



STATE OF VERMONT
SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION

MEMORANDUM

To: House and Senate Committees on Appropriations
House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

From: Sunset Advisory Commission

CC: Michael O'Grady, Deputy Chief Counsel, Office of Legislative Counsel
Daniel Dickerson, Fiscal Analyst/Financial Manager, Joint Fiscal Office

Date: November 19, 2020

Subject: Request to establish a funding stream for Connecticut River Watershed
Advisory Commission

The Sunset Advisory Commission (SAC) was created in [3 V.S.A. § 268](#) to review and make recommendations on whether to maintain as is, amend, or repeal the State's boards and commissions. In accordance with this duty, SAC reviewed the Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission (Commission) set forth in [10 V.S.A. § 1193](#). As a result of this review, SAC is requesting that you, as committees of jurisdiction, consider establishing a funding stream for the Commission.

As described in its enabling law, the Commission was established to enhance interstate cooperation and coordination between the States of Vermont and New Hampshire for the purpose of guiding development in the Connecticut River watershed in a way that maximizes the conservation of the watershed's visual, ecological, and agricultural integrity. In a SAC questionnaire [completed by the Chair of the Commission](#) and in a subsequent SAC questionnaire [completed by both the Chair and the Department of Environmental Conservation](#), both the Chair and the Department indicated that the Commission's purpose is still needed, since no other entity oversees development and resource protection of the entire Connecticut River watershed. These responses were made after the Commission recently completed a [five-year strategic plan](#), which evaluated the ongoing need for the Commission in light of anticipated substantial growth within the watershed. Ultimately, SAC voted to maintain the Commission.

However, one issue that arose during SAC's review of the Commission is that it lacks a steady funding stream. The Commission relies upon funding from both states,

but the Chair's questionnaire response indicated that Vermont had not provided the Commission with funding in Fiscal Year 2021.

For reference, in recent fiscal years, the Commission has obtained funding from Vermont through grants from the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR). For example:

- **Fiscal Year 2020.** The VT & NH [Joint Commission FY20 Financial Report](#) on pg. 3, in the Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets table, indicates that in FY20, Vermont provided the Joint Commission with \$19,960 in State grants.
 - This \$19,960 was appropriated to ANR for "Grants" in the [2019 Budget Act](#), in Sec. B.700 (pg. 68).
- **Fiscal Year 2019.** Similarly, one can see on the [FY19 State grants webpage](#), after searching for "Connecticut river," an ANR grant, Grant # 06100 CRJC SFY19, described as "Connecticut River Joint Commission Annual Support – Appropriated General Fund" was granted to the Joint Commission in an amount of \$34,960.
 - This \$34,960 was appropriated to ANR for "Grants" in the [2018 Sp. Sess. Budget Act](#), in Sec. B.700 (pg. 68).

But, one can see that for Fiscal Year 2021, in the [2020 Budget Act](#) in Sec. B.700 (pg. 69), ANR did not have a "Grants" appropriation line item. This appears to originate from ANR's FY21 [budget presentation](#): In the table on pg. 9, ANR proposed to eliminate the grant to the Joint Commission and instead encourage the Joint Commission to apply for a Clean Water Grant.

Because SAC finds that the Commission serves an important State and regional purpose that is not entirely fulfilled by any other State entity, SAC requests that your committees consider establishing a funding stream for the Commission to support its work in guiding development and resource protection in the Connecticut River watershed. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information.