

To: Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee
From: Karen Horn, Director Public Policy & Advocacy
Re: H. 126 Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act
Date: March 31, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H. 126.

We support the concept that an effective and efficient contribution to conserving biological diversity and to maintaining a landscape resilient to climate change is to conserve intact and connected ecosystems. We agree that supporting landowner education, technical assistance and programs, conservation easements to promote forest management and fee acquisitions of property will all contribute to climate resiliency and biodiversity.

We also agree that housing is an enormous and equally immediate crisis and that the land area in which the state hopes housing will be built comprises approximately 31 of Vermont's 9,600 square miles.

According to a map provided by the Trust for Public Land on August 20, 2021, lands currently conserved "with some level of legal protection" equal 1,655,279 acres or 2,586 square miles. The goal of 30 percent conserved land according to that map is 1,846,218 acres or 1,846 square miles. That map includes current and completed Trust for Public Land projects, federal, state and local land, private conservation land, and the Appalachian, Long and Catamount Trails.

We urge you to invite John Adams, Director at the Vermont Center for Geographic Information to show you updated maps of areas conserved today and how that might relate to the conserved land inventory required by H. 126.

H. 126 acknowledges in its 14th finding that we face an "urgent pre-pandemic need for new housing" and that "strategic investment in conservation is consistent with construction of housing in Vermont's villages and Town centers". We agree with that statement and would add that conservation is consistent with construction of housing beyond just villages and town centers.

H. 126 would not to count, the following areas of land that are off the table for development as a result of statutes, rules or regulations such as: steep slopes, lands above 2500 elevation, wetlands and wetland buffer areas, shoreland protection areas, waters of the state, certain floodplains, deer yards, and areas conserved pursuant to agreements with the state or Act 250 permits (to name a few). We urge you to include those protected areas in the count of conserved areas pursuant to H. 126.