



**WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE**  
www.vermontworkinglands.com

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Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets  
Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation  
Agency of Commerce & Community Development

## **2021 Joint Session Talking Points 2/10/22**

**8:50am WLEB Coordinating Committee and Board members, AAFM, ACCD,FPR, Secretary Tebbetts, Molly Mahar, Steve Bick, Joe Bossen sign-into Zoom (Other guest, not speaking Brian Lowe, VCRD)**

**9am-9:10am Committee introductions, then Secretary Tebbetts asks WLEB who are present to introduce themselves, and the seat they represent.**

**Anson, please introduce all speakers, in this order:**

- 1. Lynn Ellen Schimoler, Program Lead Working Lands Enterprise Initiative**
- 2. Molly Mahar, President of Vermont Ski Associations**
- 3. Charlie Hancock, Cold Hollow to Canada**
- 4. Danielle Fitzko, Director of Forests, Department of Forest Parks and Recreation**
- 5. Randall Szott, Partner Program Liaison to WLEF from Agency of Commerce and Community Development**
- 6. Ellen Kahler, Executive Director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund**
- 7. Gus Seelig, Executive Director, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board**
- 8. Sarah Isham, Director of Agricultural Lending, Vermont Economic Development Authority**
- 9. Steve Bick, PhD, Owner, Northeast Forests LLC**
- 10. Joe Bossen, Owner, Vermont Bean Crafters & Vermont All Souls Tortilleria**

**Lynn Ellen Schimoler:**

- To support the work of the Board, and nimbly get dollars to businesses, I do want to acknowledge some of the staff in Agriculture who dedicated part-time hours in 2021: Diana Ferguson and Gina Clithero. In late 2021, the program welcomed a full-time agriculture development specialist: Clare Salerno. Enjoy working with Paul Frederick and Katherine Servidio from Forest Parks and Recreation, and Randall Szott Partner Program colleague from Commerce and Community Development.
- Honored to lead a program that is making a difference for working lands enterprises and VT communities. I know first-hand the hard work, wins and losses that come with running a business, and the types of resources and supports all enterprises need to stay viable. My mother and grandfather owned and operated retail food stores, and prior to joining the Agency, I managed independently and cooperatively owned markets on both coasts.
- In my role at WL, among my many priorities; I want to highlight two: 1. Coordinate Board governance nimbly particularly as liaison to appointing offices, with the WL Board's 8 sub-committees, supporting Deputy Eastman's excellent facilitation of Board meetings and; 2. mitigate the administrative burden of the application process for applicants, providing them with resources at the agency or matchmaking them to viability partners.
- What you'll hear today is evidence of what the Working Lands Enterprise Board does best: effectively deploy capital and business assistance to Vermont working lands farm, food and forest enterprises, thereby to date - helping to create and protect jobs (over 500 ) generate revenue (45M ) and keep the working landscape (over 22,000 acres) vibrant and vital.



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- This Board strategically allocates the funds it is appropriated, measures the influence of those allocations, and communicates those results. I encourage you to visit the 2021 Working Lands Impact report posted on the WL website and routed to your committees. This program's consistent track record of demonstrating impact, effectively deploying, and leveraging public dollars is a pretty stellar story.

**Secretary Tebbetts:**

- The passing of ACT 142 in 2012 allowed the creation of the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, a public-private partnership empowered with a broad range of levers to invest in the economy, environment, and culture of Vermont's Working Landscape
- WLEB is an established program; has a competitive application process and vetted review process; the board is empowered by statute to set annual priorities that align with current needs/opportunities; there are various forms of collaborative investments (Ski VT, allocations to VEDA/VCLF, sharing applications with VCF, CRF appropriation)
- Fiscal Year 2022 appropriation and program readiness

**9:10-9:15 Molly Mahar, President Vermont Ski Areas Association**

- **(Molly Mahar Remarks)**

**9:15– 9:18 Charlie Hancock**

- Since the programs' inception, the WLEF has funded over \$7.3 million in projects, leveraging \$11 million dollars to 249 enterprises. These investments continue to make an impact in all 14 counties.
- Investments are designed to support businesses at critical growth stages. Specific focus is on maintaining an active, working, and vibrant landscape - the foundation of Vermont's communities and economies.
- Much of the work of the Board is governance. WLEB's committees facilitate planning and analysis that support effective and efficient Board decision-making that, in turn, amplifies impact. The grants review process often brings together public, private thought partners who make investment recommendations that proactively address WLEB's strategic considerations and opportunities, enabling the Initiative to be both innovative and responsive.

**9:18 -9:22 Danielle Fitzko:**

- The WLEB is grateful to the consistent philanthropic dollars from Ski Vermont, utilizing their 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Passport program as the revenue stream. Ski Vermont's intentional focus on sponsoring WLEF recipients (over 80K to date) recognizes the value of the outdoor recreation sector to Vermont's economy and working landscape.
- \$2.1 million has been awarded as of January, to:



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- Service Provider organizations for viability,
- Smaller Business Infrastructure projects,
- Meat Processing and Slaughter enterprises for processing and/or distribution, addressing known existing infrastructure bottlenecks and
- Producer Associations for organizational development, governance: board training and more
- \$3.2 million will be awarded in April 2022 pending review of the Supply Chain Impact and Market Level Infrastructure Impact projects designed to leverage supply chain partnerships at significant scale of up to \$250k per award.  
(VT Recreation/ Forest Economy/FPR highlights)

**9:22-9:26 Randall Szott:**

- Vermont's food, farm, forest and wood products sector are a critical economic engine for the state. These grants encourage innovation and risk taking to bring these companies to the next phase, Working Lands Enterprise Initiative is unique because it invests in the businesses and organizations that are the keystones to support our Working Lands economy. Without these enterprises and organizations, other businesses would not have the same access to markets or growth potential.
- Vermont Working Lands entrepreneurs are at the heart of our communities' landscape. They are the backbone of the Vermont economy, a top source for job creation, and an integral part to what continues to make Vermont a quality place to live (Feel free to insert what's needed for ACCD)
- Remarks on December 2021 Jasper Hill visit & investments across counties throughout the years

**9:26 -9:31 Ellen Kahler**

General ex-officio role - Three ex-officio seats that do not rotate off the board and are not members of the Administration, provide some consistency and historical knowledge over time, in addition deep expertise in the Working Lands sector as a whole with considering strategic investments in the sectors more broadly. The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund was included as ex-officio member because in 2009 the Vermont Legislature asked VSJF to create and manage the Farm to Plate Investment Program – for the purpose of writing the Farm to Plate Strategic Plan.

- The WLEB convenes annual symposium to assess strategy for appropriation to invest in the state's working landscape, targeted for catalytic investments in critical leverage points of the Vermont farm and forest economy. Requests to the program continue to come from a wide demographic across the State, across many sectors.
- The WLEI's ability consistently receives more applications and requests for assistance during years when the program's State allocation is higher.
- Each of these years, the Working Lands Program was over-subscribed with significantly greater demand for financial assistance than were available resources. WLEB experiences oscillating



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appropriations but has maintained a continuous over subscription. The Board has the nimbleness to respond if Budget Adjustment Act is approved to allocate additional funds during FY22.  
(Relevant highlights for F2P Strategic Plan)

**9:31 -9:36 Gus Seelig**

The role of Vermont Housing and Conservation Board VHCB plays an active and integral role in both the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) and Farm to Plate, with staff sitting on the WLEB board and reviewing project proposals.

- The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program serves to strengthen Vermont’s working lands economy and rural communities by providing in-depth advising and succession planning services to businesses and family forestland owners, as well as administering grant programs to support investment for future growth.
- WLEB and staff serve as a “directory of resources” for businesses and refer businesses who are not yet ready for a working lands grant to technical assistance or other capital resources who would be a better fit.
- WLEB focus on building executive business skills; critical needs continue for business planning, market development, succession planning, workforce development, etc., for agricultural and forestry businesses.

**9:36-9:42 Sarah Isham**

The Vermont Economic Development Authority, as an ex-officio member of the WLEB has allowed for partnering and leveraging opportunities.

- VEDA’s role in providing financing to farm and forest-based businesses to enhance Vermont’s economy has allowed the WLEB and VEDA to work collaboratively in identifying gaps, barriers and opportunities for these industries.
- By consistently providing grants to businesses, and from to time philanthropically supporting financial institutions to provide innovative financing tools that effectively leverage public dollars to address system gaps and opportunities, WLEB complements the day-to-day work of VT lenders and capital providers.

**(9:42am – 10:15) (WLEF GRANTEES)**

**Steve Bick, Northeast Forests LLC,**

**Joe Bossen, Owner Vt Bean Crafters and All Souls Tortilleria**

**10:15am to 10:30am Q & A with Legislators**