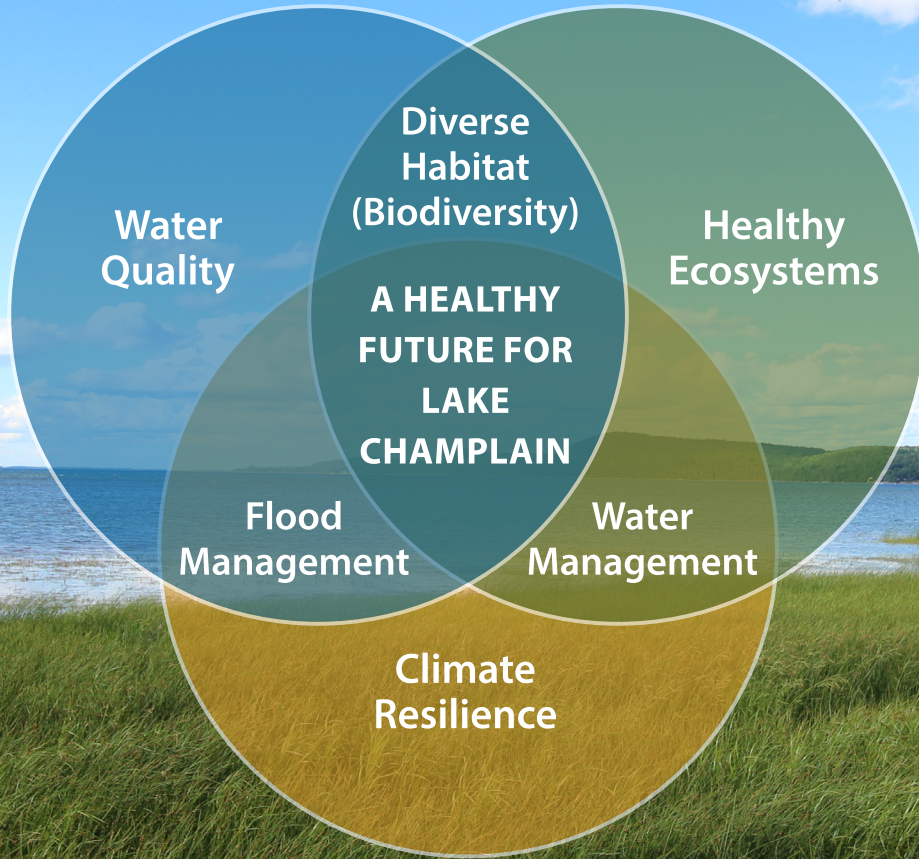


VERMONT CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN'S FUTURE



2025 LAKE CHAMPLAIN ACTION PLAN

ACHIEVING A THRIVING LAKE CHAMPLAIN BASIN ECOSYSTEM

Lake Champlain is a reflection of us, it reflects our habits, priorities, and investments. The issues facing Lake Champlain and its watershed are complex, interconnected, and challenging. Cyanobacteria blooms, flooding, chloride and other contaminant pollution, aquatic invasive species, and other threats impact the health of our environment, communities, and economy and these impacts are likely to be exacerbated by a changing climate. The issues affecting Lake Champlain

did not develop overnight and the needed solutions will take time, but the resulting healthy lake will provide immeasurable value to present and future generations. The Lake Champlain watershed jurisdictions include the States of Vermont and New York and the Province of Québec. We have a shared responsibility to recommit to actions and proactive investments that will create positive outcomes for our clean water resources and the ecosystems and communities surrounding it.

2025 PRIORITIES

The 2025 Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee on Lake Champlain's Future (CAC) priorities are at the nexus of clean water, biodiversity, and climate resilience. The interconnected nature of the issues we are facing emphasizes the importance of seeking mutually beneficial solutions that maximize positive outcomes. As the State of Vermont revises the Climate Action Plan in

2025, we want to make sure it adequately addresses and promotes actions needed to sustain Lake Champlain and its watershed. Our action plan aligns with the Vermont Climate Action Plan's focus on actions that build on existing programs and maximize co-benefits to clean water, biodiversity, and climate resilience in the Lake Champlain Basin and beyond.

VERMONT MUST:

- ! advance flood mitigation, climate adaptation, and resilience through riparian, wetland, and floodplain conservation and restoration, dam removal, right-sizing of culverts, and agricultural and land use practices that reduce runoff.
- ! develop and implement plans to assess, mitigate, and eliminate chloride contamination and continue efforts to address PFAS and other contaminants.
- ! prioritize land use and sustainable development that reduces water quality impacts.
- ! pursue continued and robust investments in aquatic invasive species education, monitoring, and management.
- ! continue to increase and improve equitable public access to Lake Champlain and its tributaries for all communities.



Flooding in Waterbury, VT 2023. Since 2011, the Lake Champlain Basin has been impacted by all 22 major FEMA declared extreme weather disasters in Vermont including three severe storms and flooding in 2023 and two in 2024.

ADVANCE FLOOD MITIGATION, ADAPTATION, AND RESILIENCE

Climate change is causing more variable and intense precipitation and severe flooding, posing risks to public safety, infrastructure, property, water quality, and habitat suitability for fish, wildlife and plants. As the frequency and severity of extreme precipitation events increases, ***swift action and investments are needed to ensure our communities, environment, and economy are more resilient*** to climate change impacts.

Riparian and Floodplain Restoration:

Restoration and conservation of Lake Champlain’s headwaters, river corridors, floodplains, wetlands, soils, and riparian buffers can **increase resilience** of and adaptation by natural and human communities to flooding and droughts. These **cost-effective nature-based solutions mitigate climate change** by naturally sequestering and storing carbon in plants and soils; maintain biodiversity by providing diverse, healthy connected habitats, and achieve clean water for the lake and its tributaries through increased infiltration and decreased runoff. The CAC endorses **investment in nature-based solutions** for resilience, **full staffing, cohesion and collaboration within and across Department of Environmental Conservation programs, and increasing collaboration and support with organizations working to implement river restoration and protection.**

Recent funding opportunities from select agricultural support programs drew immense interest with programs that offered \$2.1M and \$2.3M in available funding receiving \$43.6M and \$16.2M in requests, respectively.

Aquatic Connectivity for Resilience:

Dam removals and right-sizing of culverts are necessary to connect and restore native species habitat; reduce habitat fragmentation, erosion, and nutrient loading; and enhance community flood resilience and climate change adaptation. The CAC recommends continued **funding, research, and implementation for river connection, restoration, and aquatic organism passage.**

Agriculture and Working Lands:

Since 2016, increased investments in local technical assistance programs and on-farm pollution prevention projects have cost-effectively reduced phosphorus runoff to our waters. However, the intensifying impacts of climate change and oversubscribed grant programs pose challenges to the agricultural community and water quality. Between the 2023 and 2024 floods, farmers in Vermont experienced more than \$18.5 million in losses due to flooding. **Additional State and Federal funding support to agricultural producers** is essential to continue to **support a vibrant local food system and reach climate and water quality goals** on working lands.

Developed Land Use:

The CAC supports **improving public infrastructure** including bridges, roadways, drinking water facilities, and stormwater infrastructure **to meet current codes and standards and withstand future flooding events.** Failing wastewater facilities and septic systems are further stressed by intense rain events and threaten water quality and public health. To counter these threats, the CAC encourages the State to **support efforts limiting new construction** or development **in vulnerable river corridors, improve failing municipal systems, inventory existing septic systems** located near water bodies, continue the Healthy Homes Initiative, and provide more proactive education, oversight, and outreach to homeowners about their septic systems.

VTCAC MEMBERSHIP

Denise Smith	Chair, Nonprofit Executive Director	Andrew Milliken	Biologist
Karina Dailey	Vice-Chair, Environmental Scientist	Hilary Solomon	Conservation District Manager
Breck Bowden	Watershed Scientist	Alison Spasyk	Graduate Student
Eric Clifford	Dairy Farmer	Representative Carol Ode	
Wayne Elliott, PE	Engineer	Fmr. Representative Kari Dolan	
Robert Fischer	Water Facility Operator	Senator Martine Larocque Gulick	
Lori Fisher	Nonprofit Executive Director	Senator Randy Brock	

DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR CONTAMINANTS POLLUTION

Eliminating toxic contamination is essential to protect human and environmental health. While progress is underway in controlling neonicotinoids and certain PFAS compounds, **chloride is an emerging concern**. Chloride pollution in the Lake Champlain Basin negatively impacts infrastructure, drinking water, and wildlife. Proactive assessment and mitigation are crucial for ensuring a safe and sustainable environment. The CAC recommends the State **incentivize public and private applicators to follow safe deicing and winter road management best practices to reduce chloride pollution and cumulative costs, particularly as winter rain events increase.**

PRIORITIZE LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT THAT REDUCES WATER QUALITY IMPACTS

The State must **increase the flexibility of the types of projects that are eligible for clean water funds** to effectively improve water quality. State leadership is needed to encourage and incentivize Vermont's working and developed lands to be sustainable—with an emphasis on significant reductions of nonpoint source water pollution. Existing developments must be brought up to current standards and **new development must happen in tandem with effective mitigation efforts** to address the increase of impervious surfaces and added stormwater runoff. The CAC encourages the State to **provide consistent regulatory enforcement and support, resources, and technical assistance for developers, farmers, and woodland owners** to ensure sound management, healthy soils, and clean water.

INVEST IN AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES SPREAD PREVENTION

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are a significant threat to Lake Champlain and the state's waterways. AIS are impacting aquatic ecosystem integrity and have the potential to cause **billions of dollars in damage** to recreation, water quality, infrastructure, and property values. To mitigate and prevent further AIS damage, **Vermont must increase investment in consistent staffing and funding for its AIS programs** to complement and influence the cooperative work underway in New York and Québec. The State should **consider: a new funding source involving a mandatory boat decal for motorized and non-motorized craft; a mandatory watercraft inspection and certification program; and high-profile inspection stations at key lake access points.**

EXPAND EQUITABLE PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

Access to Vermont's healthy lands and clean waters is crucial to the health and wellbeing of Vermonters and to the State's \$1.5 billion outdoor recreation economy. Vermont needs to allocate resources to expand water access for **ALL**, including opportunities for non-motorized recreation to reduce conflicts at boat launches. **Expanding lake and tributary access and outdoor education opportunities** will foster greater experiences with and stewardship of the State's natural resources. The CAC particularly recommends strategies to **improve access in the South Lake and for marginalized and historically disenfranchised communities. Continued investments in outdoor recreation businesses** will bolster public access opportunities and Vermont's recreation economy.