

VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #10

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 9:30am to 1:00pm EST

MEETING NOTES



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FOR MORE INFORMATION





TAC 3/19/26 Notes

TAC members present: Gannon Osborn, Krista Karlson, Alex Smith, Ari Rocklan-Smith, Emily Alger, Nick Bennette, Kate Forrer, Chris Castanos, Hannah Sessions, Jamey Fidel, Rich Holschuh, Jean Hamilton, Chris Campany

VHCB and ANR Staff Present: Annie Decker, Trey Martin, Isaac Bissell, Bob Zaino, Gunnar Nurme, Billy Coster, Becca Washburn, Oliver Pierson, Gus Seelig

AGENDA COVERED

Update from VHCB

- Three more TAC meetings after today. 2 virtual, 1 in person
- Regional listening sessions around the state completed
- 28 grants for stakeholder listening sessions. Halfway through those
 - VHCB has been working with Center for Whole Communities who is helping provide additional support to stakeholders
 - LAOB has been a great partner for helping plan community engagement

Reflecting on Input and Overarching Themes

- VHCB-identified themes
 - Quality > quantity
 - Efficiency
 - Who is part of the conservation community? How can we get more people to see themselves in it?
 - What to do about small-medium parcels? Without adding stewardship burden
 - Enhancing land access and affordability
 - Working lands viability and access for outdoor recreation
- TAC member reflections
 - Relationships. The challenge posed by conservation being led by statewide organizations and the restraints that come with that. People who do the work

on the ground and are tied into local communities are a missing link sometimes

- Still a tension/misunderstanding around permanent protections vs UVA and other forms of little c conservation
- Some feedback that Vermont is already so forested, where are we trying to go from here?
- Lots of Act 181 feedback. People not understanding the difference. But this also shows the concern out there about people's property rights etc.
- Some positive feedback – people saying they love it and want to find out how they can help. Where can we point them? Saying they can get involved with local/regional groups doesn't always satisfy, some people want to get more involved individually
- Need to expand CC and local land trust capacity
- The layering of all the different legislation going on right now – 181, 59, school district consolidation. A sense of loss of local control and distrust
- Want to be careful about the push for more local control without more capacity
- Good to see that the plan identifies how conservation is good for recreation, but the plan doesn't mention how can recreation help advance conservation. Need to close that loop
- 75% of trails in VT are on private land, most of which is not conserved. How can Act 59 help secure access to recreational assets
- How can we innovate within the established status quo/system?
- Capacity building at the local level, but also capacity “bringing”
- The layering of all the different Acts right now has diminished the ag/working land voice. Working lands culture of VT needs to stay center
- Opportunity to strengthen how the plan talks about the economic side of things for landowners/communities. Plan talks about working lands/forests, but doesn't truly acknowledge the reality of the impact of working lands enough
- While the layering of all the different Acts has some downsides, there are also opportunities to think about how we can weave things together for good
- Plan could still do a better job of considering other forms of conservation or land planning beyond easements/fee ownership by cons org
- Both Act 59 and Act 181 need to be seen as bottom-up approaches
- The balance between the vision and goals is still a challenge

- Re: the tension between wildlands conservation and working lands, the reality is that a lot of people value both. How do we recognize this and advance both
- Still arguing about the what instead of the how
- People are still not understanding what Act 59 is. We're a bit to blame for that. Never developed sideboards that would have allowed people to see themselves in it more
- Plan has lost the ecological themes a bit
- The structure of Act 59 should be about permanent land conservation with willing landowners and how it can help advance biodiversity, working lands, etc. Where people can then see themselves in it is how they can play a role as a willing landowner interested in permanent conservation
- Too much jargon
- There is also a goal to conserve 30% of the food consumed in New England in New England by 2030. Plan should acknowledge
- One important stakeholder that doesn't have a voice is the land/species
- Some sort of summary higher up in the document to highlight what actions private landowners/communities/state can take. In addition to the actions list
- **Initial input prior to break at 10:25am**
 - How TAC could facilitate ranking/prioritization
 - Land Trusts (LTs) and Conservation Management Systems (CMS) should support stewardship and practices
 - E. Sorenson table: clarify roles (permits, DRA, zoning) and what each does
 - How to support all initiatives
 - Funding and financing considerations
 - Example: Chris C's 10 acres (individual landowner context)
 - Highlight successes of current work (extent of protection and access)
 - Transition from voluntary to perpetual conservation – what data exists on access?
 - Avoid restructuring the entire plan
 - Capture input from people not engaged in formal processes
 - Ecological directives are unclear – maintain focus, especially for communities and stakeholders
 - Use themes as opportunities for cross-cutting organization and communication
 - Decide whether to address all cross-cutting issues or focus on key objectives/plans
 - Clarify concrete discussion points
 - Emphasize ecological connections and features
 - Clarify how CMS supports other conversations and initiatives
 - Provide guidance for municipalities, RPCs, and NRCDs

- Translate technical jargon into accessible language
- Consider food security (30x30 context)
- Consider delaying Act 181 exemptions to allow more planning time
- Assess whether current land use is durable/permanent
- Clarify how to include this focus
- Support both wildlands and working lands (avoid division)
- Focus on ‘how’ rather than just ‘what’
- Clarify scope (what is/is not included)
- Concerns about loss of local control
- Concerns about local capacity
- Explore how other initiatives (e.g., OR) can drive conservation and stewardship
- Private land trail hosts as potential partners
- Who is speaking from the non-human perspective?
- Wildlife advocates need a stronger voice
- Farming is critical – take a view through Current Condition – how can we protect and keep this land protected?
- Vision for 2030, 2050, 2100

Policy & Planning

- Delay Act 181 exemptions to allow more time for planning
- Assess whether current land use is durable and permanent
- Clarify how to incorporate this focus into planning
- Define scope clearly (what is included vs. excluded)
- Focus on implementation (‘how’), not just goals (‘what’)

Land Use & Conservation Approach

- Support both wildlands and working lands without division
- Address tension between development and land protection
- Balance voluntary versus regulatory approaches
- Consider impacts on property values and risks of land grabs
- Move beyond easements and acquisition toward broader engagement

Relationships & Governance

- Strengthen relationships with local organizations
- Use local organizations to improve communication and access
- Clarify connections across Tier 3 / Act 250 / Act 181 / IPRs
- Address diminished voice of rural landowners and ag/forestry communities
- Balance community capacity, system capacity, and ownership

Equity & Community Considerations

- Address economic realities facing rural landowners
- Ensure landowners and stakeholder groups are engaged early
- Address concerns about loss of local control and capacity
- Recognize lack of representation/voice for ecosystems

Strategy & Coordination

- Move toward integrated ('policy lasagna') rather than disconnected layers
- Align conservation strategies across multiple scales
- Analyze land and land-use choices systematically
- Identify clear problem statement, access issues, and next steps

Emerging Concerns

- Who is acquiring farmland in New England?
- Avoid framing issues as opposing sides
- Ensure conservation and stewardship are aligned with broader initiatives

Prioritization Framework

- Short-term priorities:
 - - Urgent actions
 - - Funded initiatives
 - - Projects ready to move
 - - Quick wins
- Long-term priorities:
 - - New programs
 - - New funding sources
 - - Multiple strategies

Next Steps

- Define what is urgent
- Identify what is funded and ready to move
- Determine ready partners and collaborators
- Identify quick wins

Reflecting on themes and moving towards implementation

- These themes seem to leave out biodiversity
- How do we as a TAC want to balance what we're hearing from the public and what the Act directs us to do
- Feels like these belong towards the end of the plan in the implementation phase
- Some of these themes feel like cross-cuts of the O&Ps, some feel repetitive. How will these interact with the O&Ps
- Will adding another framework truly help people understand it better? Or is it just confusing
- These themes identify some important topics that need to be discussed. Could we narrow down a list of topics to focus on as a TAC?
- Are there opportunities to promote better stewardship of private lands? As a way to make private landowners/the average Vermonter feel seen in the plan
- Can we find data about how much of private land in VT is being posted? Can we add some data to the plan to back up the idea of the VT land ethic?
- The plan shouldn't be restructured to fit these themes. But they should be kept in mind re: implementation and worked in where possible
- What do we do with the criticism of the plan? How do we consider that as we move into implementation?
- There are some themes from our discussion today that aren't on here. Specifically the theme around the layering of different legislation. That seems like it should be spelled out
- Focus on short vs long term priorities – we should focus on some short term priorities so we have some work to show. Are there low hanging fruits?
- TAC should spend some time discussing priorities – feels like a good use of TAC time
- Pulling these themes out as a way to consider how we prioritize actions
- Would we want to consider ranking actions? Opens a can of worms, but there is something to be said for using the qualitative data we've gathered over the course of the planning process. Could help people make decisions
- Discussion around the range of conservation from permanent to temporary to stewardship/practices. And how they all have their values and when one tool makes more sense than another totally depends on the situation/land/landowner
- A funding working group could be an example of a good way to focus in on actions/implementation

From listening sessions to long-term partnerships

- We've seen that getting people in a room together works. Conversely, not getting people together leads to misunderstandings and divisions. The amount of people who still don't understand what Act 59 is shows that there are still opportunities to get the word out and communicate better. But once people come out and sit at a table, whether that's the TAC or the public at listening sessions, progress is made
- People are confused by all the legislation and initiatives. How can we clear this up?
- Discussion around how it seems like there are still some topics that need more discussion. Are there opportunities to do working groups?
- What do we do on July 2nd? Can the plan spell out more about the plan beyond the plan? If we're going to do working groups to tackle any outstanding issues, could the plan mention those?
 - It shouldn't be up to the conservation community around the state to receive the final plan and then run with it independently. There should be some collaboration
 - While also being sure that it's not just the same historical partners in the conservation community. Want to expand community and pull people in
- Consider how the VCP interacts with other related plans into the future
- There used to be a pathway about conservation at different scales. This is important and feels like it's been lost a little bit
- How do we organize resources, data and technical assistance in a way that's accessible
- Are there opportunities to add notes/sections to the plan that call out which stakeholders/partners might want to engage on certain actions/pathway and how?