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February 2014 E-News



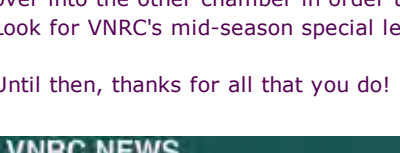
It's February, and that means VNRC's in the thick of things up at the State House. Staff have been helping lawmakers understand the issues and have been tracking a dozen or so pieces of legislation. So far this year, legislators have taken some positive steps: they're moving a bill to better protect Vermont's lake shorelands, another measure to make it easier to install solar energy systems, and yet another encouraging the removal of abandoned dams in our rivers, something that will help river water quality. Lawmakers are also working on legislation that will promote well-planned development and reduce the amount of sprawling, strip development that chews up our land.

As we approach "crossover" - the point in the session when bills from one chamber have to have passed over into the other chamber in order to be considered this year - things will pick up even more steam. Look for VNRC's mid-season special legislative report with more detail, coming soon.

Until then, thanks for all that you do!

VNRC NEWS

VNRC, with Partners, Urges Shumlin to Demonstrate Leadership on Lake Champlain



Last week, VNRC organized an effort to publicly call on Gov. Shumlin to demonstrate leadership on Lake Champlain cleanup. At a news conference, VNRC, the Conservation Law Foundation, Lake Champlain Committee and Lake Champlain International issued a [joint statement](#) urging the Governor to require that his Agency of Natural Resources develop a comprehensive and effective plan that spreads cleanup obligations fairly across the full range of polluters in order to restore the health of Lake Champlain.

"This is an opportunity for the Governor to establish a lasting environmental legacy," said Brian Shupe, VNRC's executive director.

VNRC and our partners issued the statement the same day that the Environmental Protection Agency visited Vermont to underscore the urgency of a strong Lake Cleanup plan.

[Read VNRC's comments on a proposed state plan for lake cleanup>>](#)

VNRC Launches New "Water Caucus"



We've formally launched a new initiative known as the [VNRC Water Caucus](#).

In recent years, VNRC has seen a need for greater diversity, perspective and number of advocates to influence the outcomes of statewide water policy decisions.

"VNRC is involved in these issues regularly, and we believed it would be useful to have a forum to pass on information to organizations that may lack the staff and resources to participate in policy discussions," said Kim Greenwood, VNRC's water program director.

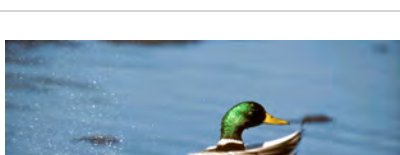
One of the goals of the Caucus is to present enough information to member organizations for them to be able to choose whether or not they want to engage in policy discussions, and if they do, how they can do so.

The mission of the Caucus is to better involve the environmental community in the development and implementation of sound water policy and legislation in Vermont. The Caucus will bring relevant information to watershed organizations and other interested parties to help them engage on these issues in a constructive, efficient and effective manner.

For more information, contact Kim Greenwood at kgreenwood@vnrc.org or (802) 223-2328 ext 119.

VERMONT NEWS

Public Service Board, in Precedent-Setting Decision, Denies Biomass Electric Plant



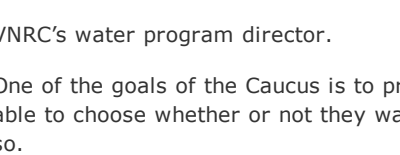
The Vermont Public Service board recently denied an application for the construction of a biomass-fueled electricity generating plant in North Springfield.

VNRC was actively involved in the case to ensure that the proposed project would safeguard forest health, use limited forest resources efficiently and not contribute to climate change. Among other things, the PSB recognized that the project, which would have used wood to generate mainly electricity rather than heat, would have burned 300,000 green tons of Vermont's wood in an inefficient manner. The Board was also troubled by amount of greenhouse gas emissions the plant would have produced on an annual basis, 448,714 tons of CO2 per year.

"This is a precedent-setting decision," said Jamey Fidel, VNRC's General Counsel. "Future applicants for biomass electricity generating plants will need to understand the greenhouse gas impacts of a proposed project and design it with a high enough level of thermal efficiency to offset those impacts."

[Read more about the decision>>](#)

Tar Sands Pipelines Getting Hot: Town Meeting Resolutions and Keystone Action Loom



There's lots of local, and national, tar sands pipeline action these days.

The concern over damaging tar sands continues to brew as pipeline companies look for ways to move tar sands oil from Alberta to seaside ports and refineries.

At this year's town meeting here in Vermont, voters in several Northeast Kingdom towns will be asked to express opposition to the pipeline transport of climate-killing tar sands oil through the state. Also, at the national level, the federal government is on the brink of deciding whether or not to approve the Keystone XL pipeline that would run down the middle of the United States.

Last year, 29 Vermont towns passed resolutions saying no to transporting the substance through the state. This year, with the help of organizations like 350 Vermont, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club and others, [at least a dozen more towns are mobilizing in opposition](#).

The resolutions call on the governor, the Legislature, and the U.S. State Department to ensure thorough environmental impact reviews of any tar sands related proposals.

Nationally, the game-changing decision on the most high profile and contentious tar sands issue in the U.S. to date — Keystone XL — is imminent. The U.S. State Department is taking comments (see link below) on the proposal until March 7.

"This is a critical moment in history," said Johanna Miller, VNRC's energy and climate action program director. "Will the U.S. get serious and do what it can to slow or stop climate change or will we remain complicit in the rampant use of fossil fuels — despite the havoc they are wreaking on our planet?"

[Learn more about the issue>>](#)

[Comment on Keystone>>](#)

When it Comes to Solar Energy Employment per Capita, Vermont is Shining



Last week, The Solar Foundation named Vermont number 1 in the nation for solar jobs per capita.

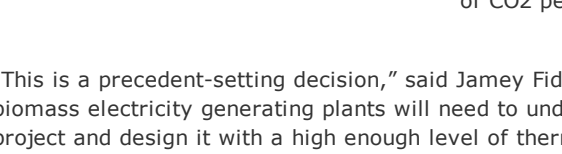
According to The Solar Foundation, Vermont has 1,300 solar jobs, up from just over 300 last year. The state is 27th overall in the total number of solar jobs.

Part of the reason the number of solar jobs has grown so fast in Vermont is the state's successful net metering program, which allows homeowners to generate their own power — generally by having solar panels installed on their property — and send excess electricity out onto the grid.

Late last month the Vermont House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in favor of continuing to maintain and expand Vermont's successful program. Now, the bill is in the Senate.

"We hope this important bill moves swiftly through the Senate so that Vermont can continue to grow this important program," said Johanna Miller, VNRC's energy and climate action program director.

New Report from Vermonter for a Sustainable Population Spurs Conversation

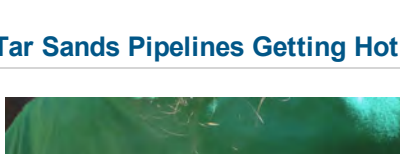


A new report from [Vermonter for a Sustainable Population](#) has been receiving attention and was recently featured on [VPR's Vermont Edition](#).

The report, "What is an Optimum/Sustainable Population for Vermont," offers "optimal/sustainable" population numbers for Vermont in more than a dozen categories, including biodiversity, forest cover, greenhouse gas emissions, scenic beauty and spiritual connectedness. The optimal population numbers average out to 494,210. The state's current estimated population, according to the US Census Bureau, is 626,630.

"People will likely disagree over the conclusions of the report," said Brian Shupe, VNRC's executive director, "but it raises important questions about Vermont's ability to grow and still retain its unique character and environmental well-being."

Training Program for Landscape Stewards set for This Spring

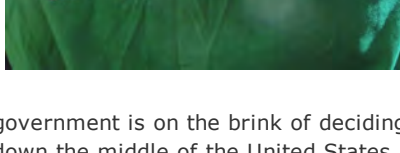


Lake Champlain Sea Grant (LCSG) is now taking registrations for its Sustainable Landscape Steward Training Program set for this spring. The course is designed for municipal staff, conservation commission members, watershed group employees and board members, Master Gardeners, SOUL Stewards and members of the public. It will cover the science and policy of watershed management, the impacts of stormwater and the role of "green infrastructure" and "low impact design." The class, which meets nine times throughout the spring and takes place in classroom and field settings, is approved for 3.6 continuing education credits from UVM's Office of Continuing Education. Course cost, including books, is \$136.

[Register here](#) or email Becky Tharp at LCSG: rtharp@uvm.edu

UPCOMING EVENTS

Come to Duxbury's Eighth Annual LEAP Energy Fair - Saturday, April 5



This year's Local Energy Action Partnership (LEAP) Energy Fair will take place on Saturday, April 5 from 9 am to 3 pm at the Crossett Brook Middle School gym in Duxbury. This family-friendly event, one of the largest and most popular energy fairs in Vermont, is free.

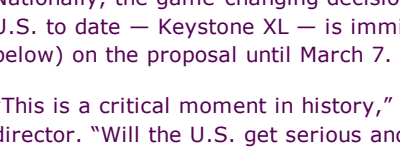
Tour more than 70 exhibits and talk with experts about solar power, energy incentives, energy audits, weatherization, green building, geothermal, biomass, pellet stoves, and many other subjects. Featured exhibits will highlight energy projects by local students, and the Waterbury Farmer's Market will set up shop on-site so you can get local food and refreshments while learning how to cut your energy bills, and savings, and help the environment.

The Fair will include breakout sessions with local experts on important topics including:

- 10 am - Energy Efficiency 101 – Top ways to Save energy and money
- 11 am - Going Solar – What are my options, and how do I decide?
- 12 noon - Sustainable Transportation – Vanpools, carpools, electric vehicles, and more!
- 1 pm - Heat Pumps – A powerful way to save energy and money

[Waterbury LEAP](#) is a volunteer-run nonprofit working to help Waterbury become the greenest community in Vermont by 2020. For more information contact Ned at 244-7829 or hesplanning@aol.com.

Solar Heat: A Clean, Cost-Saving Solution - Information Session February 25



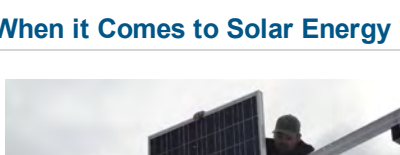
Money-saving heat pumps, especially paired with solar power, offer an exciting opportunity to marry clean energy goals with cost-saving solutions. Most Vermonters spend about twice as much on heating as they spend on electricity. Not only are heating bills high, but heating our homes with oil, propane, or natural gas contributes significantly to Vermont's greenhouse gas pollution.

Combining solar power with heat pumps allows Vermonters to heat (and cool) our homes comfortably, cleanly, and efficiently. Switching to solar heat can reduce a home's use of traditional heating fuels by as much as 80% and can cut heating bills by half.

[Quoted text hidden]

NATIONAL NEWS

Vermont's Congressional Delegation Super Green, Compared to Colleagues



The 2013 National League of Conservation Voters recently released its [2013 National Environmental Scorecard](#), and Vermont's delegation gets high marks.

The 2013 Scorecard covers votes during the first session of the 113th Congress. It includes 13 Senate votes and 28 House votes on issues ranging from public health protections to clean energy to land and wildlife conservation. It comes on the heels of another record-breaking year of climate change impacts.

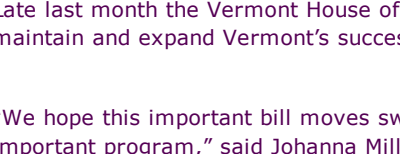
"It was another year of extreme attacks on our environment from far too many in Congress, but Sens. Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders as well as Rep. Peter Welch all stand out for putting Vermont values first," said Brian Shupe, Vermont Conservation Voters' executive director.

In Vermont, Sens. Leahy and Sanders each scored 100 percent; Rep. Welch scored 93 percent.

Nationwide, the average Senate score was 58 percent and average House score was 43 percent.

"There is a jarring disconnect between the frightening climate change developments of 2013 and the results of the 2013 National Environmental Scorecard," said LCV President Gene Karpinski. "Together with our allies in the Senate, the Obama Administration was able to defend against the worst attacks on our environment and protect public health."

Clear Winter Roads are Good for Drivers, but Tough on Critters and Water

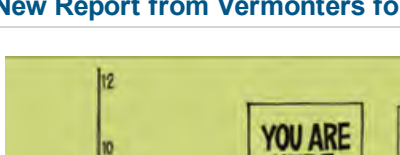


Road salt can pollute drinking water, can have a negative impact on the survival of crustaceans, amphibians, fish, and plants, and can reduce water circulation in lakes and ponds, [according to a recent article on Smithsonian.com](#).

It's estimated that nationally, road crews spread about 22 million tons of road salt annually, about 137 pounds for every American.

Sugarcane and cheese brine have been tried in certain places to cut down on the amount of chloride used.

New Survey of Entrepreneurs: It's About Quality of Life, Not Low Taxes



Quality of life is a major factor entrepreneurs consider when deciding where to create jobs, according to [a new survey](#) of founders of some of the country's fastest-growing companies suggests.

The 150 executives surveyed by Endeavor Insight, a research firm that examines how entrepreneurs contribute to job creation and long-term economic growth, said a skilled workforce and high quality of life were the main reasons why they founded their companies where they did; taxes weren't a significant factor.

The survey found that thirty one percent of founders cited access to talent as a factor in their decision on where to launch their company and cited a link between the ability to attract talented employees and a city's quality of life and only five percent cited low tax rates as a factor in their decision on where to launch their company and only 2% mentioned "business-friendly regulations" and other government policies.

"Vermont has a quality of life – walkable communities, working farms and forests, a real sense of community – that is truly remarkable, and this survey suggests these are very important assets in terms of job creation," said Kate McCarthy, VNRC's sustainable communities program director.

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VNRC's Mission

Through research, education, collaboration and advocacy, VNRC protects and enhances Vermont's natural environments, vibrant communities, productive working landscapes, rural character and unique sense of place, and prepares the state for future challenges and opportunities.