

**Testimony of Philip B. Huffman
to the House Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife Committee
February 9, 2018**

Good morning, Chairman Deen and members of the Committee. My name is Phil Huffman, and I am Director of Landscape Conservation and Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Vermont. I am here today as one of the four co-chairs of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition, a collection of about 50 organizations working to advance conservation and affordable housing efforts across the state. I also come wearing a local volunteer hat, as Chairman of the Town of Waitsfield's Conservation Commission. Our community has benefitted greatly from VHCB investments over time, most recently through two critical conservation and recreation projects that closed last year.

Thank you for making time to hear from us today and for your strong past support for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. The witnesses with me today are reflective of the tens of thousands of Vermonters, many of whom are here in the State House today, who care deeply about conservation and affordable housing issues that are so central to the fabric of our communities and landscape. **We ask now for your support of full funding for VHCB from the Property Transfer Tax at the amount required by statute. For fiscal 2019, this is about \$20.4 million.**

We are here to describe the importance of VHCB support by sharing snapshots of a few recent projects. These projects illustrate how VHCB investments are at the nexus of the social, economic and environmental values that makes our state so unique and resilient.

These public investments also create remarkable leverage of other public and private funds and result in jobs, immediate and long term economic activity and enrich the quality of life in our communities.

Over its 30 years, VHCB investments have conserved 267,000 acres for public recreation and natural areas and 700 farms encompassing more than 164,000 additional acres; created affordable housing for more than 32,000 Vermonters, and restored 69 historic buildings for community use. VHCB has invested a total of \$322 million in state funds in this remarkable array of projects, which have touched down in more than 200 communities. In turn, these investments have leveraged an additional \$1.5 billion from federal programs, foundations, private capital and charitable donations – nearly 5 dollars from other sources for every dollar of state investment.

VHCB projects are in every corner of our state – in our communities and across our priceless landscape. They provide countless public benefits – water quality protection, flood resilience, habitat for native plants and wildlife, carbon storage, and other ecological benefits, as well as vital access for recreation, local food, historic preservation, workforce and low-income housing, and increased home ownership. Many of these benefits tie directly to the work of this Committee, and complement efforts such as the House passage last year of H. 233, the forest integrity in Act 250 legislation in which this Committee played such an instrumental role. They also are essential to the state's economic vitality and our irreplaceable brand.

While the results of VHCB investments have been remarkable, the need continues to be pressing. There are many important natural

areas, forestlands, farms, community open spaces, and housing projects that are in the pipeline and at risk if not funded, yet demand for VHCB funding continues to significantly outstrip annual appropriations. These projects are often one-time opportunities and years in the making, and they depend upon a reliable state partner to help get them across the finish line. **That is why it is so important for the Legislature to provide full funding for VHCB from the Property Transfer Tax at the amount required by statute, \$20.4 million for fiscal 2019.**

It is my pleasure now to introduce our other witnesses:

- My colleague Rose Paul, Director of Science and Freshwater Programs for The Nature Conservancy in Vermont, accompanied by Calais Conservation Commission member Cathy Kashanski and Jon Ramsay, Director of Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program
- Mike Zwickelmaier from the Sharon Conservation Commission, accompanied by another TNC colleague Jon Binhammer, our Director of Protection

Thank you again for your time and support. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,
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