

### **International Background**

- **COP15:** The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity was held in Montréal in 2022, resulting in the creation of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the international agreement to protect 30% of land and 30% of oceans by 2030
- **America the Beautiful Initiative:** a Department of the Interior initiative that was launched under the Biden-Harris administration in 2020 to set forth a voluntary nationwide effort to conserve and restore lands, waters, and wildlife through a 30x30 goal; \$1 billion *America the Beautiful* Challenge supports projects that conserve and restore habitats

### **Examples of 30x30 Initiatives Across the U.S.**

- **California:** E.O. N-82-20 in 2020; created a framework of 10 pathways to reach their 30x30 conservation goals and have extensive funding to conserve additional acreage including a \$30 million Natural Community Conservation grant program and \$1.1 billion for nature-based solutions; 25.25% of California's land and 16.23% of coastal waters are conserved as of June 2024
- **Maryland:** 2023 Maryland the Beautiful Act; completed their 30x30 goal and are working toward their 40x40 goal; have numerous Department of Natural Resource programs dedicated to conserving more land, especially forest and farmland

### **Vision and Goals of Act 59: Community Resilience & Biodiversity Protection Act**

- The **vision** of the State of Vermont is 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 and appreciation of the natural world, and supports the historic settlement pattern of compact villages surrounded by rural lands and natural areas.
- **It is the goal of the State that 30 percent of Vermont's total land area shall be conserved by 2030, and 50 percent of the State's total land area shall be conserved by 2050.** The Secretary of Natural Resources shall lead the effort in achieving these goals. The land conserved shall include State, federal, municipal, and private land.
- **Reaching 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050 shall include a mix of ecological reserve areas, biodiversity conservation areas, and natural resource management areas.** In order to support an ecologically functional and connected landscape with sustainable production of natural resources and recreational opportunities, **the approximate percentages of each type of conservation category shall be guided by the principles of conservation science and the conservation targets within Vermont Conservation Design,** prioritizing ecological reserve areas to protect highest priority natural communities and maintain or restore old forests.

### **Key Definitions**

- **“Ecological reserve area”**: an area having permanent protection from conversion and that is managed to maintain a natural state within which natural ecological processes and disturbance events are allowed to proceed with minimal interference.
- **“Biodiversity conservation area”**: an area having permanent protection from conversion for the majority of the area and that is managed for the primary goal of sustaining species or habitats. These areas may include regular, active interventions to address the needs of particular species or to maintain or restore habitats.
- **“Natural resource management area”**: an area having permanent protection from conversion for the majority of the area but that is subject to long-term, sustainable land management.
- **“Sustainable land management”**: the stewardship and use of forests and forestlands, grasslands, wetlands, riparian areas, and other lands, including the types of agricultural lands that support biodiversity, in a way, and at a rate, that maintains or restores their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and their potential to fulfill, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic, and social functions at local, State, and regional levels, and that does not degrade ecosystem function.
- **“Conserved”**: permanently protected and meeting the definition of ecological reserve area, biodiversity conservation area, or natural resource management area as defined in this section for purposes of meeting the 30 percent goal in subsection 2802(b) of this title.

### **Stakeholders as defined by Act 59**

Private owners of forestlands and agricultural lands, land trusts, conservation organizations, environmental organizations, working lands enterprises, outdoor recreation groups and businesses, Indigenous groups and representatives from historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities, watershed groups, municipalities, regional planning commissions, conservation commissions, and relevant State and federal agencies.

### **Equity Considerations**

- **Legislative finding** recognizes that Vermont is the traditional and unceded home of the Abenaki people; that BIPOC Vermonters and others from historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities have not had equal access to land and land-based enterprise; and that conservation planning process must address strategies for equity of access.
- 10 V.S.A. § 2803 requires initial conserved land equity to include an **equity assessment** of Vermont’s existing land protection and conservation programs and strategies.
- 10 V.S.A. § 2804 requires VHCB and ANR to lead **inclusive outreach** to inform conservation plan development.

**Phase 1: Conservation Inventory – Completed June 30, 2024**

An assessment of existing and potential conservation data, practices, programs, equity, and funding with recommended next steps (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)

<b>Final Inventory Results for 2024</b>	
Ecological Reserve Areas	240,060 acres
Biodiversity Conservation Areas	235,950 acres
Forestland & Natural Cover	927,398 acres
Agricultural & Open Land	173,380 acres
Uncategorized Conserved Land (not included)	47,595 acres
<i>Total of Conserved Land is 1,576,788 acres of 5,889,121 total acres (~27%)</i>	

**Phase 2: Conservation Plan – Due December 2025**

A comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (July 1, 2024 – December 31, 2025), including, per Act 59:

- (1) a comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of section 2802 of this title while continuing to conserve and protect Vermont’s agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters;
- (2) the implementation methods for achieving the vision and goals of this chapter using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide;
- (3) recommendations to provide and increase equitable access to protected and conserved lands and land-based enterprises, including recreational access to and use of conserved lands; and
- (4) recommendations to implement the vision and goals of this chapter while also enhancing the State of Vermont’s current investments and commitments to working lands enterprises, rural landowners, and the broad conservation mission implemented by the Secretary and VHCB, including conservation of agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, recreational lands, and surface waters.

**Ongoing Public Process & Upcoming Timeline**

- **47 interviews** were conducted with community members to complete the inventory
- **21 affinity-based focus groups** with over 350 participants to discuss Phase I and Phase II
- **147 survey respondents** to a survey open to the public and on the VHCB website
- **4 working groups** to answer questions posed by the legislature
- **6 public meetings** open to the public to weigh in on work group progress and the draft inventory
- **Winter and Spring 2024-25:** VHCB to hire project manager (PM); set foundation for regional working group sessions
- **Summer 2025:** Steering committee and work group processes led by VHCB, ANR, PM
- **Fall 2025:** Refine and finalize conservation plan through public meetings
- **December 31, 2025:** Release final conservation plan