

1 H.606

2 Introduced by Representative Sheldon of Middlebury

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Conservation and development; land use; land conservation;

6 biodiversity; community resilience

7 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish State  
8 goals of conserving 30 percent of the land of the State by 2030 and 50 percent  
9 by 2050.

10 An act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection

11 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

12 Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

13 This Act may be cited as the “Community Resilience and Biodiversity  
14 Protection Act” or “CRBPA”.

15 Sec. 2. FINDINGS

16 The General Assembly finds that:

17 (1) Nature is facing a catastrophic loss of biodiversity, both globally and  
18 locally.

19 (2) According to the United Nations, a million species of plants and  
20 animals are threatened with extinction.

1           (3) In addition to its intrinsic value, biodiversity is essential to human  
2 survival.

3           (4) Human activity has altered almost 75 percent of the Earth's surface,  
4 squeezing wildlife and nature into ever-smaller natural areas of the planet,  
5 according to the United Nations.

6           (5) Further, the United Nations found that the health of ecosystems on  
7 which humans and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than  
8 ever, affecting the very foundations of economies, livelihoods, food security,  
9 health, and quality of life worldwide.

10           (6) The United Nations ranks the causes of the drivers of changes in  
11 nature as: (1) changes in land and sea use, (2) direct exploitation of organisms,  
12 (3) climate change, (4) pollution, and (5) invasive alien species.

13           (7) The 2021 Vermont Climate Assessment highlights an increase in  
14 extreme weather events such as droughts and floods as a significant impact of  
15 climate change in Vermont and recommends nature-based solutions as a  
16 proven, low-cost strategy for climate adaptation and resilience.

17           (8) The 2017 Vermont Forest Action Plan found that fragmentation and  
18 parcelization represent major threats to forest health and productivity and  
19 exacerbate the impacts of climate change.

1           (9) The Nature Conservancy has developed the Resilient and Connected  
2           Landscapes projects and found that Vermont plays a key role in the  
3           conservation of biodiversity regionally.

4           (10) The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, working within the  
5           Agency of Natural Resources and with Vermont conservation organizations,  
6           has developed the Vermont Conservation Design, a vision to sustain the State’s  
7           ecologically functional landscape into the future.

8           (11) The initial Vermont Climate Action Plan calls for investing in  
9           strategic conservation to increase the pace of permanent conservation towards  
10          30 by 30 targets, with Vermont Conservation Design acting as the guiding plan  
11          for prioritization of efforts.

12          (12) Intact and connected ecosystems that are permanently protected and  
13          passively managed to increase in age and complexity support Vermont’s native  
14          biodiversity, reduce flood risks, mitigate drought, and sequester and store  
15          carbon.

16          (13) Vermont’s most effective and efficient contribution to conserving  
17          biological diversity and maintaining a landscape resilient to climate change is  
18          to conserve an intact and connected landscape.

1 Sec. 3. 10 V.S.A. chapter 89 is added to read:

2 Chapter 89. COMMUNITY RESILIENCY AND BIODIVERSITY

3 PROTECTION

4 § 2801. DEFINITIONS

5 As used in this section:

6 (1) “Biodiversity reserve” means an area having permanent protection  
7 from conversion of natural land cover and a mandated management plan in  
8 operation to maintain a natural state.

9 (2) “Ecological conservation area” means an area having permanent  
10 protection from conversion of natural land cover and a mandated management  
11 plan in operation for specific habitat improvement projects to maintain a  
12 primarily natural state.

13 (3) “Sustainable resource management area” means an area having  
14 permanent protection from conversion of natural land cover for the majority of  
15 the area but subject to long-term forest management.

16 §2802. CONSERVATION GOALS

17 (a) Thirty percent of Vermont’s total land area shall be conserved by 2030,  
18 and 50 percent of the State’s total land area by 2050. The Secretary of Natural  
19 Resources shall assist the State in achieving these goals. The land conserved  
20 shall include State, federal, municipal, and private land.

1       (b) Reaching 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050 shall include a  
2       mix of biodiversity reserves, ecological conservation areas, and sustainable  
3       resource management areas. In order to support an ecologically functional  
4       landscape with sustainable production of natural resources and recreational  
5       opportunities, the percentages of each type of conservation area shall be  
6       determined by the goals within Vermont Conservation Design, including the  
7       use of biodiversity reserves to protect highest priority natural communities and  
8       maintain or restore old forests across at least nine percent of Vermont  
9       forestland.

10       §2803. CONSERVATION PLAN

11       (1) On or before July 15, 2023, the Secretary shall develop a plan to  
12       implement Vermont Conservation Design to meet the goals established in  
13       section 2802 of this title. The plan shall be submitted to the House  
14       Committees on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife, Agriculture and  
15       Forestry, and Energy and Technology and the Senate Committee on Natural  
16       Resources and Energy.

17       (2) The plan shall include:

18               (A) an initial inventory of the amount of land in Vermont that is  
19       permanently conserved, including public and private land;

20               (B) an evaluation of the impact of intergenerational land transfer  
21       trends;

1           (C) an assessment of how the goals of this chapter can be achieved  
2           and how State lands will be used to increase biodiversity reserves;

3           (D) an actionable conservation plan establishing how the goals will  
4           be achieved, using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide; and

5           (E) an inventory and assessment of existing programs that will be  
6           used to meet the goals of this chapter and recommendations for new programs  
7           and funding that will be needed to meet the goals.

8           (3) In developing the plan, the Secretary shall hold not less than three  
9           public meetings on the plan and accept public comments. The Secretary shall  
10          receive input from various stakeholders, including land trusts, conservation  
11          organizations, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and other State  
12          agencies.

13          (4) The conserved land inventory shall be updated annually to track  
14          progress toward meeting the goals of this chapter.

15          Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

16          This act shall take effect on July 1, 2022.