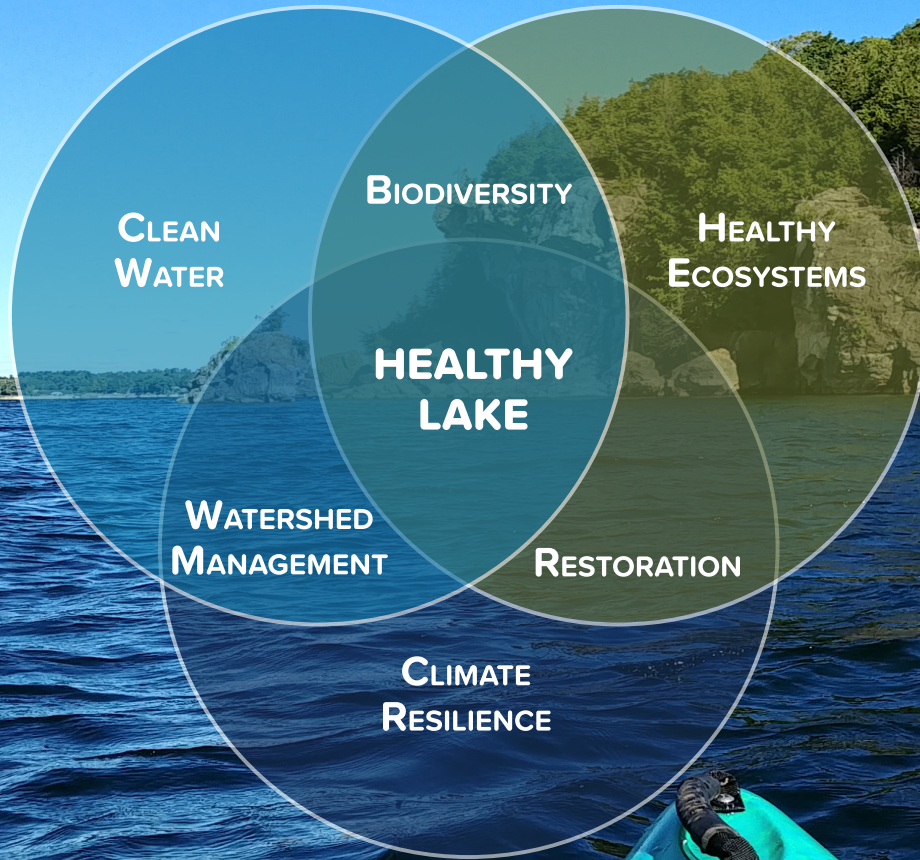


# VERMONT CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN'S FUTURE



## 2026 LAKE CHAMPLAIN ACTION PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

Lake Champlain reflects more than the surrounding landscape — it reflects our choices, our habits, and our collective priorities. The challenges facing Lake Champlain and its watershed are complex, interconnected, and increasingly urgent. Harmful cyanobacteria blooms, more frequent and intense flooding and drought, chloride and other contaminant pollution, and

invasive aquatic species are having serious impacts on our environment, communities, and economy. These challenges will intensify in a changing climate. This crisis did not emerge overnight and neither will the solutions. Yet, with sustained commitment and bold, proactive action, we can ensure a healthier lake and watershed that provides immeasurable value to current and future generations.



# 2026 PRIORITIES

The 2026 CAC priorities sit at the critical intersection of **clean water, biodiversity, and climate resilience**. The deeply interconnected challenges facing Lake Champlain and its watershed highlight the need for **integrated, mutually beneficial solutions**—approaches that address multiple issues simultaneously and maximize positive outcomes for people, ecosystems, and communities across the Vermont watershed of Lake Champlain and beyond.

Our action plan aligns with recently updated State and regional plans including the Vermont Conservation Design, State Wildlife Action Plan, Vermont’s Climate Action Plan, the Resilience Implementation Strategy and the Lake Champlain Basin Program’s *Opportunities for Action*. Our priorities build on existing programs and maximize co-benefits to clean water, biodiversity, climate resilience and recreation in the Lake Champlain Basin and beyond.

## OUR TOP PRIORITIES ARE:

**ADVANCE FLOOD MITIGATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

Vermont must strengthen its efforts in flood mitigation and climate adaptation by conserving and restoring riparian areas, wetlands and floodplains, removing obsolete dams, right-sizing culverts, and promoting sustainable development, agricultural planning and land use practices that reduce runoff and enhance watershed health.

**ADDRESS WATER CONTAMINANTS**

Vermont must pass and implement legislation to reduce chloride contamination, while continuing efforts to monitor and address PFAS and other emerging contaminants that threaten water quality and public health.

**INVEST IN AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT**

Vermont must maintain and expand robust programs for education, monitoring, prevention and management of aquatic invasive species to protect the ecological integrity of Lake Champlain and other waterways.

**ENSURE EQUITABLE PUBLIC ACCESS TO WATERWAYS**

Vermont must continue to expand and improve equitable public access to Lake Champlain and its tributaries, ensuring all communities can safely enjoy and benefit from the state’s water resources.

**ADVANCE FLOOD MITIGATION, CLIMATE ADAPTATION, AND RESILIENCE**

Since 2011, the Lake Champlain Basin has been impacted by all 25 major FEMA declared extreme weather disasters in Vermont including severe storms, flooding in 2023 and two in 2024, as well as record setting low lake levels and severe drought conditions. As the frequency and severity

of extreme weather events increase, swift action and investments are needed to ensure our communities, environment, and economy are more resilient to climate change impacts.

**Restoration and conservation of Lake Champlain’s headwaters, river corridors, floodplains, wetlands, soils, and riparian buffers** can increase resilience of and adaptation by natural and human communities to flooding and droughts. These cost-effective nature-based solutions mitigate climate change by naturally sequestering and storing carbon; maintain diverse healthy connected habitats for fish and wildlife and achieve clean water in the lake and its tributaries. **The CAC endorses investment in full staffing, cohesion and collaboration within and across all State Agencies working to implement watershed restoration as well as increasing collaboration and support with organizations working on these issues. Restoring aquatic organism passage** through dam removals and right-sizing culverts and bridges is necessary to connect and restore habitat; reduce fragmentation, erosion, nutrient loading; and increase flood resilience and public health and safety. **The State must continue to support funding and research to restore natural stream processes that benefit ecosystems and communities within the Lake Champlain watershed.**

**Increased investments in sustainable agriculture, forests, and working lands have cost-effectively reduced phosphorus runoff to our waters.** The intensifying impacts of climate change and oversubscribed grant programs continue to pose challenges to water quality. Additional State funding is essential and particularly urgent because of reduced federal support to continue our vibrant local economy and reach climate and water quality goals.

**Invest in public and private infrastructure including transportation, drinking water, and stormwater systems to meet modern standards and withstand future flooding.** Failing wastewater and septic systems, increasingly stressed by severe weather events, threaten both water quality and public health. The State must limit new development in vulnerable river corridors, upgrade failing municipal systems, inventory septic systems near water bodies, continue the Healthy Homes Initiative, and expand education, oversight, and outreach on septic system maintenance. To reduce nonpoint source pollution, the State must expand eligibility for clean water funds and support sustainable practices on working and developed lands. New development must include effective stormwater mitigation, while existing infrastructure should be upgraded to current standards.

**DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR CONTAMINANTS POLLUTION**

Eliminating toxic contamination is essential to protect human and environmental health. While progress is underway in controlling neonicotinoids and certain PFAS compounds, chloride is an increasing concern. Chloride pollution in the Lake Champlain Basin negatively impacts infrastructure, drinking water, and wildlife. Proactive assessment and mitigation are crucial for ensuring a safe and sustainable environment. The CAC recommends the State incentivizes public and private applicators to follow safe deicing and winter road management best practices to reduce chloride pollution and cumulative costs, particularly as winter rain events increase.

*Additional State funding is essential and particularly urgent because of reduced federal support to continue our vibrant local economy and reach climate and water quality goals.*

## INVEST IN AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES SPREAD PREVENTION

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are a significant threat to Lake Champlain and the state's waterways. AIS are impacting aquatic ecosystem integrity and have the potential to cause billions of dollars in damage to recreation, water quality, infrastructure, and property values. To mitigate and prevent further AIS damage, Vermont must **increase investment in consistent staffing and funding for its AIS programs** to complement and influence the cooperative work underway in New York and Quebec to limit introduction of AIS through canal and river systems. The State should consider: **a new funding source involving a mandatory boat decal for motorized and non-motorized craft; a mandatory watercraft inspection and certification program; high-profile inspection stations at key lake access points, and advocate for the management of canal systems to limit AIS entry into Lake Champlain.**



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## EXPAND EQUITABLE PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

Access to Vermont's healthy lands and clean waters are crucial to the health and wellbeing of Vermonters and to the State's \$1.5 billion outdoor recreation economy. Vermont needs to allocate resources to expand water access for **ALL**, including opportunities for non-motorized recreation to reduce conflicts at boat launches. Expanding lake and tributary access and outdoor education opportunities will foster greater experience with and stewardship of the State's natural resources. The CAC particularly recommends strategies to **improve access in the South Lake and for marginalized and historically disenfranchised communities. Continued investments in outdoor recreation businesses** will bolster public access opportunities and Vermont's recreation economy.



Local Motion

## VTCAC MEMBERSHIP

Karina Dailey	Chair, Vermont Natural Resources Council
Denise Smith	Vice-Chair, Nonprofit Executive Director
Breck Bowden	Watershed Scientist
Eric Clifford	Dairy Farmer
Wayne Elliott, PE	Engineer
Robert Fischer	Water Facility Operator
Lori Fisher	Nonprofit Executive Director

Andrew Milliken
Hilary Solomon
Alison Spasyk
Representative Carolyn Branagan
Representative Carol Ode
Senator Martine Larocque Gulick
Senator Randy Brock

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