

## **Principles for Protection and Restoration of Wetlands**

*As of July 15, 2019*

### **I. Importance of Wetlands**

Wetlands and floodplains provide critical environmental, public safety, and economic benefits. Vermont's existing programs for wetlands conservation and restoration need to be strengthened to fully achieve those benefits.

Wetlands serve a variety of functions and values beneficial to the general public and to the environment, including flood resiliency, water quality protection, wildlife and aquatic vegetation habitat, groundwater recharge, erosion control, carbon storage, recreational and educational opportunities.

Wetlands will increasingly buffer human communities from environmental threats such as increased rainfall and increasing greenhouse gases. Policies and funding programs should set a baseline of regulatory protections while also incentivizing farmers and other landowners to restore wetlands and compensate them for the extensive ecosystem services that wetlands provide.

### **II. Wetlands are Threatened**

The greatest threats to wetlands are development, draining and clearing for farming, invasive species, timber harvesting, and climate change that may alter hydrologic cycles.

Alterations to wetlands disturb their natural ability to store water and carbon, adversely affect flood resiliency, reduce their value as habitat, limit their ability to retain nutrients and sediment, and impact public health and welfare.

### **III. Science Should Guide Wetlands Policy and Regulation**

Any changes to the State statute, regulations or guidelines for wetlands protection and restoration must be guided by science and have a net environmental benefit. Wetlands should be defined by scientifically based characteristics, not by loosely defined exemptions or exclusions.

A scientific advisory panel should be formed to examine the threshold criteria and factors to define wetlands. The scientific advisory panel should also review and evaluate all agricultural and silvicultural exemptions for their impact on wetland loss. Any exemptions, if warranted, should be narrowly drawn and have an overall environmental benefit.

### **IV. Vermont Should Strengthen Wetlands Protections**

Because of their critical importance to people and nature, the goal of the state of Vermont must be the protection and restoration of wetlands. The current policy of the state of Vermont is no net loss of wetlands. This State policy should be modernized with a goal of a net gain of wetlands by encouraging restoration practices.

Federal wetland laws and regulations do not provide adequate protection for Vermont's wetlands. Necessary protection must include effective, complementary State laws and regulations to fill the gaps left by federal law.

Wetlands jurisdiction should be clear. The general public and interested parties need a clear and predictable regulatory program for wetlands. The Agency of Natural Resources has the expertise, and therefore should be the sole State agency with authority over wetlands.

Rather than expanding exemptions to fill or drain wetlands, policies should focus on promoting the restoration of wetlands to reap the ecosystem service benefits they can provide.

Signed,

Audubon Vermont  
Conservation Law Foundation  
Lake Champlain Committee  
The Nature Conservancy in Vermont  
Vermont Conservation Voters  
Vermont Natural Resources Council