

# VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #11

Thursday, April 16, 2026, 9:30am to 11:00am EST

## MEETING NOTES



### **Annie Decker**

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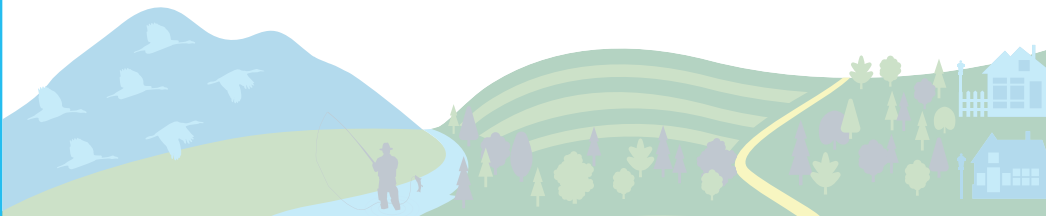
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FOR MORE INFORMATION



## **TAC 4/16/26 Notes**

TAC members present: Alex Smith, Greg Gustina, Chris Company, Emily Alger, Chris Castano, Ari Rockland-Miller, Jean Hamilton, Krista Karlson, Nick Bennette, Gannon Osborn, Ornella Matta-Figueroa

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

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### **AGENDA COVERED**

#### **Update from VHCB**

- 75 days left until June 30 deadline
- VHCB, CWC and FiQ working to provide an analysis of feedback received from regional and stakeholder led listening sessions
- VHCB is consulting with ANR to produce a final draft version of the plan for public input and comments in late May
- Final public meetings will be virtual with multiple options/times of day to support attendance
- Two more TAC meetings
  - May 21 – in person/hybrid at Unitarian Church
  - June 11 – remote
- There were 30 stakeholder led listening sessions, in addition to the regional listening sessions
  - Also over 150 public comments via email and website

#### **High level share out on feedback**

- 1) Scope and framing. Did not support narrowing to biodiversity alone but divides exist between biodiversity and working lands
- 2) The plan is widely perceived as too abstract and broad
- 3) Ecological reserves and old forests are under-emphasized
- 4) Private landowners and working forests feel under-recognized or overburdened
- 5) Confusion over conservation definitions and what counts
- 6) Public lands support multiple values and equitable access

## **Discussion and hot topics**

- Has there been any increase in feedback related to the increased dialogue around Act 181?
  - Not necessarily
  - But there are some groups/stakeholders who view the two as connected policies
- Did food security/regional food system resilience come up?
  - Yes, definitely heard that from certain constituencies
- VHCB has hundreds of pages of comments to sort through. Using a combination of human organization and AI
- The realities of funding seems like a missing point here. Because there is a large gap between the funding reality when the Act was passed versus now
  - Yes, but there has never/rarely been an abundance of conservation dollars in VT. It will always be changing
- Some feedback that is missing here is feedback about public engagement/power/role in the process. Heard lots of feedback about that throughout the process, and don't want to push that aside
- One thing we can learn from Act 181 is that we should focus on making sure the VCP is best prepared to land well with Vermonters. Perception is reality
- Need to lean on the fact that Act 59 focuses on voluntary decisions by landowners. Be careful with language given the knife's edge we're on. Even "willing landowner" sounds a little bit tough
- Do we need some sort of PR campaign to help get the right message out as the VCP nears being published?
- "Tools vs rules"
- Land is an emotional subject for people. That + stress + the suspicion that this is a "land grab" can create a difficult environment for messaging. Need to think about that when considering PR. Instead think about ways to bring community(s) together around Act 59
  - Different entry points to the information. Different levels of depth, different materials for different audiences, etc.
  - Could we hire a UX designer?
  - Two sides of the coin with PR/marketing. On one hand people might not like information being thrown at them, but on the other it's good visibility
- To some extent the broad scope of the plan makes it harder to understand
- There is still room to better center landowners in the plan itself
- In thinking about this and how much to simplify language in the plan, the actions should remain specific
- What do we do the day after the plan is published? How can we support landowners, communities, etc. to engage in the work. ANR/VHCB will have some responsibilities, but a lot will fall on landowners/communities.
  - Community events
  - What is the appropriate scale at which to do this? Recognizing that we can't meet with every small farm or even every community