

ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATES FROM VNRC & VCV

Celebrating Major Wins for Climate Action, Smart Growth Housing & Biodiversity Protection



By Brian Shupe,
Executive Director,
Vermont Natural
Resources Council &
Lauren Hierl,
Executive Director,
Vermont
Conservation Voters



Dear fellow Vermonter,

During the 2022 election season, VCV worked hard to support pro-climate candidates – and we delivered. Committed climate champions overwhelmingly won their races, and that momentum translated into a strong focus on environmental priorities this year. **Vermont lawmakers and advocates achieved noteworthy wins on key environmental policies in 2023.**

This legislative session was unique in many ways – including being the first fully in-person session since 2019. Further, a record number of freshman legislators were sworn into office resulting in about one-third of the

Legislature being comprised of new lawmakers. These legislators brought fresh energy and new perspectives to the building – and both returning leaders and first-

timers alike arrived ready to tackle big issues, including climate change, housing, child care, and more.

In exciting news, lawmakers took bold action to meet Vermont's legal and moral commitment to climate action by overriding Governor Scott's veto and enacting into law S.5, the Affordable Heat Act. This groundbreaking legislation will start the process of designing a clean heat standard program, with an emphasis on ensuring all Vermonters are part of the transition to cleaner technologies for heating our homes and buildings.

We also successfully advocated for a suite of policies to address Vermont's housing shortage in ways that encourage expansion in our

downtowns and village centers and prevent poorly planned development. Lawmakers also passed legislation to conserve biodiversity and maintain a landscape resilient to climate change by establishing a benchmark of durably conserving 30% of our lands by 2030 – a recommendation of Vermont's Climate Action Plan – and 50% by 2050, while creating a process to develop an inventory and plan to reach those goals. As of the time of publication, we're awaiting final action from the Governor on several bills, but anticipate likely enactment of the housing and biodiversity conservation bills. The Legislature scheduled a brief "veto session" in late June where they could give final approval to pending bills and/or vote to override any vetoes.

Bills that don't make it all the way through the legislative process will be taken up where they left off in January 2024. For example, we played a key role in the Senate's unanimous passage of a nation-leading bill to

continued on page 2

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS



VNRC Advisory Committee

Maude Barlow, Carolyn Finney,
Bill McKibben, James Gustave Speth

VNRC Board of Directors

Will Lintilhac, *Chair*

Maisie Anrod, Steph Baer, Kathy Beyer, Megan
Camp, Jameson Davis, Judy Dow, Elizabeth Gibson,
Charlie Hancock, Nolan Homes, Mark Nelson,
Bindu Panikkar, Diane Snelling, Peter Sterling

VNRC Staff

Brian Shupe, *Executive Director*

Sarah Bayer, *VHCB AmeriCorps Community Energy
Coordinator, VECAN*

Alex Connizzo, *Interim Office Manager*

Karina Dailey, *Restoration Ecologist*

Jamey Fidel, *General Counsel/ Forest and Wildlife
Program Director*

Kati Gallagher, *Sustainable Communities Program
Director*

Jon Groveman, *Policy and Water Program Director*

Greta Hasler, *Communications Director*

Colin Keegan, *Membership and Engagement
Director*

Johanna Miller, *Energy and Climate Program
Director/VECAN Coordinator*

Stephanie Mueller, *Development Director*

Mary Perchlik, *ECO AmeriCorps Ecological
Restoration Associate*

Sarah Plaut, *Communications & Outreach Fellow*



VCV Board of Directors

Linda Gray, *Chair*

Michael Fisher, Kelly Coleman, David Deen,
Tom Hughes, Helen Riehle, Mary Sullivan

VCV Staff

Lauren Hierl, *Executive Director*

Justin Marsh, *Political Outreach Director*

Erika Faulkner, *Organizing Fellow*

Publications

Greta Hasler, *Editor*

Tim Newcomb, *Design*



Copyright © 2023, VNRC and VCV

Major Wins

continued from page 1

ban toxic chemicals including PFAS and other “forever chemicals” from cosmetics, menstrual products, textiles, and artificial turf. The House and Senate both passed an expansion to Vermont’s Bottle Bill to improve and increase recycling, but that bill awaits final action. Legislation to expand ranked choice voting also passed the Senate but will still need to pass the House.

The advocacy of VNRC and VCV – and the engagement of our members and coalition partners – helped make these victories possible. Our organizations collaborate to bring both policy expertise and political savvy to our advocacy campaigns. VNRC leans on its longstanding history of bringing a nuanced, well-researched, community-informed perspective to policy debates. VCV holds lawmakers accountable using tools like our online Environmental Scorecard, and works to recruit, train, and elect candidates who share our vision to deliver on strong, pro-environment, legislative majorities for Vermont.

Looking ahead to next year, we are excited to continue advocating for better protections from toxic chemicals, better protections for our rivers, streams, and wetlands, updates to Act 250, expanded democracy initiatives, additional climate action, and much more. We will continue to convene coalitions to develop inclusive campaigns, and educate Vermonters about these important issues. Our work would not be possible without your support, so thank you!

*Sincerely,
Brian & Lauren*

Affordable Heat Act (S.5)

The Vermont Legislature made a strong commitment to helping all Vermonters access more affordable and cleaner heating solutions by enacting S.5, the Affordable Heat Act. This bill is a

cornerstone of the state’s adopted Climate Action Plan, and central to reducing climate pollution in our heating sector – Vermont’s second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. While Governor Scott vetoed this bill, more than two-thirds of the Vermont Legislature voted to override his veto, thereby enacting the policy into law. The passage of the Affordable Heat Act kicks off a two year process to develop a clean heat standard that would hold heating fuel providers responsible for helping customers (mostly low- and moderate-income Vermonters) transition to cleaner technologies, including cold climate heat pumps and weatherization services. The process of developing this program will include robust technical and economic analysis and stakeholder input, and lawmakers will then vote again on whether to implement this program in 2025.

Smart Growth Housing (S.100)

Vermont saw a big win for smart growth development with the passage of the housing bill, S.100. This legislation focuses on addressing Vermont’s housing shortage with an emphasis on encouraging development in our downtowns and village centers. Primarily by reforming local zoning laws, this legislation will allow for denser development where infrastructure already exists – supporting more housing that meets the needs of all Vermonters while also protecting our outlying natural and working lands. This bill also invests in a suite of programs to help develop more housing units. Encouraging well-planned development will help more Vermonters live in compact, walkable communities, which brings a suite of social, economic, and environmental benefits. Next up – studies are underway examining how Act 250 and the state’s downtown incentive programs could be modernized, and we anticipate a robust legislative conversation next year.

Biodiversity Protections (H.126)

Lawmakers passed an important bill to help protect Vermont's biodiversity and foster a more climate-resilient landscape. H.126 establishes a state target of durably conserving 30% of land and water by 2030 – a recommendation of the state's Climate Action Plan – and goes one step further to conserve 50% by 2050. The bill requires development of a statewide inventory, as well as a planning and stakeholder engagement process to determine how to achieve these conservation targets. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that Vermont may be losing upwards of 12,000 acres of forestland every year to development, and if this trend continues, over 300,000 acres of forestland may be lost by 2050. H.126 recognizes that promoting land conservation with willing landowners is essential for promoting the health of Vermont's forests, including habitat connectivity, biodiversity protection, outdoor recreation, sustainable forestry, public health, and climate-resilient communities.



health, this study is a critical step in understanding how Vermont can manage aquatic nuisances in a controlled manner that avoids any unknown and unintended impacts of applying chemicals in waters around the state. We look forward to building on this work, along with other significant protections for clean and healthy Vermont waters, next session.

Looking Ahead

While we achieved major wins on climate action, conservation, and housing, a number of bills didn't make it over the finish line. Vermont has a biennium system, so bills get taken up next year exactly where they left off this year. As of this moment, the modernized Bottle Bill, H.158, passed both the House and Senate, but still needs final legislative approval before being sent to the Governor. The Senate unanimously passed legislation, S.25, to ban toxic chemicals including PFAS "forever chemicals" from cosmetics, menstrual products, textiles, and artificial turf. This bill awaits action in the House. We also supported a bill to expand access to ranked choice voting, which was combined with a miscellaneous elections bill, H.429. The ranked choice voting provisions

have passed the Senate but have not yet passed the House.

Further, with S.112, the Legislature created a working group to assess how to update our Renewable Energy Standard to ensure Vermont's electricity is as renewable, locally generated, and clean as possible – a particularly important step as we look to electrify our transportation and heating sectors. We also hope to see action on better addressing several clean water issues, including aquatic invasive species, protecting areas along our rivers and streams, and conserving and restoring wetlands. We'll keep you updated as these and other priority issues develop!

Thank You to Our Incredible Interns

We are always so grateful for our legislative interns, who support our work in incalculable ways

Kerry Brosnan tracked numerous environmental bills as they moved through key committees and were debated on the House and Senate floors. She brought valuable insights and analysis to the role, and we wish her all the best in her future career.

Josh Hunter, Legal Extern, helped to track legislation related to biodiversity and wildlife conservation, and performed valuable policy research related to legislation in the Vermont State House.

With Gratitude For Our Partners

The work of VNRC and VCV is immeasurably strengthened by the coalitions we work with, including the Act on Climate Vermont coalition, the Forest Partnership, Transportation for Vermonters, the Water Caucus, and the Toxics Coalition. We thank them all for their partnership on these critical issues, and look forward to continuing to expand our partnerships to engage more Vermont voices in these critical issues.

Studying Impacts of Pesticide Use in Vermont's Waters (H.31)

In a step forward for understanding how Vermont can best manage and support clean water, the legislature advanced a bill to study the impacts of using pesticides to address aquatic invasive species. H.31 creates a study committee, comprised of scientists, legislators and Agency experts, that will make recommendations to the existing law that allows the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to issue permits for chemical pesticide use to address aquatic nuisance species. Given what we know about the adverse impacts of pesticides to our environment and human



11 Baldwin Street
Montpelier VT 05602

Email: info@vnrc.org

Web: www.vnrc.org

Twitter: @VNRCorg

Instagram: @vt_naturalresources

Email: info@vermontconservationvoters.org

Web: vermontconservationvoters.org

Twitter: @VoteGreenVT

Instagram: @vtconservationvoters

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U S POSTAGE
PAID
Permont No. 61
Montpelier, VT

VNRC & VCV in Action

Photos from several 2023 events



Rally for the Planet: VNRC, VCV and partners helped support Vermont Youth Lobby's annual Rally for Planet. More than 400 students showed up to call on legislators to take bold action on climate, and support S.5, the Affordable Heat Act.



Toxics Presser: VCV helped organize a press conference alongside VPIRG, Attorney General Charity Clark, Senator Ginny Lyons, and others to highlight the importance of taking action to regulate toxic chemicals in products Vermonters use every day.



T4VT Lobby Day: Transportation for Vermonters, a broad coalition led by VNRC's Kati Gallagher, organized a Lobby Day at the State House with sweeping organizational support for a more robust, diverse and sustainable transportation system for Vermont.



Health Lobby Day: VNRC and VCV helped organize an annual event with Vermont Climate & Health Alliance, Vermont Public Health Association, and the Vermont Medical Society, who held a press event and met with Lt. Governor David Zuckerman and Speaker of the House Jill Krowinski.