water and resilience. We know our vulnerabilities and we know the solutions. I’m here today to urge you to support funding that allows watershed groups and our critical partners the capacity we need to advance this work, and to also support funding that puts important projects on the ground now.

Thank you for your time.