

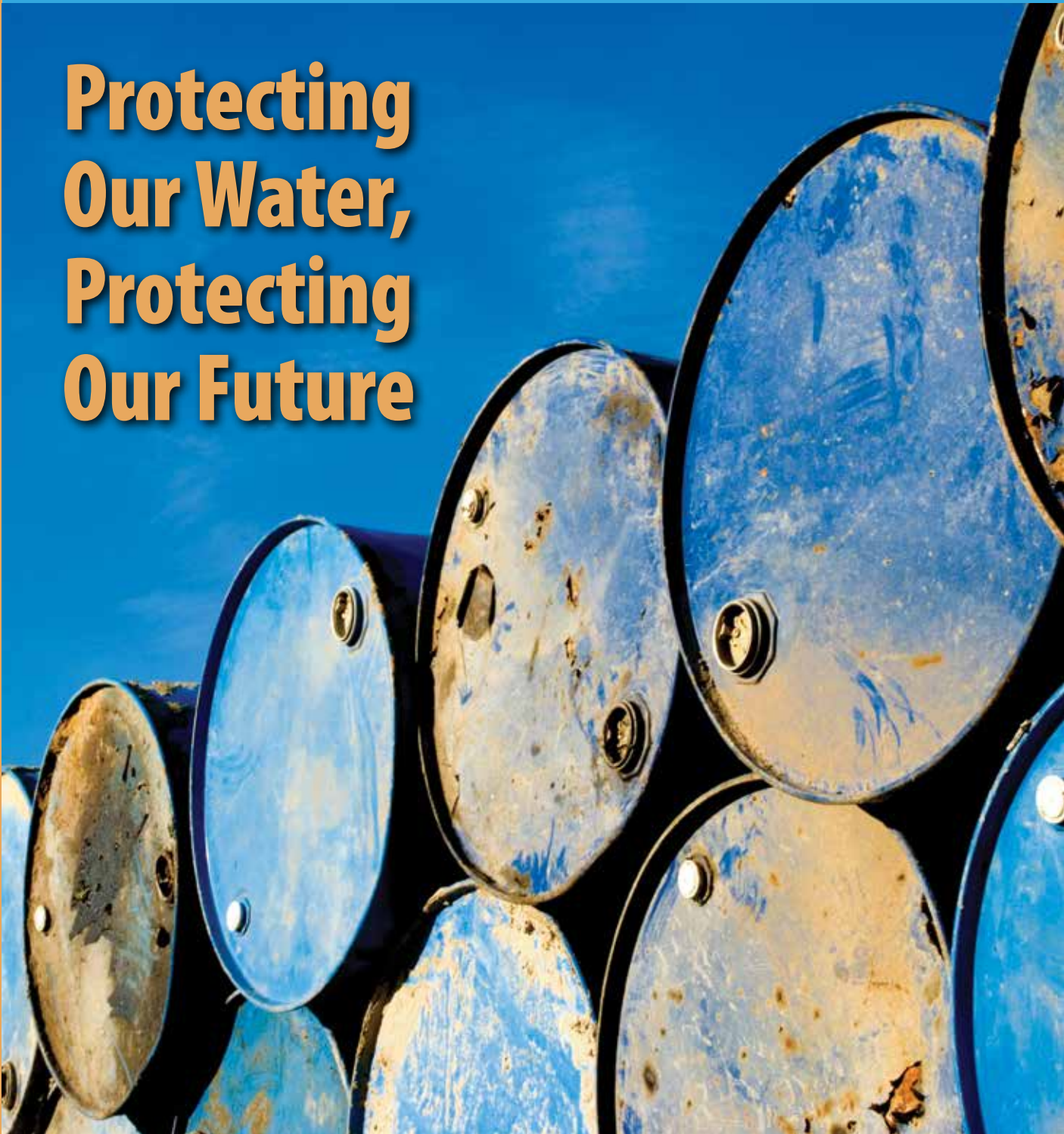
VNRC

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Resources  
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# Vermont

## Environmental Report

**Protecting  
Our Water,  
Protecting  
Our Future**



Fall  
2017

# Ensuring a Strong Future: Support VNRC with a Planned Gift



Tim Newcomb

By Bill Roper, VNRC board member

I started practicing environmental law in Vermont in 1983 and VNRC's name quickly came up. I was so impressed by their work that I joined the Board in the mid-90's, eventually becoming chair, only to step down to help them lead the fight against the scattered, "in-the-middle-of-a-corn-field," big box development proposed by Wal-Mart in St. Albans. I rejoined the Board six years ago to help facilitate the successful merger of Smart Growth VT into VNRC. I have watched and supported this leading, courageous and balanced organization for more than 30 years. The high quality, dedicated staff and executive directors have ensured Vermont retains its high quality of life predicated on sound planning and resource management. Without VNRC, Vermont could easily look like Anywhere USA, and I believe the population and development pressures will continue to grow



Bill Roper

with global warming. A strong and enduring VNRC is essential to Vermont's unique development, conservation, and way of life – and this is why I will support VNRC even after I'm gone.

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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.

VNRC is the Vermont affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

**VNRC membership includes a subscription to the Vermont Environmental Report magazine. Join VNRC in protecting Vermont with your membership of \$40.**

**Local Leadership**

*By Brian Shupe, Executive Director*



**W**e're all familiar with the old adage: think globally and act locally. Though the saying has become a cliché, the essence behind it is powerfully relevant to today's troubled times.

It is increasingly clear that Vermont's communities can no longer rely on the federal government to prioritize the health and safety of Vermonters. The Trump administration's war on the environment is rolling along unabated, especially within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the disastrous leadership of current Administrator Scott Pruitt.

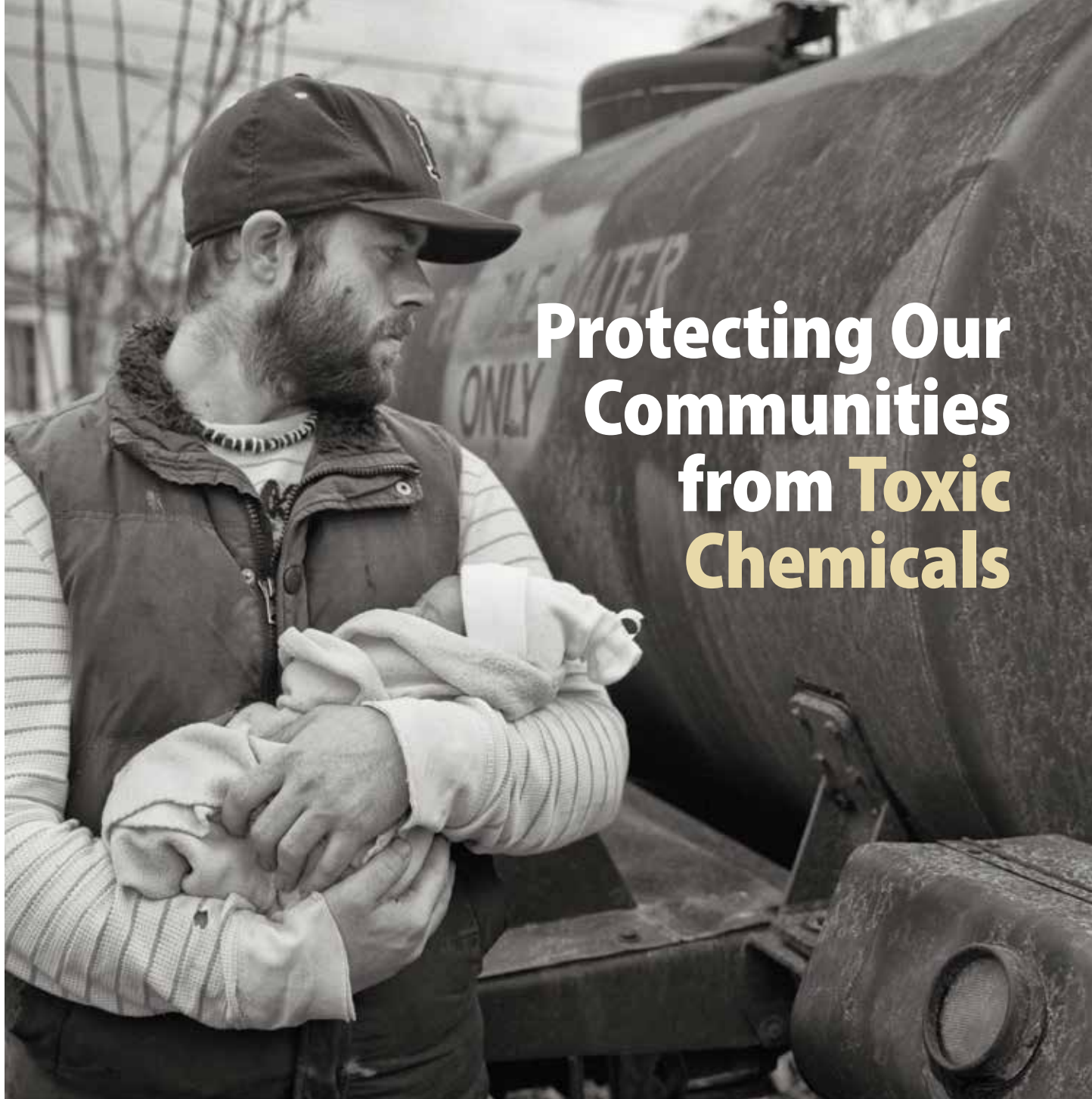
Pruitt, who unabashedly denies that burning fossil fuels and the associated emission of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere is causing climate change, has already rolled back several policies designed to protect public health and the environment. To date, Pruitt has:

- Proposed slashing the EPA's budget by 31 percent – a greater cut than is faced by any other federal agency. If enacted, these cuts would dramatically reduce protections against pollutants such as mercury, lead, smog, and carbon pollution; undermine enforcement of the Clean Air and Clean Water acts; and reduce cleanup of toxic waste sites. The impact of such cuts would ripple through Vermont, and have a devastating impact on our outdoor recreation and tourism industry – not to mention the health and well-being of our communities.
- Abandoned the Clean Power Plan designed to reduce the nation's carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants.
- Indicated his intent to reconsider the Mercury and Air Toxics Rule, which reduce dangerous neurotoxins that harm children's brain development.
- Aggressively – and successfully – lobbied the White House to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement.
- Reversed the Water of the United States rule, adopted by the Obama administration to clarify a provision of the Clean Water Act to better protect the drinking water supplies of over 100 million Americans.
- Denied a petition to ban the pesticide chlorpyrifos, despite the EPA's own analysis which found widespread risk to children from residues on food, in drinking water, and in the air surrounding agricultural communities.

Unfortunately, this is an incomplete – and growing – list of shameless actions that sacrifice the health of American citizens and the quality of our air, water, and soils to increase the profits of many of the nation's most egregious corporate polluters. Americans need to fight back, and we in Vermont need to take matters into our own hands to protect our shared interests in a clean, healthy environment.

This issue of the *VER* explores some of the state actions needed to safeguard Vermonters from the contamination of our drinking water, food supplies, and consumer goods from toxic chemicals.

Toxic chemical pollution is a global problem, and we are acting locally to address it. VNRC is committed to working with our partners and all Vermonters to create a future that is healthy, thriving, and balanced. Thank you for your support in this work, and all of our work. Together, we will realize a healthy, thriving Vermont for generations to come.



Peter Cahbrece

# Protecting Our Communities from Toxic Chemicals

Since our founding in 1963, VNRC has worked to safeguard the health of Vermont communities, ecosystems, and natural resources. We build coalitions, work with community members, and offer common sense solutions – and protecting Vermont families from harmful chemicals is common sense. However, understanding the many ways people are exposed to toxic chemicals, and then reducing their exposure, can be very challenging. Given the degree of difficulty and the scale of the problem, it should come as no surprise that the regulation of hazardous toxics has been a focus of the modern American environmental movement.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s toxic chemicals captured our attention in vivid ways. Rachel Carson's iconic 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, forced us to imagine a world in which songbirds no longer sang due to the use of DDT and other industrial

chemicals. As communities across the nation grappled with how toxic chemicals shape our world and impact our health, Lois Gibbs, a mother in Love Canal, NY started knocking on her neighbors' doors and asking: is your child sick too? It soon came to light that Gibbs's small, working-class community was battling disproportionately high rates of illness and rare childhood cancers because their homes and schools were sited atop 21,000 tons of toxic industrial waste.

In the wake of Love Canal, communities and lawmakers were confronted with a question that demanded action: What kind of world do we wish to live in? And does that world include the songs of wild birds, clean water, and healthy communities?

People across the country answered the question loud and clear: The world they wanted was one where toxic chemicals can not damage the health and wellbeing of people and our

environment. The events described above were flashpoints that brought to bear the critical need for hazardous chemical regulation – because we were living the deadly consequences of having none.

At the national level, federal regulations such as the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) of 1976, and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA, also known as Superfund) of 1980, were enacted by the U.S. Congress to regulate the introduction of new and existing chemicals, to create a framework for the proper management of hazardous and non-hazardous solid wastes, and to identify and mitigate sites where hazardous materials threaten the health of communities or the environment.

These laws were a major step forward as the United States began to develop toxic chemical regulations. Over time, however, the success of these laws has been hampered by the incredible prevalence of toxic chemicals in our environment and the influence of industry on how programs and policies were implemented. From the start, we adopted a legal framework that assumes chemicals are safe to enter the market until they are found to be dangerous. As a result, it is extremely difficult to legally ban a toxic chemical from being used in the United States and we continue to see a proliferation of industrial chemicals introduced into communities. For more on the challenges and ongoing opportunities of toxic chemical regulation, see VNRC Policy and Water Program Director Jon Groveman's *Protecting the Tap* on page 5.

## Common Sense Solutions

Vermont has long recognized the gaps in protections for our families from toxic chemicals. State officials have been national leaders in regulating the use of several toxic substances, including lead, mercury, phthalates, BPA, and certain flame retardants. However, with tens of thousands of chemicals on the market, Vermonters remain vulnerable to toxic chemical exposure.

In the winter of 2016, this problem became all too clear when Bennington residents learned the water they had been drinking, bathing their children in, watering their gardens with, filling their swimming pools with, and cooking with had been contaminated for years with the toxic chemical perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

Used to make a variety of products, including Teflon, PFOA persists in our environment for decades and studies have linked PFOA exposure to certain cancers, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and other health problems. Since the PFOA-contaminated water was discovered, additional testing has uncovered contaminated water in the drinking water supplies of several communities in the Bennington area as well as six other parts of the state.

“While visiting Bennington, I talked with a woman whose property was found to have a contaminated well,” noted Jon Groveman, VNRC’s policy and water program director, as he recounted the impact of PFOA contamination on Vermont communities. “Seeing how the stress of having her well tested, learning her water was contaminated, and then finding out she had health problems correlated to PFOA exposure really hit



Peter Cabree

*Pownal, VT resident forced to use bottled water after PFOA contamination of drinking water.*

home – stories like hers motivate me to keep fighting for the health and wellbeing of all Vermonters.”

The PFOA contamination brought to light the inadequacies of our hazardous chemical regulations given the broad range of industrial chemicals we are exposed to on a daily basis. In response, VNRC and our partners worked with legislators to take swift action and pass Act 154. This law established a Chemical Use Working Group to identify where chemical regulations are failing us and what we can do to better protect Vermonters. VNRC and Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) were at that table and helped lay out a series of recommendations to improve protections for our drinking water and to ensure the products in our homes are safe for our children.

The Vermont Senate acted on several of those recommendations, requiring the testing of new drinking water wells for certain toxic contaminants and creating an interagency committee to better coordinate among the numerous agencies that regulate hazardous and toxic chemicals. The Vermont House then strengthened that work by passing improvements to Act 188, or the Toxic Free Families Act. These Act 188 improvements would help ensure Vermont’s existing Chemicals of High Concern in Children’s Products program can work as intended by allowing the Commissioner of Health to take action to ensure products such as baby bottles do not have hidden toxic chemicals in them. The changes made by the House must be approved by the Senate and signed by the Governor in order to become law. The Senate will take up the improvements, S.103, during the next session. It will be

important for lawmakers to hear from you about your support for S.103. To learn more about Act 188 and next steps, read VCV Political Director Lauren Hierl's *Is Vermont Up to the Challenge?* on page 6.

"Looking ahead to 2018, we have important work to be done to pass S.103, a vital step in toxic chemical regulations," notes VNRC's Executive Director Brian Shupe. "I look forward to working with legislators, businesses, nonprofit partners, and our members to pass this crucial legislation."

S.103, however, is only a first step in Vermont's effort to protect communities from toxic chemicals. The Act 154 Chemical Use Working Group recommended seven actions to address the gaps in Vermont's laws regulating toxic substances including improving public access to information about toxics in our communities, reducing the use of toxics in Vermont, comprehensively testing drinking water wells at risk for toxic contamination, ensuring that Vermonters have adequate legal remedies to protect themselves from toxic contamination, expanding the chemicals regulated in Act 188, and banning certain products that contain PFOA from being sold in Vermont. Groveman said, "We must pass S.103 and then turn our attention to the other recommendations in the Act 154 report if Vermont is serious about addressing the threat posed by toxic chemicals."

Martin Wolf, director of sustainability and authenticity at Seventh Generation, added that VNRC plays a pivotal role in giving testimony, supporting partners, and convening community conversations. "Working with VNRC and VCV to protect Vermonters from toxic chemicals has been great," he emphasized. "Their agenda is clear, their objectives are to protect our health and the environment, and they get important pieces of legislation in front of lawmakers."

## Taking Action in Vermont

It's hard to argue that cleaning up toxic chemicals that harm the health of our communities is anything but common sense. There is no debate: harmful chemicals are hurting Vermonters, our families, and our environment. And yet, we have seen decades of challenges when crafting, passing, and implementing legislation that regulates chemical use in the U.S. – regardless of the administration setting the direction for federal agencies and their local impact. In Vermont, the PFOA contamination served as a catalyst for action – but at the cost of tragedy first.

"Companies don't want to disclose the toxicants in their products," noted Wolf. "They fight tooth and nail to prevent state-by-state legislation that regulates consumer products – even though



Mike Dougherty/VT Digger

they might know which chemicals are being used where. Disclosing that information to the public would mean they would have to change their practices."

Similarly, Groveman noted that while the state-by-state approach to regulating toxic chemicals is not as effective as federal action, "Now, more than ever, we know we cannot count on the federal government to make the health of our citizens and environment a priority."

Lauren Hierl, VCV's political director agreed saying, "The Trump administration has stacked the EPA, the agency in charge of regulating toxic chemicals, with appointees who

have a long track record of putting corporate profits over public health. Nancy Beck, for example, recently became the Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Toxics Office at the EPA, but was previously at the American Chemical Council (ACC) – the lobbying arm of chemical manufacturers. Even in Vermont, we've seen the chemical industry and its allies use underhanded tactics like robo-calls spreading misinformation, and we're very concerned that the federal Agency tasked with protecting our environment and public health is being run by people who prioritize corporate profits over communities."

## New Era – Same Question

As a country, we may have forgotten what it was to live at a time when neighborhoods could be sited on top of hazardous waste dumps. But toxic chemicals are no less present in our lives. They continue to seep into our drinking water and



Tim Newcomb

enter via products we bring into our homes, making an impact family by family, one town at a time.

In Vermont, the stories of Bennington residents bring home an important lesson: keeping toxic chemicals and pollutants at bay through stronger policies is challenging because the companies profiting off their use have deep pockets and political sway, but better protections are clearly needed to safeguard our communities. When regulations are weakened or abandoned, we pay the price with our health and the health of our children.

As we look toward the next era of environmentalism in America and Vermont, we are confronted with the same question as those who came before us: What kind of world do we wish to live in? And does that world



Mike Dougherty/VT Digger

include harmful, unregulated toxic chemicals?

VNRC is working to improve the oversight of how toxic chemicals are used in industrial processes in the state, ensure that Vermonters are informed about the use of such substances in our communities, and provide meaningful accountability for citizens when government fails to take their responsibility to protect the public seriously. We're out in communities, providing technical assistance, representing your interests at the statehouse, and working behind the scenes through litigation and collaboration to ensure that the health of all Vermonters, and the environment in which we all live, is at the forefront of decision-making in our state.

*Contaminated well in Bennington*

## Protecting the Tap

By Jon Groveman, Policy & Water Program Director

The lead contamination of water in Flint, Michigan, and PFOA contamination near Bennington, Vermont has brought to the forefront the fact that contamination of drinking water by toxic chemicals remains a serious problem in Vermont and across the country.

Despite the adoption of several federal laws in the 1970s designed to reduce the impacts of toxic chemicals on the environment, none of these laws were designed specifically to address the risk of toxic pollutants to drinking water supplies.

The gap in federal law has left the states to do their best to address the toxic contamination of drinking water supplies, with mixed results. Beyond lead and PFOA contamination, groundwater and private wells in New England have been found contaminated with the gasoline additive MTBE. In Iowa, Ohio, and Indiana, public water supplies in large cities have been contaminated by the pesticide atrazine. Right here in Vermont, we've seen private wells contaminated by the pesticide atrazine, and groundwater contaminated by the chemical TCE, a chemical that was commonly used in dry-cleaning facilities.

VNRC has been working to address the protection of groundwater and drinking water in Vermont for years. In 2008, as a result of VNRC's two-year push, the Vermont Legislature enacted Act 199, which made it clear that groundwater is a public trust resource that cannot be owned by a private entity. As such, the State of Vermont has an obligation to manage groundwater to benefit all Vermonters.

The protection of private drinking water supplies is



A. Blake Gardner

*Vermonters shouldn't have to worry about the safety of their drinking water. VNRC works to protect Vermont water resources from toxic chemicals.*

particularly important in rural states like ours where 40 percent of Vermonters get their drinking water from private wells or springs. Public water supplies are subject to regular monitoring and testing. Accordingly, there is an opportunity for toxic contamination of public water supplies to be discovered. However, there is no required testing for private water supplies, and testing that is typically done by well owners are for contaminants like pathogens (e.g., E. coli), and not toxic chemicals. This is why situations like the PFOA contamination in Bennington could go undetected for decades.

S.103, a bill awaiting action in the Vermont Senate, would take a small but important step to addressing toxic contamination of private wells by requiring that all new private wells be tested for certain toxic chemicals. However, much more must be done to address this issue. VNRC will advocate vigorously for a comprehensive program to test any well, new or existing, where there is a high risk of toxic contamination. Moreover, we believe a fund should be established to enable Vermonters or the Department of Health to test wells where a risk of contamination has been identified.

It is vital that we continue to shine a light on and address the threats to our water supplies posed by toxic chemicals. No Vermonter should have to worry that their drinking water contains substances linked to cancers and other diseases, nor should they ever be exposed to the type of harm that can come from this toxic chemical exposure.

# Is Vermont Up to the Challenge?

By Lauren Hierl, Vermont Conservation Voters Policy Director

Ever wonder what hidden chemicals might be in our children's products? With headlines in the *New York Times* this summer including "The Chemicals in Your Mac and Cheese"<sup>1</sup> and "The Womb is No Protection from Toxic Chemicals"<sup>2</sup> it's understandable if you're concerned, and perhaps a bit overwhelmed.

Right now, it's hard to figure out what chemicals are in many household products – let alone whether those chemicals are safe. And with the federal government failing to regulate even well-studied toxins, it has been up to states to fill the void.

That's why the Vermont Natural Resources Council and allies including Vermont Conservation Voters, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, Toxics Action Center, Seventh Generation, and others joined together to push for comprehensive chemical reform.

We worked with our champions in the Vermont Legislature to help pass Act 188, which set up a program to:

1. Identify a list of chemicals of high concern to children.
2. Require companies to report if they use those toxic chemicals in children's products they sell in Vermont.
3. Establish a process for the Commissioner of Health to restrict the use of harmful chemicals to better protect children's health.

Passing Act 188 was a first step. Now we are working to ensure this program works as intended to protect Vermont children from harmful chemicals by identifying a series of improvements. Several of our recommendations are incorporated in a bill pending before the legislature (S.103). That bill would ensure companies are providing user-friendly data on any chemicals of high concern they're using in children's products on store shelves in Vermont. The bill also strengthens



the ability of the Commissioner of Health to take action to get toxic chemicals out of children's products.

Beyond S.103, we will push to expand the program to cover products in addition to those "marketed to children," which is the current scope of the program. For example, children eat food cooked on our pots and pans, sit on our furniture, and crawl around on our carpets – none of which are products covered under the existing program. Further, while a child is still in their mother's womb, they are the most vulnerable of all to the impacts of chemicals, so our program should better protect pregnant women from exposure to harmful chemicals.

Ultimately, people shouldn't have to shop around toxic products on our store shelves, nor should they need a degree in toxicology to know whether products are safe. Vermont can and must continue to lead the way to develop and implement policies to phase out the use of dangerous chemicals from household products, resulting in healthier homes and families.

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/12/well/eat/the-chemicals-in-your-mac-and-cheese.html>

2 [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/opinion/toxic-chemicals-pregnancy-fetus.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/opinion/toxic-chemicals-pregnancy-fetus.html?_r=0)



# News & Notes

## Farewell to Departing Board Members

At our 2017 annual meeting we will be honoring and bidding farewell to long-term board members Beth Humstone of Charlotte, Virginia Farley of Montpelier, Judy Greer of Morristown, Gerry Tarrant of Montpelier, and Bill Roper of Weybridge. “VNRC is deeply grateful for the work of all of our board members,” said Brian Shupe, VNRC Executive Director. “Beth, Bill, Gerry, Judy, and Virginia will be deeply missed but we look forward to their continued support and hope to see them at many future VNRC events and gatherings.” Special thanks to Beth Humstone, current board chair, for her service in that leadership capacity.

## A Sad but Fond Farewell – Thank You, Keil!

In September 2012, VNRC was pleased to hire Keil Corey as our second AmeriCorps member to support our efforts on energy and climate change issues. After serving as our AmeriCorps member for two years, Keil accepted a more permanent position at VNRC as our Membership and Outreach Coordinator, and finally over the past year, served as our Communications Coordinator. Keil’s tireless efforts and boundless enthusiasm were integral on a number of issues over the years. We all wish Keil well as he starts his Masters in Leadership for Sustainability program at UVM.



*Keil Corey*

## Welcome Amber Collett to the VNRC Team

This past summer we were thrilled to welcome Amber Collett as our Communications & Community Relations Director. A communicator, coalition builder, organizer, and community engagement specialist, Amber has more than a decade of experience working with nonprofits across the country on a range of issues such as transportation, land and water use, healthy communities, and wilderness/wildlife initiatives. Prior to attending graduate school at Yale, she helped launch and grow a Minnesota-based communications consulting firm where she worked with major foundations, government agencies, nonprofits, and small businesses to help them do their good work even better. An avid cyclist and runner, we know she’ll fit right in at VNRC and in Vermont. Welcome, Amber!



*Amber Collett*

## VNRC AmeriCorps Members – a Goodbye and a Hello

Ian Hitchcock will join VNRC and VECAN as our AmeriCorps Community Energy and Climate Action Coordinator. This summer Ian has been canvassing for VPIRG, and he previously interned at Renewable Energy Vermont and Senator Sanders’s office. Ian will take over for Katie Emerson,

who previously served as the VECAN Coordinator. “We wish Katie the very best, and can’t thank her enough for her help this past year as we worked to make progress on energy efficiency and clean energy goals with our community partners,” said Johanna Miller, VNRC energy and climate action program director. Thanks, Katie – and welcome, Ian!

## From Research to Resources: Legal Interns at VNRC

Each year VNRC staff are excited to welcome legal interns to our office. While at VNRC, legal interns work on a variety of fronts – from conducting research on key initiatives, to drafting memos, and revamping toolkits or resources. Many thanks to our 2017 interns, Samantha Longo and Laura Savall, both attending Vermont Law School, for their hard work over the past few months. Longo, the VNRC Mollie Beattie intern, said, “Working at VNRC this summer has helped me better understand the role of a statewide nonprofit, and the importance of community engagement in making a difference.”



Amber Collett

*Legal interns Samantha Longo, left, and Laura Savall*

## VCV Highlights Work on Toxic Chemicals with Legislative Leaders from Across the Country

In August, Vermont Conservation Voters was invited to present to the National Council of Environmental Legislators in Boston, where VCV shared our experiences with Vermont’s response to PFOA contamination of drinking water, as well as our nation-leading program to protect kids from harmful chemicals in children’s products sold in Vermont. During the next session and beyond, we look forward to working with state and national leaders to address the extensive work that remains to be done to better protect people and our environment from dangerous chemicals. Read more about VCV’s work at: [vermontconservationvoters.org](http://vermontconservationvoters.org).

# Program Updates

Below is a brief rundown of VNRC's programs, a few recent highlights of our work, and program director contact information.

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAM

*Works to advance conservation, efficiency, renewable energy, and transportation solutions that reduce fossil fuel usage and save Vermonters money.*

- Appointed to serve on Governor Scott's new Vermont Climate Action Commission, which is charged with identifying concrete solutions Vermont must advance to achieve our comprehensive energy and greenhouse gas pollution reduction goals.
- Partnered with Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility to organize a series of discussions around Vermont this fall to highlight the economic opportunity in climate action for all Vermonters.
- Continued our close collaboration with partners in the Energy Independent Vermont coalition and others to identify and shape beneficial policies, such as carbon pricing and clean energy workforce development.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:  
Johanna Miller, [jmiller@vnrc.org](mailto:jmiller@vnrc.org)



## FOREST AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

*Works to maintain and enhance the ecological and economic vitality of Vermont's forests with the overarching goal of keeping forests as forests to maintain their overall integrity.*

- Supported efforts in the Vermont Legislature to strengthen Act 250 to minimize the fragmentation of priority forest blocks and wildlife connectivity areas. Through these efforts, H.233 passed the House last session and is awaiting action in the Senate.
- Conducted outreach in southern Vermont with partners from the Staying Connected Initiative to help towns maintain wildlife connectivity areas.
- Finished an online continuing education class for real estate agents to work with landowners to maintain and conserve forests.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:  
Jamey Fidel, [jfidel@vnrc.org](mailto:jfidel@vnrc.org)



## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

*Works to protect and promote Vermont's traditional development patterns of compact settlements – with options for transportation, housing, and employment – surrounded by farms, forests, and unique natural areas.*

- With Preservation Trust of Vermont, Conservation Law Foundation, and Exit 4 Open Space, raised one million dollars in just two months to purchase the last 22 acres of prime agricultural land at Exit 4 in Randolph. Currently seeking potential owners via a request for concepts.
- Presented successful Smart Growth Summit in partnership with AARP. Over 160 attendees learned about Vermont's smart growth accomplishments and opportunities.
- Collaborated with partners to create a statewide transportation coalition, Transportation for Vermonters, which will work across sectors to advocate for sustainable, accessible transportation.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:  
Kate McCarthy, [kmccarthy@vnrc.org](mailto:kmccarthy@vnrc.org)



## WATER PROGRAM

*Aims to protect and enhance the quality of Vermont's streams, rivers, lakes and ponds, wetlands, and groundwater.*

- Advocated to move legislation through the House limiting exposure to toxic chemicals, including a provision requiring that new wells drilled in Vermont be tested for certain toxins. The Senate will take up the House changes (S.103) in January 2018.
- Advocated for continued funding to clean up Vermont's waters. The Legislature provided two years of funding at approximately \$25 million a year. VNRC is actively working to establish long-term, stable funding.
- Petitioned for Class I reclassification for LaPlatte River Marsh wetlands, and continued to work on issues related to implementing the Vermont Clean Water Act of 2015 (Act 64).

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:  
Jon Groveman, [jgroveman@vnrc.org](mailto:jgroveman@vnrc.org)



# Member Profile

## VNRC Member Profile: A. Blake Gardner

VNRC's Amber Collett recently chatted with VNRC supporter and professional photographer, A. Blake Gardner of Westminster, about his photography and how he views Vermont's environment. For more than 25 years, Blake has generously donated hundreds of hours of his time, and thousands of his beautiful photographs to VNRC. He has climbed mountains, paddled rivers, traveled to off-the-beaten-track towns, and gone up in airplanes – all to capture the perfect shot for VNRC. The following is a condensed version of their conversation.

### *How did you get started in photography, and what brought you to Vermont?*

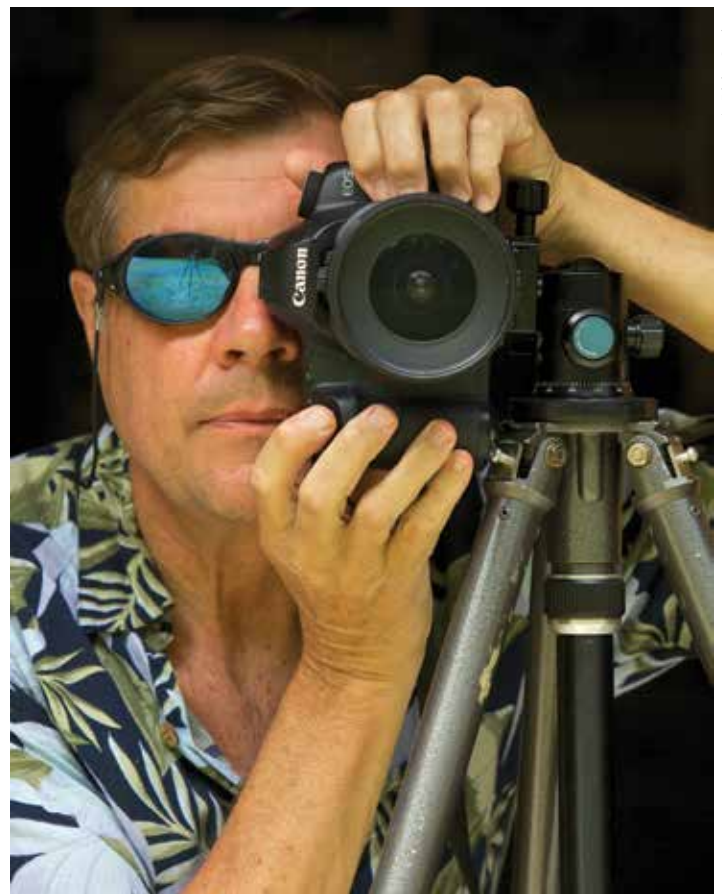
I started my career in 1979 while hitchhiking through Texas and in the mountains of SE Arizona. I was asked to help locate and document the nests of Western birds with Peterson Field Guides. I bought my first camera right after that experience! When I moved to Vermont in 1981, I fell in love with the ecological diversity here – be it the mountains, or the bogs, or the fields, or forests. The rural, small scale nature of the state is beautiful and it's a place where a creative person like me should be able to make a go of it and produce work I believe in.

### *How did you first get involved with VNRC?*

VNRC was instrumental in supporting my first book, *Untamed Vermont*. During that process, I became friends with the staff and came to realize the hard work that goes on behind the scenes to protect the ecosystems I photograph. Former Vermont Governor Madeleine Kunin once said, "What better gift to give our children, and our children's children, than clean water to drink, mountains to climb, and woods to walk through?" To the layman who isn't involved with advocacy, or all of the other work that VNRC does behind the scenes, this quote really says it all: this work is important, and it needs to be done.

### *Is there an issue VNRC works on that you're most passionate about?*

That's like asking me to pick my favorite ice cream flavor – there are too many! As a photographer, showing the beauty of nature is something I am inspired by, and something that I hope will inspire others to care about Vermont as well. I see VNRC doing that as well, and if my photographs can help, I'm proud to be a part of that work. Donating the



A. Blake Gardner

use of my photographs to VNRC is one way that I give back and help 'fight the good fight' to preserve the health and beauty of Vermont's nature.

### *What are your hopes for the future of Vermont? For VNRC?*

I hope we keep our small, rural character intact. It would be a good, lasting legacy for our state. A number of years ago, I took aerial photos for VNRC above the mountains in Stowe and I was aghast at the forest and habitat fragmentation I saw. There are good ways to develop, and there are bad ways, and I'm glad VNRC is paying attention. Personally, I have a 23-year-old son who just graduated from college and who would like to come back to Vermont. I hope that when or if he does, this state will be a place where he can make a home. We need high quality jobs, affordable communities, and smart growth to help make that happen. Big picture, I've worked all across the country and I'm always thrilled to come home to Vermont – and the work of VNRC to protect Vermont's natural areas is a big part of that. Keeping the land whole and healthy so people want to be here and start families, be creative, and invest in their communities is essential to Vermont's future. If my photographs can inspire others to care, to love, to visit, or to get involved, then I've done a good thing.

*To see some of Blake's work or to connect, visit:  
[www.ablakegardner.com](http://www.ablakegardner.com)*

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## Exit 4 Land Preserved – Thank You!

Thanks to the generosity of hundreds of Vermonters, one million dollars was raised to purchase 22 acres at Exit 4 in Randolph. This parcel was added to the 150 acres purchased by the Castanea Foundation, allowing for the preservation of a total of 172 acres of land. The land will be protected from development and put into agricultural use. This was a team effort. When the application for massive development was submitted, VNRC – in partnership with the Conservation Law Foundation – led the opposition in the Act 250 permitting process. Exit 4 Open Space rallied local support and provided a strong voice at the hearings. Preservation Trust of Vermont supported these efforts by funding expert witnesses and helping to raise public awareness around the state about the importance of this fight. It was a daunting task, but together, we saved this valuable farm and open land!



*VNRC staff and partners celebrating the conservation of land at Exit 4 in Randolph in July 2017.*

VNRC/CLF/Preservation Trust Vermont/Exit 4 Open Space

**Remember:**  
**VNRC is a membership organization and we count on members for support!**  
***Please join us!***

[vnrc.org](http://vnrc.org)