



# House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife

January 29, 2021



# House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Committee

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“Conservation and development of the state’s water resources; conservation and development of lands; land resources; land use; geology; fish and wildlife; natural habitats; air quality, environmental permitting; climate change; scenery; and solid waste and toxic substances management.”

House Rule 25

# Vermont Housing & Conservation Board Statutory Purpose



“the dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and conserving and protecting Vermont’s agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.”

10 V.S.A.15 §302



# and Protecting Water Quality



“... the protection of lands for multiple conservation purposes, including the **protection of surface waters** and associated natural resources.



## VHCB Results: FY 2019 and FY 2020

State Investment: \$31M

Leverage: \$162M

- 875 homes and apartments
- 45 farms; 5,765 acres conserved
- 25 natural areas; forests; parks and trails:  
7,908 acres conserved
- 2 historic preservation projects
- 317 farm and forest enterprises served  
with business planning and technical  
assistance.

### VHCB Program Impacts

- Farm and Forest next gen transfers
- Rural Economic Development
- Water Quality
- Homes for Workers
- Downtown/Village Revitalization
- Outdoor Recreation
- Housing the Homeless
- Historic Community Buildings



# COVID Response and Recovery

Housing for the Homeless; Business Support for the Farm, Food & Forestry Sectors



Managed \$33 million in CRF for 26 projects securing **247 new homes and beds for those experiencing homelessness as well as improvements to 12 shelters** around the state for health and safety during COVID.

VHCB's Farm & Forest Viability Program has used \$192,000 in CRF funding to provide rapid-response **business coaching for more than 500 enterprises**, helping them apply for state and federal relief programs, work on financial planning, re-orient to new markets, connecting to health and wellness resources and manage human resource challenges.

# Home Sales and Prices Surge

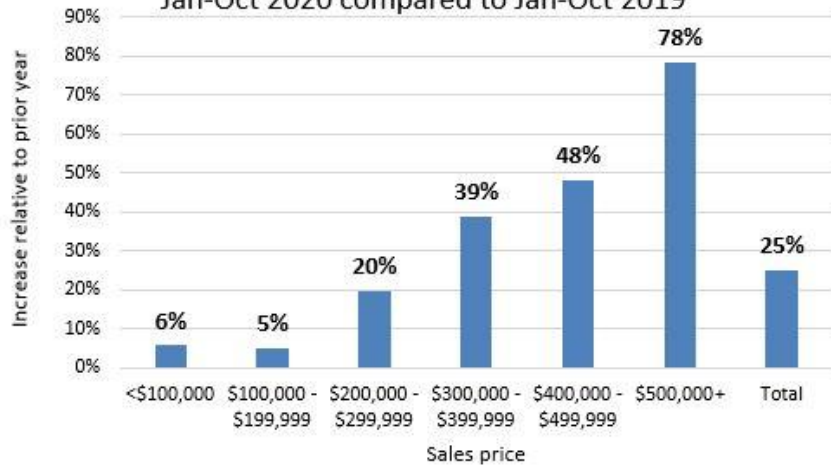
## Property Transfer Tax Revenues Up

V T D I G G E R

**Sales of \$1M homes tripled in Vermont last year**

January 29, 2021

Increase in Vermont homes sold (MLS)  
Jan-Oct 2020 compared to Jan-Oct 2019



Source: Vermont Housing Finance Agency

These “COVID refugees” bought properties at a blistering pace, accelerating an already expanding real estate market. As a result, **property transfer tax revenues in the first six months of FY21 were 40% above expectations.**

*Economic Review and Revenue Forecast  
Update*

*Kavet, Rockler & Associates, LLC*



# Housing in Community Centers

Randolph, Montpelier, St. Johnsbury, Springfield and Bennington





# Energy Efficient Affordable Housing





# Housing and Conservation at Cambrian Rise in Burlington



New neighborhood of 700 new homes under development. 12 acres of conserved land with public access on Lake Champlain. All levels of affordability from luxury condos to apartments dedicated to the homeless. Partnership between the City, private developer, housing nonprofit and land trust. HRB funding committed to or under consideration for 157 apartments and condominiums for moderate to low income households.





# Land Conservation

Protection of natural areas, water resources, recreational lands and forest tracts improves water quality and builds flood resiliency, protects wildlife habitat, and supports rural economic development.



Kingdom Trails, East Burke

VHCB has funded acquisition of two parcels by Kingdom Trails as they secure their trail network that annually brings million in revenue to the area.



Deer Run Nature Preserve, Newfane, Dummerston, and Brookline

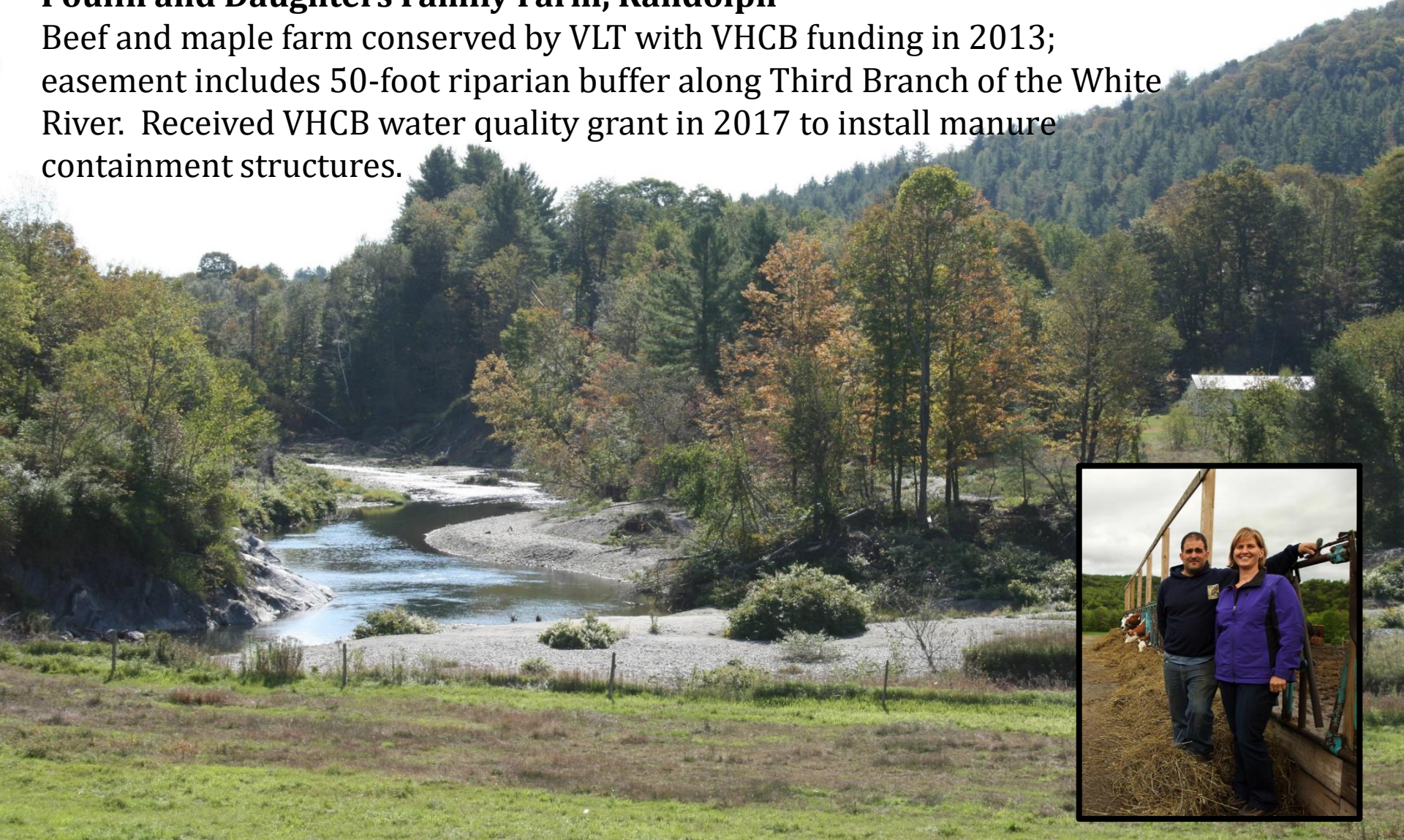
The Green Mountain Conservancy is establishing with VHCB support a new 913-acre nature preserve near the southern end of the Putney Mountain ridge with 2.5 miles of frontage on the West River. Public access for hiking, hunting, and fishing.



# Land Conservation

## **Poulin and Daughters Family Farm, Randolph**

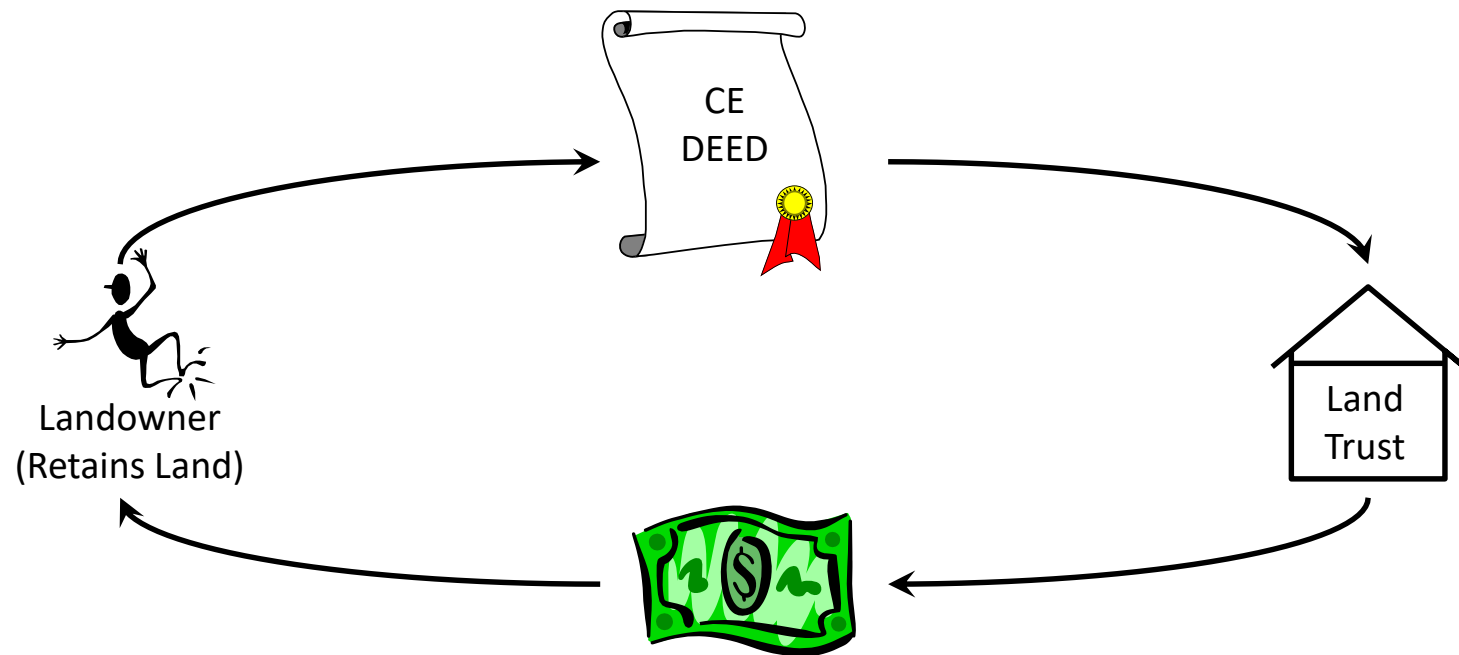
Beef and maple farm conserved by VLT with VHCB funding in 2013; easement includes 50-foot riparian buffer along Third Branch of the White River. Received VHCB water quality grant in 2017 to install manure containment structures.





# Protection Through Easements

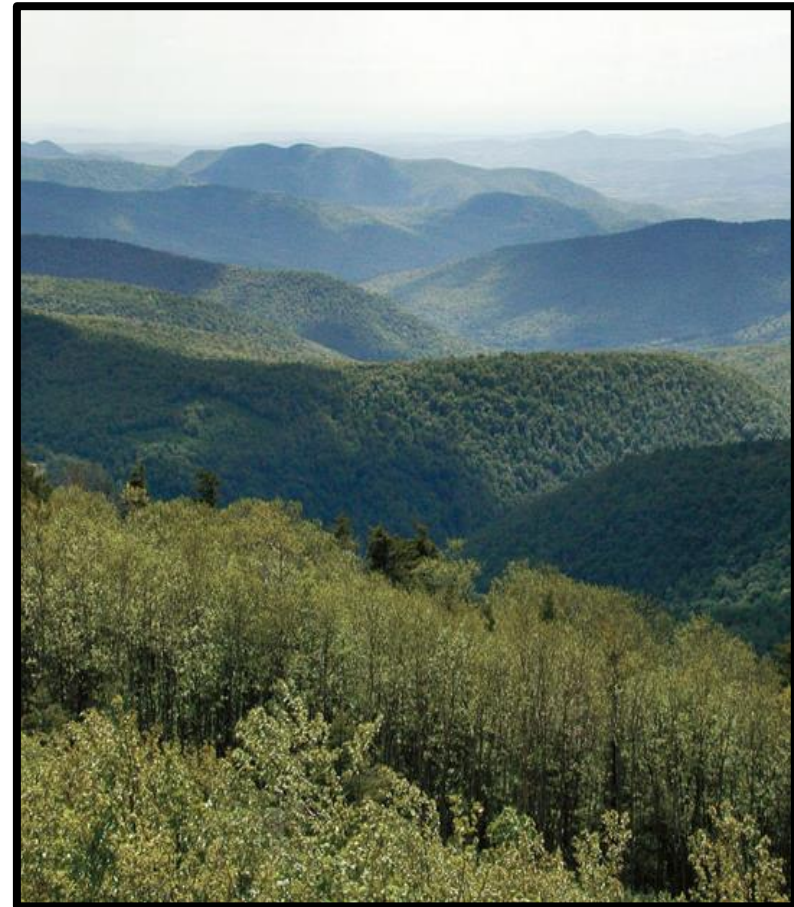
A conservation easement is appraised and the owner is paid the fair market value (or less) of the easement. Funding for purchase from VHCB.



# **VHCB projects are cost-effective and lasting investments that address many of Vermont's most pressing needs and challenges**

**Equinox Highlands**

- Nature's services protect and enhance water quality and reduce the vulnerability of downstream communities to flooding
- Intact forests absorb and store carbon, slowing the pace of climate change
- Builds resilience of communities and ecosystems to climate change by protecting key forest blocks and providing undisturbed habitat for native plants and wildlife
- Securing outdoor recreation opportunities contributes to health of people, communities and economy



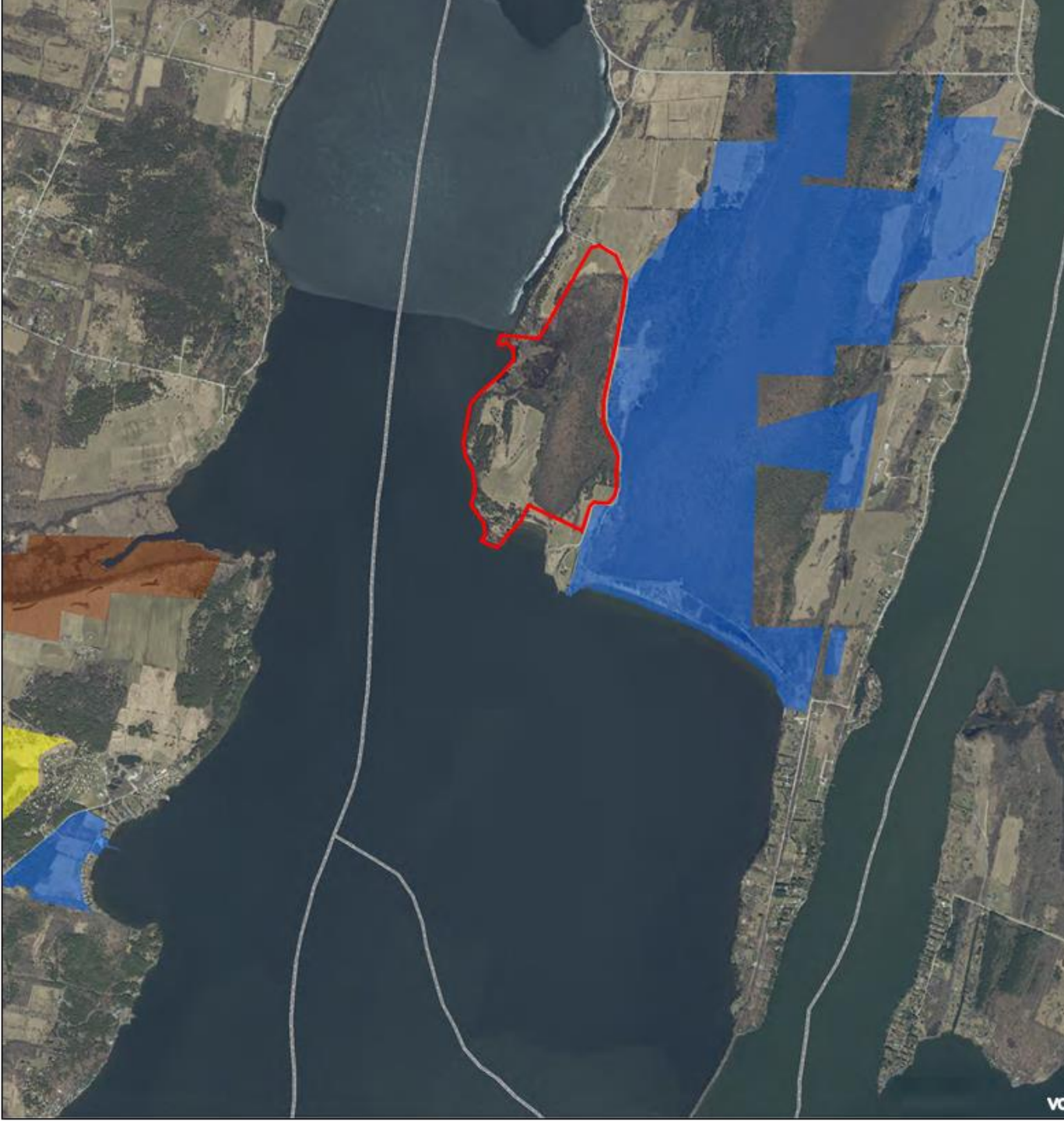


# An irreplaceable Lake Champlain property, an addition to Alburgh Dunes State Park



One of the last  
large stretches  
of undeveloped,  
unprotected  
Lake Champlain  
shoreline

VHCB funds are  
needed to  
match  
\$554,500 of  
Federal LWCF  
funds



1-mile of  
lakeside cliffs  
and beaches

160-acres will  
join 600+  
acres  
conserved  
over the past  
25 years by  
FPR, TNC and  
VHCB



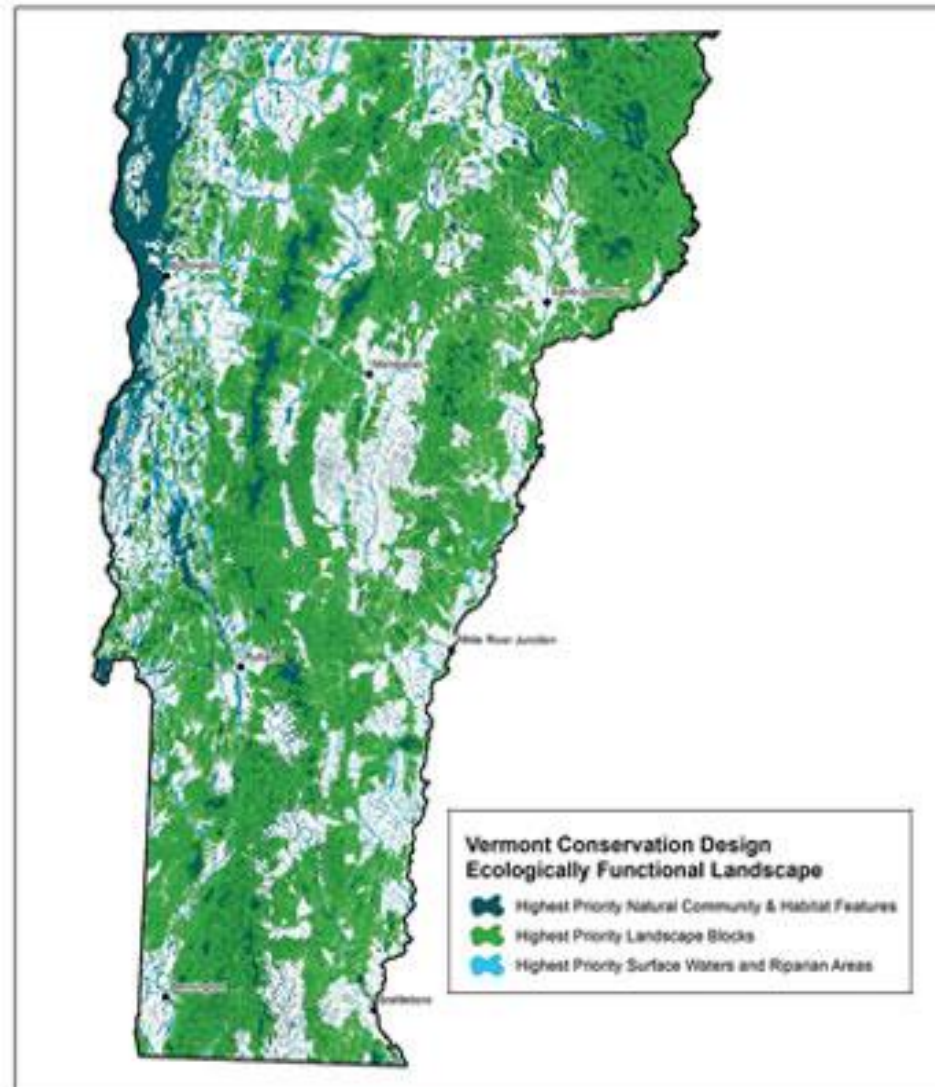
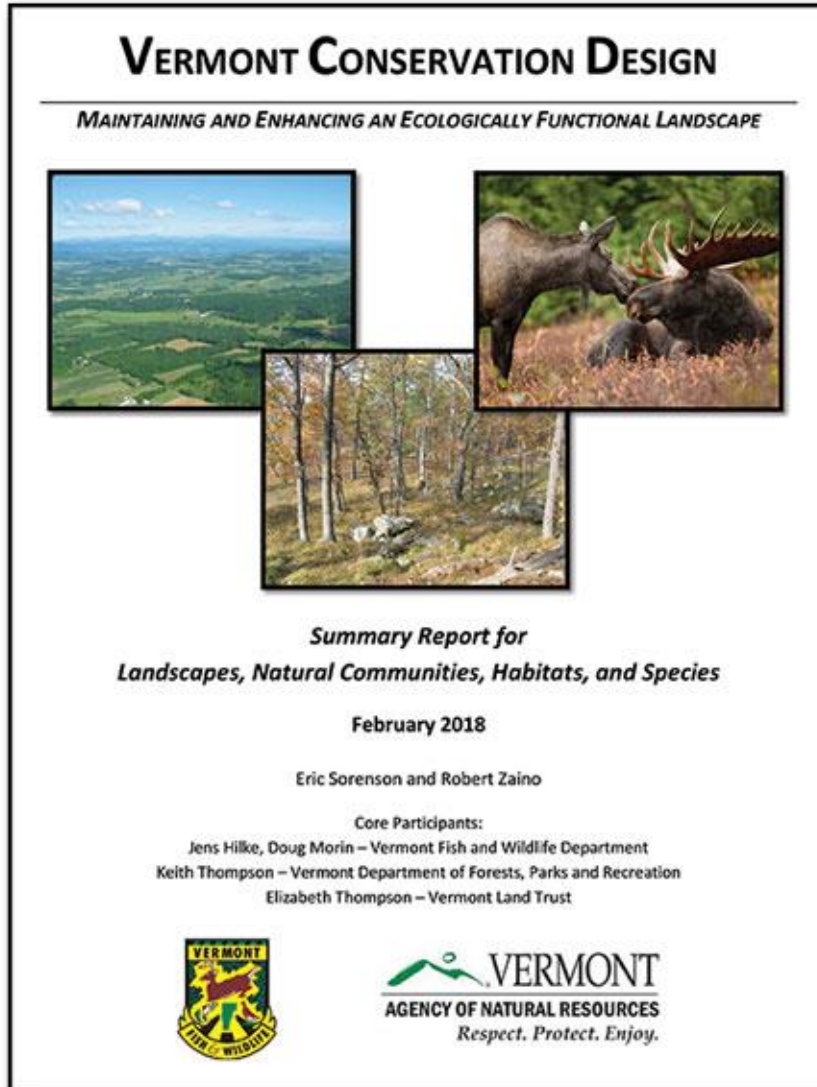
# **VHCB Natural Areas Policy: “Lands that support an ecologically functional and resilient landscape now and as the climate changes”**

Glebe Mountain adds to a protected network of climate resilient sites and linkages that will support sustaining the diversity of plants and animals while storing substantial amounts of carbon, creating cleaner air and water, and facilitating nature’s adaptation.



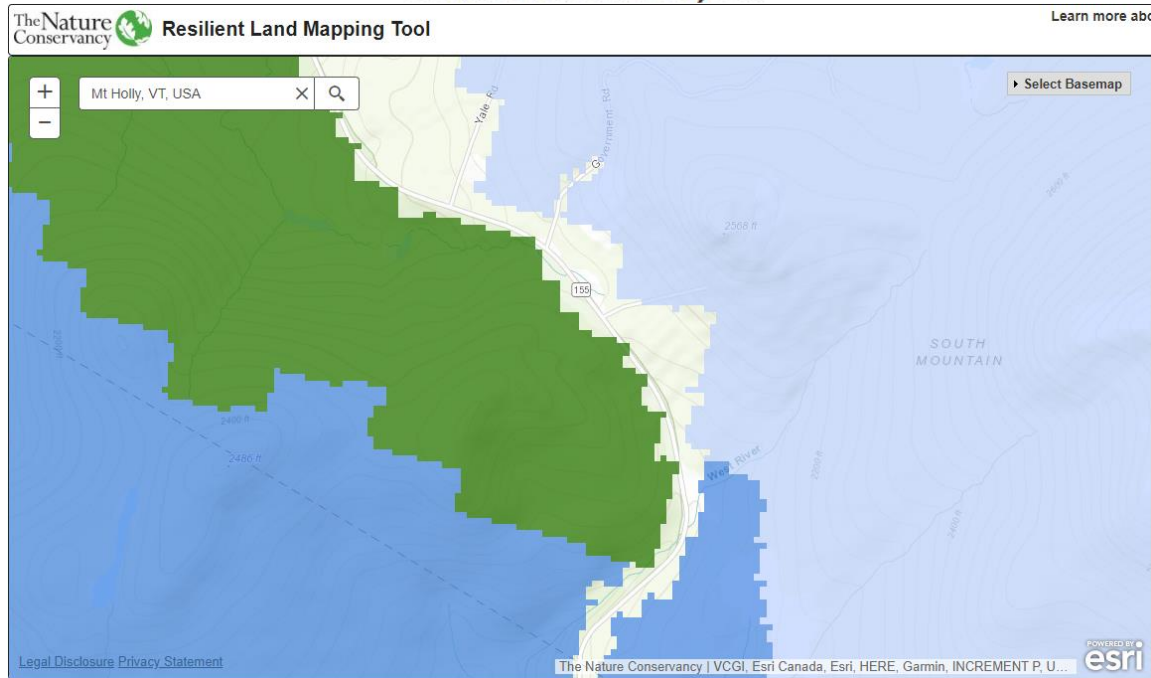


# Employing statewide planning tools in VHCB project prioritization



# Supporting State Planning Strategies: Vermont Conservation Design

## Okemo Wildlife Corridor Conservation Project



- Okemo State Forest, Mount Holly
- Mount Holly Conservation Trust, VT Dept. FPR, Vermont Land Trust
- VCD Highest Priority:
  - Connectivity Block
  - Representative Physical Landscape
- VCD Priority:
  - Interior Forest Block







**Farmland Conservation**

**Choiniere Family Farm, Highgate**

The Choinieres implemented numerous conservation practices, installing buffers along the river, cattle lanes and fencing, and keeping manure under cover using bedded pack barns. The farm now produces milk without feeding grain. The Choinieres purchased a neighboring conserved farm last year and sold river corridor restrictions along the Rock River.





# Conserved Farmland and Natural Areas in Addison County





# Farmland Conservation

State funding matched with federal and privately raised funding to protect productive farmland, improve water quality, and facilitate transfers to the next generation.

## Hewitt/Old Road Farm, Route 100, Granville

- New owners run an organic vegetable operation, breathing new life into the tiny village of Granville at a time when COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of local food.
- Assistance from the Vermont Land Trust Farmland Access Program and business/transition planning with the Intervale Center through the Farm & Forest Viability Program.





# Whetstone Brook River Corridor





# Cersosimo - Conceptual Site Plan



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## FLOOD STORAGE

- A restored floodplain will provide storage capacity during high water events, reducing peak flows and helping protect downstream property

## WATER QUALITY

- Stormwater runoff will be redirected into a wetland, protecting Whetstone Brook's water quality

## PUBLIC ACCESS

- A pedestrian trail will meander through the restoration area, and provide river access
- Through partnerships, other public uses are possible, such as community gardens, a conservation nursery, a picnic area, or a playground

## WILDLIFE HABITAT

- The restoration effort will create wildlife habitat, including grasslands and riparian forests, restoring species present prior to conversion to a lumber yard.





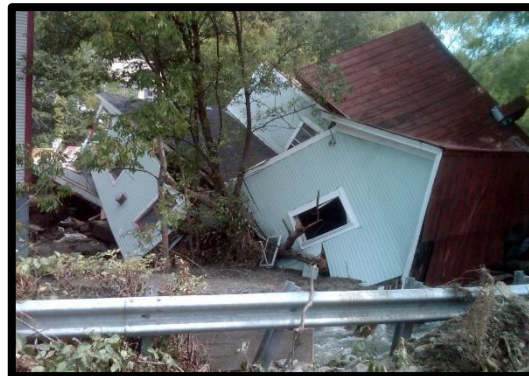
# Morgan Street Wetlands - Bennington





# Restoring Floodplain and Reducing Future Risk

## VHCB and FEMA Buyouts





# Clean Water Initiative

## Water Quality Farm Improvement and Retirement Projects



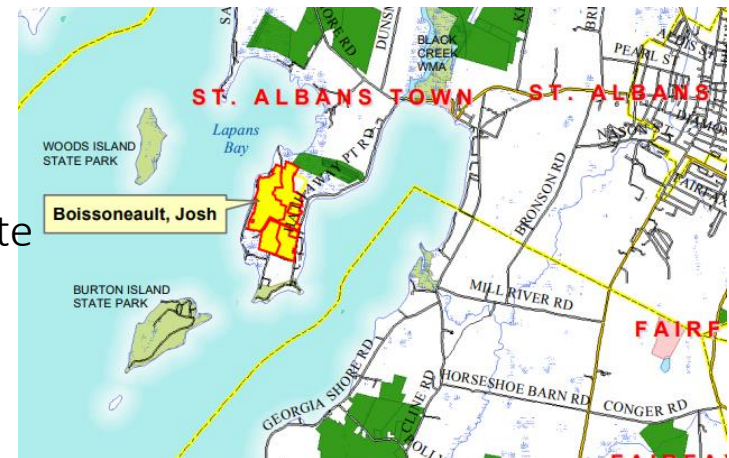
WQ Grant to Stonebroke Farm, Pawlet



Farm Retirement, Colchester

## Land Conservation and Water Quality

Boissoneault Farm, St. Albans - \$230,500 in capital bill funds leveraged \$356,500 in federal and private funding to conserve 264 acres on Lake Champlain including 140 acres of wetlands with multiple rare and uncommon natural communities.



# Water Quality Farm Projects



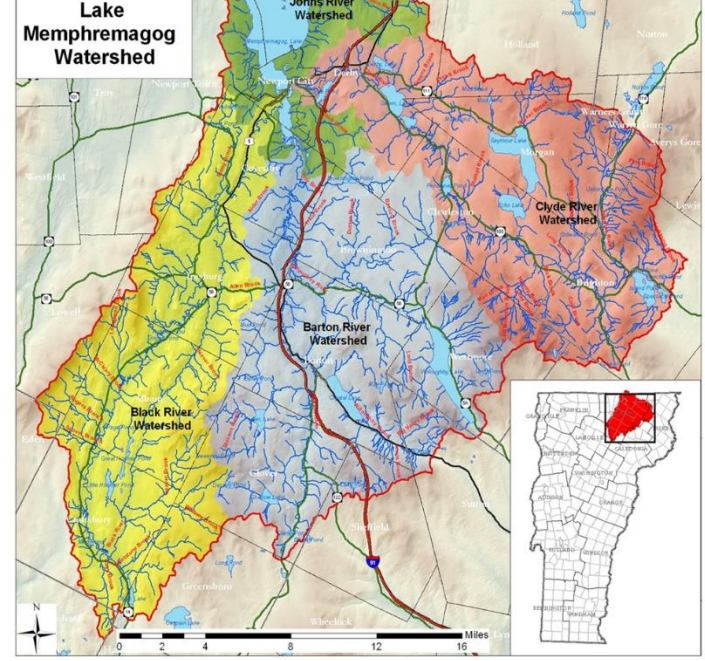
Kelsey Chandler & Phelan O'Connor operate Pigasus Meats, raising pork and chicken on the conserved Landon farm in **South Hero**. They were awarded a \$40,000 Water Quality Grant for a bedded pack hoop barn for winter hog housing allowing for efficient manure management with no liquid manure, reducing runoff.



The Vosburg Farm in **Swanton** received \$40,000 for new manure storage infrastructure to eliminate groundwater contamination.

In **Sheldon**, HJ & A Howrigan and Sons, Inc. received \$8,191 for a no-till planter that will reduce runoff and soil erosion, improving water quality.





# Clean Water Service provider for the Lake Memphremagog Basin







## Conserving working forests & supporting the forest economy

- The Vermont forest products industry contributes 10,555 jobs and \$1.5 billion in economic output, including value-added manufacturing and tourism.
- Forests provide a backdrop for Vermont's world-class tourism industry and boost rural economies, as demonstrated by the Westford Town Forest, Mount Ascutney in West Windsor, and Kingdom Trails, all conserved with VHCB funding.
- VHCB has protected 7 town forests totaling 2,083 acres over the past three years.
- The Viability Program has worked with more than 50 foresters, loggers, and forest products businesses, and provides succession planning services to forest landowners.



# Conservation of Natural & Recreational Areas

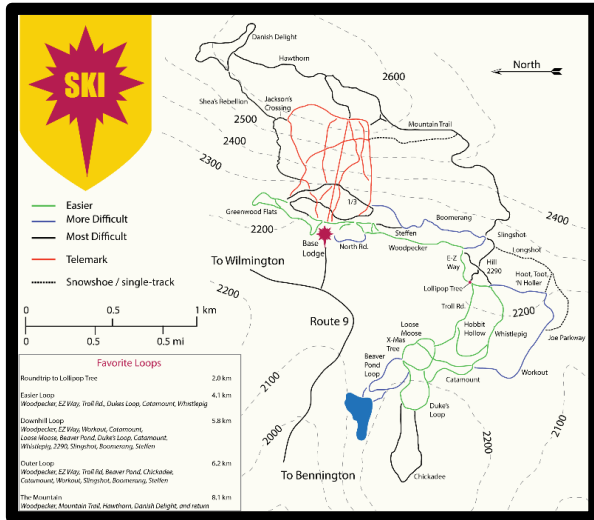
## Ascutney Mountain, West Windsor



- Acquisition and conservation of 469-acre addition to the town forest creating a 4,730 acre block of protected land.
- Added 11 miles of trails to an existing network following loss of the local ski area.
- Values of the land include wildlife habitat, natural resource protection, sustainable forest management, water quality protection.



# Recreation Landscape Protected and Enhanced



# Prospect Mountain Nordic Ski Area in Woodford





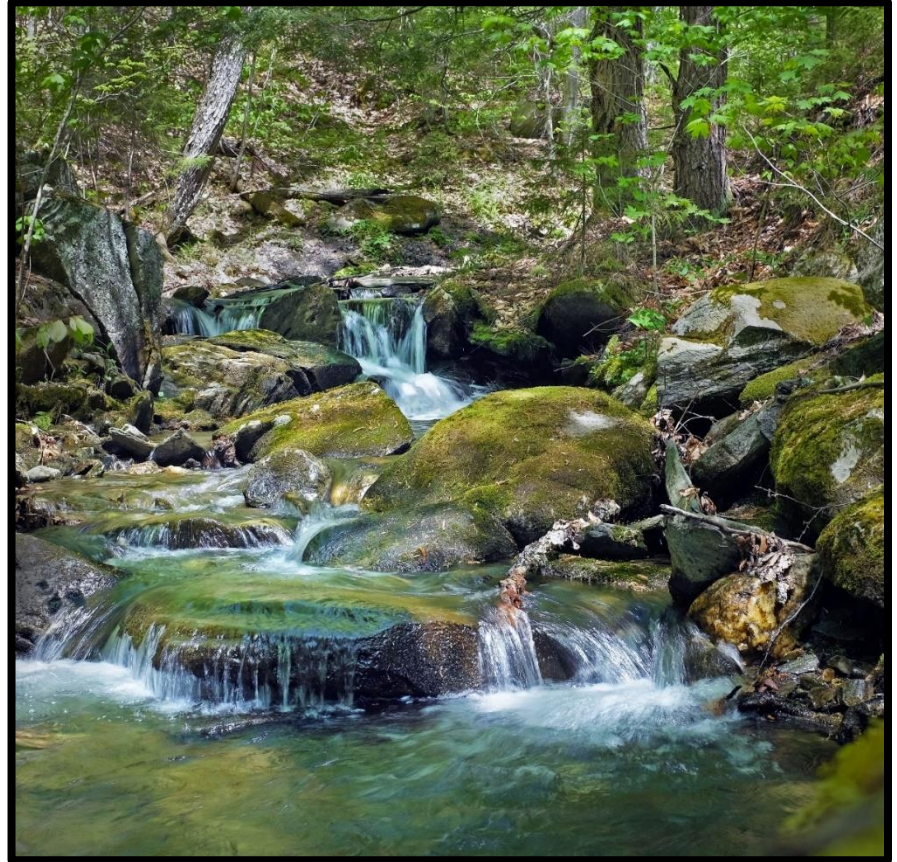
## Rural Economic Development Initiative

- For communities under 5,000 in population.
- From FY18 to FY20, \$225,000 for grant writing helped 24 rural enterprises and small towns win **\$4.4 million** in federal, state, and philanthropic funding.
- An additional \$2.3 million in federal, state, and philanthropic funds are pending.
- Projects span the state from Pownal to Newport, and have helped with outdoor recreation infrastructure, agricultural and forest industry projects, downtown revitalization, and developing rural childcare centers.

# More to be Done

## 18-Month Project Pipeline

- ✓ \$9 million for 61 natural resources and recreational areas projects
- ✓ \$16 million for 54 farmland conservation projects
- ✓ \$1.5 million for 24 historic community buildings
- ✓ \$32 million for 45 rental housing projects, homeownership and accessibility



Bridgewater Hollow Bramhall Preserve

**Millions in federal funding available and more expected if state \$s can match.**



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