

CELEBRATING
60
YEARS



Vermont

Environmental Report

**Celebrating 60 Years
of Advocating for
Vermont's Environment
and Communities**

Fall
2023

Former Intern Profiles: Where Are They Now?

Richard Cowart, Summer Intern 1975

1. What led to your internship at VNRC?

My internship at VNRC in the summer of 1975 was a major turning point in my life. I was grad student in law and planning at UC Berkeley and knew through my studies that Vermont was a leader on land use and environmental issues. A close law school friend introduced me to Darby Bradley, then VNRC's General Counsel, and I was invited to work for the summer. VNRC had little money to fund interns, but, luckily for me, there was a package deal — Darby and Liisa Bradley graciously offered to give me a place to stay with them and their three young boys in Calais. This led to life-long friendships with the Bradley family and a grand introduction to life in central Vermont. Years later the Bradley sons helped us on our Christmas tree farm, and Markus is our forester still.



2. What was your experience at VNRC like?

During the internship I had the chance to work on a number of projects, but one thing in particular sticks with me. I had worked in states where public policy was heavily fractured and social and environmental issues were highly politicized. But that summer I followed the work of a legislative summer study committee, where conscientious people engaged in thoughtful debate over the issues, trying to figure out the right path. As I've testified many times since, the Vermont legislative process is a model of grounded, deliberate democracy, something sorely needed in many places today. I was hooked.

3. Professionally, where are you now?

After graduation, I set my sights on coming back to Vermont and working in the environmental arena. And for over forty years, this has worked out. My wife Anne and I raised our children on our Christmas tree farm, also in Calais, and we were both able to work in state government. Early on, I was the Executive Officer of the Environmental Board, and then a law professor at UC Berkeley and Vermont Law School, with a focus on land use and resources. A major turn occurred when Governor Kunin asked me to join what is now the Public Utility Commission, where I served as Chair for 12 years. One of my major goals in that job was to bring greater environmental responsibility to Vermont's energy choices. We initiated the first major dockets on energy efficiency and promoted weatherization and renewable electricity. Utility regulation led me to a career-long focus on energy efficiency, consumer protection, renewable energy, and climate change.

Since leaving the Commission, I've been a Principal at RAP, a global nonprofit based in Montpelier, which advises governments and advocates on energy and climate policies. I've worked on these issues in many states and nations. During the Obama Administration I spent six years as Chair of the Electricity Advisory Committee of the US Department of Energy. For ten years I led RAP's team in Europe, where we advised the European Commission and Parliament and many EU nations. In all of this work I feel privileged to take some of the best ideas from Vermont to decision-makers across the country and the world.

More recently, it's been a bit of a full circle for me. I'm focused again on Vermont, serve on the Climate Council, work closely with VNRC and many others on energy and climate initiatives, and appreciate VNRC's continued presence as a major force for Vermont's sustainable future.

Jordan Gonda, Legislative Intern, 2012

1. What led to your internship at VNRC?

Shortly after starting classes at what was then Vermont Law School in 2008, I knew that Vermont was where I wanted to live and work. Though I pursued a law degree, I've always been interested in policy development and environmental science, but I didn't know what kind of position or career path would allow me to be exposed to each of those areas.

I spent time researching the organizations that shared my mission for environmental protection and advocacy. VNRC was one of the entities that stood out among the others in terms of the breadth of issues touching upon environmental quality and public health. I was also intrigued by the ways in which VNRC staff advocated for sound and science-backed environmental policies and outcomes in the State Legislature and in legal proceedings.

I actually applied to VNRC while I was still in law school, hoping for an opportunity to gain experience there while finishing my legal education. That was probably overambitious, and the opportunity didn't come to be. One day shortly after law school graduation, a friend called to let me know that VNRC was looking for a legislative intern and that she thought it sounded like something I'd be interested in and good at. Rather than submitting an application, I picked up the phone and called about the opportunity and pitched myself over the phone. I don't think I'll ever forget that call or how well it went. Before long, I was touring the VNRC offices and meeting the staff. The experience was formative in understanding how law and science can be balanced to effectuate good policy, and set me on a path to the position that I have today.



2. What was your experience at VNRC like?

I really loved spending time in the State House, listening to testimony in committee rooms, tracking bills as they moved through the process, and meeting all kinds of people: other advocates, scientists, legislators and regulators, and grassroots organizers. To this day, I find the legislative process both fascinating and befuddling, and I appreciated the accessibility of the process and the venue to Vermonters and other stakeholders, as well as the expertise that legislators are both exposed to (in terms of witnesses) and develop in important policy areas.

A standout moment for me was working on a bill to place a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing activities in the State (H.464 of 2012). Being from Pennsylvania, which was at the time experiencing an uptick in "fracking" for oil and natural gas, I was acutely aware of the environmental and other impacts posed by the industry and lack of protective regulations. The bill provided me a unique and personal opportunity to advocate for the moratorium in Vermont: I conducted research and testified before some of the committees that considered the bill. When the bill passed as Act 152 of 2012, I attended the bill signing by then Governor Shumlin.

3. Professionally, where are you now?

The internship with VNRC very much influenced my career path, and was the first of several steps that helped me to land in my current position as General Counsel of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.

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Through research, education, collaboration and advocacy, VNRC protects and enhances Vermont's natural environments, vibrant communities, productive working landscapes, rural character and unique sense of place, and prepares the state for future challenges and opportunities.

VNRC is the Vermont affiliate of the
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The Inside Word

Six Decades of Leadership and What Lies Ahead



By Brian Shupe, Executive Director

Next year will mark 160 years since Vermont native George Perkins Marsh authored *Man and Nature*, one of the first books to document the impact of human actions on the health of our environment. At the time of the book's publication, approximately 80% of Vermont's forests had been cleared. Based on his knowledge of Mediterranean landscapes and the denuded hillsides visible from his Woodstock home, Marsh understood the adverse impacts of deforestation on water quality, wildlife populations, and economic vitality.

In Vermont, the results of unsustainable farming practices and forest clearing was economic and ecological collapse, and a century of stagnation and gradual recovery. But, by the early 1960s, the state had begun a transition that would bring significant changes to the state's landscape, economy and communities. Many of these changes – relative economic prosperity, greater mobility, community revitalization – were widely welcomed at the time.

But change also brings uncertainty, and the lessons of Vermont's past experience with unsustainable development had not been forgotten. The world was also waking up to new threats to the environment that didn't exist when Marsh wrote *Man and Nature*, like toxic pollution, sprawling development patterns, and overpopulation. This marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement, and Vermont – and the newly formed Vermont Natural Resources Council – was destined to play a critically important role in that movement.

For the past sixty years, VNRC has been a pivotal leader in the effort to maintain the health and wellbeing of Vermont's environment, and by extension its communities and people. As we enter our seventh generation and look to tackle the challenges of today and the future, we are better equipped than at any time in our organization's history. We have the largest – and arguably the most talented – staff yet, and a network of partnerships and coalitions that extend our collective reach further than ever before.

This is good news for Vermont. Despite all of our past efforts, the challenges facing the world today are larger and more threatening than ever. We are stepping up to address the dual crises of climate change – most recently through the passage of the Affordable Heat Act to help provide Vermonters with cleaner, more affordable energy – and biodiversity collapse, through enactment of a new law that puts the state onto a path of conserving 50% of our land and water by 2050.

We are involved in litigation to clean up our rivers from sewage overflows. We have furthered our smart growth mission – somewhat unusual for an environmental organization – by supporting regulatory reform that promotes compact residential neighborhoods in community centers. And, in tandem with our partner organization Vermont Conservation Voters, we have made significant progress in removing toxic chemicals from a range of consumer products.

The challenges we face are complex and interconnected. But, I'm proud to lead VNRC at this moment of building on our legacy of over six decades of shaping Vermont and working to protect the state's remarkable natural resources to help the state tackle the challenges ahead.



60 Years of Vermont Natural Resources Council

A Legacy of Balancing Protecting Vermont's Environment and Supporting Vibrant, Healthy Communities



By Elizabeth Hewitt

In the spring of 1963, Vermont's landscape was facing change. Bulldozers and pavers were five years into building Interstate 91 up the state's eastern border. The young tourism industry and other growing businesses attracted a wave of new permanent and part-time residents, kicking off a boom of development. Underdeveloped wastewater systems and industries polluted rivers and lakes.

An environmental movement was budding nationally. Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring," published the year before, alerted the public to DDT and pesticides' devastating impacts. In 1963, Congress passed the Clean Air Act, the first landmark federal

environmental legislation.

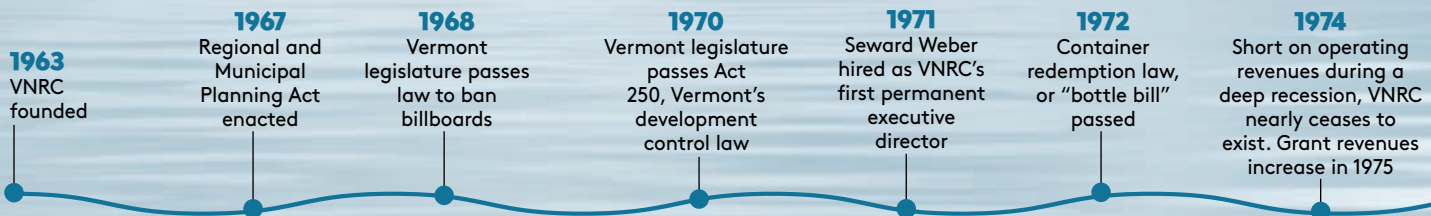
That spring, a wide-ranging group of Vermonters concerned about the future of the state's natural resources met at Goddard College, setting in motion the push for an entity that would bring together voices invested in Vermont's environment. At the end of June 1963, the Vermont Natural Resources Council was launched with the mission to "promote wise use and preservation of natural resources to the benefit of Vermont citizens."

Six decades later, Vermont's landscape is again facing urgent questions of change.

Two weeks and 60 years after VNRC's first Board meeting, a storm soaked Vermont with more than 8 inches of rain in just two days. Barre and Montpelier residents canoed through inundated downtowns. High waters cracked asphalt, washed out bridges, and cut off Hardwick and Ludlow. Mudslides crashed through homes in Barre and Ripton. The second once-in-a-century storm hit just over a decade after Tropical Storm Irene.

The flooding was shocking, but not surprising. The warming

Elizabeth Hewitt is a journalist based in the Netherlands and Vermont. She's a former editor and reporter for VTDigger, where she covered the Vermont state legislature and reported on Congress. Her work has appeared in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Slate*, *PRI's The World*, and elsewhere.



climate was predicted to bring more intense rain events to Vermont's hills and valleys. But it underscored that the climate crisis is not some distant future.

"The genie is out of the bottle," says VNRC Executive Director Brian Shupe. "It really drove home the need to make Vermont a more resilient state, to protect our natural infrastructure."

To become more resilient to extreme weather, the state must protect wetlands, forested hillsides and mountaintops, and healthy river corridors. Reducing emissions from energy and transportation that contribute to the crisis is vital, too. Questions of how to protect Vermont's natural resources are intertwined with the need to equitably support communities as climate impacts elsewhere are likely to drive more residents to the state.



Dave Marvin

Over the last six decades, VNRC's coalition-building, expertise, and advocacy have protected forests and fields, cleaned waterways, and supported development of vibrant town centers. Now, as the council begins its seventh decade, it is set to build on its legacy — expanding on its expertise and deep relationships to meet the changing needs of Vermont's environment and communities.

"VNRC's legacy is its concentration on developing a conservation ethic and attention to conservation in the Vermont community," says Dave Marvin, who served as VNRC's Board chair from 1976-1978. "I also see VNRC as adapting and growing with changing times, because the issues confronting the environment and conservation 60 years ago were not the same as they are today.

"The need is still the same," Marvin says, "which is to protect this very special place, our environment and our community."

A Half Century of Protecting Vermont's Environment

Before VNRC's launch in 1963, an assortment of smaller organizations and individuals across Vermont were interested in conservation and environmental protection. But there wasn't a strong connection among the various groups.

"The council was formed really to provide a place for them all to coalesce and agree on statewide solutions to big problems," says Marvin, whose father, James Marvin, a UVM professor focused on maple research, was a founding member of VNRC.

Early members included garden clubs, student associations, and groups representing foresters, the granite industry, farmers,



1967 VNRC meeting

and architects. Along with James Marvin, early board members included then-Forests and Parks Commissioner Perry Merrill, who'd helped create the Vermont State Park system, and Lucy Bugbee, a retired teacher turned botany and conservation enthusiast.

By the late 1960s, the pace of development provoked concerns. Southern Vermont, in particular, was swept into a wave of what then-Gov. Deane Davis called "rampant" growth, largely associated with the burgeoning ski industry. The former governor recalled in a 1989 interview with VNRC's *Vermont Environmental Report* that the explosion in second-home construction had overwhelmed towns. Residences were built on shoddily planned new roads and wastewater systems were underdeveloped. In some places, raw sewage flowed into ditches.

In early 1969, after VNRC Chair Justin Brande's urging, Davis launched a commission on environmental control, which assembled the framework for legislation that would become Act 250. The introduction of the bill was a milestone for VNRC.

Davis credited the council as key to the passage of Act 250. VNRC "was an institution even then in 1970 with a lot of credibility and they were extremely helpful in getting this work done," the former governor said in 1989.

Early on VNRC collaborated on initiatives that are still in effect — even visibly obvious — in Vermont's landscape. VNRC supported the statewide ban on billboards, passed in 1968. In the early 1970s, the council backed the bottle bill, an anti-littering measure establishing a nickel deposit on some beverage containers.

Environmental awareness was growing nationally. The

1978

Vermont legislature passes the "Current Use" tax law for farm and forestland; VNRC receives \$250,000 gift to start an endowment

1986

VNRC purchases home at 9 Bailey Ave in Montpelier and converts it to office space for the organization, moving out of rental space. VNRC remained there until 2020

1987

Vermont legislature passes first comprehensive statewide solid waste law

1987

Vermont creates the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

1988

Act 200, designed to integrate local, regional and state agency planning, signed into law



Cuyahoga River fire in 1969 galvanized the young movement. The US Environmental Protection Agency was created the following year. On April 22, 1970, 20 million people attended gatherings across the country on the first Earth Day. Landmark federal laws followed, including the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.

Darby Bradley, who began as VNRC's assistant director in 1974, recalls that as the national environmental movement grew, in Vermont, questions of development were tied up not only in environmental impact but also in the effect on a local community, its schools, roads, sewage, and water.

"At that time, because of Act 250, Vermont was looking at the impact of development on not just water and air and soil, but on infrastructure and community services," he says.

VNRC supported statewide conservation measures, including the land gains tax, making Vermont the first state in the country to curb land speculation by imposing higher taxes on short-term land purchases. VNRC played a leading role in the creation of the Current Use program, passed in 1978, reducing taxes for landowners whose property was actively used for agriculture or forestry. If farms in populous areas like Chittenden County were taxed at their development value, it was a matter of time before they shut down and sold. Current Use "was very important in terms of just sort of stabilizing the situation," Bradley says.

In its work to conserve land and support smart development VNRC contributed to launching two key organizations. It did the legal work to create the Ottauquechee Land Trust, later renamed the Vermont Land Trust, which now protects more

than one-tenth of Vermont's area. VNRC was part of a coalition that lobbied for the creation of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, established in 1987.

"It was a very radical idea at the time," Bradley says. Preserving open space and creating housing could be seen as opposing goals. "By putting these two things together, it made a certain amount of sense because you're looking at what the community needs as a whole."

While VNRC became influential early, organizational stability took time. In the 1970s, Bradley recalls, it wasn't always clear if VNRC would make payroll. By the mid-80s, the council matured. In 1986, VNRC bought 9 Bailey Avenue, its headquarters for the next three decades.

"One of the accomplishments from my perspective of VNRC is that, here it is, 60 years later, still working and working effectively," Bradley says.

In 1997, when Elizabeth Courtney started as VNRC's executive director, her priority was building the council's foundation. She set about establishing long-term financial security, and assembling a staff that complemented each other's expertise.

Environmental policy is not a single-issue concern, and Courtney underscores the value of working collaboratively.

"There were the people who were concerned about forests, people concerned about water, people concerned about energy, people concerned about transportation, feeding people, and many other diverse interests," Courtney says. "If you put them together to work on a common problem, you get a much richer



solution.”

Around the early 2000s, VNRC started working on protecting Vermont’s groundwater. An investor had planned to launch a bottled water company from the Montpelier area. In 2006, Vermont enacted the Groundwater Protection Act. “That helped us all to see that the groundwater is held in the public trust. That means that it belongs to everyone,” Courtney says.

“That was a powerful thing to realize on the eve of getting our minds around the idea of climate,” she says, “how the climate of the Earth is something that we share, and something that we’re all at best supported by or at worst, ruined by.”

With the council’s long history of working on conservation, it was well-positioned to help drive conversations about climate action. Looking beyond Montpelier, VNRC supported local efforts to set up energy committees and work toward curbing emissions at the municipal level through the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN).

Then, on August 28, 2011, Tropical Storm Irene hit.

While the specter of climate change had hung over Vermont for decades, the reality of extreme storms shocked the state, washing out highways, submerging neighborhoods, cutting off entire towns, killing seven people.

The Last Ten Years

As VNRC turned 50, Vermont was still reeling from the devastation caused by Irene. The damage made clear the need to make the state more resilient to extreme weather.

The urgency was again underscored by the storms and devastating flooding of the summer of 2023. “We need to address climate change,” says Shupe. “We need to prepare for a warming world, both in terms of leading the transition off of fossil fuels as well as making our communities and environment more resilient to the impacts of a warming world. That is the umbrella that VNRC does its work under.”

Deb Markowitz, then-secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources, recalls that as the state was rebuilding, VNRC helped spotlight the importance of Vermont’s natural infrastructure in mitigating the impacts of flooding events.

“They were in a great position post-Irene to really help move the conversation forward, about how we exist alongside the rivers,” Markowitz says. “How do we pivot so that we’re really protecting our forests, not just because they’re pretty and provide habitat, but because they’re the first line of flood protection for our communities in the valleys?”

Over the last decade, VNRC continued to build on its long legacy of conserving Vermont’s natural landscapes — from



2006 march to raise awareness for damaging impacts of global warming, attended by VNRC staff

tackling forest fragmentation and protecting river corridors and water quality, to supporting affordable housing development near town centers. It has reinvigorated its role as a convenor that brings together a range of organizations and entities to take a broad, long-term view of Vermont’s environmental needs and how best to address them.

A strategic partnership forged in 2013 gave the organization new muscle. VNRC and Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) merged — a win-win for both.

Long a strong voice guiding policymaking, VNRC stayed out of electoral politics; as a 501(c)(3) organization, federal rules bar certain political activities. Since the early 1980s, VCV, as a 501(c)(4), has campaigned for environmental issues and supported environmentally minded candidates, but often ebbed in non-campaign years. “It was challenging to keep the operation always stable and afloat,” says VCV Executive Director Lauren Hierl.

Working alongside VNRC has enabled VCV to stabilize and draw on the council’s expertise. While the organizations keep a firewall up around campaign work, VNRC has benefited from VCV’s political savvy. In recent years, more of Vermont’s legislators have embraced environmental policies.

The shift was evident in 2020 when the Legislature voted to override Gov. Phil Scott’s veto of the Global Warming Solutions Act, a law setting legally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont. The might of pro-environment super-majorities in both chambers came through again in 2023 when lawmakers overrode Scott’s veto of the Affordable Heat Act, which incentivizes companies that import fossil fuels to offer low- and middle-income households cleaner energy heating





establishment of housing in areas close to downtowns and villages that avoid sensitive natural areas, by allowing projects to avoid some regulatory burdens.

Meanwhile, VNRC continued to press for state-level policies and support local-led initiatives that protect Vermont's forests, key for biodiversity and climate resilience. The Current Use program, long protecting farmland and forests maintained for timber, expanded in 2022 to include landowners who let forests grow undisturbed. In 2023 the Legislature also passed the "30 by 30" bill, part of a nationwide movement, that tasks the state and VHCBC with coming up with a plan to permanently conserve 30% of Vermont's land by 2030. VNRC also raises awareness among new landowners about options for being stewards of the land.

Today, VNRC's partners include environmentally focused groups, like Conservation Law Foundation and Audubon Vermont, as well as organizations with broader scopes, like AARP and Capstone Community Action. VNRC facilitates connections on a range of subjects, like the Water Caucus, Transportation for Vermonters, the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network, the Act on Climate Coalition, and the Forest Roundtable.

"We are attempting to be kind of a hub of a network of coalitions and organizations working with shared goals," Shupe says.

David Mears, executive director of Audubon Vermont and former Department of Environmental Conservation commissioner, says that is a critical role for VNRC to play. Many groups work on Vermont's various environmental issues.

"It's a cacophony of voices," he says. "In a democratic process, the voices that tend to be most effective are those voices that are coherent, and can say, 'Here's the top three things that we want as a priority for the governor or for the Legislature.'"

Collaboration through VNRC is important for Audubon Vermont, according to Mears. The small organization can't work on every issue related to bird and habitat conservation, but can partner with others also concerned with wetlands, forests, pesticide use, and more.

"Collectively if we pool resources and have coordinated strategies we can show up on all the key issues and play a meaningful role," Mears says.

In 2019, VNRC moved into a new home after a donation allowed the council to purchase and renovate the larger space at 11 Baldwin Street as a net-zero building. As VNRC turns 60, the council has 15 staff members — almost twice the total a decade ago — who are widely respected experts.

"With the expertise, passion for the issues, and relationships that staff share, we are extremely well-prepared to deal with all oncoming challenges," Shupe says.

alternatives.

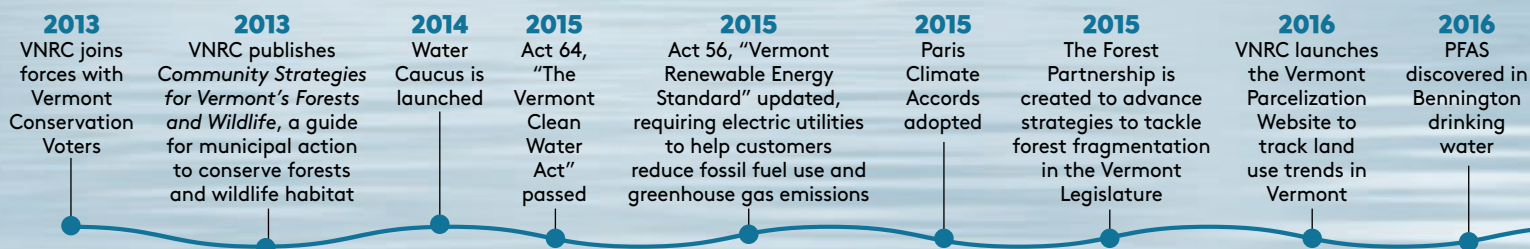
"The idea that Vermont's committed to taking action aggressively and equitably on climate is huge, and has really changed what we've been able to get done as a state," Hierl says. "We set up the political deck, and then the policy work was done and we were able to get that actually enacted and implemented."

After per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) — a category of chemicals known as "forever chemicals" — were found in groundwater supplies in Bennington, VNRC and VCV worked together, supporting two nation-leading laws: one 2021 measure restricts the sale of products that contain PFAS, and another in 2022 ensures the right of people exposed to toxic chemicals to sue responsible companies to cover health-monitoring costs.

Over the last decade, VNRC built on the 2011 merger with Smart Growth Vermont, working to support the development of housing for people of different incomes, make more transportation options accessible, and develop communities in ways that don't sprawl into the countryside.

"It's the difference between an environmental organization being a no-growth organization, and one being a smart-growth organization," Shupe says. "We've chosen to be the smart-growth organization."

One recent victory is the expansion of neighborhood development areas. The land use designation encourages the





The Challenges Ahead

As VNRC begins its seventh decade, the council is ensuring equity and social justice are key parts of its work. The environmental movement has historically lacked diversity. VNRC aims to improve that.

“We’re increasingly really looking at what equity means to our work,” Shupe says. “How we make decisions, who we include in those decisions, and who they affect is something that we’ve been grappling with in the last couple of years.”

Working with the Center for Whole Communities, VNRC is adopting a screening process for taking positions on policies, which will involve reflecting on who is impacted, whether they are adversely impacted, and being sure to directly consult with communities who will be affected.

Supporting development of affordable housing is an important priority — especially as harsh impacts of climate change in other parts of the country are likely to drive more people to move to Vermont.


“Are we only going to be a climate refuge for wealthy people, or are we going to promote greater diversity in our population through providing more housing options?” Shupe says.

In the face of a growing population, one of the top legislative priorities in the near future is to modernize Act 250.

After heavy rains through the summer of 2023, businesses and homeowners in flood-stricken areas continued to rebuild. VNRC plans to push to strengthen protections against forest fragmentation, and to protect buffer zones around rivers — two measures that will both support biodiversity and reap benefits like flood mitigation.

The damage from the summer’s extreme weather underscored the immediacy of many environmental issues facing the state. Hierl pointed to Montpelier as an example, where residents are grappling with how to build back in ways that leave room for rivers and protect vulnerable town centers.

Dave Marvin, VNRC’s former Board chair, hopes that 60 years in the future, when his granddaughter is the same age he is now, she’ll continue to be able to enjoy Vermont’s special nature and communities.

“VNRC is able to tackle the future challenges that we’re going to face environmentally because of the track record, because of the proven respect, because of the methods that they’ve used over time to bring people together,” he says. 

2016

Act 171 passes with goal of maintaining intact forests and habitat connectivity areas through local and regional planning

2017

VNRC blocks Exit 4 development project and raises enough money to fully conserve the land

2017

Final report from legislative Toxic Working Group is released with all of VNRC’s recommendations

2017

Governor Scott establishes a Climate Action Commission; VNRC appointed to serve as one of 21-members

2018

Transportation for Vermonters (T4VT) coalition is launched

2018

VNRC organizes Act 250: What’s Next? conference at Vermont Law School

2018

LaPlatte River Wetland is designated as Class 1 status

Cheers to Five Years

Celebrating the Fifth Anniversary of Small Grants for Smart Growth

In Vermont, we benefit from decades of community-driven land use planning that set our state apart for protecting natural resources while fostering our downtowns and village centers. Yet we're also experiencing – along with the rest of the country – the impacts of land development that has been misguided or poorly planned through the connected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and housing affordability.

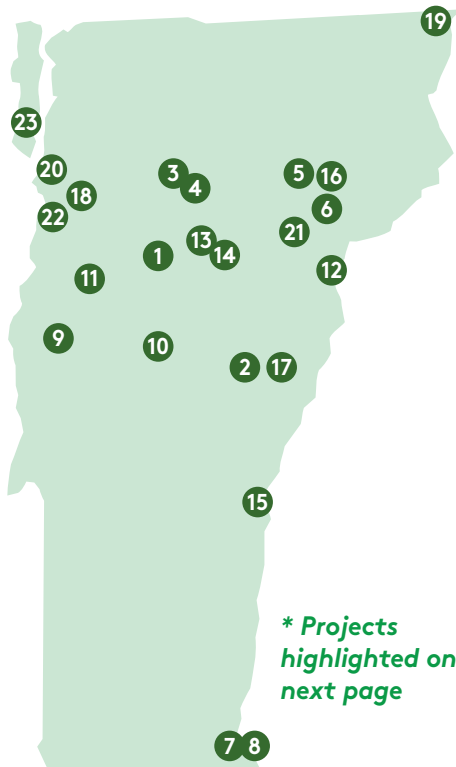
As we work to tackle these challenges as a state, and pursue a Vermont that is welcoming, vibrant, and socially and environmentally resilient, VNRC is proud to celebrate five years of our Small Grants for Smart Growth program. This program provides seed money for catalyzing community-based initiatives related to smart growth, acknowledging that community

leadership and small steps are essential for catalyzing change. Read on to learn more about five outstanding projects from past recipients of the Small Grants for Smart Growth Program.



We'd also like to wish a special thank you to Beth Humstone and Chris Gignoux, as their generous support makes the Small Grants for Smart Growth program possible!

Small Grants for Smart Growth Grant Recipients



1. Waitsfield, VT (Mad River Valley Housing Summit)
2. Woodstock, VT (IREC Climate Action Plan)
3. Hyde Park, VT (Village of North Hyde Park Initiative)
4. Hyde Park, VT (Permit Accessibility)
5. Greensboro, VT (Bend Revitalization Initiative)
6. Lyndon, VT (Downtown Revitalization)
7. Brattleboro, VT (Epsilon Spires High Street Renewal)*
8. Brattleboro, VT (Rich Earth Institute)*
9. New Haven, VT (Restoration of Historic Train Depot)
10. Randolph, VT (Affordable Housing)
11. Monkton, VT (Conservation Planning)
12. McIndoe Falls, VT (McIndoe Falls Community Center)
13. Montpelier, VT (Cross Vermont Trail Improvements)
14. Montpelier, VT (Public Access to Downtown River)
15. Rockingham, VT (Revitalizing Vacant Buildings)
16. Wheelock, VT (Redesign Historic Town Hall)
17. Hartford, VT (Stormwater Retention)
18. Hinesburg, VT (Common Space Improvements)
19. Canaan, VT (Public Access to Forest Lands)
20. Burlington, VT (Old Spokes Home)*
21. Danville, VT (Revitalizing Historic Railroad Station)*
22. Charlotte, VT (Public Education on Water Issues)
23. South Hero, VT (Planning for Building Trail Network)*



Highlighting Five Impactful Projects

Historic Danville Railroad Station – Danville, VT

The Danville Village to Village Steering Committee was awarded a Small Grant for Smart Growth to engage the community and revitalize the 1871 Historic Danville Railroad Station near the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT). The project aims to leverage the LVRT's potential to boost Danville's economic and cultural impact, enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, and restore the cherished historic landmark. The envisioned Train Station will serve as a transportation and recreation hub, featuring amenities like restrooms, a digital kiosk, and educational displays. Infrastructure improvements, including signage, recreation asset mapping, and guidebooks, are also part of the plan. Further grant funding has been secured for a water station and bike repair station. Construction is set to begin in summer 2023. The committee is redesigning their website and identifying historic markers along the LVRT to complement the Train Station displays. Local businesses are collaborating with the project, and a meeting has been scheduled to explore connections to the initiative and the LVRT. From the Committee: "Thank you again for your support – this event truly helped us to kick-off this effort and no doubt has helped us get to where we are today."



for diverse populations. They also received grants from the Vermont Agency of Transportation, Go! Vermont, and Green Mountain Transit to enhance access to existing transportation options.



South Hero Community Trails – South Hero, VT

The South Hero Land Trust worked with local partners to develop a non-motorized, multi-use trail network that will connect important community resources and natural areas in the core of South Hero, with seed funding from a Small Grant for Smart Growth. The grant facilitated community engagement efforts and supported ongoing coordination. A connector trail is being developed, fostering partnerships and raising awareness about natural resource access. Building on this initial work, a second project aims to establish a community roadmap for recreational cycling, promoting local businesses and enhancing bike and walkability. The collaborative effort involves the South Hero Land Trust, Lake Champlain Islands Economic Development Corp, Local Motion, South Hero Recreation Commission, and Northwest Regional Planning Commission.



Old Spokes Home Transportation Equity Coalition – Burlington, VT

Old Spokes Home, a non-profit bike shop, launched the Transportation Equity Coalition with a Small Grant for Smart Growth, focusing on improving transportation accessibility. Following outreach to initiate a mobility audit in the Old North End of Burlington, they were able to leverage additional funding for a comprehensive audit. Collaboration with local partners resulted in 75 survey respondents from communities that have been marginalized. The audit in the Old North End was completed in mid-2021. The organization is also working with various partners to ensure diverse voices in transportation planning processes. Old Spokes Home plans to recruit more agencies to join the Transportation Equity Coalition and involve community representatives in designing communication strategies

Epsilon Spires High Street Renewal – Brattleboro, VT

Epsilon Spires, an arts and science non-profit, led a community-driven project to transform a graffitied wall into an inspiring mural representing the region's local culture. With a Small Grant for Smart Growth, they planned and promoted the High Street Mural through grassroots efforts, including engaging local businesses, community leaders, and neighbors. Selected for Vermont's Better Places program, the High Street Mural received

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2021
H.108, a massive wetland protection bill, is passed

2022
VNRC publishes a new report, *Wildlife Considerations in Local Planning*

2022
VNRC new office space wins Vermont Green Building Network's 2022 Greenest Building Award

2022
VNRC and partners celebrate Pat Leahy for his years of environmental protection in Vermont

2023
S.5, The Affordable Heat Act, enacted, catalyzing a two-year process and potential program to help Vermonters reduce reliance on fossil-fired heat

2023
H.126 is passed, putting Vermont on course to conserve 30% of our land by 2030 and 50% by 2050

Program Updates

Legislative Victories, Expanded Partnerships, and Updates on Our Work for Vermont's Environment and Communities

Clean Energy and Climate Action



Advances conservation, efficiency, renewable energy, and transportation solutions that reduce fossil fuel usage and save Vermonters money.

- In close collaboration with many partners, VNRC helped usher the Affordable Heat Act into law, which has catalyzed a two-year expert and stakeholder process to design a thermal performance standard to reduce pollution in Vermont's fossil fuel heating sector – our second most polluting sector. We worked hard to ensure the policy offers the essential framework to make significant, actual reductions in carbon pollution, while also putting critical parameters in place to help ensure the program better centers and serves overburdened and historically marginalized Vermonters in this necessary cleaner heat transition.
- We continued to work to support and engage community energy committee leaders through a winter webinar series and many other communications tools, keeping them informed of timely policy and advocacy opportunities. We also hosted our first in-person VECAN Energy Summit on June 3rd in partnership with Middlebury College. We are continuing our efforts to help identify and advance climate solutions at the local level, and are deepening our work with VECAN partner organizations to identify and accelerate strategies to support greater equity and climate justice outcomes.

- VNRC's Johanna Miller continues to serve on the Vermont Climate Council and helps in leading the work to identify and advance solutions to transform Vermont's transportation network into a cleaner, more accessible, sustainable and multi-modal system.
- We continue to work alongside partners, including Regional Planning Commissions and the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services, and communities to implement the Municipal Energy Resilience Program. This program offers much opportunity to foster more community conversations and community-informed climate, efficiency and resilience strategic investments for municipalities across Vermont.

Healthy Forests and Wildlife

Maintains and enhances the ecological and economic vitality of Vermont's forests, including promoting healthy wildlife populations.



- We advocated for the passage of H.126, an act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection, which promotes conserving 30% of Vermont's land base by 2030, and 50% by 2050. The bill calls for the development of an inventory of conserved land, and a comprehensive conservation planning process to maintain a resilient and connected landscape. With the passage of the bill, Vermont joins eight other states that have initiated some kind of 30 by 30 conservation planning process,

although Vermont's 50 by 50 target is the strongest in the nation.

- In order to minimize the effects of parcelization and forest fragmentation, and promote smart growth housing opportunities in Vermont, it is necessary to understand where parcelization and subdivision are occurring, and the rate at which they are occurring. To assist in this effort, we updated the VNRC Vermont Parcelization website to allow users to analyze land use trend data from 2005 to 2020 through interactive maps and tools. As part of this project, we also published an Executive Summary with an overview of current land use trends and recommendations for advancing smart growth in Vermont. The website and report are available at vtforesttrends.vnrc.org/home.
- We continued to coordinate a new project to engage forest landowners to maintain healthy forests through an outreach and technical assistance program. As part of this project, we created a map of potential landowners to receive direct technical assistance in priority natural resource areas, and we are now focusing on the development of a stewardship and conservation guide for woodland owners.
- We partnered with Audubon Vermont and Professor Bill Keeton to develop comments on the Telephone Gap Integrated Resources Project on the Green Mountain National Forest. As part of the comments, we offered recommendations for ecological forestry practices to promote diverse management goals and diverse age



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class representation while protecting and recruiting late-successional and old growth forests for late seral habitat conditions and carbon storage. We expect the Forest Service to release an Environmental Assessment for the project later this summer.

Sustainable Communities

Promotes and protects Vermont's smart growth development pattern of compact settlements – with options for transportation, housing, and employment – surrounded by farms, forests, and natural areas.

- The Sustainable Communities program celebrated the successful passage of Act 47, known as the HOME, or Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone, bill. Months of collaboration with legislators, state agency staff, affordable housing developers, planners, and others went into the development of this impactful legislation, which will help to reduce exclusionary zoning regulations and support housing development - while not taking away from critical environmental protections.
- Through our coordination of the Transportation for Vermonters (T4VT) coalition and beyond, we advocated for safer streets, new funding mechanisms, and strengthened incentive programs for sustainable transportation options. Highlights include the continuation of funding for e-bike incentives, and greater data transparency and local training for Complete Streets. We also continue to be engaged with several VTrans initiatives to study land use and transportation alternatives.
- We collaborated with AARP-VT and the VT Department of Housing & Community Development to launch the "Great Housing Hunt," an effort to educate Vermonters about the need for historic "missing middle" home types, and to crowdsource images of missing middle homes in communities throughout the state. These types of homes are critical for providing diverse and affordable housing choices and achieving densities that support walkability, transit and local-serving small businesses.
- We shared the findings of the 2023



Vermont Poll, which builds on decades of smart growth data collection. This year's responses highlighted support for sustainable development (87.5%) and action to increase smart growth housing (78.5%).

Clean Water and Dam Removal

Protects and enhances the quality of Vermont's streams, rivers, lakes and ponds, wetlands, and groundwater.

- VNRC is continuing to work on implementing a campaign focused on the importance of healthy, functioning, intact river and wetland systems for climate resilience. The need for land management practices that protect clean water, address extreme weather impacts, and improve resilience was made abundantly clear by the devastating rainfall and flooding throughout Vermont this July. Our campaign calls on the Legislature to enact statewide programs to protect the riparian areas along streams and river corridors, and to improve protections for our vitally important wetlands. Last year, we advocated for bills to be introduced to address river corridors (H.29), and improve wetland protection (H.30). VNRC also advocated for the enactment of H.80, which requires the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources to issue a report on establishing a statewide riparian area program. Stay tuned for more on how you get involved in this crucial campaign.
- With many important projects in the hopper, our dam removal season started early this summer with the removal of a 320 ft long earthen embankment dam that was rated as a significant hazard and causing a physical barrier to spawning brook trout in the headwaters of the Mill River in Shrewsbury, VT. The project is designed to reconnect the headwaters to the Mill River and ultimately Lake Champlain. Many co-benefits result from dam removals including restoring natural sediment transport, reduced erosion, restored aquatic organism passage, reconnection with the floodplain to support flood resilience, restored



wetlands, stream channel processes, and a restored ecosystem with increased biodiversity. Learn more about our dam removal projects and process at FreeVermontRivers.org.

- VNRC was instrumental in getting H.31 passed, a bill that requires the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Legislature to revise Vermont laws that allow pesticides to be used in Vermont waters to address aquatic invasive species. Our position is that pesticides should only be used in Vermont's waters as a last resort to address ecological harm when there is no alternative. In a related win for clean water, the Agency recently proposed to deny a permit for the use of pesticides in Lake Bomoseen amidst the attention given to the issue as part of the Legislative debate on H.31.
- We appealed the Clean Water Act discharge permit for the City of Rutland over the inadequacy and illegality of the conditions to address Combined

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Planned Giving

VNRC has been fortunate to have received financial support from our members through intentional gifting in their wills. You can join these supporters and plan to give in the same manner. A planned gift to VNRC represents a commitment by donors to protecting Vermont's environment beyond their own lifetimes, and to ensuring our communities are best equipped to nurture us for generations to come. For more information on planned giving, contact Stephanie Mueller at 802-223-2328 x 113, or smueller@vnrc.org.

News & Notes

Staff News

Mollie Beattie 2023

Sai Swamy joined VNRC as our 2023 Mollie Beattie Intern. Learn more about Sai in her own words:

“I learned about VNRC when I came across the Mollie Beattie internship from my law school’s newsletter. Upon doing further research online, I found that VNRC was the perfect place for me to intern. I strongly believe in regulation and policy being key drivers for long-term sustainability and environmental protection, which aligns with VNRC’s mode of operation. This is, by far, one of my favorite internships. One of my most memorable standout moments was my first day when I received a warm welcome from the team and was treated as a team member from day one. At VNRC, I contributed to actual real-world problems and applied my research, written communication, and analytical skills. In the future, I see myself practicing in a non-governmental organization (NGO), because they focus on very key problem areas in their relevant industries. This internship was my first experience working at an NGO, and I truly enjoyed the problem space and mode of operation, which further motivates me to pursue more internship and full-time opportunities at an NGO.”



Thanking Outgoing Interns and AmeriCorps Members

We’re grateful for the support and efforts of our wonderful outgoing interns, AmeriCorps Members, and externs. We’ve bid farewell to **Kerry Brosnan**, our 2023 Legislative Intern who is now at the North Branch Nature Center; **Sarah Bayer**, our VHC AmeriCorps Community Energy Coordinator who is now working for the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation; **Mary Perchlik**, ECO AmeriCorps Restoration Associate; and **Josh Hunter**, Legal Extern.

Welcoming Incoming Staff

VNRC has hired **Greta Hasler** as Communications Director, **Emily Shaw** as Business Manager, **Sarah Plaut** has moved into a one-year Communications and Outreach Fellowship. Also in the past year, Vermont Conservation Voters has welcomed **Justin Marsh** as Political Outreach Director and **Erika Faulker** as Organizing Fellow. Justin and Erika have both provided vital support to VCV’s efforts to elect pro-environment leaders to the State House, and hold them accountable throughout the legislative session.


Art Gibb Award 2023 - Darby Bradley

Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) is delighted to present the 2023 Arthur Gibb Award for Individual Leadership to Darby Bradley, in recognition of his over three decades long career dedicated to Vermont’s land and people. Darby was formerly VNRC’s Assistant Director and Staff Attorney, President of the Vermont Land Trust and Chair of the Vermont Environmental Board under Governor Kunin. VNRC will present the award to Darby at VNRC’s Annual Meeting at Lareau Farm Inn in Waitsfield on September 21st.

Before his long tenure as President of the Vermont Land Trust, Darby served as VNRC’s Assistant Director and Staff Attorney from 1974 to 1982. During his time at VNRC, he helped create the *Environmental Law Manual*, which VNRC published from 1975 to 1981. When VNRC received a grant in 1975 to preserve open space in Hartland, Darby helped design four different open space protection programs involving various combinations of tax incentives and conservation easements. Darby termed the Hartland project a “major defeat” when voters rejected the proposals, but credited it with laying the foundation for two alternative methods of open space conservation—land trusts and the current use property tax program.

Every year, in honor of Arthur Gibb’s legacy of commitment to safeguarding Vermont’s environment and communities, VNRC recognizes an individual whose leadership has similarly brought about positive and lasting change in integrating growth and conservation. Gibb played a major role in passing key environmental and land use legislation that includes banning billboards, enacting Vermont’s bottle deposit law, regulating junkyards, and modernizing statutes governing local and regional planning. Gibb headed the commission that laid the groundwork for Act 250 and served twelve years on the Vermont Environmental Board.

As the Vermont Land Trust’s nomination of Darby for the Arthur Gibb award stated, “He worked tirelessly connecting with landowners, legislators, conservation partners and his staff. His aim was to assist communities and individuals in preserving their treasured places and ensuring a rural landscape for future generations. He worked steadfastly to preserve these rural landscapes, fortify land-based livelihoods, and strengthen communities.”

Darby’s vision, integrity, humility, and courage helped position Vermont as a national role model in progressive, innovative approaches to integrating conservation and growth. His decades of work helped to create a legacy of natural resource protection that will serve as a foundational value in Vermont for generations to come. VNRC is honored to present him with our 2023 Arthur Gibb Award for Individual Leadership. To learn more about the Arthur Gibb Award, visit vnrc.org/awards. 

Former Intern Profile

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The experience in the State House helped me to understand the importance of law in policy development, and my interest in science exposed me to the work of environmental regulators, whose jobs are essential to maintaining the quality of life and environment that Vermonters are fortunate to enjoy. The education and behind-the-curtain view of lawmaking made me appreciate public process

and input, as well as the many practical challenges that sometimes need to be balanced with other policy goals to achieve a successful outcome. The connections I made with others in the State House were invaluable, and I maintain relationships with many of those individuals today. Most importantly, the experience enabled me to demonstrate my passion for environmental law and policy and my legal skill set, which eventually led to subsequent positions working as a Staff Attorney with Legislative Council and as an attorney with the Department of Environmental Conservation. 🌿

Five Projects

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a 2:1 matching grant after exceeding their crowdfunding goal. Epsilon Spires shared, “We believe that our award from VNRC made all the difference in our competitiveness for the Better



Places Program!” A successful Charity Bingo Night at Whetstone Brewery generated donations and positive feedback. The “Meet the Artists” event allowed community members to view the latest designs and learn about the talented artists. The mural was unveiled on October 7, 2022, at Epsilon Spires.

Rich Earth Institute Nutrient Reclamation Pilot Project – Brattleboro, VT

The Rich Earth Institute, a non-profit dedicated to advancing sustainable waste management and nutrient reclamation, was awarded two Small Grants for Smart Growth in 2018 and 2019 to support planning activities and site visits to bring urine

diverting sanitation systems to facilities and residences in West Dummerston and Westminster. Collaborating with the Windham Regional Commission, Rich Earth’s Village Sanitation Pilot



Study aimed to alleviate pressure on septic systems in unsewered Vermont villages and assess the feasibility of innovative wastewater solutions. Significant progress has been made, establishing urine diversion installations in various locations. Additional installations are planned, and permits are being pursued. A report detailing the study’s findings was published in 2020 and can be found on Rich Earth’s website. With recent funding from the Thomas Thompson Trust and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Rich Earth aims to maximize their pilot permit for 25 plumbed and 25 unplumbed installations by 2024. 🌿

A big thanks to all of our Small Grant for Smart Growth grantees, who are dedicated to supporting these Smart Growth development principles that support a Vermont that is welcoming, vibrant, socially and environmentally resilient.

Program Updates

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Sewer Overflows (CSOs), which occur when stormwater from extreme rain events flows into wastewater treatment plants and overwhelm the plant’s capacity. This can cause the plant to discharge raw or partially treated sewage into Vermont’s waters. VNRC alleges in our appeal that the state is not following the Clean Water Act in addressing CSOs in the Rutland permit, and requiring that CSOs be mitigated through conditions and ultimately phased out at the Rutland facility. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources has filed motions to dismiss our appeal on procedural grounds, and VNRC has responded to this motion and are now waiting for the court’s response.

- VNRC and the Conservation Law Foundation have intervened in an appeal of the Agency of Natural Resource’s decision that PFAs toxins flowing from the Coventry Landfill do not require a discharge permit under the federal Clean Water Act. The appeal was filed by a local community group Don’t Undermine Memphremagog’s Purity (DUMP). DUMP had petitioned the Agency to address the PFAs chemicals emanating from the landfill, but the petition was denied on the grounds that the landfill operator will eventually install a pretreatment system to address the toxins. This is an important case for addressing PFAS chemicals harming Vermont waters and setting precedent for discharge permit requirements in Vermont. The case is made even more important in light of the recent United States Supreme Court decision in *Sackett v. EPA*, which substantially narrowed the definition of waters protected by the CWA. 🌿



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VNRC's 60th Anniversary Celebration

Thursday, September 21 | 5:30 - 8:30 PM
American Flatbread at Lareau Farm Inn
46 Lareau Rd. Waitsfield



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