

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Report Name: PROGRESS REPORT ON WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Year: 2025

Date reported: 1/15/2026

Authorizing statute: 10 V.S.A. § 921 – 929 and 10 V.S.A. § 1253

Committees: House Committees on Agriculture and the Environment, and the Senate Committees on Agriculture and on Natural Resources and Energy

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Executive Summary The [Watershed Planning Program](#) (WPP) of the [Water Investment Division](#) (WID) is charged with developing and implementing watershed management plans that summarize existing water quality conditions and associated attainment with surface water uses (such as recreation and aquatic life support), with identified priorities for surface water protection and restoration of degraded waters. Vermont state statute (10 VSA §1252) as well as the Vermont Water Quality Standards require the development of Tactical Basin Plans (TBPs) for each of Vermont's 15 river basins to be approved on a five-year iterative cycle (Fig. 1). These TBPs also serve as iterative implementation plans for the Champlain, Memphremagog, and other TMDLs.



Figure 1. Tactical Basin Planning 5-year Cycle

Key Achievements – [WPP completed the following in 2025:](#)

- Vetted over 1100 new [clean water projects](#).
- Supported an acceleration of phosphorus reduction projects by [Clean Water Service Providers](#) under Water Quality Restoration Formula Grants, at an average cost of \$8,000/kg/year.
- Revised the [Water Quality Restoration Formula Grants Targets and Fund Allocation Methodology](#).
- Submitted the [South Lake Champlain TBP Interim Progress Report](#), along with Vermont's [Clean Water Initiative 2025 Performance Report](#), to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Vermont General Assembly in January 2026.

In 2026 there will be a higher-than-normal volume of TBP updates (listed below) and enhancement of TMDL implementation plan content (phase 4) as well as the increase in the development and activities related to clean water project development and implementation. Tactical Basin Plans are indexed to the five-year incremental phases of the Lake Champlain Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). In this past year, WPP has been focused on the development and publication of the Lake Progress Report on River Basin Water Quality Management Planning
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Champlain Phosphorus TMDL "Phase 4" content which describes the state's progress since 2016 towards meeting sector-specific phosphorus targets and state programmatic commitments, as well as projections of sector-specific target reductions for the next five years. In 2026, the phase 4 content is in development for the Missisquoi and Northern Lake Champlain Direct Tactical Basin Plans, which will present the Champlain TMDL phosphorus reduction targets for the next five-year phase of TMDL implementation.

The following Tactical Basin Plans are slated for completion in 2026:

- [Batten Kill, Hoosic, Walloomsac River Basins](#) (Basin 01)
- [Missisquoi River Basin](#) (Basin 06)
- [Lamoille River Basin](#) (Basin 07)
- [West, Williams, Saxtons River Basins](#) (Basin 11)
- [Ompompanoosuc, Stevens, Wells, Waits and Connecticut River tributaries](#) (Basin 14)
- [Upper Connecticut Basin including the Nulhegan River](#) – Basin 16)

TBP Interim and Final Interim Status Report (included in the Vermont [Clean Water Initiative 2025 Performance Report](#)): TBPs (also referred to as TMDL Implementation Plans) have a five-year implementation cycle, and the TMDL Accountability Framework indicates that at the culmination of each five-year cycle, EPA will provide an assessment of state progress toward implementation goals for each plan. WPP developed the interim (2.5 year) South Lake Champlain as an appendix to Vermont's Clean Water Initiative 2025 Performance Report. EPA will then review this interim status report to determine if the state is on track toward accomplishing the actions identified in the 2023 South Lake Champlain TBP Implementation Tables.

Statutory Partner Involvement in Tactical Basin Planning

Community and stakeholder engagement is a key component of TBP development and implementation. TBP partners, including municipalities, Natural Resources Conservation Districts, Regional Planning Commissions, and watershed organizations, also utilize TBPs to target their clean water activities/projects. There are three TBP statutory partners:

- ❖ [Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies](#)
- ❖ [Vermont Natural Resource Conservation Districts](#)
- ❖ [Watersheds United Vermont](#)

The Clean Water Board allocates \$750,000 per year for tactical basin planning in the form of organizational support grants, a sum that has increased incrementally over time with increasing statutory requirements for the planning process. WPP program worked closely with the three statutory partners to determine how \$750,000 of State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2026 funding was allocated through the TBP support grants, which allowed the WPP to fund 13 Natural Resource Conservation Districts, 15 watershed groups and 11 Regional Planning Commissions to complete over 320 separate tasks through the SFY 2026 agreements. This Tactical Basin Planning Grant funding supported and enhanced regional coordination efforts, regional sector-based workgroups, outreach and technical assistance, municipal plan and bylaw updates, water quality monitoring and assessment, tactical basin plan development, and Water Quality Restoration Formula Grant Basin Water Quality Council (BWQC) participation. These funds support consistent engagement and participation across all statutory partners and member organizations. These groups enhance community outreach and engagement for clean water project delivery efforts. These efforts promote

widespread and improved understanding of state surface water restoration requirements and in the process support diverse and sustained partner collaboration.

Progress on the Pace of Clean Water Project Implementation

Tactical Basin Plans identify clean water goals and the strategies necessary to identify, develop, design and implement projects to meet these targets. These projects are catalogued in an online [Watershed Projects Database](#), which is continuously updated as partners identify new projects or project phases. In the first eleven months of 2025, over 1130 projects have been added to the database with review from the Watershed Planning Program. This includes 500 stormwater projects, 86 road projects, 172 river planting projects, 167 floodplain/stream restoration projects, 73 lake projects and 56 project development efforts. Tactical Basin Planning is integral to identifying priority projects to achieve clean water targets described in clean water restoration plans, known as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), the [Vermont Clean Water Act of 2015](#), and the [Clean Water Service Delivery Act \(76\) of 2019](#). The planning process identifies gaps in capacity to meet clean water goals and, in coordination with clean water partners, develops tactical strategies to fill these gaps through trainings and capacity building funding.

Watershed Planning and Clean Water Service Delivery (Act 76 of 2019)

Act 76 established regional organizations called Clean Water Service Providers (CWSPs) for each Tactical Planning Basin in the Lake Champlain and Lake Memphremagog basins. CWSPs are responsible for partnering with Basin Water Quality Councils (BWQCs) and project implementers to oversee the identification, funding, implementation, operation, and maintenance of non-regulatory clean water projects to meet non-regulatory phosphorus reduction targets with funding provided through the Water Quality Restoration Formula Grant Program.

Water Quality Restoration Formula Grants are awarded annually to each CWSP. Formula Grant funds are allocated based on the Water Quality Restoration Formula Grant Targets and Fund Allocation Methodology. The Fund Allocation Methodology was updated and finalized in December of 2025 to include project cost data through SFY 2024, to factor in inflation and refine the project types attributed to each sector and adding weighting to reflect the likely distribution of project types to be implemented for each sector. The Fund Allocation Methodology considers the annual pollutant reduction allocation established for the CWSP, multiplied by the standard cost for pollutant reduction, with phosphorus reduction allocations and award values scaled to available funds. Formula Grants are funded under the Clean Water Initiative and administered by WPP.

Eligible non-regulatory clean water project types that can be funded under Formula Grants are described in the CWIP Funding Policy.⁶ This includes projects across a range of sectors including floodplain and stream restoration, riparian buffer plantings, stormwater management improvements, road erosion control measures, and lake shoreline restoration. CWSPs and their BWQCs are responsible for determining how Formula Grant funds are awarded at the project-level, within their respective basins, using state-derived guidance. From SFY 2023 through 2025, a total of \$23.7 million has been awarded to CWSPs and this level of funding is accompanied by total phosphorus reduction targets of 706.3 kilograms per year in the Lake Champlain basin and 60.0 kilograms per year in the Lake Memphremagog basin. In SFY 2025, Addison County Regional Planning Commission (RPC) was reappointed to a second term as the CWSP for the Otter Creek Basin (Basin 3).

Progress is being made – both organizationally, as well as towards CWSP-assigned phosphorus targets, as the Formula Grant program has been underway since SFY 2023. Formula Grants have provided CWSPs with the funding to implement 140 unique projects, nearly 20 of which have been funded through multiple phases of work (i.e., design through implementation). These have included

12 different project types and have included 34 project development efforts that are expected to bring in more future projects. To date the projects that have been implemented and closed out represent 118 kg/year of phosphorus reduction achieved and CWSPs are currently implementing projects with additional estimated 406 kg/year of phosphorus reduction. Additionally, CWSPs have funded projects at the design phase that have the potential to reduce an estimated phosphorus loading by over 1,100 kg/ year of phosphorus per year once implemented (see Figure 2 below). Reported data on implemented projects funded by Formula Grants indicates an average implementation cost of \$8,000/kg of estimated phosphorus reduction, demonstrating that this program is performing efficiently in support of the State's water quality restoration goals.

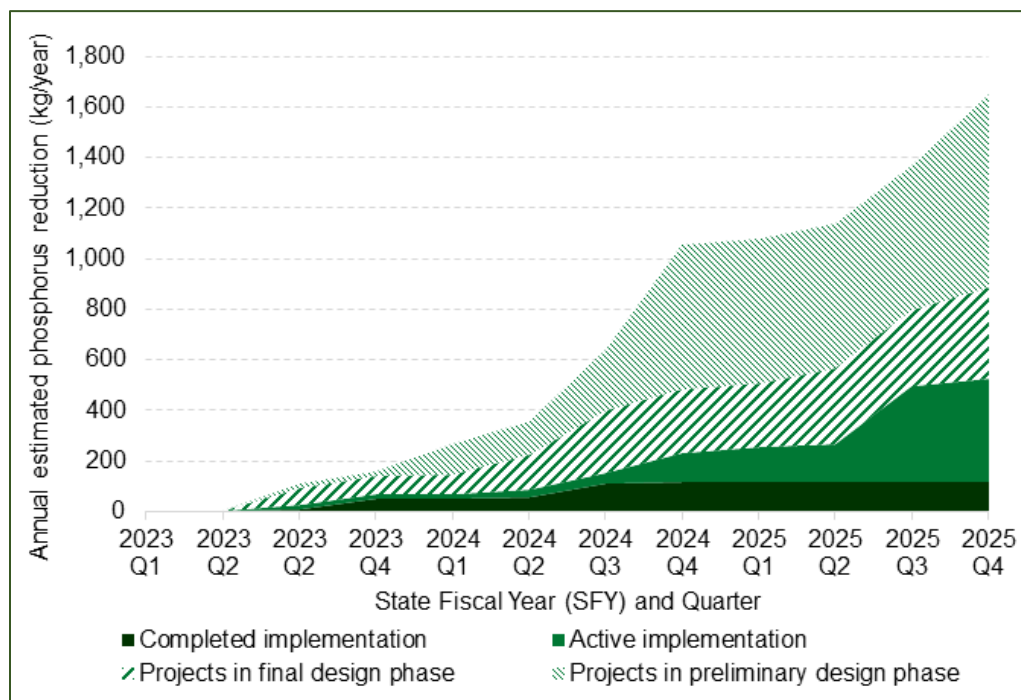


Figure 2: Cumulative estimated annual total phosphorus load reduction (kg/year) of projects funded by CWSPs and BWQCs from SFY 2023 – 2025 by quarter (Q), including implementation

SFY 2025 is the first year CWSPs were obligated to fund and complete project operation and maintenance (O&M). Under Clean Water Funding opportunities, CWSPs now have the ability to fund O&M to ensure that implemented projects maintain and/or extend their P reduction credits. CWSPs are either taking on O&M for their projects or supporting other partners to do this work, which supports the real-world functioning of implemented projects. CWSPs are also in the process of adopting previously implemented (older) projects to keep those projects functioning into the future.

Despite the meaningful progress, critical gaps exist in a few areas limiting the full potential of the Clean Water Service Network (CWSN). DEC collected stakeholder input, including the need for increased training and streamlined technical permit review of projects. DEC responded to stakeholder input with the development of a [Clean Water Action Plan which identifies specific actions to address challenges within the CWSN](#). Capacity gaps among watershed partners also exist in some basins. DEC is now offering the Clean Water Workforce Capacity Development block grant to address capacity gaps.