



CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLATFORM

2007 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



BUILDING VERMONT'S CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE AND COMBATING GLOBAL WARMING

To combat rapid global climate change that threatens Vermont's farming, sugaring, ski, and tourism industries, and to prepare for the potential loss of contracts that currently provide two-thirds of Vermont's electric power.

- **Support Clean, Safe, and Affordable Power Supply Options:** Vermonters overwhelmingly support the development of renewable energy from a combination of wind, solar, biomass, and small hydroelectric plants. These projects require new capital, but investors are taking their money out of state due to regulatory uncertainty and stronger incentives elsewhere. The Legislature should pass a Renewable Energy Standard which utilities can meet by building new renewable energy projects in Vermont or by contracting with local providers. In combination with a Renewable Energy Standard, the Legislature should create a smoother permitting process for community-scale renewable energy projects.
- **Expand Energy Efficiency Opportunities:** Vermont has tremendous untapped potential for energy savings in its buildings. We can reduce our consumption of fossil fuels, along with our heating bills, by improving the energy efficiency of our homes and businesses. The Legislature should provide incentives to realize all cost-effective efficiency potential in existing buildings, while enacting progressively stronger standards for new construction.

PROTECTING VERMONT'S WORKING LANDSCAPES AND NATURAL AREAS

To preserve the vitality and character of Vermont's communities and working landscapes as they face unprecedented development pressure.

- **Strengthen Programs Protecting Communities, Working Landscapes and Vital Natural Areas:** Popular local land conservation programs support working farms and forests, preserve vital natural areas, and provide increased public access to rivers. These conservation opportunities will be lost forever if our investments fall short. The Legislature should strengthen the Current Use Program and fully fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.
- **Support Downtown and Village Center Development:** The development needed to keep our downtowns healthy requires the investment of more state resources in town and village centers. Financial incentives for redeveloping old and vacant buildings are working, but are too limited. At the same time, our tax dollars are subsidizing sprawl development that hurts our communities. The cap on tax credits in the Downtown and Village Center Program should be raised by \$1 million to meet the demand. Further, our tax dollars should be directed to smart growth development and effective implementation and expansion of the Growth Center Program.
- **Provide Citizens Full and Accurate Information on Large-Scale Retail Developments:** Local economic growth works best when Vermonters can make informed decisions on how to develop their communities. The Legislature should require an independent, developer-funded, community-impact study for any new retail store over 75,000 square feet.

- **Close Act 250 Loopholes that Promote Sprawl:** Loopholes in Act 250 allow unregulated development that destroys critical wildlife habitats and makes it more difficult to conserve Vermont's natural resources. The Legislature should eliminate Act 250's loopholes, such as the utility-line and road-rule exemptions, to halt rural sprawl and prevent further environmental damage.

PROTECTING VERMONT'S WATER

To safeguard Vermont's invaluable water resources for current and future generations.

- **Clean Up Lake Champlain by 2009:** Lake Champlain is one of Vermont's most prized natural assets. The lake provides drinking water for more than 200,000 people, annually generates hundreds of millions of dollars in tourism revenue, and offers priceless recreational opportunities for Vermonters. But phosphorous pollution from sewage treatment plants, agricultural runoff, stormwater discharges, and the resulting noxious algae blooms are contaminating this invaluable resource. In order to meet the 2009 deadline laid out in the Governor's Clean and Clear Action Plan, the Legislature should enact legislation to audit existing clean-up programs, institute necessary enhancements to those programs, and establish tougher controls on major pollution sources.
- **Improve Stormwater Policy:** Acre for acre, paved land contributes more pollution to Vermont's waters than farmland. Despite this fact, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources stormwater policy makes it easier, in many cases, for developers to pave over farms than to pave lots in already-developed areas. This policy is bad for water quality and bad for keeping Vermont's vital small farms in business. The Legislature should reverse this policy.

INCREASING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

To ensure that environmental laws protecting Vermont's clean air, clean water, and landscapes are enforced consistently and transparently.

- **Broaden Public Participation in Enforcement of Environmental Laws:** Illegal pollution is damaging Vermont's communities, yet all too often the Agency of Natural Resources fails to act on citizen complaints. The Legislature should allow some form of public enforcement, whether in state court or through informal settlement agreements, if state officials fail to act against polluters in their community.
- **Hold Polluters Accountable for Environmental Damage:** Actual punishments for environmental violations are rare, and when they are imposed the fines are too low to deter future polluting activity. The Legislature should prohibit state agencies from granting new permits or renewing existing permits to polluters who have failed to pay their fines. The Legislature should also require random follow-up inspections to ensure that polluters are cleaning up the damage for which they are responsible.

The following organizations have endorsed this Conservation and Environmental Legislative Platform:

Audubon Vermont ♦ Conservation Law Foundation, Inc. ♦ Forest Watch ♦ Green Mountain Club ♦ Lake Champlain Committee ♦ National Wildlife Federation ♦ Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont ♦ Northern Forest Alliance ♦ Preservation Trust of Vermont. ♦ REP America ♦ Rural Vermont ♦ Sustainable Energy Resource Group ♦ Sustainable Valley Group ♦ Toxics Action Center Campaigns ♦ Vermont Alliance of Conservation Voters ♦ Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility ♦ Vermont Forum on Sprawl ♦ Vermont Natural Resources Council ♦ Vermont Public Interest Research Group ♦ Vermont Sierra Club ♦ Vermonters for a Clean Environment.



VERMONT ALLIANCE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

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