



May 20, 1985

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LEGISLATURE PUTS THE WRAPS ON HISTORIC SESSION

A wearied Vermont Legislature closed the first half of the 1985 Biennium with a flourish as it passed, in the space of a week, seven major environmental bills ranging from toxics cleanup to groundwater protection to streamlining measures in Act 250. The final fall of the gavel marked the most historic session for environmental legislation since 1970, the year Act 250 passed, and in doing so, ushered in a new era of environmental standards for the state of Vermont! CONGRATULATIONS !!

Many people had a hand in bringing such legislation to fruition; notably those of you who contacted your Senators and Representatives in support of key environmental bills and all VNRC members who, through your ongoing support, help maintain the Council's lobbying efforts. Now is the time to thank those legislators who voted for the bills listed below.

VNRC would like to extend their appreciation to the heads of the respective House and Senate Committees and their members: Chairmen Steve Reynes, (D-Poufret) and Senator Arthur Gibb, (R-Addison). Representatives Arnold, Pickering, Bassett, Emmons, Fortna, Kimack, MacDonald, McCormack, Burke and Hooper; and Senators Manchester, Parker, Racine, Little and Carter all deserve acknowledgment.

Credit also goes to the agricultural community; legislators and lobbyists alike, who worked painstakingly with VNRC and other environmental groups to guide a hefty environmental agenda through the legislative labyrinth. In particular, Representatives Bob Starr, and Jean Ann Duffy and Senators Vince Illuzi, Gerald Morse, and Doug Baker, who, although often at loggerheads with environmental bills, provided timely support on groundwater legislation. And as usual, strong support was received from the many sponsors and co-sponsors of all the environmental bills.

*** * ON May 15, GOVERNOR MADELEINE H. KUNIN SIGNED THE FOLLOWING BILLS INTO LAW: * ***

Groundwater:

S.11 - Establishes a comprehensive management program for the protection of groundwater based on risk assessment and a new classification system.

H.130 - Fundamental change in groundwater law from the absolute right to use and pollute to a law based on reasonable use and a right of court action for damages.

Toxics:

H.212 - Mini-superfund bill; taxes hazardous waste generators to provide funds for cleanup of toxic spills and other hazardous materials.

H.65 - Addresses leaking underground storage tanks through a new permit and monitoring system; provides money and staff for a statewide inventory.

H.305 - Establishes a pesticides monitoring program to gather information about pesticide use, methods of application, and potential contamination resulting from misuse.

Act 250 Amendments:

H.80 - Provides for the use of civil penalties in enforcing Act 250 as opposed to criminal penalties which are harder to invoke. Civil enforcement would allow injunctive relief for Act 250 violators and fines up to \$10,000.

H.299 - This bill rescinds the right of land use permit applicants to appeal Act 250 decisions to Superior Court. The previous law was burdensome to the Courts, resulted in inconsistent environmental decisions, and was costly to municipalities and other parties that participated in Act 250 proceedings.

VNRC's SUMMER AGENDA:

VNRC continues to be involved in the Ottauquechee Coalition for the purposes of fundraising and advocating for responsible growth management decisions that affect the Ottauquechee River basin and central Vermont communities. The Coalition plans to have a major fundraising campaign throughout June - "Vermont Rivers Month" - culminating with a dinner at the North Pomfret town hall on June 26.

Most recently, VNRC participated in the reconvening of an Act 250 hearing for an application by Killington Limited to build five chairlifts. Three of the lifts would increase uphill capacity at the area while two are billed as "transportation" lifts to ferry skiers from the to-be-completed Killington Ski Village and relieve congestion on the upper mountain. The effects of an estimated 20% increase in daily skiers on an already problematic traffic situation, and the impact of increased water withdrawals for snowmaking on fish habitat were the major unresolved issues. While not opposing the project directly, the VNRC is asking that the District Environmental Commission grant a permit to build only one lift per year, maintain biologically-necessary minimum streamflows, and require traffic improvements as new lifts are built.

Despite the significant environmental achievements of the past session, legislative answers to the "growth management" problem remain unsettled. It will be at least one year before a bill addressing rapid growth is passed and two years before it is implemented. This summer, Vermonters will be able to provide input to legislative committees on the "growth management" issue at a series of summer hearings. Plan to listen in, or comment!

JUNE IS RIVERS MONTH IN VERMONT!

On May 29, Governor Madeleine Kunin will sign a proclamation kicking off Vermont Rivers Month in June. VNRC is working with several other statewide environmental groups to coordinate and encourage local appreciation of Vermont rivers as a natural and cultural heritage. Several events are planned statewide; notably a Saturday, June 8 gathering of river enthusiasts at the Ethan Allen Homestead on the Winooski River, featuring new Fish & Wildlife Commissioner Steve Wright, a June 26 dinner at the No. Pomfret Town Hall mentioned above, and river trips sponsored on the Mad River, the Ottauquechee, the New Haven and Otter Creek. Watch the papers for more information on rivers events near you or start one of your own! Also, for you fisherman, Trout Unlimited is having their national convention at the Bolton Valley Ski Resort June 17-23 with many special events and speakers.

HIGH-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE MEETINGS SCHEDULED

* Tuesday, May 28, 7:30 P.M., Floodbrook School, Londonderry, VT.

* Thursday, May 30, 7:30 P.M., Blue Mountain Union High School, Newbury, VT.

Vermont is under active consideration for the siting of a national high-level nuclear waste repository. The site would be situated some 2000 feet down in the granitic rock formations of Vermont with a capacity to hold 70 metric tons of highly radioactive substances. According to Dept. of Energy officials a 6-mile radius "control zone" is necessary to protect the public.

At issue are obvious health and safety issues, but also more burning questions, such as the known association of high-level waste repositories with plutonium reprocessing plants. What are the real capabilities of the disposal technology and what are the implications to Vermont's environmental integrity? Plan to attend at least one of the following meetings and let yourself be heard. This is potentially the biggest environmental threat Vermont faces for many generations!

***** I SPEAK FOR THE EARTH *****
* VNRC, Parents & Teachers for Social Responsibility, and the Vermont Chapter of the *
* National Education Association are co-sponsoring this opportunity for people to *
* write about caring and protecting the Earth. We received 350 submissions from *
* students and adults in the central Vermont area and will be hosting an event on *
* June 1, 2:30-5 p.m. at the Unitarian Church in Montpelier. Exhibit of all the *
* poetry entered, readings of selected poems, an exciting slide/song presentation, *
* music, and refreshments are all part of the afternoon. Everyone is welcome! *

Vermont Natural Resources Council
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