

1 S.38

2 Introduced by Senator White

3 Referred to Committee on

4 Date:

5 Subject: Conservation and development; wildlife conservation; habitat  
6 corridors; wildlife crossings

7 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to require the  
8 Secretary of Natural Resources to establish a program to fund the creation and  
9 maintenance of habitat corridors and wildlife crossings in the State.

10 An act relating to conserving habitat corridors and wildlife crossings

11 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

12 Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

13 This act may be cited as the “Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamp Act.”

14 Sec. 2. FINDINGS

15 The General Assembly finds that:

16 (1) Nature faces a catastrophic loss of biodiversity, both locally and  
17 globally.

18 (2) In addition to the value it has for its own sake, biodiversity is  
19 essential to human survival.

1           (3) The 2017 Vermont Forest Action Plan found that fragmentation and  
2           parcelization represent major threats to forest health and productivity and  
3           exacerbate the impacts of climate change.

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

8           (5) The initial Vermont Climate Action Plan calls for investing in  
9           strategic conservation to increase the pace of permanent conservation towards  
10          30 by 30 targets, with Vermont Conservation Design guiding prioritization of  
11          efforts.

12          (6) The Nature Conservancy has developed the Resilient and Connected  
13          Landscapes project and found that Vermont plays a key role in the  
14          conservation of biodiversity regionally.

15          (7) The Staying Connected Initiative is an international partnership of  
16          public and private organizations. Its goal is to maintain, enhance, and restore  
17          landscape connectivity for wide-ranging mammals across the Northern  
18          Appalachians-Acadian region, from the Adirondack Mountains to the Maritime  
19          Provinces. The Staying Connected Initiative has identified nine linkages  
20          across this vast region that are extremely important to wildlife. Six of these  
21          linkages lie within Vermont.

1           (8) Vermont’s most effective and efficient contribution to conserving  
2           biological diversity and maintaining a landscape resilient to climate change is,  
3           first, to conserve an intact and connected landscape and, second, to create and  
4           protect connections in the landscape.

5           (9) Given the threats of biodiversity loss, landscape fragmentation, and  
6           climate change, the General Assembly should conserve lands in the State to  
7           increase landscape connectivity.

8           Sec. 3. 10 V.S.A. chapter 104 is added to read:

9                   CHAPTER 104. HABITAT CORRIDOR CONSERVATION

10           § 4201. DEFINITIONS

11           As used in this chapter:

12                   (1) “Amenable land” means an area of land that the State may acquire  
13                   and use for habitat corridors or wildlife crossings.

14                   (2) “Habitat corridor” means an area of land, including wildlife  
15                   crossings, that connect at least two habitats, including land meant to facilitate  
16                   the movement of wildlife or designated to connect wildlife habitats.

17                   (3) “Secretary” means the Secretary of Natural Resources.

18                   (4) “Take” means:

19                           (A) pursuing, shooting, hunting, killing, capturing, trapping, harming,  
20                   snaring, or netting wildlife;

1           (B) an act intended to create a risk of injury to wildlife, whether or  
2           not injury occurs, including harassing; wounding; or placing, setting, drawing,  
3           or using any net or other device used to take wildlife; or

4           (C) attempting to engage in or assisting another to engage in an act  
5           set forth under subdivision (A) or (B) of this subdivision (4).

6           (5) “Wildlife” means all living sentient creatures, including fishes,  
7           amphibians, reptiles, and insects, that are not human beings and are not  
8           domestic animals, domestic fowl, or domestic pets.

9           (6) “Wildlife crossing” means infrastructure that connects two or more  
10          wildlife habitats, including infrastructure meant to:

11          (A) facilitate the safe movement of wildlife over or beneath roads,  
12          waters, and other barriers to wildlife movement;

13          (B) connect wildlife habitats;

14          (C) reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions;

15          (D) reduce the likelihood of injuries and mortalities to humans and  
16          wildlife from wildlife-vehicle collisions; or

17          (E) reduce the potential for damage to motor vehicles from wildlife-  
18          vehicle collisions.

19          § 4202. CONSERVATION VISION AND GOAL

20          (a) The vision of the State of Vermont is to maintain an ecologically  
21          functional landscape that sustains biodiversity, facilitates wildlife’s migratory

1 behaviors, encourages landscape connectivity, reduces wildlife-vehicle  
2 collisions, and promotes climate resiliency.

3 (b) It is the goal of the State to increase landscape connectivity. Increases  
4 in landscape connectivity under this chapter may qualify as ecological reserve  
5 areas, biodiversity conservation areas, or natural resource management areas as  
6 defined under section 2801 of this title to satisfy the goal of the State under  
7 section 2802 of this title. The Secretary of Natural Resources shall lead the  
8 efforts in achieving this goal. The land conserved shall include State, federal,  
9 municipal, and private land acquired by donation, assignment, lease, fee  
10 purchase, conservation easement, or other means of transfer.

11 § 4203. AMENABLE LAND INVENTORY

12 (a) The Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation  
13 where appropriate, shall conduct and create an inventory of Vermont's  
14 amenable lands to serve as the basis of meeting the conservation goals of  
15 Vermont Conservation Design and to meet the goal established in section 4202  
16 of this title. The inventory shall be submitted for review to the House  
17 Committees on Environment; on Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry;  
18 and on Transportation and the Senate Committees on Natural Resources and  
19 Energy, on Agriculture, and on Transportation.

20 (b) The inventory shall include:

1           (1) an assessment of how State lands will be used to increase landscape  
2           connectivity, including habitat corridors and wildlife crossings;

3           (2) the implementation methods that could be utilized for achieving the  
4           goals of this chapter using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide;

5           (3) a review of how aquatic systems are currently conserved or  
6           otherwise protected in the State, including a description of the benefits land  
7           conservation provides for aquatic systems, whether this is sufficient to  
8           maintain aquatic system functions and services, and how the implementation  
9           methods for achieving the goals of this chapter using Vermont Conservation  
10          Design as a guide would include specific strategies for protecting aquatic  
11          system health;

12          (4) an assessment of existing funding sources that will be needed for  
13          acquisition of land, purchase, stewardship of conservation easements, staffing  
14          capacity, and long-term stewardship of habitat corridors and wildlife crossings  
15          acquired under this chapter; and

16          (5) an assessment of which lands may be acquired under this chapter for  
17          habitat corridors and wildlife crossings, including lands acquired by donation,  
18          assignment, lease, fee purchase, conservation easement, or other means of  
19          transfer.

20          (c) The Secretary shall update the amenable land inventory required under  
21          subsection (a) of this section biennially on or before January 15 of the relevant

1 year to track progress toward meeting the vision and goals of this title. The  
2 Secretary shall submit a report to the House Committee on Environment and  
3 the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy regarding each  
4 biennial update.

5 § 4204. CONSERVATION PLAN

6 (a) On or before December 31, 2028, the Secretary, in consultation with the  
7 Agency of Transportation, shall develop a draft plan to implement the  
8 conservation goals of Vermont Conservation Design and to meet the vision and  
9 goal established in section 4202 of this title. The plan shall be submitted for  
10 review to the House Committee on Environment and the Senate Committee on  
11 Natural Resources and Energy.

12 (b) The plan shall include:

13 (1) strategies for achieving the vision and goal of section 4202 of this  
14 title, including identification of wildlife in need of protection and information  
15 on their population distributions, habitat requirements, existing infrastructure  
16 facilitating wildlife's movement, limiting factors, and other pertinent  
17 biological and ecological data on wildlife in need of protection;

18 (2) estimates of resources available for these strategies;

19 (3) plans for research and public education about landscape  
20 connectivity, including habitat corridors and wildlife crossings;

1           (4) a strategy for achieving the vision and goal of section 4202 of this  
2           title while continuing to conserve and protect Vermont’s agricultural land,  
3           working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters;

4           (5) the implementation methods for achieving the vision and goal of this  
5           chapter using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide; and

6           (6) recommendations to implement the vision and goal of this chapter  
7           while also enhancing the State of Vermont’s current investments and  
8           commitments to working lands enterprises, rural landowners, and the broad  
9           conservation mission implemented by the Secretary, including conservation of  
10           agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and  
11           surface waters.

12           (c) In developing the plan, the Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary  
13           of Transportation, shall hold 12 or more public meetings on the draft plan  
14           between July 1, 2026 and December 31, 2027 to solicit input from  
15           stakeholders. Stakeholders shall include private owners of forestlands and  
16           agricultural lands, land trusts, animal advocacy organizations, conservation  
17           organizations, environmental organizations, working lands enterprises, outdoor  
18           recreation groups and municipalities, regional planning commissions,  
19           conservation commissions, and relevant State and federal agencies. At least  
20           three of the meetings shall be designed to solicit comments from the general  
21           public.



1     § 4205. HABITAT CORRIDOR CONSERVATION SPECIAL FUND

2           (a)(1) The Habitat Corridor Conservation Special Fund is established  
3     pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 7, subchapter 5 to fund increased landscape  
4     connectivity in the State consistent with the conservation plan established  
5     under section 4204 of this title. The Fund shall be administered by the  
6     Secretary and shall consist of:

7           (A) revenue from the sale of Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamps  
8     as provided for under section 4206 of this title;

9           (B) funds appropriated by the General Assembly;

10          (C) funds from public and private sources that the Secretary accepts  
11     for the Fund;

12          (D) funds from federal government aid for State activities in  
13     conservation, landscape connectivity, habitat corridors, or wildlife crossings;  
14     and

15          (E) all interest earned on Fund balances.

16          (2) Amounts in the account shall carry over from year to year.

17          (b) The Secretary shall make expenditures from the Fund solely for  
18     programs identified in the conservation plan established under section 4204 of  
19     this title for the purposes of increasing landscape connectivity, including  
20     through the development and maintenance of habitat corridors and wildlife  
21     crossings. Expenditures consistent with the purposes of the plan may be made

1 under the terms of contracts with private organizations and groups.

2 Expenditures shall not exceed the monies available in the Fund.

3 (c) The Secretary may take appropriate actions to encourage taxpayers to  
4 make contributions to the Habitat Corridor Conservation Special Fund,  
5 including explaining the purposes of the Fund and the uses to which the Fund  
6 has been or will be applied. The Secretary may solicit federal funds, grants,  
7 and private contributions directed toward landscape connectivity. Any money  
8 received by the Secretary from federal funds, grants, and private contributions  
9 directed toward landscape connectivity shall be deposited in the Habitat  
10 Corridor Conservation Special Fund.

11 § 4206. HABITAT CORRIDOR CONSERVATION STAMP

12 (a) The Secretary shall be responsible for the contest, production,  
13 procurement, distribution, and sale of the Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamp  
14 and all marketable stamp by-products such as posters, artwork, calendars, and  
15 other items. For the purposes of the contest, the Secretary may cooperate with  
16 any reputable association, organization, or agency, and the Secretary may  
17 designate any person found by the Secretary to be competent to facilitate such  
18 contest.

19 (b) Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamps shall be sold at the direction of  
20 the Secretary for a fee of \$20.00. The Secretary shall deposit all revenue from

1 the sale of Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamps in the Habitat Corridor  
2 Conservation Special Fund.

3 (c) There is created the Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamp Advisory  
4 Committee to consult with and make recommendations to the Secretary  
5 regarding all projects and activities supported by the Habitat Corridor  
6 Conservation Special Fund. The Advisory Committee shall consist of five  
7 persons and up to three alternates appointed by and serving at the pleasure of  
8 the Secretary. The Secretary shall designate the Chair. The Secretary annually  
9 shall report to the Advisory Committee with an accounting of the Habitat  
10 Corridor Conservation Special Fund and the activities financed by the Fund.

11 § 4207. HABITAT CORRIDOR CONSERVATION STAMP CONTEST

12 (a) The Secretary may authorize a contest for the design of the Habitat  
13 Corridor Conservation Stamp. The Secretary may enter a contract or other  
14 agreement with an entity to conduct the contest.

15 (b) The Secretary may authorize a fee to be charged for entry into the  
16 contest. The revenue from any fee shall first be used to pay for the costs of the  
17 contest. The Secretary shall deposit any revenue in excess of the costs of the  
18 contest into the Habitat Corridor Conservation Special Fund.

19 § 4208. TAKE PROHIBITION ON WILDLIFE CROSSINGS ACQUIRED

20 UNDER THIS CHAPTER

21 (a) Except as authorized under this chapter, a person shall not:

1           (1) take, possess, or transport wildlife that are within or entering a  
2           wildlife crossing where the Secretary of Natural Resources or Secretary of  
3           Transportation has prohibited the taking of wildlife; or

4           (2) injure, damage, erode, or waste the wildlife crossing.

5           (b) Any person who violates subsection (a) of this section by knowingly  
6           injuring wildlife within or entering a wildlife crossing or knowingly injuring,  
7           damaging, eroding, or wasting a wildlife crossing and who is subject to  
8           criminal prosecution under 13 V.S.A. chapter 81 may be required by the court  
9           to pay restitution for:

10           (1) actual costs and related expenses incurred in treating and caring for  
11           the wildlife by the person incurring these expenses, including the costs of  
12           veterinarian services and Agency of Natural Resources staff time; or

13           (2) reasonable mitigation and restoration costs such as wildlife  
14           restoration plans; habitat protection; and enhancement, transplanting,  
15           cultivation, and propagation.

16           (c) The Secretary of Natural Resources or the Secretary of Transportation  
17           may prohibit the taking of wildlife on or within a wildlife crossing.

18           Sec. 4. 32 V.S.A. § 5813 is amended to read:

19           § 5813. STATUTORY PURPOSES

20                                   \* \* \*

1        (aa) The statutory purpose of the Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamp  
2        credit in section 5830g of this title is to incentivize the sale of Habitat Corridor  
3        Conservation Stamps to pay for increased landscape connectivity in the State.

4        Sec. 5. 32 V.S.A. § 5830g is added to read:

5        § 5830g. CONSERVATION STAMP CREDIT

6        A resident individual or part-year resident individual who purchased  
7        conservation stamps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources shall be  
8        entitled to a nonrefundable credit against the tax imposed by section 5822 of  
9        this title for the taxable year. The credit shall be equal to one-half of the cost  
10       of any Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamps authorized under 10 V.S.A.  
11       § 4206 or any other stamp authorized by the Commissioner of Fish and  
12       Wildlife to generate revenue for the Species and Habitat Conservation Fund  
13       under 10 V.S.A. § 4047 that were purchased by the individual in the tax year.  
14       The credit under this section shall not exceed \$40.00 per tax year. For  
15       purposes of this section, spouses filing jointly shall be considered an  
16       individual.

17       Sec. 6. APPROPRIATIONS

18       (a) The sum of \$25,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the  
19       Department of Fish and Wildlife in fiscal year 2026 to support public  
20       education, which may cover the importance of landscape connectivity,  
21       including habitat corridors and wildlife crossings, and outreach to encourage

1 purchases of Habitat Corridor Conservation Stamps and other stamps  
2 authorized by the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife and directed toward and  
3 deposited in the Species and Habitat Conservation Fund under 10 V.S.A.  
4 § 4047.

5 (b) The sum of \$125,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the  
6 Secretary of Natural Resource in fiscal year 2026 to support the amenable land  
7 inventory under 10 V.S.A. § 4203 and the conservation plan under 10 V.S.A.  
8 § 4204.

9 Sec. 7. EFFECTIVE DATE

10 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.