

November 27, 2017

Michael Snyder
Commissioner, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation
Chair, Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2
Montpelier, VT 05620-3801

Dear Commissioner Snyder,

As members of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition and Vermont Forest Roundtable, we applaud Governor Scott's creation of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative and its emphasis on engaging diverse stakeholders across the state. We agree wholeheartedly about the importance of the connection between outdoor recreation and Vermont's economy, and the need to focus additional attention on it.

We are writing to offer our input as organizations representing the voices of landowners, foresters, conservationists, and affordable housing activists. Together, our memberships and partnerships include tens of thousands of individuals statewide.

The protection and the health of our forests, farms and waters are vital to maintaining high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities. These experiences are in turn critical for our tourism and recreation economy, quality of life, and the well-being of Vermonters.

It is important to connect the dots -- safeguarding our natural infrastructure of healthy lands and waters through strategic conservation AND long-term stewardship of these assets is fundamental to Vermont's future.

We ask that VOREC include the following recommendations in its report to Governor Scott:

- Commit to fully funding the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board at the levels established in state statute on an annual basis.
- Expand education and outreach to private forest landowners on ways to keep their land intact and accessible for recreation opportunities. As examples, expand education about voluntary land conservation options and existing landowner liability protection laws that address public access on private lands.
- Support the creation of affordable workforce housing for employees in the outdoor recreation sector. Such housing should be located reasonably close to related job opportunities and sited in a way that sustains landscape quality for recreation and other values.
- Bolster job creation by looking for mechanisms (e.g., financial and tax incentives, marketing, models from other states, etc.) to strengthen existing Vermont businesses and attract new ones that are tied to outdoor recreation, or that rely on Vermont's landscape and outdoor recreation opportunities to attract and retain employees.
- Help to ensure that Act 250 and other land use tools provide sound protection for Vermont's forests, agricultural lands, and waters. Review how trails are regulated under Act 250 to determine if the State can improve the review process for landowners who provide access or may be affected by trails, entities that develop and maintain trails, and other stakeholders, while protecting natural resources.

- Provide a sustainable, long-term funding source to address Vermont’s water quality challenges.
- Consider establishing incentives in the current use (Use Value Appraisal) program that encourage landowners to allow public access and recreational trails and to pursue permanent land conservation.
- Assess the degree to which all Vermonters have safe and local access to high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities and open space. Identify gaps in local recreation opportunities, and invest in facilities and staffing to address them.
- Support strategic public land acquisitions for recreation and conservation from willing sellers by local, State, and federal agencies.
- Stewardship of our public lands and trail networks is essential and needs greater investment of public and private dollars. Consider new ways to fund conservation and stewardship.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to this important effort. If you have questions or would like to discuss any of our recommendations, please feel free to contact Phil Huffman with The Nature Conservancy in Vermont at phuffman@tnc.org or (802) 229-4425 x109.

We look forward to seeing the Steering Committee’s report and collaborating on implementation.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

Addison County Community Trust	Lyme Timber Company
Audubon Vermont	Northern Rivers Land Trust
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers	Putney Mountain Association
Catamount Trail Association	Richmond Land Trust
Cathedral Square	Stowe Land Trust
Champlain Housing Trust	The Nature Conservancy in Vermont
Cold Hollow to Canada	Trust for Public Land
Cross Vermont Trail Association	Vermont Chapter of the Sierra Club
Downstreet Housing & Community Development	Vermont Conservation Voters
Greensboro Land Trust	Vermont Land Trust
Hinesburg Land Trust	Vermont Natural Resources Council
Housing Vermont	Wildlife Management Institute

Individuals:

Senator Alison H. Clarkson, Woodstock (Member, Senate Economic Development Committee, and Chair, Billings Park Commission)
 Georgie Heller, Putney
 Matthew Hoffman, Dummerston
 Hugo Liepmann, Middlesex

cc: Secretary Julie Moore, Commissioner Louis Porter, Jessica Savage