

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:

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

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

16 (3) According to the United Nations:

17 (A) one million species of plants and animals are threatened with
18 extinction;

19 (B) human activity has altered almost 75 percent of the Earth’s
20 surface, squeezing wildlife and nature into ever-smaller natural areas of the
21 planet;

1 (C) the health of ecosystems on which humans and all other species
2 depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever, affecting the very foundations
3 of economies, livelihoods, food security, health, and quality of life worldwide;
4 and

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

8 (4) 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 (5) 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 (6) The Nature Conservancy has developed the Resilient and Connected
16 Landscapes project and found that Vermont plays a key role in the
17 conservation of biodiversity regionally.

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

1 (8) 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 guiding prioritization of
4 efforts.

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

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

14 (11) 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 (12) In order to conserve ecological functions in intact and connected
18 ecosystems, the full range of conservation approaches is needed, including
19 supporting private landowner education, technical assistance, and programs,
20 conservation easements that promote sustainable forest management, and
21 conservation easements and fee 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) “Ecological reserve area” means an area having permanent
7 protection from conversion of natural land cover and is managed to maintain a
8 natural state within which natural ecological processes and disturbance events
9 are allowed to proceed with minimal interference.

10 (2) “Biodiversity conservation area” means an area having permanent
11 protection from conversion of natural land cover for the majority of the area
12 and is managed for the primary goal of sustaining species or habitats. These
13 areas may include regular, active interventions to address the needs of
14 particular species or to maintain or restore habitats.

15 (3) “Natural resource management area” means an area having
16 permanent protection from conversion of natural land cover for the majority of
17 the area but that is subject to long-term sustainable forest management.

18 (4) “Sustainable forest management” means the stewardship and use of
19 forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity,
20 productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfill, now

1 and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local,
2 State, and regional levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems.

3 § 2802. CONSERVATION GOALS

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

8 (b) Reaching 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050 shall include a
9 mix of ecological reserve areas, biodiversity reserve areas, and sustainable
10 resource management areas. In order to support an ecologically functional
11 landscape with sustainable production of natural resources and recreational
12 opportunities, the approximate percentages of each type of conservation
13 category shall be guided by the conservation targets within Vermont
14 Conservation Design, including the use of ecological reserve areas to protect
15 highest priority natural communities and maintain or restore old forests.

16 § 2803. CONSERVATION PLAN

17 (1) On or before December 31, 2023, the Secretary shall develop a plan
18 to implement the conservation goals of Vermont Conservation Design to meet
19 the goals established in section 2802 of this title. The plan shall be submitted
20 to the House Committees on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife, on

1 Agriculture and Forestry, and on Energy and Technology and the Senate
2 Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

3 (2) The plan shall include:

4 (A) a review of the three conservation categories defined in section
5 2801 of this title, and suggestions for modifications or additions to these
6 categories;

7 (B) an initial inventory of the amount of land in Vermont that is
8 permanently conserved and to the extant practical, the amount of permanently
9 conserved land that generally falls into each of the three conservation
10 categories defined in section 2801 of this title, including public and private
11 land;

12 (C) an evaluation of the impact of intergenerational land transfer
13 trends;

14 (D) an assessment of how the goals of this chapter can be achieved
15 and how State lands will be used to increase ecological reserve areas;

16 (E) an actionable conservation plan establishing how the goals will
17 be achieved, using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide;

18 (F) an inventory and assessment of existing programs that will be
19 used to meet the permanent, nonconversion conservation goals of this chapter
20 and recommendations for new programs that will be needed to meet the goals;
21 and

1 (G) an assessment of existing funding and recommendations for new
2 funding sources that will be needed for acquisition of land, staffing capacity,
3 and long-term stewardship to meet the goals.

4 (3) In developing the plan, the Secretary shall hold not less than three
5 public meetings on the plan and accept public comments. The Secretary shall
6 receive input from various stakeholders, including private landowners, land
7 trusts, conservation organizations, the Vermont Housing and Conservation
8 Board, environmental organizations, working lands enterprises, outdoor
9 recreation groups, Indigenous groups, regional planning commissions,
10 conservation commissions, and relevant State and federal agencies.

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

13 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

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

15

16 (Committee vote: _____)

17

18

Representative _____

19

FOR THE COMMITTEE