



FORESTS, PARKS & RECREATION
VERMONT



AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

PUBLIC LANDS FOR ALL: WILDLANDS AND WORKING FORESTS

H. 276 – An act relating to the designation of State wildlands

Danielle Fitzko, Commissioner  **VERMONT**

WELCOME



Wildlands? Yes—For Good Reason



Photo: Erica Houskeeper, VSJF

Wildlands on State Lands: Yes—and Intentionally Designated



Photo: Erica Houskeeper, VSJF

One Forested Landscape — Multiple Public Benefits

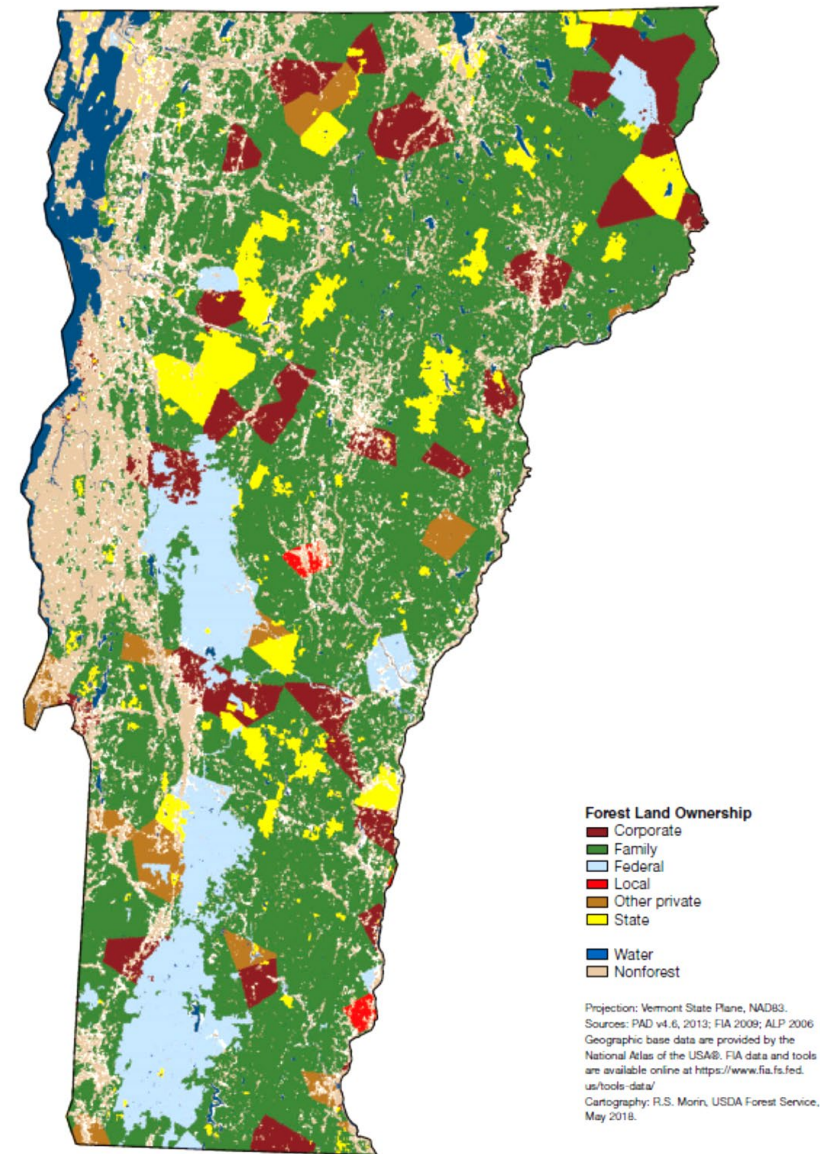
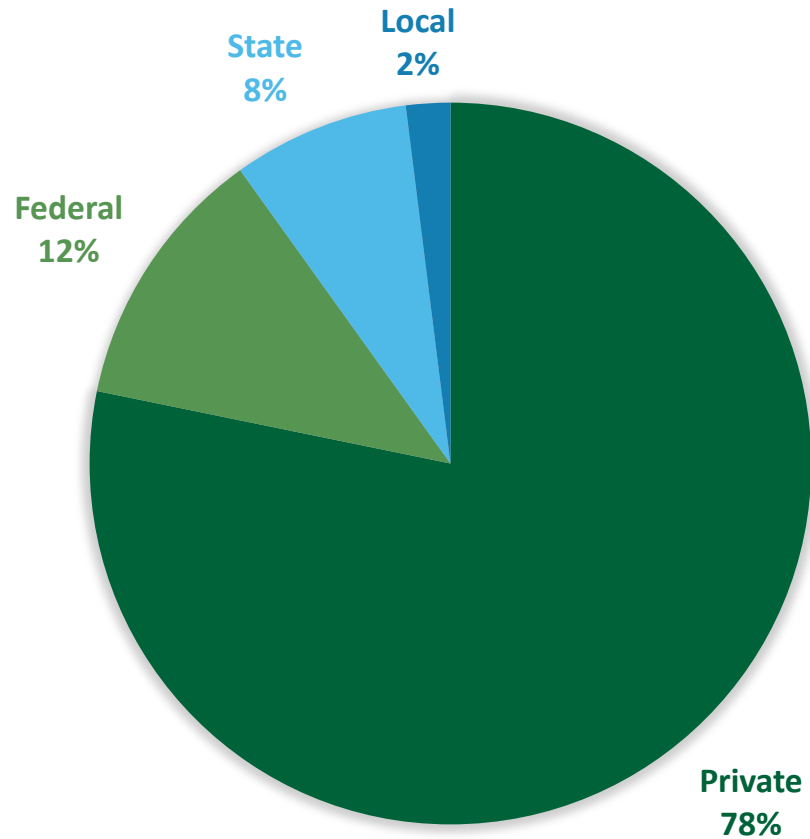
Vermont's forested landscape — across public and private lands — supports climate resilience, wildlife, recreation, working lands, community well-being, and so much more.



Photo: Erica Houskeeper, VSJF

Vermont's Forests: A Deliberate, Integrated Success Story

The landscape we see today reflects decades of collaboration among landowners, state agencies, conservation partners, forest economy businesses, and the Legislature.

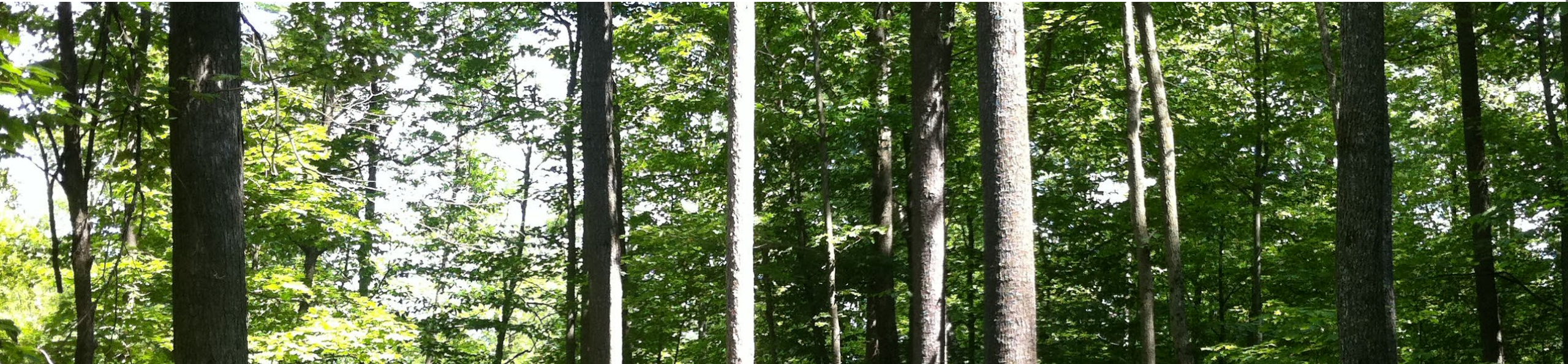


Vermont's Forests: A Shared Responsibility

Maximizing the benefits of Vermont's forests requires all landowners working together — with the state leading by example to support multiple values and uses.

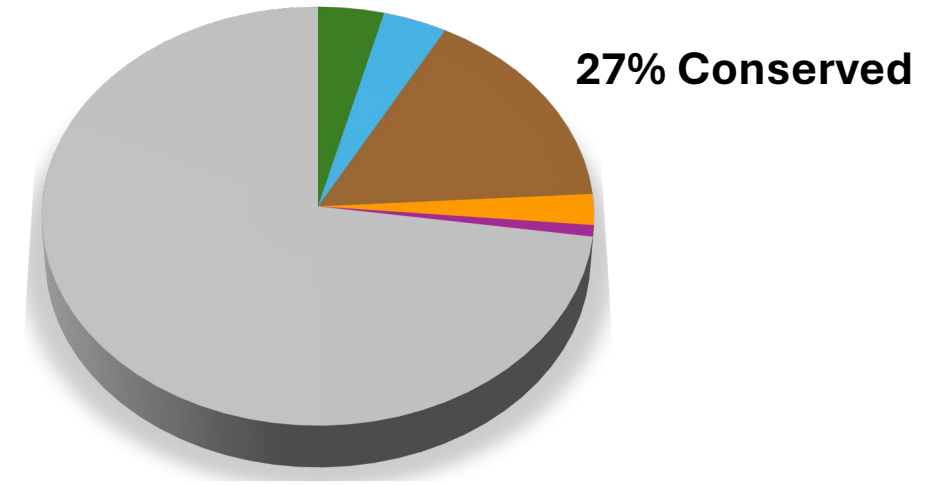
ACT 59: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION ACT

- Establishes statewide conservation goals: **30% by 2030, 50% by 2050**
- Guided by **Vermont Conservation Design** (VCD) science framework
- VCD sets a **9% old forest target** and a **3-5% young forest target**, both underrepresented
- Requires a **statewide inventory** of conservation
- Categorizes land conservation using **three defined categories**
- Directs development of a **plan** to achieve these goals



LAND CATEGORIES

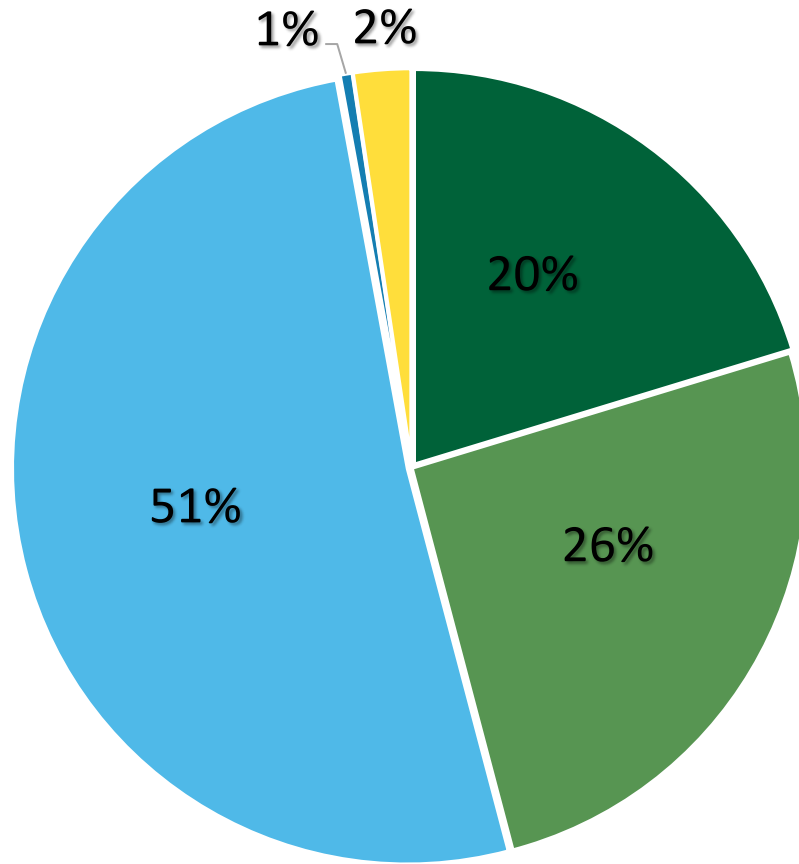
- **ECOLOGICAL RESERVE AREA:**
Natural processes predominate
- **BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AREA:**
Management for outcomes to benefit particular species and habitats
- **NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AREA:**
Permanent protection from conversion with long-term, sustainable land management



Going Forward: Ecological Reserves

STATE LANDS ARE MEANINGFULLY CONTRIBUTING TO ACT 59 GOALS

ANR Lands by Act 59 Land Category



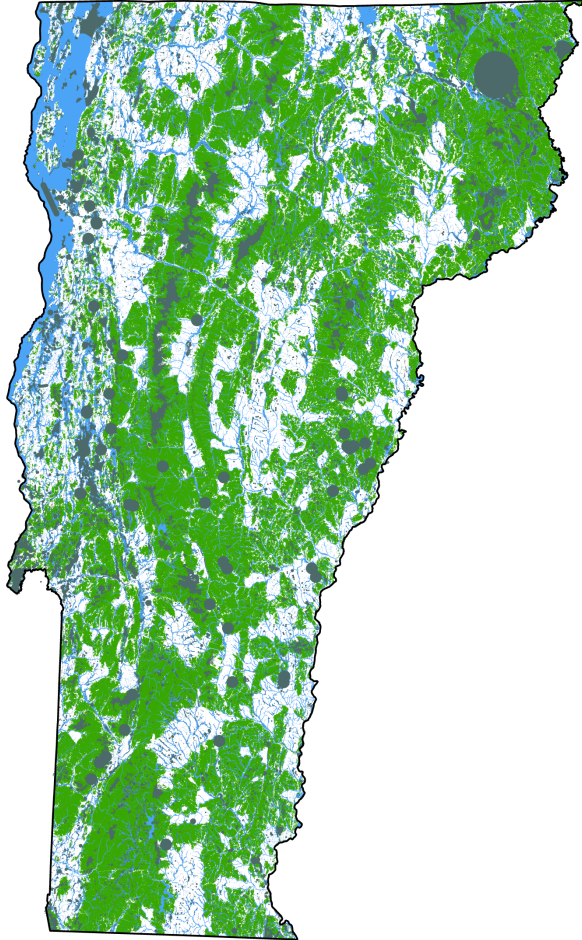
- Ecological Reserve Area
- Biodiversity Conservation Area
- Natural Resource Management Area
- Natural Resource Management Area - Ag Field
- Uncategorized

ANR Lands = approx. 365,000 acres

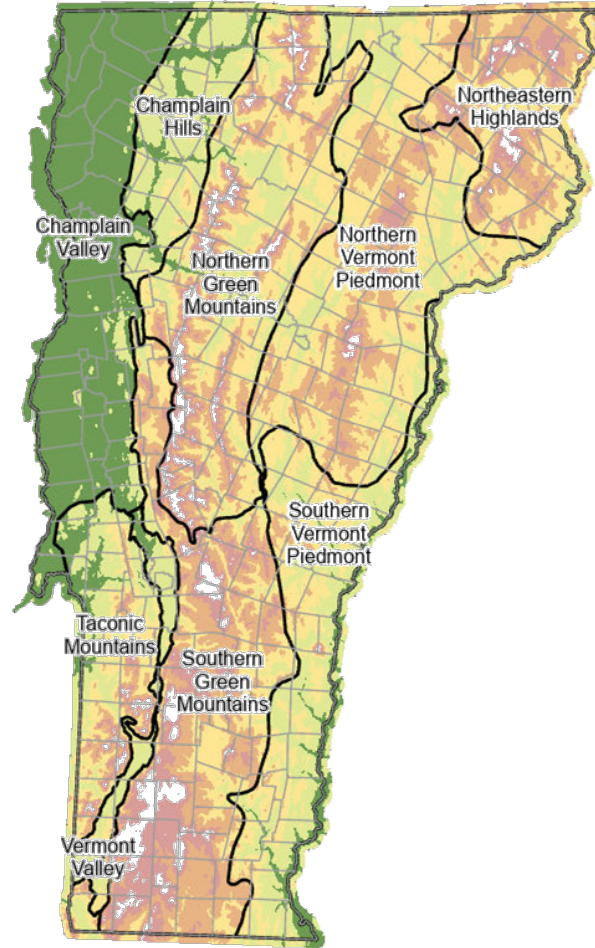
Data have a 2,500-acre (0.005%) error due to GIS mapping inconsistencies

State lands make up approximately 23% of Vermont's currently conserved lands, with 20% of those lands in Ecological Reserves

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES: LOCATION MATTERS



Vermont Conservation Design



Biophysical Regions

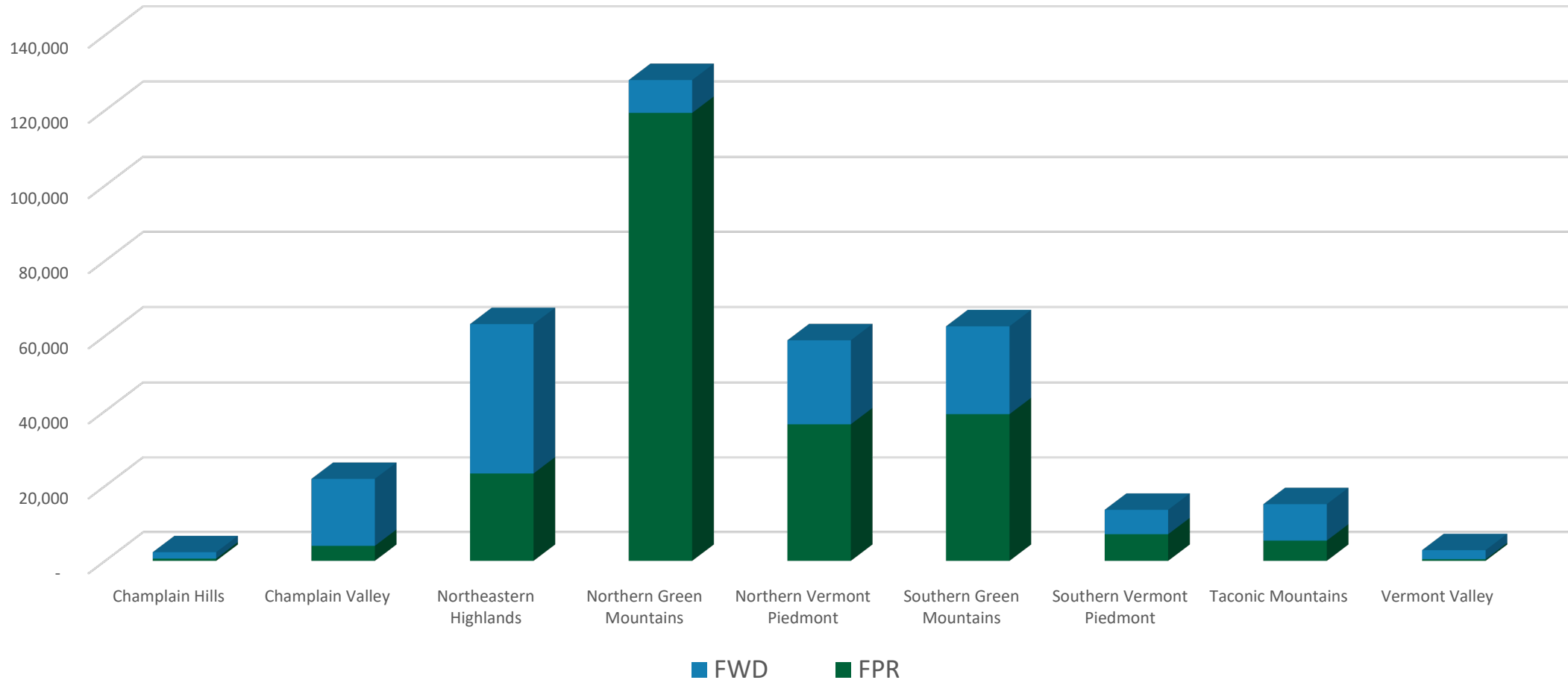


Public Lands

Using science and landscape context to guide conservation decisions

STATE LANDS ARE UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED

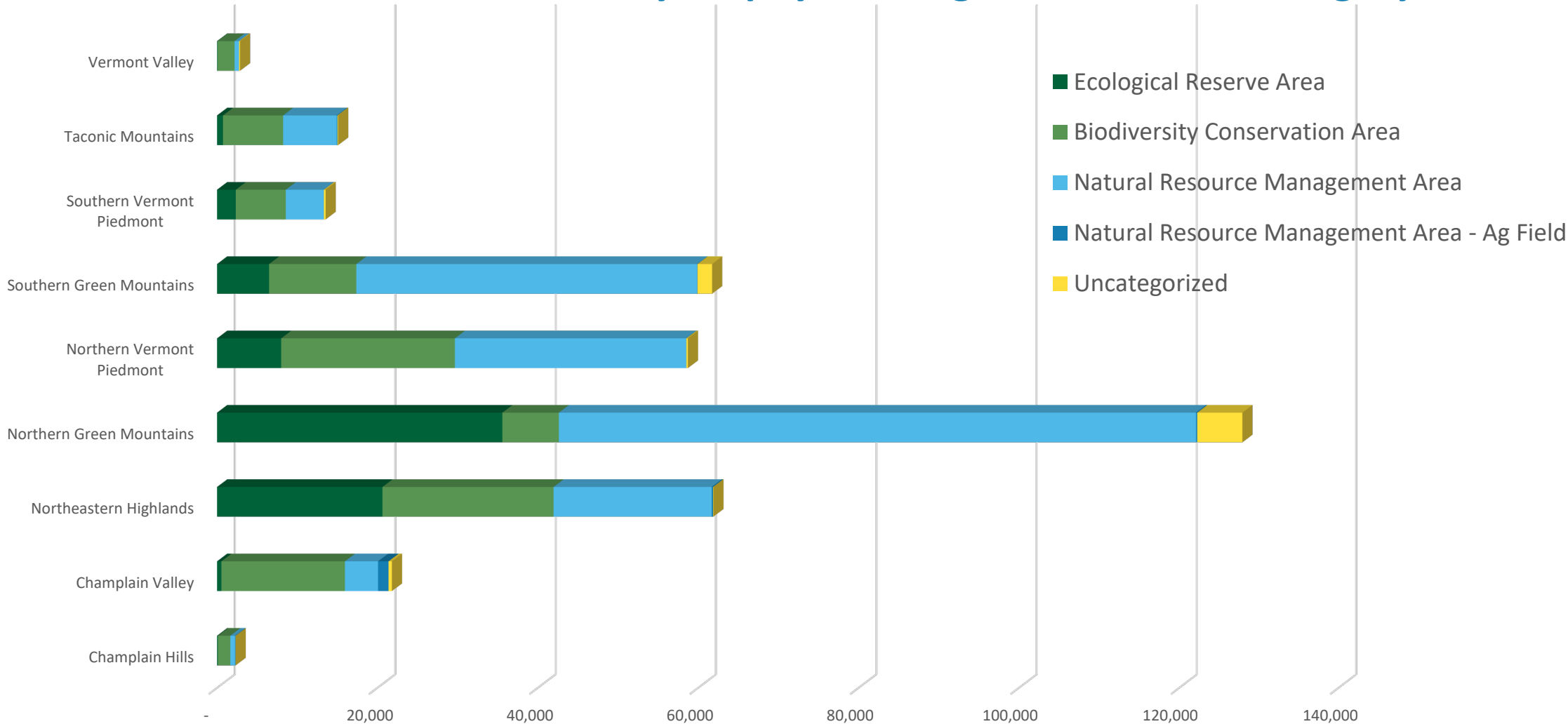
Distribution of ANR lands by Biophysical Region and Department



Science tells us that conservation outcomes depend on landscape context—not just acreage totals

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES ARE UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED

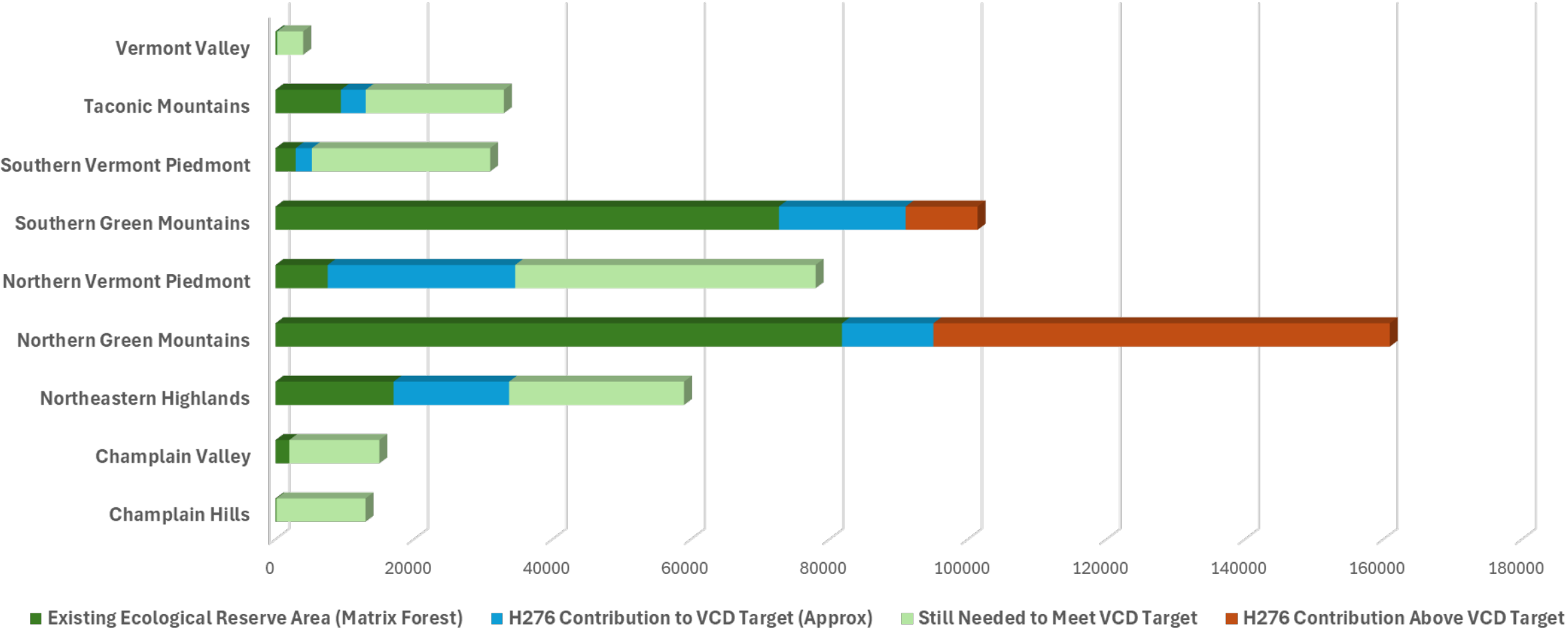
Distribution of ANR Lands by Biophysical Region and Act 59 Category



Act 59 land categories show higher concentrations of Ecological Reserves in some biophysical regions and limited representation in others—highlighting the need for place-based, strategic decisions

H.276 PROPOSES UNEVEN EXPANSION OF ECOLOGICAL RESERVES

H.276 and Approximate Spatial Contribution of Ecological Reserves



Adds Ecological Reserves in regions that are already well represented, while gaps remain elsewhere —prioritizing one goal at the expense of other forest benefits in those landscapes.



STATE LANDS WORKING GROUP: ACTIONS TO SUPPORT ECOLOGICAL RESERVES

1. Establish New Statutory Designation: *Ecological Reserve Area*
2. Update Land Management Classifications:
 - a) Highly Sensitive Management Areas: *Ecological Representation Area*
 - b) Special Management Areas: *Ecological Enhancement Area*
3. Eliminate the VHCB conservation easement co-hold requirement for state fee land acquisitions
4. Utilize landscape-scale conservation planning analyses
5. Initiate an evaluation of the role the Forest Legacy Program can play in increasing conserved ecological reserve areas.



Photo: Erica Houskeeper, VSJF

H.276 would expand ecological reserves unevenly—concentrating them in already well-represented regions and limiting the ability to balance other statewide forest goals



H.276 would limit active forest management on state lands—management that is essential for wildlife habitat, climate resilience, research, and supporting Vermont’s rural economy



Recommendation:

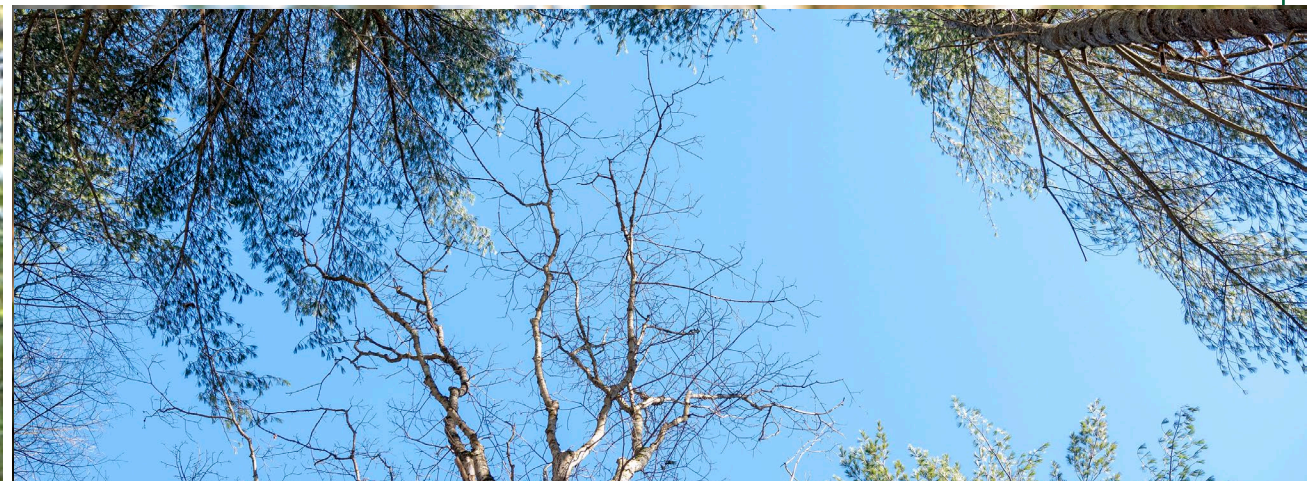
Allow the Act 59 directed process to inform where investments and capacity are most needed.

In the meantime, we are advancing priority recommendations from the State Lands Working Group.



ANR Process and Transparency

Plan publicly. Assess scientifically. Implement professionally.



One Forested Landscape — Multiple Public Benefits

We manage state lands at a landscape scale to balance ecological integrity, climate resilience, recreation, working forests, community well-being, and so much more.



Thank You



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