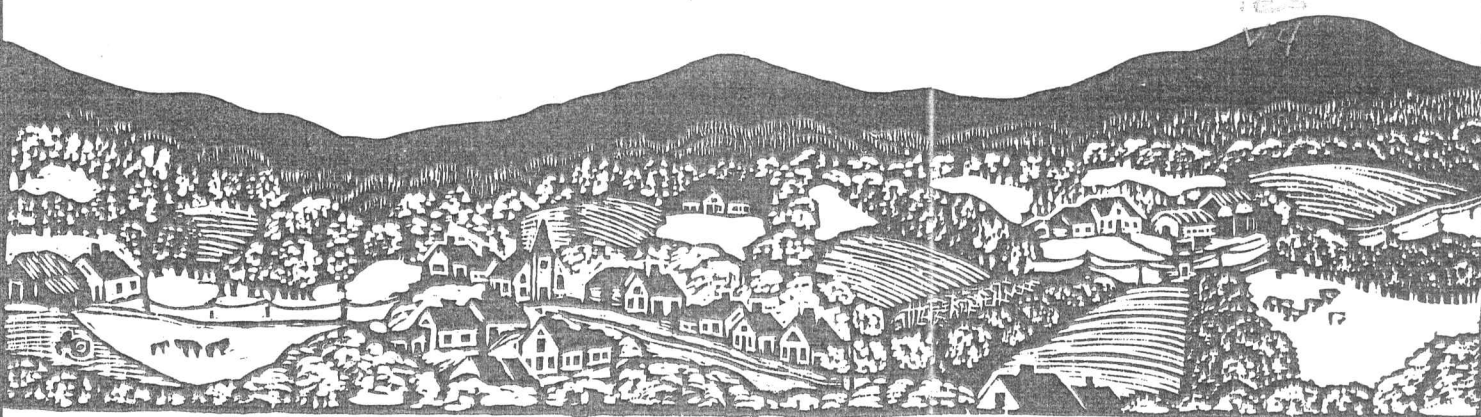


VNRC Bulletin

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165



1984 LEGISLATURE

The lawmakers are back, committee agendas are already packed, and the pace at the State House just ten days into the 1984 session is anything but leisurely. Given the political undercurrents of this session resulting from Gov. Snelling's decision not to seek reelection and with the responsibility for retiring the deficit weighing heavily on legislators' minds, VNRC is concerned that environmental legislation may take a back seat. VNRC members are urged to establish and maintain communication with their representatives to ensure that environmental bills do not get lost in the shuffle.

THE AGENDA

ACT 250: Near the top of VNRC's legislative agenda are three modest bills which would improve the administration and enforcement of Act 250.

H.82 would close the 10-acre exemption by requiring large subdivisions which have potentially the greatest impact on land use in Vermont to go through the Act 250 process.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has decorated the one-line bill with fourteen pages of amendments, but has promised to return it to the full Senate for a vote in the next 10 days. Now is a good time to call your Senator to say you'd like the like the "loophole" closed, and the Agriculture Committee's provisions to be dealt with carefully next session.

A new bill, H.488 introduced by Rep. Carse, exempts municipalities which have approved farmland protection plans from Act 250 review under agricultural soils criteria 9(b). The House Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a public hearing on this bill on January 19, and it may move quickly if there is public support for the idea. VNRC likes the encouragement of local agricultural plans, but we worry that the bill may not be tight enough to keep some municipalities from taking undue advantage of the "local option."

Two other Act 250 bills, which VNRC favor, will move more slowly through committee. H.81 is in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and would strengthen enforcement of Act 250, and H.92, in the Senate Judiciary Committee, is a consumer protection measure which would have Act 250 permit conditions recorded by the town clerk so that a prospective buyer would be aware of them.

CURRENT USE TAX PROGRAM: The main purpose of Vermont's use value appraisal program, now in its fifth year, is to help keep productive farm land in production, and to stimulate increased productivity on Vermont forest land by encouraging forest management. In return for lower property tax assessments, landowners agree to keep their tracts in farming and forestry and "undeveloped."

Two new bills have been introduced which are of equal concern to VNRC and the newly formed Vermont Current Use Tax Coalition. S.170, which VNRC opposes, would abolish the successful current use program by discontinuing its \$1.5-\$2 million annual appropriation. This bill is in Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

H.505, which VNRC supports, would strengthen the program's administration and enforcement, and dovetail with the proposed adoption of forest management standards by the Dept. of Forests, Park, & Recreation. Extensive testimony has been taken in the opening weeks of the '84 session by the House Natural Resources Committee and an amended bill is expected to emerge on Jan. 20. Stay tuned, this one may move quickly!

WILDERNESS: A resolution calling for no additional wilderness in Vermont has been introduced in the Vermont Senate and referred to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Although non-binding, a General Assembly Resolution against wilderness could slow or influence U.S. Senate consideration of the Vt. Congressional wilderness and National Recreation Area bill (H.R.4198) in Washington. A hearing before Jesse Helms' Senate Agriculture Committee is scheduled for February 1. In mid-January, both wilderness factions signed off on clarifying language concerning habitat management and timber harvesting in the White Rocks Nat'l Recreation Area. Moderates of both persuasions now hope for speedy passage of the compromise bill, H.R.4198, by the full U.S. Senate, unencumbered by any new debate in the Vermont General Assembly.

LOW-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE: The Vermont legislature faces the onerous task of deciding whether to join a regional compact for the disposal of its low-level nuclear waste or to "go it alone." In the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act of 1980, Congress mandated that each state be responsible for the disposal of low-level waste generated within its borders. The Act also stated that the waste would best be taken care of on a regional basis, and empowered states to form compacts to manage the waste.

Two bills, H.447 (11-state Northeast compact) and S.232 (3-state compact between Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont) are under heavy scrutiny now. As the deadline for joining the 11-state compact is June 30, 1984, this issue must be decided during this session. VNRC is monitoring the issue closely, as new developments, information, and political considerations emerge almost daily. (See the box below for details on an excellent conference being held January 28th on this topic.)

Another bill, S.202, would alleviate the financial burden of rad waste disposal by charging generators a service fee of \$10/cubic foot of waste which is shipped to a commercial disposal facility. Revenues would go into the General Fund.

OTHER BILLS INCLUDE: (look for the Jan-Feb VLR for details on these)

S.84 would establish a fund for the management of non-game species, provided by a check-off on the state income tax form. S.208 amends the Endangered Species law allowing a penalty for the taking of an endangered species regardless of ignorance of the law. Three bills, H.455, H.456, H.457 in the House Natural Resources Committee, deal with municipal planning and zoning. And H.493 provides for fair market value assessment of all state lands (not buildings). Four bills which would strengthen and broaden the container deposit law are being studied; they are H.548, H.91, H.141 and H.183. H.538 allows landowners to prevent the spraying of herbicides on utilities rights-of-way. H.30 would regulate ground water withdrawal to a system based on correlative rights. H.232 would tighten regulations on the transportation of radioactive materials through Vermont. H.361 establishes a fund for the decommissioning of Vermont Yankee.

For more information on these or other bills, contact the staff at VNRC, 223-2328.

LOW-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE CONFERENCE

On Saturday, January 28, at Trinity College in Burlington, there will be a day-long conference on the management of low-level radioactive waste. The conference will focus on all aspects of this complex issue, from health and safety issues to the political realities involved. Featured speakers include top people representing citizens groups, the State, Vermont's nuclear waste generators, the Federal government, and COMEG. The conference is co-sponsored by VNRC, the League of Women Voters, Vermont Sierra Club, VPIRG, University of Vermont, Vermont Yankee, and Trinity College. It promises to be a productive and thought-provoking day.

Location: Delhanty Auditorium, Trinity College, Burlington

Time: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. No pre-registration is necessary.

Cost: No charge. Bring your own lunch or plan to eat at a nearby restaurant.

More Info: Call Dr. Patrick Lawrence at Trinity College: 802-658-5036

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