



Testimony of Lynn Bondurant

to the House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Committee

February 19, 2019

Good morning, Chair Sheldon and members of the Committee. My name is Lynn Bondurant. I am a resident of the town of Danby, Vermont, and I am volunteer chair of the Vermont Chapter of the Nature Conservancy Board of Trustees.

I give my time and efforts to TNC's because I believe in its mission: to protect the lands and water on which all life depends. TNC was founded in 1951, and now has chapters in all fifty states and 72 countries. Together we have protected more than 119 million acres of land and thousands of miles of rivers worldwide — and we operate more than 100 marine conservation projects globally. The Nature Conservancy in Vermont is a leader in safeguarding the natural heritage of our Green Mountain State. We have helped conserve over 300,000 acres of land, 1,200 miles of shoreline, and we manage and maintain 55 natural areas that are open for hiking, fishing, skiing and hunting. The Vermont chapter is proud to be connecting land, water, wildlife, and people in a changing landscape, for nearly 60 years.

I am here today to talk about TNC's latest project to protect the forest and waters of Vermont, and the importance of VHCB funding to help make it and other critical conservation projects possible. This month TNC will be purchasing 3,500 acres at Glebe Mountain in the towns of Windham and South Londonderry.

In the 1990's, TNC identified Glebe Mountain and the forest around it as one of Vermont's best opportunities to protect a large and intact forest block and we have remained focused on this goal. TNC's acquisition will safeguard a rich forest block for wildlife habitat. Not only does the site contain one of the most significant beech stands in southern Vermont—an important source of food for bears in summer and fall—the site is important for northern New England forest birds, such as Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Blackburnian Warblers. The property is a mix of northern mixed hardwoods and red spruce forests. Our assessment identified that 95% of the property contains state significant natural communities.

This project will also help improve water quality, by securing nearly the entirety of the upper Cobb Brook watershed that flows into Hamilton Falls at Jamaica State Park and the West River. Brook trout habitat and water quality will be protected and enhanced as we work to remove culverts and add large wood to support a healthy stream ecosystem.

Our Glebe Mountain acquisition will also help reduce the vulnerability of communities downstream to flooding. The vast forest lands on the property will play a key role in absorbing rain water in storms large and small, and slowing the runoff of snowmelt. And our restoration efforts in Cobb Brook will help the stream to function more naturally, again helping to mitigate high flows.

For the past 20 years, this property has been posted. With TNC's acquisition the property will now be open to the public in perpetuity for hiking, fishing, snowshoeing, and hunting. This will be an important step in countering the trend of increasing amounts of posted land in southern VT and elsewhere, which is precluding opportunities for long-standing VT traditions of outdoor recreation and connecting with the outdoors, with their associated benefits for personal enjoyment, health, well-being, families, and communities.

Protecting large forest blocks like Glebe Mountain is a critical strategy in helping Vermont buffer the impacts of climate change. Glebe Mountain will help Vermont meet the goals of the Agency of Natural Resources' Vermont Conservation Design by protecting our present biodiversity and also by maintaining a network of lands that are connected and will allow wildlife and plants to move and adjust to a changing climate.

TNC is purchasing the 3,500 acres at Glebe Mountain for \$3.5 million, and the total project cost is estimated to be \$4 million. In addition to private contributions, we will be requesting \$800,000 from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. Opportunities to protect a forest parcel of this size and ecological significance are rare in Southern Vermont. Having a full funded Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust fund is critical to helping projects like this become reality. I urge you to support full funding for VHCB in accordance with long-standing statutory requirements, which in FY20 would be approximately \$21.8 million.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my perspective.