VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN | **REGIONAL LISTENING SESSIONS**
JULY 23-24 & 29-30, 2025

CONSERVATION PROJECT SUCCESS STORIES

Merck Forest and Farmland Center

Merck Forest and Farmland Center, located in Rupert, owns and stewards 3,500 acres, 3,200 of which is conserved, and works to educate the community and inspire connections between people and the natural and working landscape.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Merck's conserved forestland and farmland **support the local working lands' economies** and provide forest and farm products for the community.

Merck offers **educational opportunities for people of all ages**, helping to inform people about the working and natural landscapes around them and inspire enduring connections to the land.

Merck's property includes a **network of trails and rustic cabins** that offer a unique and wide-ranging variety of recreational opportunities.

Vermont Land Trust holds a **conservation easement on 3,200 acres** of Merck's land, ensuring that the land will remain undeveloped and continue to provide opportunities for people to connect to the land into the future.

Fitzgerald Farm Retirement

This success story highlights the VFWD fee acquisition and restoration of 124 acres of farmland in Colchester along the Winooski River. This project is improving water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin by reducing nutrient and sediment loads entering the river and by increasing the floodplain's capacity to filter pollutants and mitigate floods.

This former dairy is located **entirely in the floodplain**, and much of the property is subject to regular flooding. The land was gradually restored to floodplain forest and wetlands and is managed as a Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Located in the most densely populated region of the state, public ownership of the Fitzgerald farm improves the accessibility of state-owned lands in the urban and suburban areas of Chittenden County.

A **diverse group of stakeholders** – VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), DF&W, UVM Extension (business planner) and VHCB – have been working for several years with the Fitzgeralds, who have been reluctant to give up farming, and to sell, cherished family land. However, the combined forces of the economic challenges of dairy farming, and climate change and increased rainfall, made production on this farmland problematic. **Restoration of the floodplain forest and wetlands** were done in partnership with TNC; TNC also co-holds the conservation easement with VHCB.

The farm includes approximately **124 acres** in one parcel, with 8,546 feet of frontage along the Winooski River. 75 acres are tillable, and 91 acres are prime agricultural soils. 46 acres are wetlands. The property includes a significant natural community along the river: **silver maple-ostrich fern floodplain forest**. The land along the river ranks high in VCD as a surface water and riparian area providing ecological function, wildlife habitat and connectivity.