

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife to which was
3 referred House Bill No. 606 entitled “An act relating to community resilience
4 and biodiversity protection” respectfully reports that it has considered the same
5 and recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting
6 clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

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

10 Sec. 2. FINDINGS

11 The General Assembly finds that:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 (10) The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, working within the
19 Agency of Natural Resources and with Vermont conservation organizations,
20 has developed the Vermont Conservation Design, a vision to sustain the State's
21 ecologically functional landscape into the future.

1 (11) The initial Vermont Climate Action Plan calls for investing in
2 strategic conservation to increase the pace of permanent conservation towards
3 30 by 30 targets, with Vermont Conservation Design acting as the guiding plan
4 for prioritization of efforts.

5 (12) The goal of the Staying Connected Initiative is to maintain,
6 enhance, and restore landscape connectivity for wide-ranging mammals across
7 the Northern Appalachians/Acadian region (from the Adirondacks Mountains
8 to the Maritime Provinces). Staying Connected Initiative has identified nine
9 linkages across this vast region that are extremely important to wildlife. Six of
10 these linkages lie within Vermont.

11 (13) Intact and connected ecosystems support Vermont’s native
12 biodiversity, reduce flood risks, mitigate drought, and sequester and store
13 carbon.

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

17 (15) In order to conserve the full range of ecological functions in intact
18 and connected ecosystems, the full range of conservation approaches is
19 needed, including supporting private landowners, conservation easements that
20 promote sustainable forest management, and conservation easements and fee
21 acquisitions focused on passive management.

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 within which natural ecological processes
9 and disturbance events are allowed to proceed with minimal interference.

10 (2) “Ecological conservation area” means an area having permanent
11 protection from conversion of natural land cover and a mandated management
12 plan in operation for specific habitat improvement projects to maintain a
13 primarily natural state, but allowing specific habitat improvements and low
14 intensity forest management projects.

15 (3) “Sustainable resource management area” means an area having
16 permanent protection from conversion of natural land cover for the majority of
17 the area but subject to long-term forest management using high ecological
18 standards.

19 §2802. CONSERVATION GOALS

20 (a) Thirty percent of Vermont’s total land area shall be conserved by 2030,
21 and 50 percent of the State’s total land area by 2050. The Secretary of Natural

1 Resources shall assist the State in achieving these goals. The land conserved
2 shall include State, federal, municipal, and private land.

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

12 §2803. CONSERVATION PLAN

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

19 (2) The plan shall include:

1 (A) an initial inventory of the amount of land in Vermont that is
2 permanently conserved and falls into each of the three conservation categories
3 defined in section 2801, including public and private land;

4 (B) an evaluation of the impact of intergenerational land transfer
5 trends;

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

8 (D) an actionable conservation plan establishing how the goals will
9 be achieved, using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide focusing on the
10 permanent conservation of thirty percent of the land base by 2030, and a broad
11 suite of conservation tools to achieve 50 percent land conservation by 2050;
12 and

13 (E) an inventory and assessment of existing programs that will be
14 used to meet the permanent, non-conversion conservation goals of this chapter
15 and recommendations for new programs and funding that will be needed to
16 meet the goals.

17 (3) In developing the plan, the Secretary shall hold not less than three
18 public meetings on the plan and accept public comments. The Secretary shall
19 receive input from various stakeholders, including land trusts, conservation
20 organizations, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and other State
21 agencies. The Secretary shall convene a stakeholder group and receive input

1 from various stakeholders, including representatives from land conservation
2 organizations, environmental organizations, the Vermont Housing and
3 Conservation Board, working lands enterprises, outdoor recreation groups,
4 indigenous groups, regional planning commissions, and relevant State and
5 federal agencies.

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

8 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

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

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(Committee vote: _____)

Representative _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE