

2/22/18 Clean Water Day Testimony to House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife  
Mary Russ, Executive Director, White River Partnership

Thank you Representative Deen and the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Mary Russ and I'm the Executive Director of the White River Partnership. For 22 years the Partnership has been working to protect and improve Vermont's White River.

To accomplish our mission, we've worked with community and technical partners to identify threats to a healthy White River – like eroding river banks that degrade water quality, and undersized stream crossing culverts that block fish and sediment passage.

And we've worked with our funding partners – including the state of Vermont – to complete hundreds of on-the-ground projects designed to address those threats – like planting thousands of trees along the river each year to keep the river cold and clean; and replacing undersized culverts to reconnect habitat and natural sediment flows.

But despite our successes, we face significant challenges. Climate change means more rain, more often in New England and we experienced what that means first hand when Tropical Storm Irene flooding devastated the White River valley in 2011.

The Partnership responded immediately and has been working ever since to help communities rebuild in a way that better prepares us for an uncertain future: those trees growing along the river slow down floodwaters and keep riverbanks in place; and those right-sized culverts mean roads don't wash away.

However the need to do more is immense: since 2011 we've worked with the state and other partners to identify over 1,000 high-priority projects to improve both clean water and flood resilience in the White River valley. The Partnership is committed to addressing these needs, but without funding to implement strategic projects, we cannot meet our collective clean water goals.

So I invite the legislature to join us – by supporting Clean Water Funding now – to make sure that our White River is clean and resilient for the future. Thank you.