

Testimony: Watersheds United Vermont to
The House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife.
Clean Water Day: February 22, 2018
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Thank you Representative Deen and the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife for giving watershed groups an opportunity to speak today. My name is Lyn Munno and I'm the Director of Watersheds United Vermont – or WUV – as we call ourselves.

WUV is one of the co-organizers of today's Clean Water Day. It shows the value Vermonters place on Clean Water to have so many individuals and groups take the time to come to the State House today to express their strong support for clean water and share why they care so much about seeing Vermont's clean water laws implemented, enforced, and funded.

Watersheds United Vermont is an association of community-based watershed groups with a mission to empower watershed groups in all parts of the state to protect and restore Vermont's waters. We support groups by providing information, training and resources, connecting groups to each other and to partner organizations and acting as a representative and a voice for watershed groups at the state level. After Tropical Storm Irene, watershed groups working on similar water protection activities in different parts of the state started talking across watershed boundaries and realized that a state-wide organization could help facilitate communication between groups and provide opportunities to share best practices and address common challenges. We host two conferences a year to provide training on organizational and technical topics and this year we are pleased to have received a grant from DEC's Clean Water Initiative to provide training and build capacity in watershed groups on riparian buffer planting and implementing stormwater management projects.

Who are these community-based watershed groups, and why are they so important to clean water and watershed protection? WUV has 40-member organizations across the state including some Conservation Districts. We have a number of these groups here today speaking out for clean water including Friends of the Winooski River, The White River Partnership, Connecticut River Conservancy, Franklin Watershed Committee, Friends of the Mad River, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, Lewis Creek Association, Memphremagog Watershed Association, Farmer's Watershed Alliance, Green River Watershed Alliance and the Missisquoi River Basin Association.

These watershed groups and others unable to attend today are working in their home watersheds on a suite of activities to best protect and restore our rivers, streams, ponds and lakes. These strategies include stormwater management, riparian buffer planting, water quality monitoring, agriculture and forestry projects, dam removal and culvert replacement projects, river cleanups, education and outreach and participating in municipal, regional and state planning efforts including Tactical Basin Planning. There are some volunteer groups working on one or two of these strategies, and also staffed groups working on many strategies and on

more complex projects. These groups are all working to improve water quality and help the state reach clean water goals, and those organizations with more capacity are important project managers for state priority projects. These groups are well connected in their communities and work with landowners, municipalities and partner organizations to implement projects to improve water quality, address flood resilience and protect and restore important habitat. They leverage private dollars from businesses, foundations and individuals as well as federal dollars to accomplish this work. Several of the groups are here today to discuss the projects they are working on.

What can the Legislature do to help watershed groups accomplish the state's clean water goals?

1. We need a dedicated long-term funding source for clean water and healthy watersheds. Groups need state dollars to develop and implement projects, for outreach and education and for working with the state on project planning. Projects can take time to develop and implement and groups need to know that there will be consistent funding to see projects to completion.
2. We need non-capital dollars in addition to capital dollars. It is key to have enough funding for project scoping and development, landowner outreach, education and implementation of projects that are not capital eligible. We hear time and again from watershed groups that they do not have the funds necessary to do project development and therefore these important projects are not implemented.
3. It is important to make sure there are sufficient funds for natural resources protection projects, which have been shown as an excellent investment of resources to improve water quality. These projects also provide a host of co-benefits including flood resiliency and habitat protection.
4. We need funding for capacity building for our community-based watershed groups. As mentioned, these are small groups with limited (or no) staff. We have seen that those groups that have more capacity are able to accomplish significantly more project work, and an investment in local capacity will go a long way toward more on the ground work. As you have heard from DEC and as you will hear from watershed groups, there are many important projects identified that will improve water quality and these groups can be key state partners in project management with the staff support and capacity.
5. We need the Legislature to act now. No more studies, no more delays. The studies on funding options have been done. We all know the critical importance of clean water for this state and we need to commit to invest in our waters and our communities. Our community-based watershed groups know better than anyone that there is real work to do on the ground now! But they need a commitment of funds and a consistency of programs to develop and implement projects that will protect Vermont's lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, which are so vital to Vermonters.

