

# Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee on Lake Champlain's Future

## 2021 Lake Champlain Action Plan



Vermont and the Lake Champlain Basin are at a critical juncture. The State must follow through on its commitment to address the Lake's pollution problems with increased funding, and investment, including implementation of the [Lake Champlain Restoration Plan \(Phosphorus TMDL\)](#). We ask that the State provide the necessary resources to assure compliance with the plan's required load reductions. Agricultural and stormwater runoff, streambank erosion, invasive species, climate change, and next generation toxic pollutants are a continuing burden and threat. The comprehensive vision and strategies for the future of Lake Champlain, reflected in the LCBP's [Opportunities for Action](#) and also in Vermont's existing body of regulatory commitments, including the TMDL, requires re-energized legislative action. That recommitment is essential to assure that Lake Champlain is resilient and thriving, with sustainable functioning ecosystems that support our diverse landscape and people. Prioritized investment in Lake Champlain basin water quality restoration also is an investment in jobs and sustainable economic recovery.

### Investment in Natural and Developed Infrastructure

**Significant State funds must be allocated to provide technical assistance to communities to better address urban and rural infrastructure water quality improvements.**

Healthy ecosystems provide resilience to climate change. All of our agricultural and urban lands are challenged by warming lands and waters, depleted soils, invasive species, shifting habitats, fragmented forests, and floodplain mismanagement which are the major assaults to thriving ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems are a vital defense against climate change, providing enormous carbon sequestration capacity, while improving stormwater attenuation to reduce runoff and erosion. Practices to improve soil and forest health, restore wetlands, and improve floodplain functions must be implemented at every opportunity. Protections for these critical natural resources should be enhanced and public investments in restoration programs should be increased.

Surface runoff from developed lands contributes very significant pollution loads within the Lake Champlain Basin. Our built environment requires continued State investment in stormwater pollution controls, as municipalities, institutions, and private landowners comply with new State regulations and implement new stormwater treatment practices.

### Investment in Public Access and Recreation Economy

**The State must increase and improve public access for non-motorized recreation on Lake Champlain, particularly in southern Vermont, and on rivers and ponds throughout the Lake Champlain Basin.**

Existing infrastructure requires improvements and maintenance to support increased use as our state and regional population responds to Covid-19 and increasingly seeks outdoor recreation and wellness opportunities. Vermont should allocate Covid-19 funds and other resources, to expand shoreline and water access for all Vermonters, to provide more personal experiences with these natural resources, both to support our recreational economy and to increase the opportunities for Vermonters and visitors.

**Annual Report of the Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future**

A requirement of 10 V.S.A. §1961



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## Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Needs Support

**The State must increase support, grant resources and staffing for aquatic invasive species prevention and control programs and build upon decades of invasive species education and management, including increasing financial support for mandatory boat and trailer inspections and decontamination at high use public launch facilities.**

Recent interceptions of propagules of disastrous invasive species (not yet established in Lake Champlain) by Boat Launch Stewards inspecting boat trailers, highlight the unrelenting ecosystem pressures of recreational boating. During the COVID-19 pandemic, with travel restrictions in force, the Vermont Lake Champlain launches saw a 50% increase in use. Every boat launch facility is a possible port of entry for invasive species. Many would-be invasives, if established here, would cause countless millions of dollars in damage to recreation, water quality, infrastructure, and would compromise aquatic ecosystem integrity.

## Investment in Agricultural Transition to Sustainability

**The Legislature and VT Agency of Agriculture, Farm and Markets (AAFM) must provide dairy farmers with better access to alternative models of agriculture, make available the required innovative technical expertise for transition, and promote federal and state financial assistance to reduce the burdens of existing debts on outmoded facilities.**

As national and international market policies exacerbate dire financial stresses on agriculture in Vermont, particularly for the dairy industry, transitions in operations and products are inevitable. Vermont's agricultural sector is at great risk due to over-reliance on the dairy industry.

The Legislature must support a farming sector transition to a more stable financial future that significantly reduces negative impacts on water quality. Critical State leadership is needed to avoid widespread farm failures, to redesign Vermont agriculture to be sustainable, and to significantly reduce the nonpoint source water pollution from agricultural lands.

## Consolidation of Water Quality Enforcement

**The MOU providing authority for the VTAAFM to enforce water quality regulations must be terminated and all enforcement should reside within the VT Department of Environmental Conservation (VT DEC) until an alternative is legislatively approved.**

Programmatic enforcement of water quality regulations with the MOU has failed. The principle strength and focus of the VTAAFM resources should be on supporting the agricultural sector's transition to economically and environmentally sustainable alternatives to conventional dairy operations and technical assistance for compliance with Required Agricultural Practices.

## Next Generation Toxic Pollution

**The State must initiate robust improvements in collecting and analyzing herbicide and pesticide use information, with rigorous quality assurance and control, and transparent public reporting.**

Historically, the State's database of the use of agricultural chemicals and other contaminants has been minimal, suffered from quality control problems, and much of it is unusable.

**The State must fund increased screening of next generation contaminants to enable Vermont to recognize and respond to emerging pollutant issues before they become greater and more expensive problems.**

New generation agricultural and industrial chemicals are often introduced into production processes without adequate research on their environmental and human health impacts. In the past decade, there has been a tremendous surge in the application of agricultural herbicides in Vermont. PFAS and related toxic contaminants are increasingly prevalent, yet monitoring and data collection are insufficient to characterize the environmental and human health problems that they cause. Reductions of toxic substance use are essential to avoid long-term environmental damage and human health impacts requiring very costly and protracted mitigation efforts.

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