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, with underlined items reflecting changes to the Governor's recommended budget. These recommendations were voted upon by the House Environment Committee via a straw vote, with a X-Y-Z outcome.

Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW)
The following additional funding is requested for Act 59 and Act 181 implementation:
- **$500k for two regulatory review positions** in DFW to provide long-term capacity for additional Act 250 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.
- **$500k for one regulatory review position** in the Agency of Natural Resources' Office of Planning (ANR/OP) to support the agency's participation in Act 250 proceedings, and to ensure timely review of Act 250 applications.
- **$250k 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.

Committee Recommendation: We recommend an **additional $500k** in funding to support these four positions, which should be permanent and part of DFW's base budget.

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.

Committee Recommendation: We recommend **$100k in one-time funds** for digital infrastructure and **$375k to fund 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 121, 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** for the Treasurer's office to support this work, delaying ANR's funding for one year.

Serve, Learn, Earn Program
The Serve, Learn, Earn Program has requested an additional **$500k** beyond the $2 million in the Governor's recommended budget.
Committee Recommendation: The committee is still evaluating the best approach to this request.

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**.

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.
Committee Recommendation: The committee is still evaluating the best approach to this request.

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.

Sincerely,
Your Committee on House Environment via a X-Y-Z straw vote