



Vermont Conservation Plan (Act 59)

Stakeholder-led Listening Sessions

February - March 2026



Willey Woods, Burke
(photo credit TPL/Chris Bennet)

Act 59: The Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act

Vision: Maintain an **ecologically functional** and **connected landscape** that sustains **biodiversity and watershed health**, strengthens **climate resilience**, supports **working farms and forests**, provides **equitable opportunities for recreation and connection to the natural world**, and reinforces VT's **historic settlement pattern** (compact villages surrounded by rural lands/natural areas).

Goals: Conserve **30%** of Vermont by **2030** and **50%** by **2050**.



Wolcott Community Forest,
Wolcott

Why This Matters



Montpelier Flood (photo courtesy of VT Digger and Andrew Brewer)

Our Land is Under Threat

- **Farmland loss and rising costs:** Vermont has lost nearly 100,000 acres of farmland in the last twenty years.
- **Forests are fragmenting:** Vermont has lost roughly 250,000 acres of forestland in the last two decades.
- **Climate impacts are intensifying** with a rise in floods, droughts, and habitat loss.
- **Residential acreage has increased** by close to 200,000 acres over that time—supporting disproportionately **low-density outcomes and unaffordable prices.**

Resource Considerations

Moving Forward through Complex Challenges

- **Capacity constraints:** Workforce and organizational capacity limitations affect how quickly conservation efforts can move and how many initiatives can advance at once.
- **Funding uncertainty:** Shifting federal and state funding landscapes create uncertainty and require flexibility in how projects are sequenced and financed.
- **Rising costs and competing demands:** Increasing land values, construction costs, and growing needs across housing, water quality, and resilience efforts add pressure across the system.

Collaboration is essential: In this environment, coordinated efforts, shared tools, and creative partnerships across organizations and scales are critical to achieving meaningful and measurable progress.



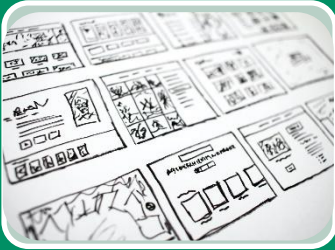
Goulet Farm Dead Creek WMA Addition, Addison

Act 59: Timeline



Phase 1. Conservation Inventory - completed July 2024

An assessment of existing and potential conservation data, practices, programs, equity, and funding with recommended next steps



Phase 2. Conservation Plan - due June 30, 2026

A comprehensive strategy for achieving the vision and goals of the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act, including recommendations to provide and increase equitable access to conserved lands/land-based enterprises and enhancing current enhancements to working lands and rural landowners.



Phase 3. Implementation - 2026 - 2050

- 30% of Land Conserved by 2030
- 50% of Land Conserved by 2050

Act 59: Phase I Overview & Results

Final Inventory Results for 2024

Ecological Reserve Areas:	240,055 acres (4.08%)
Biodiversity Conservation Areas:	235,950 acres (4.01%)
Forestland and Natural Cover:	929,431 acres (15.78%)
Agricultural and Open Land:	171,347 acres (2.91%)
Total of Conserved Land:	1,576,783 acres (~27%)
Acres to Meet 2030 Goal:	189,953 acres



Darling Hill, Burke

Conservation Plan: Coordinating with Other Plans



Lemon Fair WMA South, Bridport and Shoreham

Aligning with Other Efforts

- **Align with existing statewide, regional, and local plans**
- **Leverage established strategies and investments** (rather than duplicating them)
- **Focus Act 59 on its added value:** conservation outcomes, coordination, and prioritization
- **Examples of plans this work aligns with:**
 - Climate Action Plan & Resilience Implementation Strategy
 - Wildlife Action Plan
 - Forest Action Plan & Forest Future Roadmap
 - Move Forward Together Vermont
 - Tactical Basin Planning & Clean Water initiatives
 - Vermont Agriculture & Food System Plan

Conservation Plan: Structure & Framework

Setting Out a Strategy for Achieving the Vision & Goals for the Conservation Plan

- Act 59 requires a plan that advances shared vision and goals while meeting **four planning criteria**.
- The draft Conservation Plan is organized as a **through-line from intent to action**: objectives define outcomes, pathways define strategies, and actions and sub-actions define implementation.
- Each pathway explicitly documents how it advances the vision and goals and responds to the planning criteria, **linking statutory requirements to real-world decisions**.



VT Adaptive,
Rochester

Conservation Plan: Four Criteria



Valley Brook, Morgan

10 V.S.A. Section 2804(b) directs VHCB in consultation with ANR to Provide a Comprehensive Strategy for Achieving the Vision and Goals of the Act



Conserve Vermont's agricultural land, working forests, historic properties, and surface waters



Develop implementation methods for achieving vision and goals using Vermont Conservation Design as a guide



Provide and increase equitable access to protected and conserved lands and land-based enterprises



Implement the vision and goals while enhancing the State's current investments in working lands enterprises

Conservation Plan: Three Objectives

OBJECTIVE ONE

CENTER VERMONT CONSERVATION DESIGN

This objective is focused on how to protect, restore and maintain an ecologically functioning and connected natural and working landscape.

OBJECTIVE TWO

SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN COMMUNITIES

This objective is focused on how to better connect people and communities to the land. It aims to advance conservation in ways that benefit people and communities by protecting natural and working lands, enhancing recreation, and supporting equitable access.

OBJECTIVE THREE

STRENGTHEN CONSERVATION CAPACITY

This objective is focused on expanding the conservation community's ability to sustainably protect and steward land.

Draft Expanded Framework Report

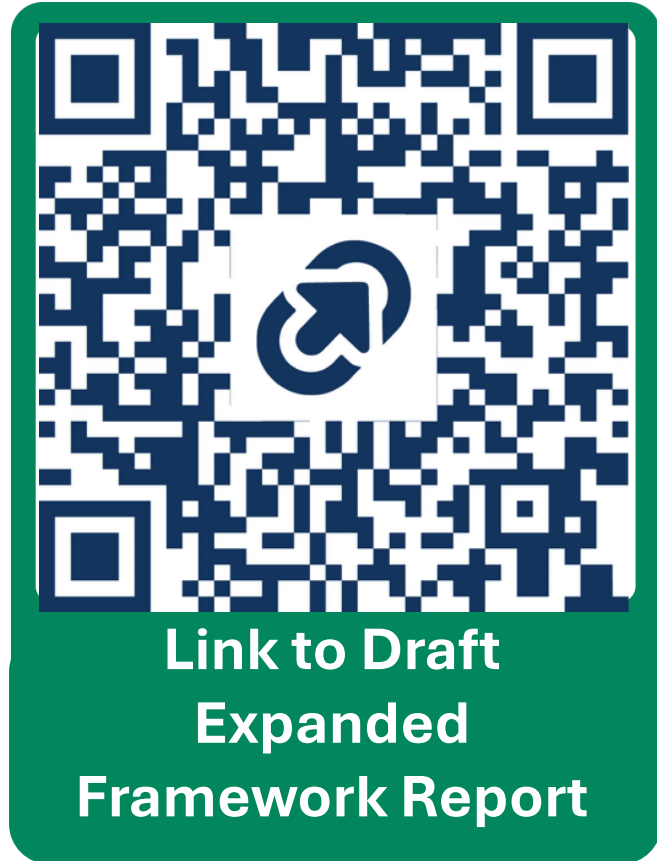
Reviewing and Providing Input on the Draft

- Available at vermontconservationplan.com
- As part of an **iterative, multi-phase** plan drafting process
- Here's how to provide input:
 - Discussion at listening sessions
 - Visit the project website and provide direct feedback on each objective or send any additional feedback via email
- All comments & feedback on this draft due by **March 31, 2026**



Mount Ascutney: Brownsville Village Weathersfield, Vermont

Act 59: Next Steps



How to Get Involved & Stay Connected

Draft Expanded Framework Report: Public draft of the VPC, outlining proposed objectives, pathways, and actions under Act 59 (posted on the project website).

Regional Listening Sessions: In-person (and one virtual) public meetings across the state this winter to gather regional perspectives on Act 59 priorities.

Stakeholder-Led Listening Sessions: Partner-hosted conversations to reach communities, sectors, and voices not always present in formal processes.

Stay Connected: Project updates, draft materials, and engagement opportunities available at vermontconservationplan.com

Questions About the Vermont Conservation Plan?

Contact Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) Staff:

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Arlington Town Forest