

## NON-REGULATORY

## 10. Federal and State Assistance Programs

### Overview

**M**unicipalities can promote financial and technical assistance programs that help landowners maintain and manage forestland and associated forest resources such as wildlife habitat, clean water, and soil productivity. Such programs can be highlighted in the town plan, through conservation commission or town-sponsored workshops, by direct outreach to landowners through local newspapers, town websites, or other media. In addition, some of these programs are available to assist local governments. Planning and conservation commissions should make themselves aware of opportunities to secure funding for programs that may be eligible for municipally owned land.

This section focuses on federal and state programs that provide funding and technical assistance for forestland management and conservation. A few key programs, such as Vermont's Current Use Program, are presented in more detail in other sections. (For example, see *Chapter 6, Current Use — Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program.*)

Federal and state programs, and program funding levels, vary from year to year and may change over time as they come up for reauthorization. Programs that help private landowners and local communities strengthen the long-term viability of forestland generally receive broad-based support, but funding is typically limited and awarded on a competitive basis. Since approximately 86% of Vermont's forestland is in private ownership, it is vitally important for local communities to work with interested landowners to foster participation in these programs.

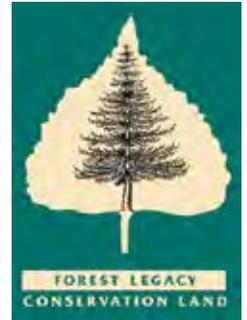
### Federal Programs

#### Forest Legacy Program

The U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is a federal grant program, administered through the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, which protects forestland from conversion to non-forest uses. The FLP recognizes that most forestland in the United States is privately held, and that many landowners are facing growing financial pressure to convert their land to other uses. Much of this pressure arises from encroaching residential and commercial development including resort and second home development, as is the case in Vermont.

The state (in its role as a FLP partner) determines, in consultation with regional planning commissions and local communities, those areas (Forest Legacy Areas, or FLA) where the most valuable forestland faces the greatest threats. Once this "assessment of need" is completed and the FLA is federally approved, landowners from towns in the program may then apply to the state for program funding. Vermont's current Forest Legacy Area includes 186 towns, two unorganized towns and one gore, and encompasses nearly 3.3 million acres of land. This includes large forested blocks, productive forest soils, and important fish and wildlife habitat that are under threat of fragmentation, conversion and development. Communities within a proposed legacy area can opt out of the program, leaving landowners in those communities ineligible for the program.

The Forest Legacy Program is voluntary. Landowners who wish to participate may either sell their property (in fee simple) or, more commonly, sell their rights to develop the land which is then placed under a conservation easement. The use of conservation easements allows the land to remain in private ownership, while ensuring that important public values such as wildlife habitat, natural areas, forest resources, and outdoor recreation opportunities are protected through a third party. The program provides up to 75% of the costs of a conservation easement or fee-simple acquisition. The remaining 25% must be matched either by the landowner or a partnering entity, such as a municipal or other non-federal governmental entity or nonprofit organization. Common partnering organizations in Vermont include the Vermont Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Trust for Public Land, and The Conservation Fund. In addition, municipalities may use Forest Legacy funds to purchase town forests. In Vermont, Forest Legacy funds have been used to purchase town forests for two towns. Learn more at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/flp.shtml>.



*"The Forest Legacy Program helps private landowners protect their forests for future generations while ensuring that their property rights are secure."*

— Senator Patrick Leahy,  
author of the  
Forest Legacy Program



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Land and Water Conservation Fund

Since its inception in 1965, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been used by over 100 municipalities and the state to create parks and open spaces, protect wilderness and forests, and provide outdoor recreational opportunities. More than 66,000 acres of outdoor recreation lands, including forestland, have been acquired through this program. Administered through the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, the LWCF can be used to reimburse up to 50% of eligible land or easement acquisition costs. The value of real property donated by the landowner may be used as a match. Learn more at: <http://www.nps.gov/lwcf/>.

Environmental Quality Incentive Program

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), administered through the Vermont offices of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), offers cost sharing programs for working forest and farmland owners. Program assistance is available to write forest management plans, manage stormwater runoff and erosion from forest roads, control invasive plants, and improve wildlife habitat and forest health. Learn more at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/programs/financial/eqip/>.

Conservation Technical Assistance

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program, also administered through Vermont's NRCS offices and conservation districts, provides voluntary technical assistance to individuals, communities, and state government to plan for and implement management practices that conserve natural resources. These include practices to improve woodlands, soil health and water quality, to conserve wetlands and enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and to address other natural resource issues. The CTA program also provides technical assistance to participants in related NRCS cost-share and conservation incentive programs. Learn more at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/technical/cp/cta/>.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for landowners who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. Through WHIP, the NRCS and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife provide technical assistance and up to 75% cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. Forest management activities that meet wildlife habitat program priorities may be eligible for funding; however, access roads and timber stand improvements are not. WHIP agreements between NRCS and a participant generally last from five to ten years from the date an agreement is signed.



Courtesy Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

Learn more at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/programs/financial/whip/>.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) focuses on the restoration of Vermont's wetland, riverine and upland wildlife habitats that benefit federal trust species – including migratory birds, anadromous fish, and federally listed threatened and endangered species. Program biologists work with private landowners, and in partnership with other federal and state agencies, municipalities, and nongovernmental organizations, to protect, enhance and restore wetland, floodplain forest, and in-stream habitat areas. The Partners Program provides technical and permitting assistance, and helps landowners identify available sources of project funding. Learn more at: <http://www.fws.gov/lcfwro/reports/Habitat/PFW1.pdf> (summary of Vermont program) or <http://www.fws.gov/partners/> (federal website).



Community Forest and Open Space Program

The Community Forest Program is a grant program that authorizes the U.S. Forest Service to provide financial assistance to local governments, tribal governments, and qualified nonprofit entities to establish community forests that provide continuing and accessible community benefits. The Community Forest Program was authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill (§8003 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-234)), which amends

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the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978. The full title is the “Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.” The working title is the “Community Forest Program.” Learn more at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/cfp.shtml>.



administered through the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Since its inception in 1991, this program has provided technical and financial assistance to over 150 Vermont communities, and more than \$1 million in competitive grants to municipal and volunteer organizations all over the state. The program focuses on urban and community forests, including town forest management, but associated educational and technical assistance programs provide excellent opportunities for community outreach, and may also be useful to private landowners interested in forest stewardship. This program also supports Vermont's local tree wardens. Learn more at: [http://www.vtfpr.org/urban/for\\_urbcomm.cfm](http://www.vtfpr.org/urban/for_urbcomm.cfm).

## State Programs

### Forest Stewardship Program

Vermont's Forest Stewardship Program is administered through the County Forester Program of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. County foresters can provide information and assistance to landowners and communities about woodland management and stewardship. They can direct landowners to programs, services and professionals appropriate for their needs for plans and projects. They can help landowners integrate goals from stewardship plans into Current Use plans. (See *Chapter 6, Current Use – Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program.*) County foresters assist municipalities in the planning, management and assessment of town forests. Learn more at: [http://www.vtfpr.org/resource/for\\_forres\\_steward.cfm](http://www.vtfpr.org/resource/for_forres_steward.cfm).



### Vermont Housing and Conservation Board Grants

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) administers two conservation grant programs – one for projects of statewide significance (as determined with input from the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and the state's Natural Heritage Program) and one for locally supported resource conservation projects. Both provide grants, available on a competitive basis as funding allows, for the acquisition of natural areas, endangered and threatened species habitat, public recreation lands (including working forests) and historic properties. No match is required for the state program, though leverage in the form of in-kind services or donated easements are common. Under the Local Conservation Grant Program, up to \$150,000 is available for the purchase of recreational lands and natural areas, but applicants must raise at least 33% of the total project cost from other sources. Local projects must also demonstrate municipal support in the form of a letter of endorsement. Working forests are now eligible for VHCB funding in accordance with legislation enacted in 2012 that specifically adds forestland to VHCB conservation program areas. Learn more at: <http://www.vhcb.org/index.htm>.

### Forest Watershed Program

The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation's Forest Watershed Program emphasizes the contribution that healthy forests and sustainable forestry practices provide to water quality. This program provides education, outreach and technical assistance to Vermont forest landowners, loggers, and forestry professionals in partnership with professional associations. This program also administers and provides landowner guidance on the state's “Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Log Jobs” (AMPs) and Vermont's “Heavy Cut” Law, which requires state review for clear cutting or heavy cutting on 40 or more acres in Vermont. Learn more at: <http://www.vtfpr.org/watershed/index.cfm>.

### Communities Caring for Canopy

This Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation program offers grants to Vermont communities to help them develop and sustain a community-wide tree program with tree planting, inventory, maintenance, plan development, public outreach, or program development. Learn more at: <http://www.vtfpr.org/urban/grants.cfm>.

### Urban and Community Forestry Program

Vermont's Urban and Community Forestry Program, funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service, is



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### Things to Consider

**Find the right funding.** As noted, many state and federal programs require a match of funds or in-kind services. In order to receive funding, projects must meet program-specific match requirements, typically through the involvement of funding partners and/or volunteer organizations. Municipal conservation funds, local fund raisers and donations can also be used to help leverage other sources of project funding.

**Who do landowners contact?** Each program has a state or federal agency coordinator that can help landowners apply to the program. Towns should provide contact information for these programs at the town office.

**What can towns do?** At a minimum, local government can promote available programs and provide contact information through the town office, website, or its conservation commission, and when needed, provide local letters of support for conservation projects. Municipalities can also establish and manage their own conservation funds and grant programs to help individual landowners or partnering organizations meet local match requirements for projects that benefit the community. (See *Chapter 9, Conservation Funds and Town Forests.*) Conservation commissions can also sponsor education and training workshops including “walks in the woods,” distribute informational materials and toolkits, and work with interested landowners on local conservation projects.

### Case Study

#### Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project

The Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project began in 1999 when one concerned citizen gathered together a group of neighbors and community leaders to discuss the future of forestland centered in Jericho, Richmond, and Bolton. With the assistance of private landowners, town commissions, conservation organizations and state agencies, the project has since conserved more than 9,300 acres in the Winooski River Valley between Mount Mansfield State Forest and Camel’s Hump State Park.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the parcels in the project area were conserved

with the assistance of the Vermont Land Trust, the Nature Conservancy, the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and Vermont’s Senator Patrick Leahy. Funding for several of the conservation easements (including the 1,700 acre Prelco property) was secured through the federal Forest Legacy Program, which has allocated a total of more than \$4 million to the project.<sup>2</sup> Other critical funding sources include donations from private individuals, businesses, and foundations, grants from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Green Mountain Club, local land trusts (such as the

Richmond Land Trust and Jericho Underhill Land Trust), and local governments.<sup>3</sup>

The project area is being conserved in order to protect significant wildlife habitat (for animals, such as bobcats, moose, and bears), recreational opportunities (for hikers, rock climbers, snowmobilers, and skiers), hunting grounds, and timber resources (for the local forest products economy).

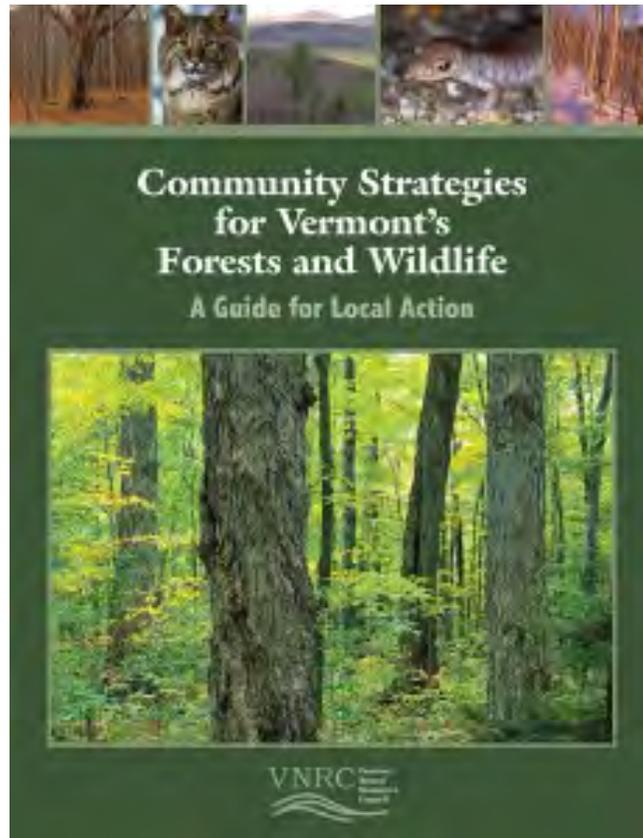


Bob Linck/Vermont Land Trust



This chapter is part of a larger publication called ***Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action***. You can download the entire publication or individual chapters (including the endnotes, resources, and credits page) for FREE at:

[www.vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/](http://www.vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/)



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**Funding or general support for this publication was provided by:** Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust; Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC), a partnership of Northern Forest states (New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, and New York), in coordination with the USDA Forest Service; The Nature Conservancy – Vermont Chapter; U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry; U.S. Forest Service, Green Mountain National Forest; Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

**Design:** Tim Newcomb, Newcomb Studios Printing; Stillwater Graphics, Williamstown, VT

**Prepared by the Vermont Natural Resources Council**

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