

House Committee on Environment

February 5, 2025



Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board

Gus Seelig
Executive Director

Trey Martin
Dir. of Conservation & Rural Community Development

Birdseye Wildlife Management Area, Poultney

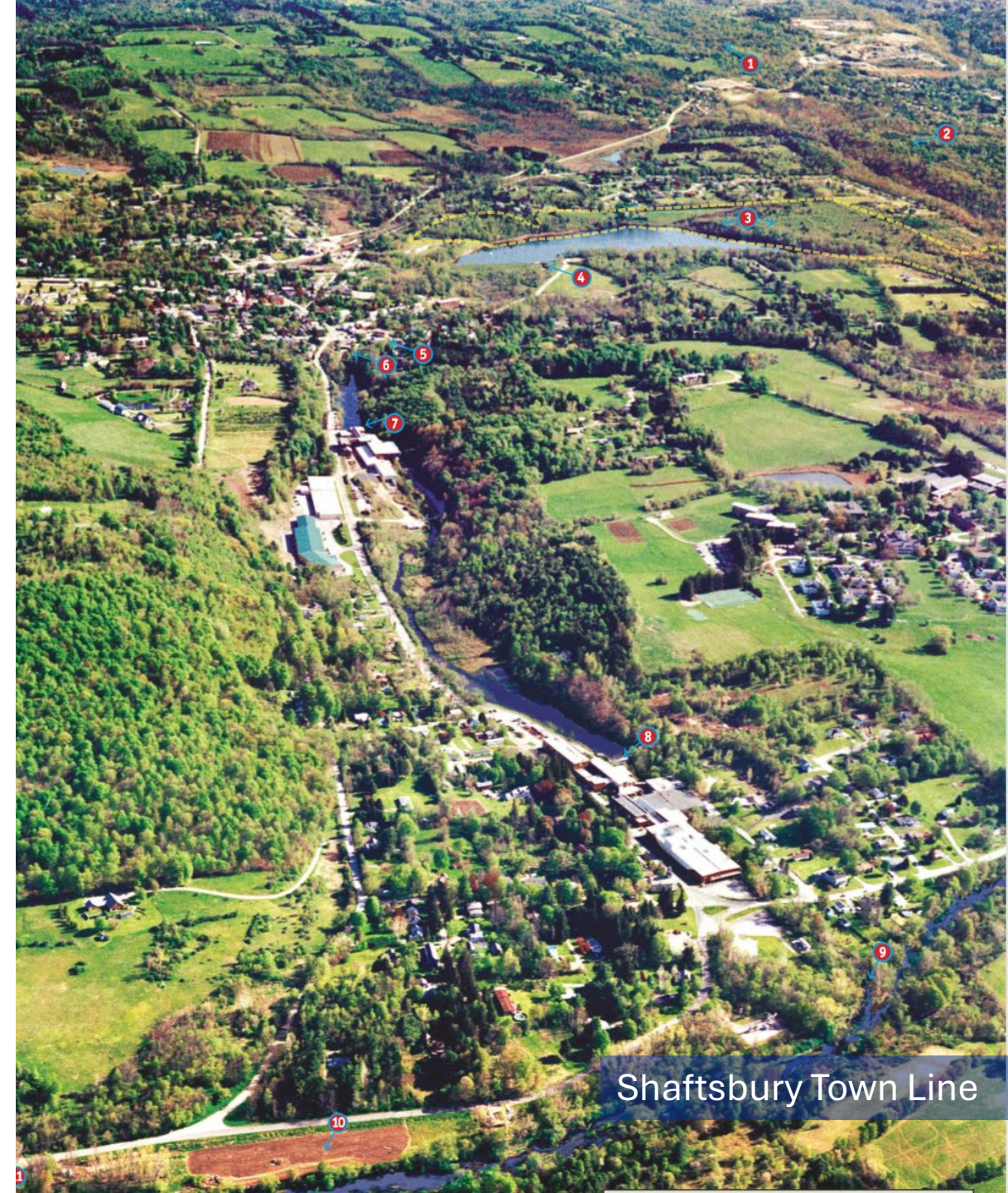


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Board

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



Shaftsbury Town Line

Dual Goal Impact



Dual Goal Projects in Shaftsbury

Dual Goal Impact



Dual Goal Projects in Burlington

Dual Goal Impact



Dual Goal Projects in Windsor County



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VHCB All-time Results*

State Investment: \$552M | Leverage: \$2.4B



16,335 permanently affordable homes
(rental & homeownership)



822 farms conserved
across 175,755 acres



278,741 acres conserved
natural areas, forestland & recreational lands



87 historic preservation projects



1,300 working lands businesses served

Island Pond Island, Brighton

*Since inception through June 30, 2024



Alice M. Ward Library, Canaan

Conservation & Other Programs

- Recreational Lands, Working Lands, Forests, and Natural Areas Conservation
- Historic Preservation
- Water Quality
- VHCB AmeriCorps
- Farm & Forest Viability Program
- Rural Economic Development Initiative
- Land Access & Opportunity Board

Natural Area Conservation Programs

- **Municipal Lands:** conservation of town forests, parks, and recreational areas
- **Private Forests:** protection of working forests to ensure sustainable forestry practices, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection
- **Non-Profit Lands:** collaborations with land trusts and non-profits to protect ecologically significant natural areas, foster biodiversity & strengthen community engagement
- **State-Owned Lands:** state agencies conserve lands of ecological, historical, or recreational importance



Roxbury State Forest



Willoughby Peaks, Westmore



Conservation Easements

- **Land Protection:** permanent restrictions on development of the land
- **Flexible Agreements:** landowners retain ownership and can customize easements based on personal preferences and funding requirements
- **Financial Benefits:** easement donations can provide tax benefits, and selling an easement may yield financial compensation
- **Long-Term Stewardship:** qualified organizations monitor and enforce easements to ensure compliance and preservation in perpetuity
- **Legacy Planning:** easements can be donated during a landowner's lifetime or within nine months after their death, providing financial and conservation benefits for heirs while fulfilling the landowner's preservation goals



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Flood Resilience



Water Street River Park, Northfield



Seminary Street, Barre



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Energy Equity



Design standards that meet and exceed state building energy standards

- Allow multi-family buildings to utilize off-site net metering for solar
- Enhance energy efficiency incentives for affordable housing to better align with costs

McKnight Lane, Waltham

Farmland Conservation

When 70 acres of cropland went up for sale in Waitsfield, conservation facilitated a generational transfer to Dave DeFreest of **DeFreest Farms**, a local dairy farm undergoing a period of expansion.

Project Highlights:

- 63 acres of prime agricultural soil.
- 10,000 feet of 50' buffers on the Mad River.
- 38 acres of Mad River frontage
- 8 acres of riparian protections
- 6 acres of permanently retired cropland
- Over a mile of public trails - extension of the Mad River Path

DeFreest Farm, Waitsfield

Farmland Conservation

Project Highlights:

- 39 acres of prime and statewide agricultural soils
- 31.5 acres of managed forest
- Land used to support diversified beef, replacement heifer, organic hay, and custom cropping operation



- Financially supports farmers in diversifying their operation, succession planning, or making critical infrastructure improvements
- Enhances farmland affordability through the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value
- Includes extra levels of protection on surface waters, historically significant infrastructure, archeological resources, or other unique natural features
- Encourages collaboration and ongoing support from partners, agencies, and community members



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Farm & Forest Viability Program



Sunday Bell Farm, Danville

- In-depth, individualized business assistance
- Succession planning, financial management, access to capital, land search and access, bookkeeping, improving profitability
- 108 clients in 2024 represented \$42 million in economic activity and over 300 jobs
- 36% average increase in profitability



Honeyfield Farm, Norwich

2024 Business Vitality Metrics



Farmland Conservation



C&K Butler Beef, Middlebury

- 128-acre hay farm in Middlebury conserved in 2022
- Farm transfer to the next generation – Calihan and Kristen Butler
- 78% of the land is state important soils
- VHCB Viability clients

VHCB Housing Impacts since 2020*

4,964 households served (rental & homeownership)

Total VHCB investment: \$377.4M → Total leverage: \$680.6M

RENTAL

2,303 total units

1,925 new units

694 homes for unhoused Vermonters

SHELTER

24 shelters served total

10 new shelters

571 beds

269 new beds total

HOMEOWNERSHIP

389 households supported

169 new construction

single-family homeownership units

ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

384 households received accessibility improvements

MOBILE HOME COMMUNITIES

27 infill units

944 lots in 11 communities

FARMWORKER HOUSING

59 repair projects

6 replacement projects

237 farmworkers to be served

RECOVERY RESIDENCES

4 projects

59 residents benefitted

LEAD ABATEMENT

77 households served

58 apartments

19 single-family homes

*January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2024



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VHCB Housing Programs

- Home Ownership
- Manufactured Home Communities
- Multi-Family Rental Housing
- Home Accessibility Improvements
- Career Technical Education (CTE) Program
- Farmworker Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Recovery Residences
- Shelter Improvement and Expansion

**16,335 homes
across all 14 Vermont counties**



East Montpelier Habitat Home



Bennington Habitat Home with TNC



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Smart Growth



Canal Street Veteran Housing, Winooski



Taylor Street Apartments, Montpelier



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A Conservation Vision for Vermont

Act 59 of 2023, The Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act, set forth a vision to maintain an ecologically functional landscape that:

- Sustains biodiversity
- Maintains landscape connectivity
- Supports watershed health
- Promotes climate resilience
- Supports working farms and forests
- Provides opportunities for recreation
- Supports historic settlement patterns



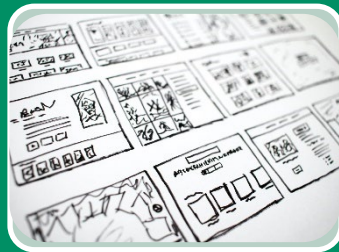
Rupert Valley Holsteins, Rupert

Act 59 Timeline



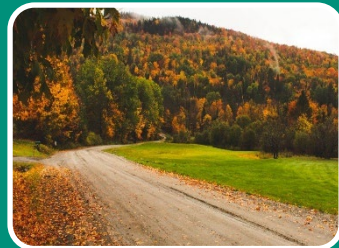
Phase 1. Conservation Inventory - completed July 2024

An assessment of existing and potential conservation data, practices, programs, equity, and funding with recommended next steps



Phase 2. Conservation Plan - due December 2025

A comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act



Phase 3. Implementation. 2026 - 2050

- 30% of Land Conserved by 2030
- 50% of Land Conserved by 2050

Phase I: Public Process & Engagement

47

Interviews

Nov. '23 – Feb. '24

Community members interviewed to complete inventory

147

Survey Respondents

Nov. '23 – Feb. '24

Open to the general public and on the VHCB website

21

Focus Groups

Mar. '24 - May '24

Affinity-based focus groups with over 350 participants

4

Working Groups

Nov. '23 - June '24

Working groups to answer three specific questions posed by the legislature

6

Public Meetings

Nov '23 - July '24

Meetings open to the public with opportunities for public feedback



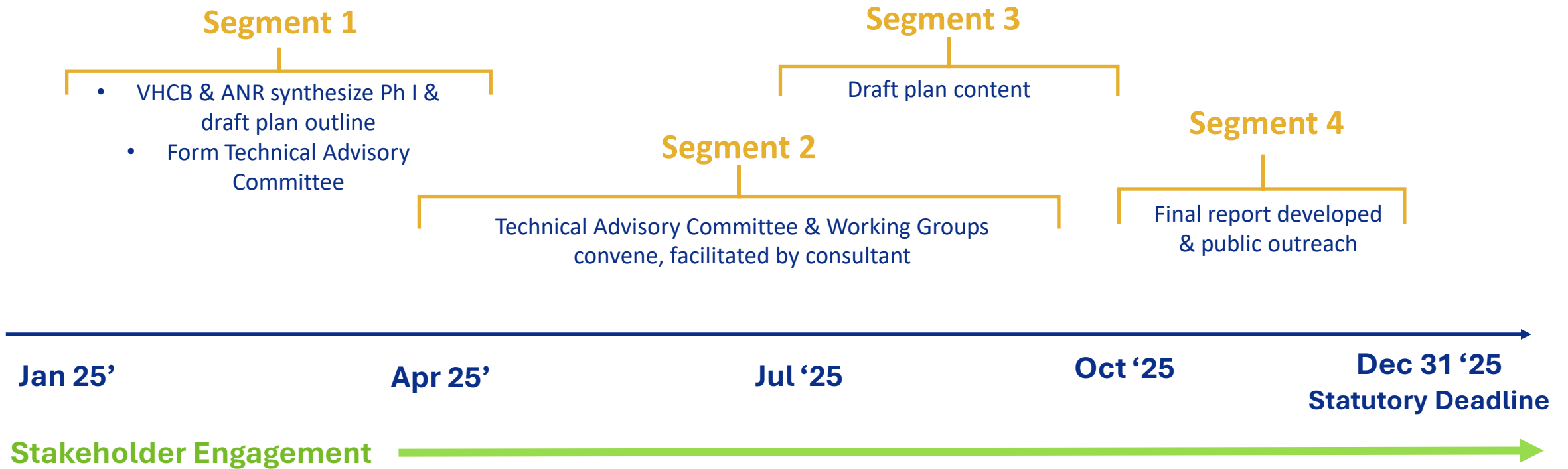


Lily Pond Highlands, Athens

Final Inventory Results for 2024

Ecological Reserve Areas:	240,055 acres (4.08%)
Biodiversity Conservation Areas:	235,950 acres (4.01%)
Forestland and Natural Cover:	929,431 acres (15.78%)
Agricultural and Open Land:	171,347 acres (2.91%)
Total of Conserved Land:	1,576,783 acres (~27%)
Acres to Meet 2030 Goal:	189,953 acres

Phase II Timeline



Project Lead Consultant: Future iQ



VERMONT FOREST FUTURE STRATEGIC ROADMAP

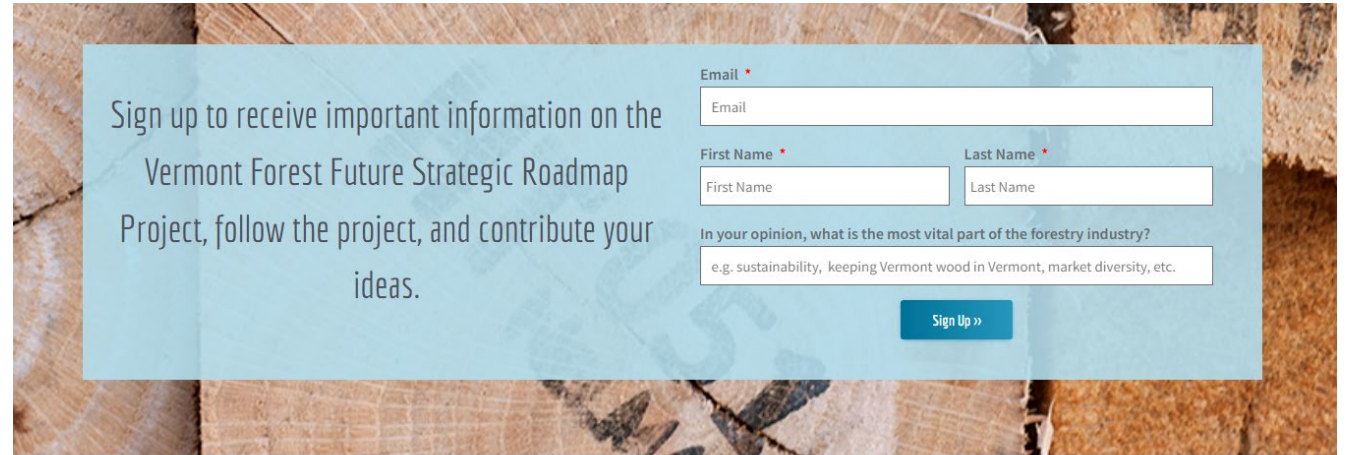
FINAL REPORT

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

future→iQ

JANUARY 2024

VERMONT



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Funding: America the Beautiful Grant

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Announces \$122.5 Million in Conservation Grants from the America the Beautiful Challenge

Third round of grants to high-priority conservation projects across the United States awarded via America's Ecosystem Restoration Initiative: America the Beautiful Challenge



VHCB Applied for
& Awarded \$1,000,000

Award Budget

VHCB Staff Time: \$250,900

ANR Staff Time: \$250,000

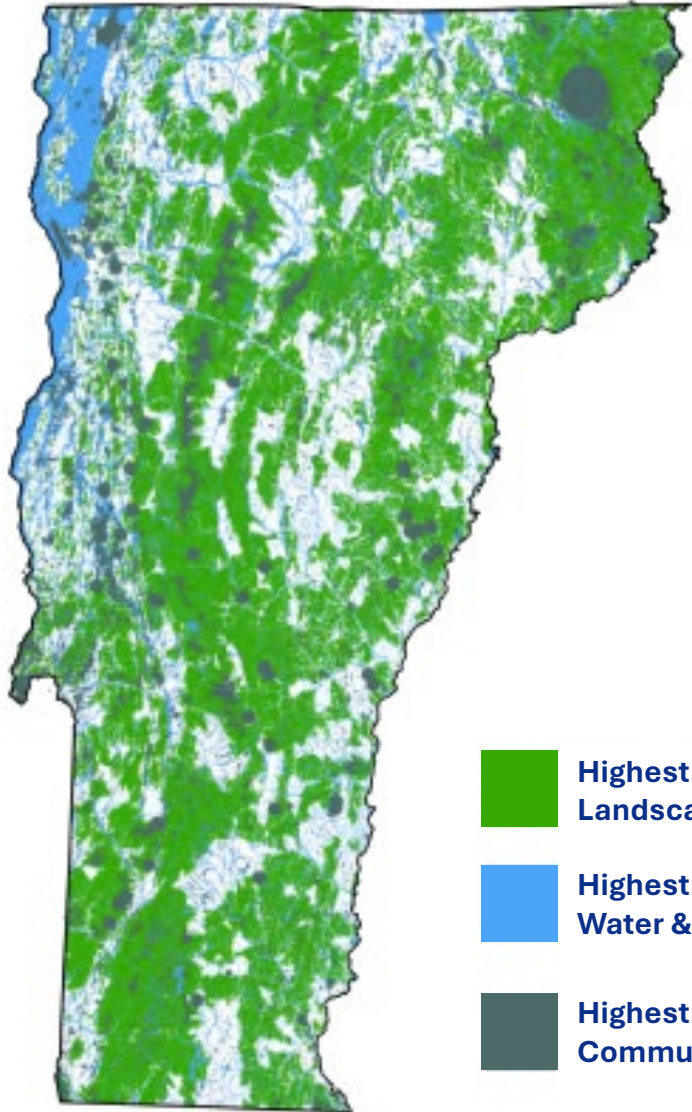
Consultant Time: \$363,700

Stakeholder Engagement: \$135,400

VHCB's Approach to Act 59: Building a Big Tent



Centering Vermont Conservation Design (VCD)



-  Highest Priority Landscape Blocks
-  Highest Priority Surface Water & Riparian Areas
-  Highest Priority Natural Community & Habitat Features

- Identifies the ecologically most-important lands and waters
- Maintains nature and the benefits it provides
- Serves as our conservation framework

Conservation Planning Models

Reviewed Other States' Conservation Plans:

- California
- Maine
- Maryland
- New York
- New Mexico

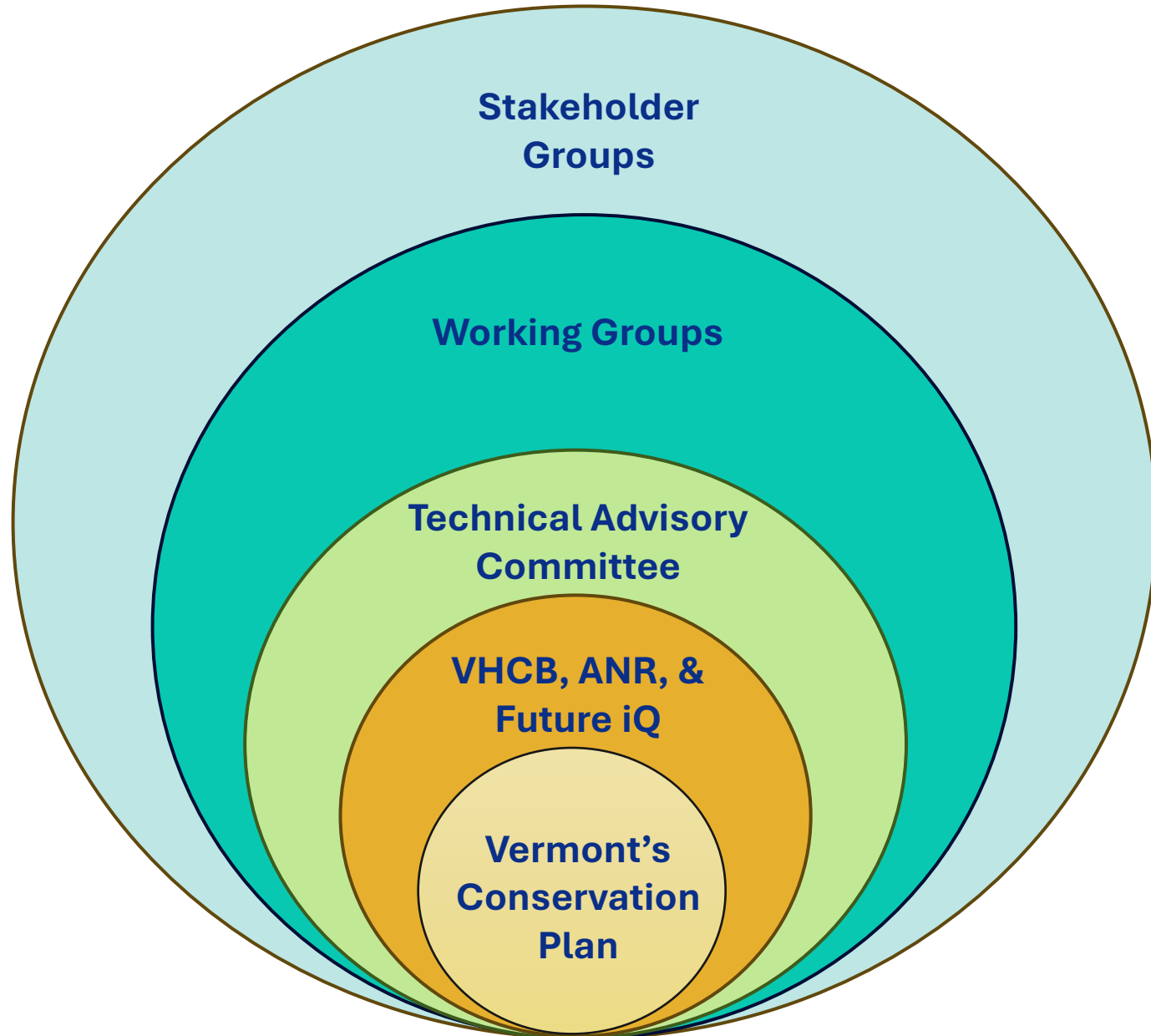
Adapting California's strategic pathways model to achieve Vermont's 30x30 Goal



30x30 New Mexico



Engaging Conservation Partners Across Vermont





Green River Reservoir, Hyde Park



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THANK YOU

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