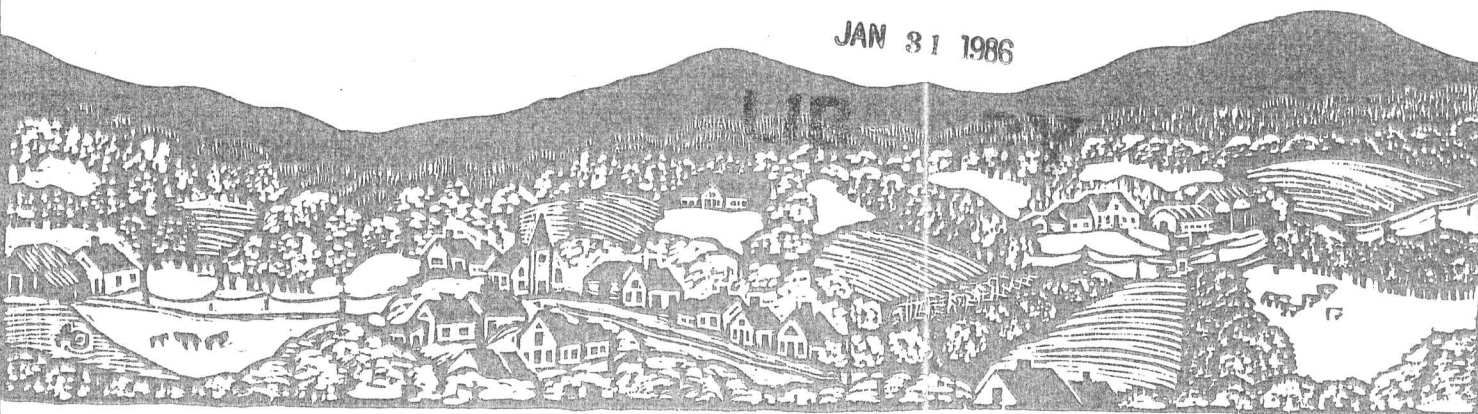


JAN 31 1986



***** LEGISLATURE BACK IN SESSION WITH ENVIRONMENTAL BILLS MOVING *****

The 1986 Legislature reconvened in January with roughly 130 new bills added to the many bills held over from 1985. About 40 new bills are environmentally related, and VNRC will be voicing your concerns throughout the lawmaking session. Several environmental bills, introduced last year, are receiving attention early.

H.295, tagged as the "cumulative impacts" bill, was the subject of a House Natural Resources Committee hearing the first week and was voted out of committee unanimously the following day to begin its legislative sojourn. The growth management process outlined in S.80 is also under discussion in the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Bills on upland stream protection, solid waste management, septage and sludge disposal, new wildlife programs, and amendments addressing the aesthetics and primary agricultural soils criteria of Act 250 are also on the agenda. VNRC has already provided considerable testimony on growth management bills and will be offering strengthening revisions and support, as needed, to new legislation.

VNRC Priorities for the 1986 Legislature:

S.80: Establishes a comprehensive growth management system for the state by intensifying planning efforts in areas experiencing rapid development. Under the bill, large-scale development having regional effects would be held to the goals of a regional plan. S.80 provides money, by increasing the property transfer tax, to towns for acquisition of significant farmlands and other natural areas. Anticipated needs for roads, sewers, and schools would be addressed in a 5-year capital budgeting process to ensure that the regional infrastructure is capable of supporting new growth. VNRC supports. (See VER, Summer 1985.)

H.295: Would amend Act 250 to require masterplans from large development projects, require the gathering of data on resources in rapid growth areas, and empower district environmental commissions to evaluate cumulative impacts from several projects in one region. VNRC supports the intent of H.295 as an information-gathering bill, but stresses the need for a process that works that information into a comprehensive planning and capital budgeting program, such as in S.80.

H.586: The Kunin administration has introduced a revised water quality proposal that is compatible with VNRC's interests for strong pristine streams protection. The fight for clean water in our mountain streams may be our toughest legislative battle this year. See the other side of this Bulletin for CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN WATER.

Current Use Tax Assessment Program: VNRC will be advocating full funding of this seven year-old program designed to give rural landowners an equitable property tax appraisal for land that is under active farm and forest management. The cost increase is expected to be approximately \$1.7 million, due to the recent new enrollments of many agricultural parcels. Total cost of the program is estimated at \$4.3 million; Governor Kunin, in her State of the State address, pledged support.

Solid Waste Management: As a result of numerous problems at landfills around the state, and more recently with the proposed Vicon incinerator in Rutland, solid waste has quickly become a legislative issue in Vermont and priority among conservationists. Two bills are being offered, one each in the House (no # yet) and Senate (S.250), for initiating recycling programs, reconstituting a statewide solid waste program, and taxing those products with greatest environmental impact and most prohibitive recyclability. The next issue of the VER will have a full report on this issue.

S.86: Would create a Vt. Energy Efficiency Agency combining the functions of the Home Energy Audit Team (administered by UVM's Extension Service) and the now-defunct Residential Conservation Corp., which provided housing improvements for energy conservation. Under the bill, energy conservation programs would be coordinated and increased efficiency in energy usage promoted. VNRC supports.

Other House and Senate environmental bills awaiting action include:

H.91: The "non-game checkoff" bill establishes a voluntary system for funding non-game wildlife conservation and habitat improvement programs. Used with success in many other states, the fund is created by adding a box on the state tax return form whereby taxpayers can make voluntary contributions for enhancing the survivability of rare species and protecting other non-hunted birds and animals.

VNRC supports

H.55: Would amend and update Vermont's endangered species list and remove a current loophole in the statute that inhibits enforcement proceedings against those who "unknowingly" violate the law. The inability to enforce this law has made Vermont ineligible for federal monies for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

VNRC supports

S.95: Proposes a state mapping and permitting program for wetlands protection. VNRC supports the intent of this bill, particularly since Vermont has no explicit wetlands protection program. The Council does not, however, support the permitting procedure outlined in this bill and is reviewing alternative approaches.

CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN WATER RELIES ON YOU!

Over the next several weeks legislative committees will be considering important new proposals which, if passed, will affect the cleanliness of Vermont's waters for years to come. The stakes in this legislative debate are high--but no higher, perhaps, than the value that Vermonters have traditionally placed on clean water--especially the water that makes up our high elevation streams.

These streams, increasingly under pressure from demands to accommodate new sewage disposal, have little biological resistance to new sources of pollution. Once altered, their value for fisheries habitat, drinking water supply, downstream recreational uses and other forms of wildlife, shellfish and insects is restricted and in some cases eliminated.

Development interests have repeatedly claimed that their effluent will reliably meet drinking water standards. Drinking water standards, according to EPA, allow for ten micrograms per liter of chlorine (a common byproduct of sewage treatment--secondary and tertiary), yet at this level trout will die in a matter of days and fingerlings in a matter of hours. EPA drinking water standards also allow for ten milligrams of nitrate nitrogen (another common byproduct of sewage treatment). Nitrate, acted upon by microorganisms, can reduce to nitrite, levels of which above one milligram per liter are hazardous to young children; above .06 milligrams per liter are toxic

to salmon and trout. These standards do not account for variability or reliability in the sewage treatment process.

EPA drinking water standards also permit 50 micrograms per liter of lead, or arsenic and .001 micrograms per liter of DDT or PCB's and 347 parts per million of toluene. A recent survey by the Dept. of Water Resources indicated that roughly 40% of the treatment plants in Vermont, at any given time, fail to adequately remove pathogens in the treatment process. Drinking water standards are not enough for our fragile pristine streams!

At a minimum, VNRC and the conservation community are asking the General Assembly to provide us, our children, and the flora and fauna that depend on clean water, with a level of protection that prohibits further alteration and degradation to pristine stream areas.

WE ASK YOU TO DO THE FOLLOWING: Many conservation and sports groups are pitching in to protect Vermont's upland streams in a CAMPAIGN FOR CLEAN WATER. It began with a letter to Governor Kunin in December signed by 22 organizations, but letters and calls from you to your representatives and senators, stating your request for a protective upland streams policy will strengthen the campaign. More information will be coming your way about this.

Call VNRC for more information on Clean Water or any other legislation at 223-2328.

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