

House of Representatives  
House Committee on Environment

February 27, 2025

Dear Chair Scheu and House Committee on Appropriations,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment regarding the FY26 budget. Below please find our recommendations. These recommendations were voted upon by the House Environment Committee via a straw vote of 11-0-0, with the exception of the Climate Superfund, which had an outcome of 8-3-0.

### **Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW)**

The following additional funding is requested for Act 59 and Act 181 implementation:

- **\$300k** for two regulatory review positions in DFW to provide long-term capacity for additional regulatory review necessitated by Act 181, and to support participation in complex rulemaking proceedings before the LURB focused on Tier 3/Critical Resource Areas and new forest block and connecting habitat criteria.
- **\$150k** for one GIS/mapping position in DFW to address new requirements for updating and maintaining online resource maps for Act 250 and tracking conserved lands for the 30x30 and 50x50 goals as part of Act 59.

### **Agency of Natural Resources**

- **\$150** for one regulatory review position in the Agency of Natural Resources' Office of Planning to support the agency's participation in Act 250 proceedings, and to ensure timely review of Act 250 applications.

**Committee Recommendation:** We recommend an **additional \$600k** in base funding to support these four permanent positions.

### **Land Use Review Board (LURB)**

The LURB has requested **\$978k** through FY29 to continue funding two district coordinator positions, currently ARPA-funded. The LURB is concerned about the potential loss of key staff members who are critical to the efficient operation of the agency. Additionally, they have requested **\$100k** for digital infrastructure to support Act 181 implementation. The Board's ability to collaborate effectively and efficiently as an agency is impacted by Vermont's Open Meeting Law. The committee recommends adding a part-time executive assistant to help with this process.

**Committee Recommendation:** We recommend **\$100k in one-time funds** for digital infrastructure, **\$50k one-time funds** for the assistant, and **\$375k in one-time funds** for two district coordinators for 1.5 years (through FY27).

### **Climate Superfund**

The Treasurer's office requires **\$825k** for cost estimates associated with the implementation of Act 122, including **\$700k** for contracted support and **\$125k** for a new limited-service position.

ANR has also requested **\$500k for contracted support** and **\$175k for a new attorney** within the Office of ANR General Counsel for this work.

**Committee Recommendation:** While the Governor did not allocate funding for this, we recommend providing **\$825k in one-time funds** for the Treasurer's office to support this work and **\$175k in one-time funds for a new attorney** within the Office of ANR General Counsel to assist with ongoing legal work. The committee also supports **\$500k** for ANR contracted support, but this request is secondary to the support for the Treasurer's office.

### **Conservation Districts**

The Conservation Districts have requested **\$3 million** in additional funding beyond the Governor's recommended **\$500k** to expand their operations and support environmental efforts.

**Committee Recommendation:** We recommend **\$1.25 million in base funding**, understanding that this will be used to fund a .5 FTE position in each district. This seems especially important this year given the uncertainty at the federal level.

**The committee supports the Governor's Recommended Budget for the following items:**

### **Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)**

The committee strongly supports **fully funding VHCB** in accordance with the Governor's recommended budget. We believe that full funding is essential for the continued success of their critical programs.

### **Agency of Natural Resources**

The committee would also like to emphasize its support of the Governor's request for **\$14.5 million for state match** to draw down \$73.4 million in funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and also **\$850,000 for ANR CAFO database project/contract support** and two full time employees for the ANR CAFO Program

### **Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)**

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has requested funding for positions under Act 121 that were not funded for FY25. However, DEC has expressed difficulty in filling these positions, which may lead to a request for an extension of deadlines for Act 121 work. If funding for these positions is provided, DEC will not need extensions. The committee supports the extension of the deadlines related to Act 121.

### **Serve, Learn, Earn Program**

The Serve, Learn, Earn Program has requested **\$2.5 million**. There is a **\$500k** appropriation in the Governor's recommended budget. The committee supports the Governor's recommendation.

**Clean Water Surcharge on the Property Transfer Tax**

The committee supports the Governor's proposal to repeal the sunset.

Sincerely,

Your House Environment Committee