



VERMONT HOUSING and CONSERVATION COALITION

**Testimony of Philip B. Huffman
to the Senate Appropriations Committee
April 4, 2018**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Kitchel and members of the Committee. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify today. My name is Phil Huffman, and I am Director of Government Relations and Policy for The Nature Conservancy in Vermont (TNC).

By way of background, TNC is a non-partisan, global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on the ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can flourish together. We work in all 50 states and in over 70 countries. Here in Vermont, we have helped conserve over 300,000 acres of land, 1200 miles of shoreline, and we own and manage 55 natural areas that are open for hiking, hunting, fishing and paddling. We have over 6,000 members who support our land, water, climate and policy work that contributes to building a resilient and thriving Vermont for people and nature.

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. Together we represent tens of thousands of Vermonters who are passionate about these issues that are so central to the fabric of our communities and landscape.

Thank you for your past strong support for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. With your help and leadership last session, the effort to secure a historic \$37 million housing bond was successful. This is already proving to be a transformational investment to meet critical needs. However, there is more urgent work to be done in both the housing and conservation sectors, and VHCB faces an ongoing shortfall in funding relative to the identified need of time-sensitive projects.

We ask now for your support of funding that is at least level with the FY18 allocation. For context, **this would still be about \$5 million, or 25%, below the amount required under the statutory funding formula for VHCB** (½ of annual Property Transfer Tax receipts, or approximately \$20.5 million for FY19).

The State's investments through VHCB reflect the combination of social, economic and environmental commitments that makes Vermont so unique, resilient, and appealing. These public investments also create remarkable leverage of other public and private funds; result in good jobs for Vermonters and both immediate and long term economic benefits; 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 settlements and across our priceless landscape – creating workforce housing, increasing home ownership among lower income residents, providing flood resilience, water quality protection, access for recreation, historic preservation, local food, habitat for native plants and wildlife, carbon storage, and other ecological benefits. They are also essential to the state's economic vitality and our irreplaceable brand.

As Win Smith, majority owner and President of Sugarbush, testified eloquently about at our Legislative Day on February 9th, the combination of conservation and affordable housing projects supported by VHCB is critical for the success of businesses like Sugarbush – in sustaining the landscape that draws the workers, visitors, and customers they depend on, and in providing housing that is within reach for their workforce.

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 investments that are in the pipeline, and at risk if not funded. These projects are often 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 this Committee and the Legislature to provide strong funding for VHCB, at least level with the FY18 allocation.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Philip B. Huffman

Director of Government Relations and Policy

The Nature Conservancy

575 Stone Cutters Way

Montpelier, VT 05602

phuffman@tnc.org

(802) 229-4425 x109