

Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions

Clean Water Implementation

Prepared for the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
by Charlie Baker, Chair, VAPDA Natural Resources Committee
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In the absence of county government, the State and its municipalities created regional planning commissions to work with the federal, state, and municipal governments on a wide range of issues to prepare for the future. These issues include: natural resources, transportation planning, emergency management, land use, economic development, energy, public health, and other topics of interest to our municipal members.

In FY18, about \$9,000,000 of investment flowed through RPCs into water quality improvement including planning and construction. Here is a brief summary of the types of investments made through RPCs:

Grants in Aid - \$2,463,278. The Grants-in-Aid pilot project provided funding for municipalities to construct best management practices on municipal roads ahead of the Municipal Roads General Permit. The project was designed to be a streamlined approach to providing financial and technical support to municipalities. In FY18, 173 municipalities participated, and 44.7 miles of roadway were improved. The improvements were to 720 road segments with 1,322 best management practices constructed.

Ecosystem Restoration Program - \$1,166,710. The program supports stormwater master plans, project design, project implementation, natural resource restoration projects, and some limited agricultural projects and equipment purchases. RPCs assisted with grant applications, grant management, and/or construction management on at least 20 ERP grants ranging from stormwater masters plans to managing construction for municipalities.

Tactical Basin Planning - \$313,000. DEC has provided funding to conduct a multi-pronged outreach effort focused on improving water quality in compliance with the Vermont Clean Water Act (VCWA) to the RPCs. The focus has been on developing strong tactical basin plans with the involvement of municipalities, conservation districts, and watershed associations. RPCs are also educating municipalities about the VCWA requirements and also work with them on improving town plans and bylaws (flood hazards and river corridors) to improve water quality. In FY18, all scheduled tactical basin plans were updated. RPCs also worked with towns to update plans and to update bylaws for river corridors and flood hazard protection.

Clean Water Block Grant - \$875,678. Through funding provided by the DEC, the Clean Water Block Grants support final design and construction. In FY18, RPCs had 11 municipal projects committed for construction.

Muni Highway and Stormwater Mitigation - \$1,956,696. This grant program is administered by VTTrans with a combination of federal transportation funds and state capital funds. It is intended for larger environmental mitigation related projects over \$250k in construction costs. In FY18, RPCs assisted several municipalities in securing and implementing these grants.

Better Roads/Road Erosion Inventories - \$1,737,394. RPCs have been assisting municipalities with road erosion inventories, prioritizing projects, seeking grants, and managing implementation to meet the Municipal Roads General Permit requirements. The Vermont Better Roads Program provides technical support and grant funding to municipalities to promote the use of erosion control and maintenance techniques that save money while protecting and enhancing water quality around the State.

Lake Champlain Basin Program/High Meadow Fund/CCRPC - \$433,297. In order to better assist our municipalities, RPCs often seek funding outside of state government from organizations such as the Lake Champlain Basin Program, CCRPC, and the High Meadows Fund. In FY 18, RPCs assisted municipalities with education, outreach, grant applications, and project implementation.

Remaining needs:

- Need to change the grant making process with RPCs, Natural Resource Conservation Districts, and watershed associations from a competitive procurement process to a cooperative agreement system so that all of the partners can collaborate with the State in creating the best solutions possible.
- There still are significant needs for more robust tactical basin planning to include project identification and prioritization with all of the partners included at the table. Increased investment is needed at this stage to identify good projects. Right now, investment is more about readiness than the best investments.
- We support the concept of making investments based upon the best value for the amount of pollution reduction achieved. In order for this concept to be implemented, there must be an estimating tool that allows RPCs and our clean water advisory committees to estimate pollution reductions for potential projects. We support more investment in ANR to quickly develop this tool.
- Comprehensively track projects as they are implemented (across funding programs, sectors and funding origin (i.e. state or federal)).
- More funding is needed for project implementation in two areas especially:
 - Natural resource projects
 - Municipal projects to reduce cost share and minimize pressure to increase property taxes