

# VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL <sup>Weber</sup>REPORT

Published monthly by EPIC, a project of the Vermont Natural Resources Council.  
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February, 1973, Number 13

## SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE ISSUE

### PROPOSED LAND ACQUISITION PLAN GIVES SHORELANDS HIGH PRIORITY

Shorelands have high priority under a proposed public land acquisition plan being considered by the Senate Natural Resources Committee. Lakes and ponds over 20 acres including Lake Champlain would get particular attention.

The plan, drafted by the Environmental Conservation Agency, calls for purchases of additional public land in four categories:

1. natural areas noted for scenic, ecological, geological or wilderness value;
2. areas providing access to other state land, especially bodies of water;
3. additions to existing holdings which would make them more usable;
4. new areas, especially for water recreation and in parts of Vermont in which there are few state-owned lands.

A \$5 million bond issue is proposed to fund the plan over a five-year period. Of this \$500,000 would go for natural areas, \$400,000 to improve access, and \$2 million each to new areas and rounding out existing areas.

Bills to purchase Spruce Mtn. and Plymbsbury are also before the legislature, but environmental officials are urging that the plan is a better approach than panic buying. Both areas might well fit in the category of rounding out existing holdings. The plan also requires, however, that the planning process be well-established in towns in which the state buys land. Two of the towns in which the Spruce Mountain tract is located do not now have any plans.

### LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION TELEPHONE SERVICE

The Vermont Natural Resources Council through its project EPIC has instituted a telephone information service on environmental legislation. For an up-to-the-minute status report on important legislation, call 223-2320. This information will serve as a useful adjunct to the legislative coverage contained in the report.

SPECIAL HOUSE COMMITTEE STUDIES  
CAPABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

By a 79-64 vote the House directed Speaker Walter L. Kennedy to create a special Committee on Natural Resources to review the proposed Land Capability and Development Plan. The move, Kennedy indicated, was aimed at speeding consideration of the document which has been rewritten into bill form. It had earlier been suggested that the plan be considered by as many as five individual House Committees.

The special committee is made up of two members from each of seven committees: Agriculture, Appropriations, Commerce, Government Operations, Judiciary, Natural Resources, and Ways and Means. The group has been instructed to submit its recommendations by mid-February. The plan is expected to be considered separately by the Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees before coming to a vote in the House.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF IN TROUBLE

H.155, the Governor's bill to offer tax relief to some sixty-five thousand Vermonters and to curb land speculation by imposing a special capital gains tax on land sales has run into trouble in the House Ways and Means Committee.

At this time it appears that the bill will be reported out with some tax relief provisions but only to the extent made possible by funds available from revenue sharing and economic growth.

Early in January, committee members who were skeptical about the capital gains provision had their doubts confirmed by administration tax commissioner, Robert Lathrop, who testified in favor of substituting a property transfer tax for the capital gains provision.

On January 18, the committee held a public hearing which brought out surprisingly little opposition from those who might be expected to be most vocal on the graduated capital gains provision.

At the end of January, defeated gubernatorial candidate Luther F. Hackett sent a letter to key legislators asking them to work against the tax relief plan. Hackett argued that the \$13.4 million needed to pay for the plan would take needed money away from state aid to education.

Early in February, Governor Salmon fired off a letter to Ways and Means Committee Chairman, Peter Giuliani, stating that he was shocked by the lack of action taken on his priority legislation. He asked that the measure be reported out of committee in some form so that its merits could be debated. The legislation, which has now become entwined in political overtones, has yet to be considered by House Appropriations and Senate Committees.