

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 rank 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 2017 Vermont Forest Action Plan found that fragmentation and
9 parcelization represent major threats to forest health and productivity and
10 exacerbate the impacts of climate change.

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

15 (6) The initial Vermont Climate Action Plan calls for investing in
16 strategic conservation to increase the pace of permanent conservation towards
17 30 by 30 targets, with Vermont Conservation Design guiding prioritization of
18 efforts.

19 (7) The Nature Conservancy has developed the Resilient and Connected
20 Landscapes project and found that Vermont plays a key role in the
21 conservation of biodiversity regionally.

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

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

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 natural resource
10 management areas. In order to support an ecologically functional landscape
11 with sustainable production of natural resources and recreational opportunities,
12 the approximate percentages of each type of conservation category shall be
13 guided by the conservation targets within Vermont Conservation Design,
14 including the use of ecological reserve areas to protect highest priority natural
15 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 for review to the House Committees on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife,

1 on 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 extent 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) a summary of the totality of conservation practices available for
15 reaching the goals of this chapter, including what they are, what they do, how
16 they contribute, and what metrics are available to quantify them;

17 (E) an assessment of how State lands will be used to increase
18 ecological reserve areas;

19 (F) the implementation **methods for achieving** the goals of this
20 chapter using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide;

1 (G) an inventory and assessment of existing programs that will be
2 used to meet the permanent, nonconversion conservation goals of this chapter
3 and recommendations for new programs that will be needed to meet the goals;
4 and

5 (H) an assessment of existing funding and recommendations for new
6 funding sources that will be needed for acquisition of land, staffing capacity,
7 and long-term stewardship 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 solicit input from various stakeholders, including private owners of forest and
11 agricultural lands, land trusts, conservation organizations, the Vermont
12 Housing and Conservation Board, environmental organizations, working lands
13 enterprises, outdoor recreation groups, Indigenous groups, regional planning
14 commissions, conservation commissions, and relevant State and federal
15 agencies.

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

18 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

19 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2022.
20
21

1 (Committee vote: _____)

2 _____

3 Representative _____

4 FOR THE COMMITTEE