

Vermont NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting

January 22, 2025

In-person: USDA State Office, Colchester

Virtual: Microsoft Teams

NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR MAY 14, 2025

Attendees (Colchester): Travis Thomason (NRCS), Luis Aponte (NRCS), Bob Thompson (NRCS), Jim Eikenberry (NRCS), Diana Dellinger (NRCS), Phyllicia Moore (NRCS), Julia Grey (NRCS), Sarah Larose (NRCS), Eileen Powers (FSA), Chris E. Smith (USFWS), Shawn White (UVM Extension), and Michelle Monroe (Senator Welch).

Attending (MS Teams): Adam Dellinger (NRCS), Marybeth Whitten (NRCS), Olivia Carlson (NRCS), John Van Hoesen (NRCS), Stephanie Vasilopoulos (NRCS), Angela Hyldborg (NRCS), Luis Hernandez (NRCS Soil & Plant Division), Davan Reece (Senator Sanders), Thomas Renner (Congresswoman Balint), Marli Rupe (VT DEC), Laura Ranker (VT DEC), Dave Adams (VT FWD), Will Eldridge (VFWD), Paul Hamelin (VFWD), Jill Arace (VACD), Clare Ireland (VACD/NRCC), Jess Miller (VACD/NRCC), Alli Lewis (VAWQP), Nina Gage (VAAF), Ross Saxton (VAAF), Stacy Cibula (VHCB), Alissa White (AFT), Ryan Karb (AFT), Vern Grubinger (UVM Extension/VVBGA), Julie Callahan (UVM Extension), Rachel Stievater (UVM Extension), Peter Beringer (FS), Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux (Vermont State Climatologist), Nancy LaRowe (NOFA-VT), Theresa Vander Woude (EPA), Kira Jacobs (EPA), Eric Howe (LCBP), Cory Ross (WCNRCD), Jennifer Byrne (WRNRCD), Michael Fernandez (Bennington Co NRCD), Chief Don Stevens (Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe) and Hale Morrell (Long View Forest).

Vermont NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting

January 22, 2025 | 9:30 am-12:00 pm

USDA State Office, Colchester and MS Teams

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 – 9:35 am	State Conservationist Welcome	Travis Thomason
9:35 – 9:45 am	Farm Service Agency Update	FSA Representative
9:45 – 9:55 am	Rural Development Update	RD Representative
9:55 – 10:10 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegation
10:10 – 10:40 am	Easements Update	Julia Grey, NRCS
10:40 – 10:55 am	NRCS Programs Update	Diana Dellinger, NRCS
10:55 – 11:55 am	Partner Updates	
11:55 – 12:00 pm	Wrap-up	Travis Thomason

Welcome and NRCS Updates:

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

Welcome. Review of ground rules for hybrid meetings. Review of the agenda.

Administration changes - There are many changes to the federal government right now and everything shared today could change. We continue to move forward with the mission of the agency and await updates on the priorities of the new Administration, some of which have come via Executive Orders. We are a line-and-staff organization, which means we have a Secretary of the Department (USDA) that gives information to Deputy/Under Secretaries (FPAC), who give information to our Chief (the administrator of NRCS). There is a lot of information coming via Executive Orders (federal employees, telework/remote work, Inflation Reduction Act) but we do not have any more information yet from our leadership in DC than what you have access to. Federal employees are impartial, and we work for the President/the Executive Branch. During an administration change there is transition in priorities and many unknowns, and I ask you, as partners, for your patience with our team while we learn what the new priorities are and how we transition the work. We will continue to share with you the information as we receive it. Together we will continue to implement the mission of our agency.

State Tech Committee 2.0 – With the current administration changes we have decided to pause on surveying the committee and implementing changes until we learn about our new agency priorities. Perhaps in three to four months we will have a better understanding of agency priorities and will then move forward with gathering information for improvements for fiscal year 2026.

Hiring – There is a current federal hiring freeze for 90 days (could be longer). We will work with our partners to determine how we can continue the work of the agency. We will share more information as we learn it.

Locally Led Conservation – The local workgroups have been convening, led by the Natural Resources Conservation District Managers. Some are putting together Action Plans to see what investments could look like for FY26. There is a Locally Led Conservation Delivery subcommittee meeting on January 31, 2025. (Primarily NRCS staff, some NRCD DMs, VACD.) If you are interested in attending, reach out to Travis. During the April May State Technical Committee meeting the local workgroups/NRCDs will present a summary of their local workgroup recommendations and potentially some proposals. This will be new for State Tech and I'm looking forward to hearing what some of the priorities and recommendations are for them. The next meeting was originally scheduled for April 23rd but due to school vacations was moved to April 30th. We recently learned that this could be a challenging time for the NRCDs because of their tree/shrub sales. So, the next meeting might change. It will be decided during the January 31st subcommittee meeting. (The next State Technical Committee Meeting confirmed for May 14, 2025.)

National Leadership Updates

- Brooke Rollins has been nominated by the Trump administration for the Secretary of USDA. She has not had her confirmation hearing yet.
- Richard Fordyce has been nominated for the FPAC Under Secretary (Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area which includes FSA, NRCS, RMA and the FPAC Business Center). Richard was the FSA Administrator during the prior Trump administration. NRCS worked very well with Administrator Fordyce during that time.

NRCS Toolkit: Resources for State Technical Committees from the Soil Science and Resource Assessment Deputy Area

- This information is no longer applicable due to changes in the Administration priorities. Questions or comments, please contact Travis Thomason.
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Farm Service Update:

Eileen Powers, Agricultural Program Specialist, FSA Vermont

- Currently we do not have a permanent State Executive Director (SED). Lana Walden is the Deputy State Executive Director and is serving as the Acting SED until a permanent SED is appointed.
- The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is back with the Farm Bill Extension. But at the County Office leave we are still limited on moving new projects forward until we receive some policy guidance. The team is still actively working to bring in new projects. And we can do some work regarding producer eligibility. Hoping to receive guidance soon.
- FSA MASC Program (Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops). Signup opened on 12/10/24, closed on 1/10/25 with 731 applications submitted statewide in Vermont. Payments started going out to approved applications on 1/17/25. Payments disbursed so far in Vermont - \$1,245,665. Nationwide payments disbursed so far over \$200 million.

Vermont applications by county:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| ○ Addison – 49 | ○ Franklin – 207 | ○ Rutland – 35 |
| ○ Bennington – 11 | ○ Grand Isle – 10 | ○ Washington – 52 |
| ○ Caledonia – 39 | ○ Lamoille – 49 | ○ Windham – 40 |
| ○ Chittenden – 103 | ○ Orange – 33 | ○ Windsor - 40 |
| ○ Essex – 1 | ○ Orleans – 62 | |
- With the Farm Bill extension, we also have the Dairy Margin Coverage Program back. Training tomorrow and sign-up starting next week.
 - Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) – Currently administering for seven (7) disasters that started in December 2022. (Only a few payments remaining for the Dec. 2022 disaster.) Site visits have been completed for many but still have more to complete (on pause for the winter months). Total payments around \$1.4 million but more to come.

Comments/Questions:

No questions or comments

Rural Development Update:

No Update

- The RD State Executive Director is also a political appointee. Acting SED was not able to attend.
-

Legislative Updates

Senator Sander's Office

Davan Reece, Legislative Correspondent (DC) - Agriculture and Health, davan_reece@sanders.senate.gov

- Senate is focused on processing nominations for President Trump's cabinet.
- Brooke Rollins is the President's selection for the Secretary of Agriculture (USDA) and her hearing before the Senate Agriculture Committee is tomorrow, Jan 23rd at 10:00 am. After hearings, committees are typically voting to advance the nominees within a week. Followed by a full Senate vote within a week or so. (Often delays are because of paperwork issues.)
- To date, only Senator Marco Rubio, Florida, has been confirmed for Secretary of State.
- Government funding – the current Continuing Resolution (CR) is set to expire on March 14, 2025. We realize that operating under the old budget is challenging to agencies. Without a proper FY25 budget there is no Congressionally Delegated Spending (CDS) "earmarks", so there is no incentive to not pass the full year's budget. No word yet whether Congress will accept CDS for FY26 budget.
- The government is approaching the debt ceiling. The Treasurer is taking measures to be sure debts are paid and the country does not default on its debts.
- We are expecting a budget resolution next month or early March.

- Tracking numerous Executive Orders signed by the President during his first two days in office. Tracking impacts on the state. Feel free to reach out or send impacted Vermonters our way.
- Continuing to monitor the spread of bird-flu. Weekly multi-agency meetings. No positive cases reported in VT dairy cows (or any northeast dairy cows.) USDA and VT continue to conduct bulk milk testing. According to CDC, the threat to people remains very low at this time, however HHS announced January 21, 2025, that Moderna will receive \$590 million to fast-track a bird-flu vaccine.

Senator Welch's Office

Michelle Monroe, Communications and Outreach Representative, michelle_monroe@welch.senate.gov

- Continuing Resolution passed, which included some disaster assistance for agriculture. There is \$21 million in what was previously the Emergency Relief Program. (Review of the past program.) Unsure how it will be implemented this time. There was also \$220 million for seven states (5 New England states, Hawaii and Alaska). Vermont has already provided USDA data and evidence of losses for 2022 and 2023. Thankfully VT had a lot of robust data and information. Originally projecting was that VT would get ~ \$11 million, but we hope it will be much more than that given our documented losses. That money will be given to the State to manage, and we hope it can be used for farm infrastructure losses and hazard mitigation for the future.
- Executive Orders on tariffs, ordered analysis, but a lot of it will be challenged so we need to wait and see what comes out. Concerns from farmers (organic) regarding grain from Canada, feed dealers about grain from Canada, and potash from Canada. Concern about fertilizers. We could get caught in issues connected to Wisconsin dairy farmers.
- No information on the labor front.
- Brooke Rollins coming up for a hearing for Secretary of Agriculture. Senator Welch will be part of the hearings as a member of the Ag Committee.
- Senator Welch is now the ranking member (instead of the chair) of the Subcommittee on Rural Development and Energy. Also, on the Finance Committee with Senator Sanders, which oversees the tariffs.
- Farm Bill extension left out some programs (orphaned), including the Organic Transition Initiative.

Congresswoman Balint's Office

Thomas Renner, Community Liaison/Constituent Services Representative (VT), thomas.renner@mail.house.gov

- Congresswoman from CT, Rosa DeLauro, led the effort for the \$220 million for disaster relief. Working with VAAFM, Secretary Tebbets, to get what he needs to manage this program. Some states have not acted so this could allow for VT to get more funding.

NRCS Programs Update: Easements in Vermont (See slides for details)

Julia Grey, Realty Specialist

What is Conservation Easement

- Easements - What they are
 - Western ideology of land ownership
 - Derived from common law
 - Real property (things that cannot move) vs. personal property (things that can move)
 - “Bundle of sticks” concept – ownership of land is ownership of a lot of “components”; an easement is giving away a component of your land ownership
 - Access road to Bob’s house is an example of a “component” of land ownership
 - Usually perpetual in duration
- Easements – What they are NOT
 - Not a full fee land purchase
 - Not a public property
 - Not Reversible

- Not ACT NOW – not a “fast” process (~2 years)
- Why they matter
- NRCS Easement Programs, Past and Present
 - Past: FRPP, WRP, GRP (now components of ACEP)
 - OSL: not technically a Program, but an action from a Wetland Mitigation action
 - Present: ACEP, RCPP, HFRP, EWPP-FPE (Varies depending on the Farm Bill specifics)
- Stewardship vs. Non-stewardship

Vermont Easement Portfolio (end of FY24)

- By the Numbers – Addison County has the most with 160
- Available Easement Programs in Vermont
 - ACEP-ALE
 - ACEP-WRE
 - RCPP US-Held – Agreement with VT DEC, closing on Friday, January 24, 2025
 - EWP-FPE – Funding is triggered by disaster event (no annual appropriations)
 - Restoring flood plains in residential zones (usually multiple landowners)
 - Agricultural land which can include structural components
- VT NRCS Easement Staff
- VT NRCS Key Partners

Current and Upcoming Easement Priorities – likely to change with the new Administration

- ACEP – significant increase in funding for FY25 (through IRA)
- Other Opportunities: Floodplain Easements; Wetland Restoration Priorities; Future RCPP Agreements; Upcoming Farm Bill

Ways to Get Involved

- Attend State Technical Subcommittee meetings
- Encourage participation of small land trusts or other eligible ALA entities
- Landowners interested in WRE – apply now - GARC Rates FY2025
- Sign up for Gov Delivery
- Connect with Partnership Team for RCPP opportunities

Comments/Questions:

Question: What if our easement gets damaged by a natural disaster?

Response: There is provision in policy for how to address this issue. Assessment and possible administrative action.

Question: With California wildfires and the Midwest droughts, I believe New England will become the food belt for the nation. How is the State of Vermont and NRCS VT ensuring that we have enough farmland and strategic planning around our food systems when there is a migration of people coming east and buying up property. Many farms have gone under, and those lands potentially sold for development. I am just curious on how we get agricultural land in the hands of both farmers and disadvantaged populations like ourselves? How are we preparing for these issues?

Response: A lot of your question ties to the new funding related to environmental resiliency. Ag easements are very partner driven. State of Vermont is working on a “30 by 30” plan. It is very much a collaborative approach. An important aspect of the State Technical Committee

Action item: During an ALE subcommittee meeting, discussion of what is and could be done in Vermont to address the above question.

Nationally, Vermont has one of the highest, per acreage, ratio of conserved land.
Thank you to Julia and team for leading this work.

NRCS Programs Update *(See slides for details)*

Diana Dellinger, ASTC for Programs; Luis Aponte, ASTC for Partnerships

FY24 Final Obligation Summary

- Conservation work on over 51 thousand acres; Obligating \$29.5 million

RCPP Update

- FY25 Call for Proposals – coming soon, but could change with the change in Administration
- Link to [training webinars](#)

Funding Opportunity: ACT NOW

- Accelerates the timeline from application to contract utilizing existing funding allocations through EQIP
- Funding Available, Sign-Up Period, Targeted Practices
- Producers must be registered and eligible with FSA to receive funding. Fact Sheets (with FAQ) have been created by Partnerships Team (Outreach Coordinator) to inform producers of the requirements and support available.

FY25 Funding Allocation

- We are moving forward with this work and should be able to obligate all the money allocated to us for EQIP and CSP programs. Lots of good things are happening for Vermont producers.

FY25 EQIP & CSP Payment Limitations: *(See slide for details)*

- Within the Farm Bill there are two (2) different payment limitations.
 - Each CONTRACT has a payment limitation.
 - Each PARTICIPANT has a payment limitation
- At this time, EQIP and CSP participants will NOT be subject to payment limitations identified in the 2018 Farm Bill.
 - The regulatory contract limits will still apply for each CONTRACT
 - If a PARTICIPANT has maxed out on 2018 Farm Bill payment limitations, this is an opportunity to receive additional funding through another contract.

Comments/Questions:

Question: If needed, could additional funds be requested for the Act Now applications?

Response: Yes, we have opportunities along the way to request additional funding if it is determined that it is needed.

Question: Is the focus of Act Now on Soil Health?

Response: Yes, thank you for asking. A portion of the funding (\$80,873) is going towards CPA/DIA/CEMA's including FMP and CNMP as listed on the slide, so we can expedite this work as well. We've also included FMP under Wildlife Habitat subaccount, as we heard feedback to find more avenues for funding FMP.

Partner Updates

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets Update (VAAFM)

Nina Gage, Assistant Director for the Division of Water Quality (QW)

- **Farm Bulk tank sampling for H5N1(HPAI) in dairy cattle.** VAAFM staff are/will sample unpasteurized milk on all Grade A milk producing farms in Vermont each month. **This is also an ongoing reminder to ensure biosecurity process and protocols for staff when working with or farms.** [VAAFM Begins On-Farm Bulk Milk Sampling Program](#)

- **New Disaster Relief funding coming to VT**, from 2023 and 2024 flooding, details TBD. Deadline to submit data to USDA was 1/15/25 and has been submitted by Vermont. No response/update as of today (1/17/25). Contact for more info is Nicole Dubuque.
- **Legislative Session Beginning** – Housing, Affordability, and Education Reform are the governors’ priorities. We don’t anticipate any agricultural issues to be a major focus.
 - [Governor Scott's 2025 Inaugural Address](#)
- **Water Quality Division**
 - In response to 2023 and 2024 flooding as well as historically low enrollment in the Agency's Grassed Waterway and Filter Strip Program, our agency has rebranded and revamped a program currently called the **Seeding and Filter Strip Program (SFS)** to support installation of hay-able or harvestable buffers as an alternative option where land can remain in production while improving water quality outcomes and offers producers an alternative option for assistance to long term land easements such as CREP or River Corridor.
- **CAFO Corrective Action Plan** submitted by the State of Vermont on December 9th. EPA provided a response on January 17, 2025. [EPA January 17, 2025 Response to SOV Corrective Action Plan Submitted December 9, 2024](#)
- **TSP Certification Rule is now in effect**, and TSP’s operating in VT (who charge or collect for their services) will be required to certify with the Agency of Agriculture and may be held legally responsible for NMP concerns through agency enforcement processes.
- **Regular Opportunities for Communication to the Ag Community**
 - Monthly Agriview Newspaper - [Agriview | Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets](#)
 - Agency’s weekly Ag Bulletin - [Subscribe to The Vermont Ag Bulletin](#)
 - [Read past issues of The Vermont Ag Bulletin](#)

State Natural Resource Conservation Council

Clare Ireland, Administrator

NRCC Overview

The State Natural Resources Conservation Council (NRCC) is established as an agency of the state under [Title 10 Chapter 31](#). NRCC is structured as a board comprised of a representative from the Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets; a representative from the Agency of Natural Resources; a representative from UVM Extension; and six district supervisors. It exists to provide guidance, oversight, and support to Vermont’s 14 Natural Resources Conservation Districts.

NRCC Updates

- NRCC requested \$3,000,000 in base funding from the state for FY26. This is the only source of base operational funding for the 14 NRCDs and NRCC.
- The legislature is primed to discuss a number of topics that are directly related to districts’ work and operations, including a review of Vermont’s Clean Water Act (Act 76) and ongoing discussion around clean water, discussions around flood mitigation and stormwater management, biodiversity protection, and a study committee on county and regional governance.
- NRCC has representation on a number of state committees and task forces, including the Environmental Justice Advisory Council; Study Committee on Regional & County Governance; Act 181, Tier 3 Working Group (Act 250); Act 59 Phase II (State 30x30 Goals).
- The schedule of NRCC board meetings for 2025 – 2026 can be found on the NRCC webpage: <https://www.vacd.org/nrcc/>. NRCC’s next board meeting will be held February 27 at 1 pm. Meetings are held quarterly.

District Updates

- Districts are working on their Local Work Group processes. Please contact your local conservation district to find out more about how to be involved.
- Districts have their annual Tree & Trout sales open. More information can be found at

<https://www.vacd.org/plant-sales/>. Please contact your local conservation district to find out more or place an order!

- A number of districts have hired or are in the process of hiring new agricultural positions that will be supporting outreach, education, technical assistance, and conservation planning. We are looking forward to these positions increasing capacity for agricultural work, and we'll be looking to NRCS to help get these folks onboarded, trained, and plugged in to NRCS systems.
- Rutland has a new district manager, Katie Stiles. She is working part time for the time being.
- Franklin has a new office building in St. Albans but will maintain a presence in the USDA Service Center. There will be an open house on January 30th at 5 pm. 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100A, St Albans, VT 05478. For more: <https://www.franklincountynrcd.org/post/fcnrcd-open-house-at-new-offices-january-30-2025>.
- Franklin County has also released its 2025 version of its resource guide (140 pages) for agriculture producers. <https://www.franklincountynrcd.org/agproducersguide>. Please feel free to distribute.
- Bennington NRCD has a Farm Force program assisting with 7 CSP assessments in Bennington and has recently started an Incubator Farm. Further information provided by Michael Fernandez, District Manager, Bennington NRCD.
 - Bennington Veteran Incubator Farm: The program is designed to facilitate new farmers who recently exited the service or veterans who are making a career transition into agriculture. A place for training, initiate production, and to form farm to institution market connections. Launched on Sat, January 18th, VFW Hall, and is product of the Bennington Fair Food Initiative that Senator Welch got us CDS funding a few years ago. Continuing to have community working session (volunteers and Technical Service oriented) every other Thursday. And hosting volunteer workdays on Saturdays as frequently as possible.

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (See map attached)

Jill Arace, Executive Director

- VACD represents the collective voice of the 14 Conservation Districts in Vermont.
- Conservation Districts (CD) work in all areas of natural resources, but a lot in agriculture. CDs provide outreach, education, technical assistance, conservation planning, project implementation.
- Operates largely through funding from the State of Vermont and through NRCC grants.
- We are staffing up to provide more direct technical assistance.
- Role of CDs is to assess needs in the community via outreach and articulate those needs to the Local Work Group.
- CD's have local fund pools through EQIP, ~\$5 million in FY2025.
- VACD has 14 staff who work in agriculture field: Drone pilots, Program Assistants, Wetland planners, Conservation planners, who primarily work to help NRCS obligate their funds to producers/private forest landowners.
- Jeff Farber is retiring this spring, and we will look for opportunity to celebrate his accomplishments.
- Working with consultants to review the services we provide to create efficiency specifically related to administrative burdens of being solo grant funded.

State of Vermont – Department of Environmental Conservation (See map attached)

Marli Rupe, Agricultural Water Quality Section Chief

RCPPs - Two (2) active projects with NRCS (See slides for details)

- RCPP 2132 - 2020 (2021-2026): \$10 million extension of the first RCPP project
 - Focused entirely on improving water quality through ag and forestry BMP implementation. Most Ag and Forestry funds are being contracted out.
 - The easement funding here is obviously slower to be contracted and so appreciate the help of Julia Grey. We are still working on final language for the minimally restrictive easements with Julia but also the national office and know this additional year will ensure

- this funding gets out as well.
 - Technical Assistance funds are split between Implementation (TA-I) and Enhancement (TA-E)
 - TA-I was contracted out to VACD and Redstart Forestry and are limited in scope
 - TA-E are more flexible for planning, outreach and education, assessments, monitoring
 - Over 13,000 acres and 74,000 feet of practices contracted.
 - Next steps are: See the results of ranking in February, request a one-year extension, a renewal in 2025 pending capacity
- RCPP 3273 - 2024 (2024-2029): \$10.7 million
 - Three (3) priorities: Water Quality, Flood Resiliency and Habitat Improvements
 - New Partners: The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Audubon VT as well as current partners VAAFM, LCBP, VHCB
 - RCPP also allows the partner to develop their own ranking sheet to focus where we feel the funding best fits the priorities of the RCPP agreement.
 - August application round, ranking in February, expect to fund \$1.5 million this year, and have already contracted TA-I funds, again to VACD and Redstart.
 - TA-E funds are mostly TDB but will include one priority is a social science assessment of easements. What draws a landowner to an easement, what are the challenges, stumbling blocks, successes, what types of incentives motivates a landowner to do an easement. We will work on this in coordination with partners.

VT Climate Action Council & Subcommittees within ANR

- Responsible for meeting the goals of the Global Warming Solutions Act
- Updating its Climate Action Plan, as required every 5 years. July deadline to legislature.
- There were multiple subcommittees providing input and prioritization, including the ag and eco subcommittee. A draft will be available in April and there will be multiple public meetings (in-person and virtual).
- Sign up for the Climate Action Office (CAO) monthly newsletter
<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/LKntU76>
- Link to summary of the Agriculture and Ecosystems priorities that were shared with the Climate Council. [CAP2025_PrioritiesPresentation_AgricultureEcosystems.pdf](#)

Vermont Clean Water Budget

- This year's Governor's budget for approximately \$46 million
- Covers multiple sectors – a great deal goes to ag and NR, as well as 3-acre permit compliance, phosphorus reduction with the Clean Water Service Providers, and workforce capacity.
- Clean water budget info - [State Fiscal Year 2026 Clean Water Budget Sheet](#) (Final Recommended, December 3, 2024)
- [State Fiscal Year 2026 Clean Water Budget Policy Document](#) (Final Recommended, December 3, 2024)
- [State Fiscal Year 2026 "At a Glance" and Plain Language Budget Sheet](#)

Clean Water Initiative Performance Report

- Sent annually to the legislature. Summarizes the funding directed to clean water in the state, as well as the phosphorus reductions achieved by all this work.
- Phosphorus reductions over time in the Lake Champlain basin.
- Highlight agriculture and natural resource sector numbers - yellow represents phosphorus reductions by implementing agricultural practices and the green is natural resources. Note: have better ways of tracking these sectors over the stormwater ones but still impressive number.

DEC's Clean Water Conservation

- First one tomorrow – a 1-hour lunchtime webinar series. Claire Madden – Performance Report
- [Register or find more information](#)

White River Natural Resources Conservation District (WRNRCD)

Jennifer Byrne, District Manager

Tree Sales

- Forty-seven (47) species in eight (8) micro nurseries around the district (all edible variety)

Farm Force

- Funded through NRCS, Working Lands Conservation Corp
- Hosting our second Bootcamp - USVI St Croix and St Thomas, Feb 20-28, 2025, 30 seats available for VT and USVI
- Assisted with 18 CSP applications and evaluation, Outreach to 21 farms in the USVI on EQIP and now working on CSP, training up staff to do the work.
<https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/working-lands-climate-corps-ca7e31e>
- Forty-three (43) people on AgLearn Access – With the goal for all members to register as TSPs and achieve level 1 certification for conservation planner status.
https://docs.google.com/document/d/19JF_tEyu-utsKhNMmZgN13sKZp7v0sYXpFUgc14BLU/edit?tab=t.0

RMA

- Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) due March 15th
- Micro Farm Revenue Protection (MFRP) due April 15th
- This is crop insurance
- Resources on our website: <https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/risk-management-crop-insurance>

What is the Future of My Farm?

- Hosting a six (6) part workshop series
- Launches February 1st
<https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/2025-01-31-what-is-the-future-of-my-farm>

Vermont Envirothon

- May 16th
- Members of the Farm Force are coordinating the Friday zoom training session for teams
- If you have quotes of support, please send them to Jennifer
- <https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/2025-05-16-envirothon>

Farm Bill Request

- WRCD Board Meeting Minutes where we approved our legislative requests and Farm Bill requests for funding.
<https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/files/ec3b920e6/12.20+Annual+Meeting+Minutes+-+WR+NRCD+%281%29.pdf>

WRCD Annual Report: <https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/reports>

Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP)

Alli Lewis, Coordinator

- Comprised of state, federal and non-profit partners who collaborative to support water quality and wildlife habitat on all working lands in supporting farmers and land stewards in Vermont
- The VAWQP is soon set to release its 2024 Annual Report.
- Regional Coordination meetings will be happening in the winter months across Vermont, and this work not only supports connection and collaboration at the local level but has also supported surveying and data gathering that is informing the development of the 2025-2029 VAWQP Strategic Plan. A draft version will be available for comment by partners in the coming months.

- The 5th VAWQP Annual Meeting will be held Tuesday, March 11th at Killington Conference Center.
- The VAWQP sends a newsletter each month, please reach out to alli.lewis@vacd.org if you would like to be added to the listserv.

Vermont Veggie and Berry Growers Association | UVM Extension
Vern Grubinger, Vegetable and Berry Specialist

- All are welcome to attend the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association annual meeting next Tuesday in Burlington. On-line registration ends tomorrow. Info at: <https://www.uvm.edu/d10-files/documents/2025-01/AnnualMeeting2025a.pdf>

Comments/Questions:

Question: How will the discontinuance of DEI programs (EO) affect our grant programs and other services?

Response: The EO specifically addressed DEI trainings and programs that exist within an agency. The way the funding works in the Farm Bill is there is a certain percentage that we are mandated to set aside to work with historically underserved producers. In Vermont it is typically about 5% for socially disadvantaged and 5% beginning farmers. We typically fund far more, 20-30% for beginning farmers. It is currently unknown how the EO will affect current priorities that are designated in the Farm Bill.

Questions: Several questions related to Act Now. How to submit an application?

Response: This Act Now is all based on EQIP. Targeting specific practices. Pasture and hay land planting – converting annual cropland into pasture/perennial hay ground. Email if you have additional questions OR contact your District Conservationist.

Wrap-up

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

Future meetings:

- May 14, 2025, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm (focus on USDA Local Work Group presentations)
- July 16, 2025, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm (focus on FY26 Conservation Delivery plans)
- October 22, 2025, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm

Thank you so much.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm

Welcome! VT State Tech Committee 1.22.25

■ Ground Rules for Hybrid Meetings

■ REMOTE attendees:

- MUTE your microphone in TEAMS
- Attendance: Type your name, title and affiliation into the chat
- Questions: "Raise your hand" or type your question in the chat
- Important reminder: The chat is for questions or comments relevant to the current topic/presentation. Please do not have "side conversations" in the chat

■

■ IN-PERSON attendees:

- Attendance: Sign in on the attendance sheet
- We are using a video camera, "Poly" which is in the north-central area of the room
 - Talk clearly and look towards the Poly
 - If logged into TEAMS, mute your speaker, microphone, and camera
 - Poly will serve as the speaker, microphone, and camera for the room
 - Please avoid side conversations as the Poly will pick them up and make it difficult for Teams participants to hear and it will distort the recording and transcript
- Questions: Raise your hand or use the chat in Teams

Agenda- January 22, 2025

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 - 9:35 am	State Conservationist Welcome	Travis Thomason
9:35 - 9:45 am	Farm Service Agency Update	FSA Representative
9:45 - 9:55 am	Rural Development Update	RD Representative
9:55 - 10:10 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegation
10:10 - 10:40 am	Easements Update	Julia Grey, NRCS
10:40 - 10:55 am	NRCS Programs Update	Diana Dellinger, NRCS
10:55 - 11:55 am	Partner Updates	
11:55 - 12:00 pm	Wrap-up	Travis Thomason

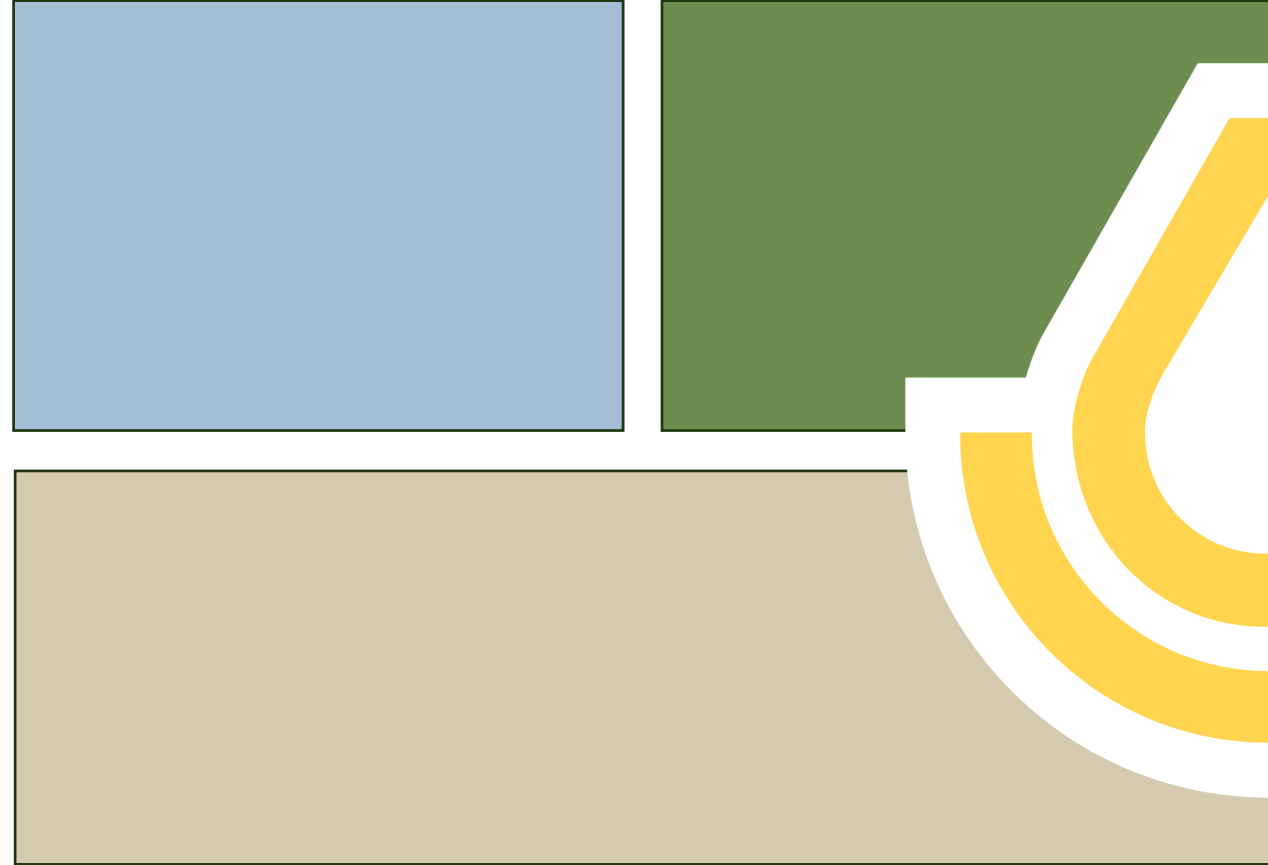
USDA Vermont State Office
356 Mountain View Drive,
Colchester, VT

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NRCS Easements in Vermont

Julia Grey, Realty Specialist, NRCS

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What is a conservation easement?



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Easements – What they are

- Western ideology of land ownership
- Derived from common law
- Real property vs. personal property
- “Bundle of sticks” concept
- Usually perpetual in duration

Example Right of Way Easement

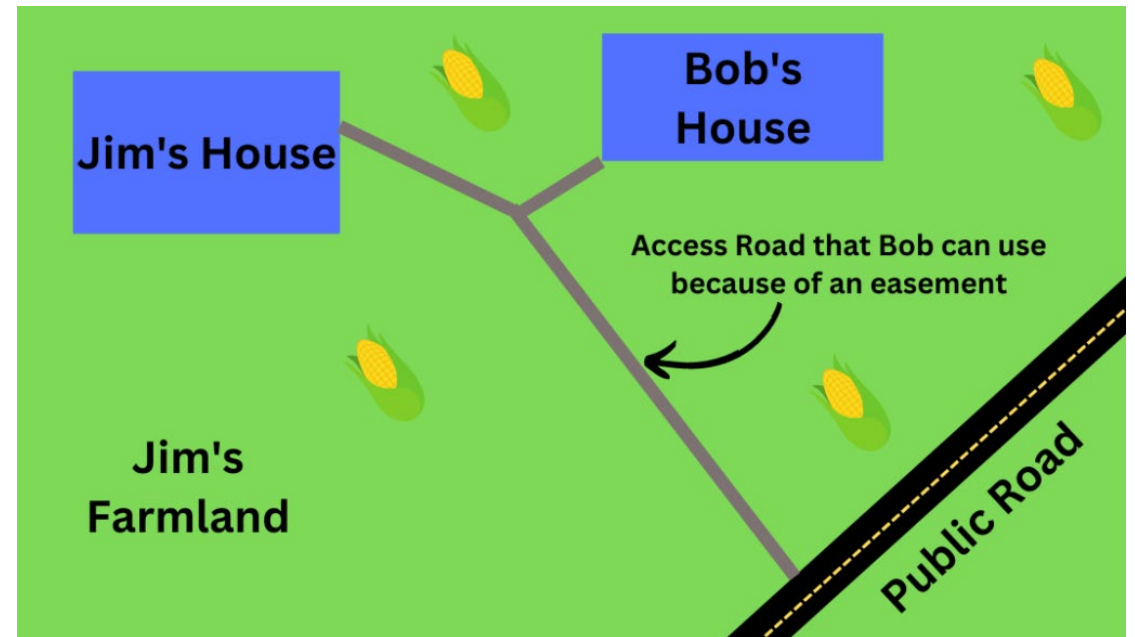


Image Credit: Heneghan Associates

Easements – What they are NOT

- Not a full fee land purchase

Landowner retains ability to transfer property

- Not a public property

Easements do not guarantee public access

- Not Reversible

Depending on the easement, may also limit future participation in NRCS programs for those acres

- Not ACT NOW

Averages about 2 years from application to closing

Why they matter



Preservation of
farmland
ensures food
security for
future
generations



Restoration of
wetlands – carbon
capture, biological
diversity, filtration
of sediments and
chemicals



Maintaining
connected blocks of
forestland benefits
wildlife and reduces
pollutants in
waterways



Flood
resiliency
and
mitigation



Legacy planning –
makes farming more
accessible to
successors and new
farmers

NRCS Easement Programs, Past and Present

FRPP

Farm and Ranchland
Protection Program

WRP

Wetland Reserve
Program

GRP

Grasslands Reserve
Program

OSL

Other Stewardship Lands*

ACEP

Agricultural Land Easement
Program

- Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)
- Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

RCPP

Regional Conservation
Partnership Program

HFRP

Healthy Forests Reserve
Program

EWPP- FPE

Emergency Watershed
Protection Program -
Floodplain Easements

* Not technically a program

Stewardship vs. Non-stewardship

■ Stewardship

- NRCS is the easement Grantee
- Responsible for stewardship in perpetuity
- Usually involves restoration
- Examples:
 - WRE, RCPP US-Held Easements, HFRP, FPE

■ Non-stewardship

- An Eligible Entity is the easement Grantee
- The entity is responsible for stewardship and provides annual reports to NRCS
- NRCS' role is as funder
- US right of enforcement
- Examples:
 - ALE, RCPP Entity-Held Easements



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VT Easement portfolio



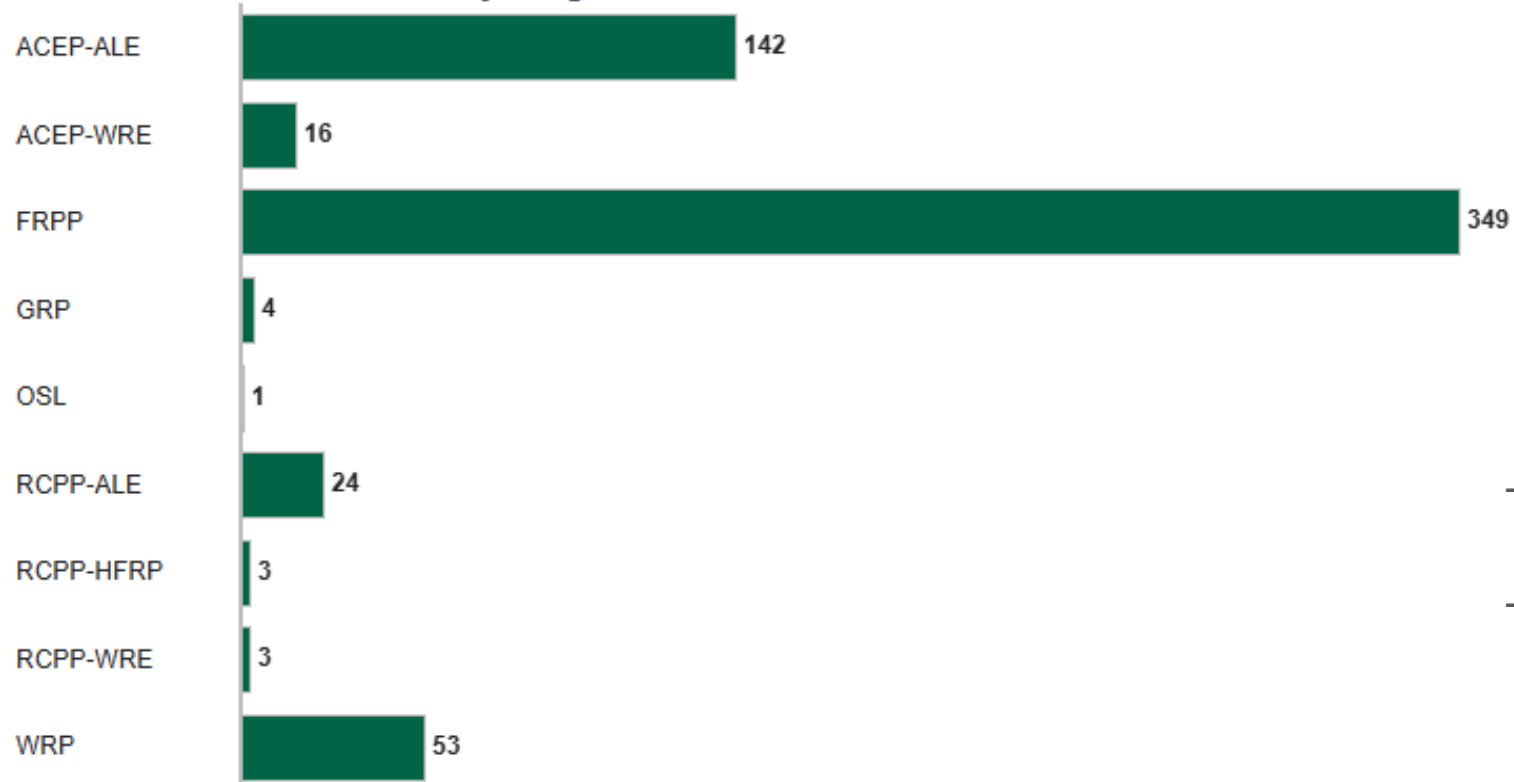
Photo credit: Stephi Drago

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VT Easements by the Numbers

Easement Programs

Count of Closed Easements by Program



Total, end of FY24: 595

Total as of 1/22/25: 598

Note: Other Stewardship Lands (OSL) is not a program but involve lands enrolled in conservation easements as a result of other factors such as mitigating wetland violations.

VT Easements by the Numbers

Easement Conservation Purpose

Acres of Closed Easements by Conservation Purpose



A map of Minnesota divided into its 1 congressional districts. The districts are color-coded: District 1 is dark green, District 2 is medium green, District 3 is light green, and District 4 is white. District 1 is located in the western part of the state, covering parts of Ramsey, Hennepin, and Washington counties.



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Available Easement Programs in VT



ACEP-ALE

NRCS works through outside Eligible Entity
NRCS does some planning and evaluation upfront
Minimal direct stewardship involvement



ACEP-WRE

Work directly with landowners
NRCS directly involved with project development
Usually involves other partners, including USFWS
Restoration, maintenance, and stewardship responsibility



RCPP US-Held

Offered through US-Held Easements (DEC 2132)
Mix of NRCS and partner involvement in project development
Variety of land types and restriction levels (Wetlands, Forestry, Ag)



EWP-FPE

Can be on residential (requires a sponsor) or agricultural lands
Funding must be requested based on a disaster event
Includes restoration component



VT NRCS Easement Staff



Jim Eikenberry, Wetlands Specialist + Acting SRC

Cassidy Gale, Wetlands Outreach + Stewardship (VACD)

VT NRCS Key Partners



Wetlands Partners

US Fish and Wildlife
VT Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
VT Association of Conservation Districts



Agricultural Partners

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
Upper Valley Land Trust
New England Forestry Foundation
Vermont Land Trust



RCPP Partners

VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation
Cold Hollow to Canada
Redstart, Inc.



NEW ENGLAND
FORESTRY
FOUNDATION





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Current and upcoming easement priorities

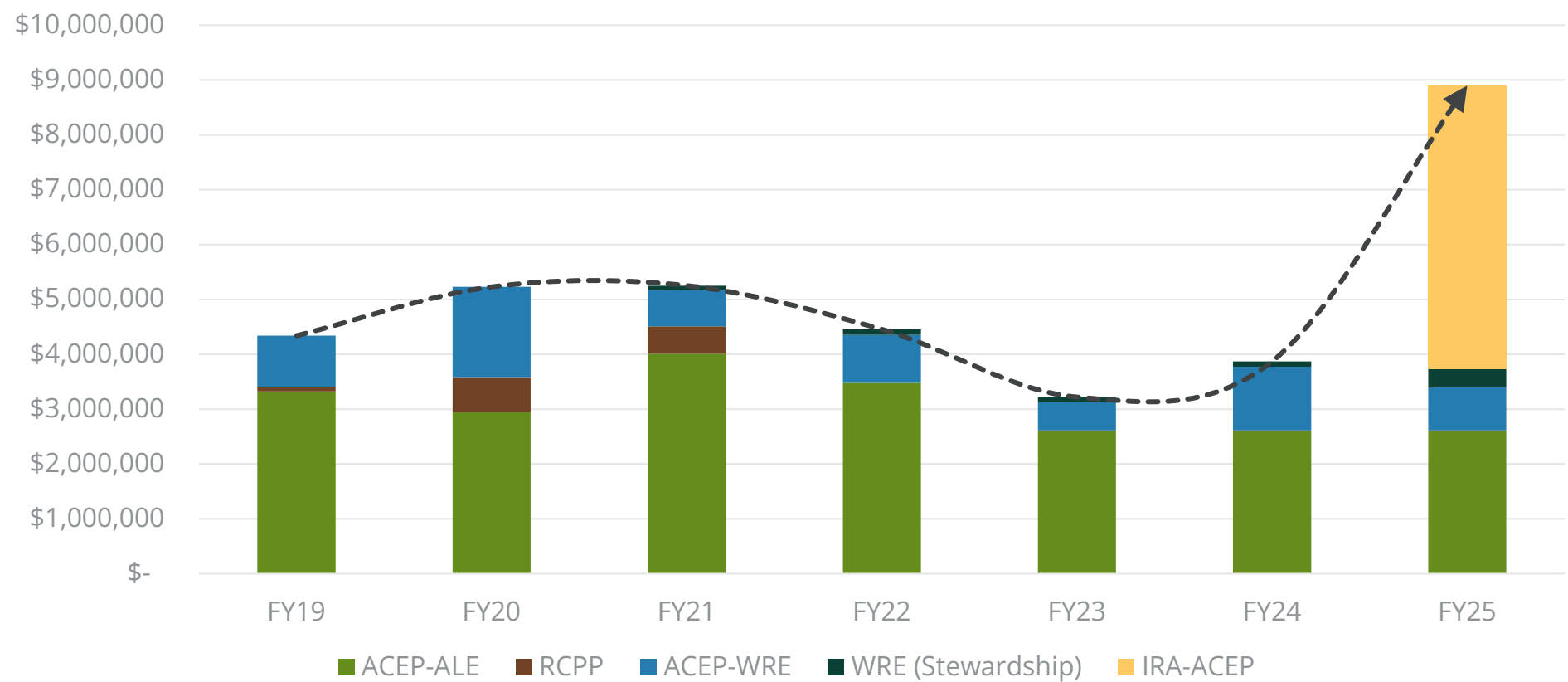


Photo credit: Stephi Drago

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Inflation Reduction Act

Easement Allocation/Obligations



(Typical EQIP allocation is ~ \$10M)

IRA ACEP Priority Areas

■ ALE

- Program-eligible agricultural lands currently classified as grassland or native vegetation (e.g., sagebrush, tall grass prairie) where NRCS has identified a high threat of **conversion to a non-grassland use**.
- Program-eligible cropland or grassland where NRCS has identified a **high threat of conversion to a nonagricultural use**.
- Active agricultural **rice cultivation on subsiding highly organic soils**.

IRA ACEP Priority Areas

- WRE

- **Highly organic soils that will optimize the soil carbon sequestration potential** and prevent increased greenhouse gas emissions through the maintenance of existing non-cultivated areas, restoration of previously cultivated areas to perennial vegetative cover, and restoration of the natural hydrology to keep the soils saturated and anaerobic.
- Prior **converted or degraded wetlands that will be restored to native** (adapted or alternative) forests (e.g., bottomland hardwood forests)
- Program-eligible, existing **forest habitat** that will be maintained as forest habitat through an NRCS-approved forest management plan.
- Approved **localized priorities**.

Other Opportunities



Floodplain Easements



Wetland Restoration Priorities



Future RCPP Agreement

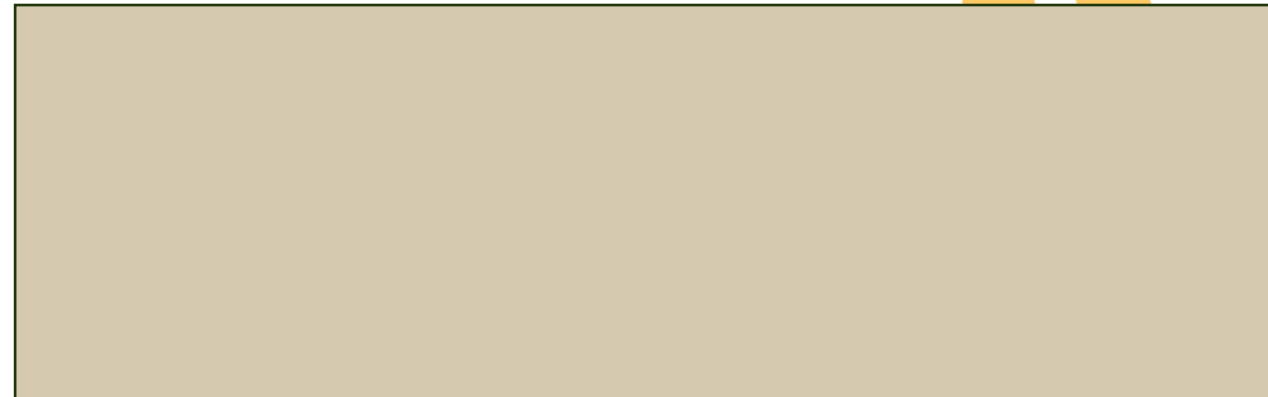
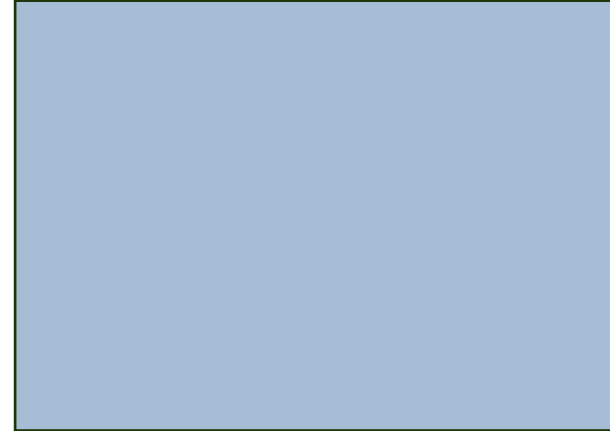


Upcoming Farm Bill





Ways to get involved

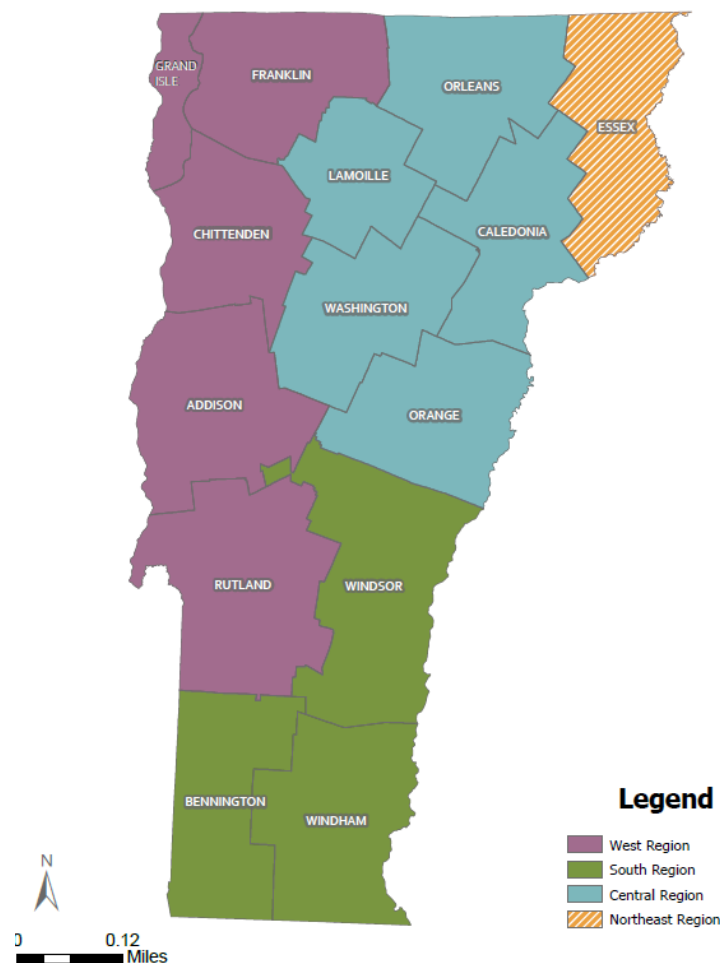


How to Get Involved

- Attend subcommittee meetings
 - WRE: March 24
 - Forest and Wildlife: February 5, April 9
 - ALE : TBD
- Small land trusts or other eligible ALE entities – encourage participation
- Landowners interested in WRE – now is a good time to apply
 - Signup deadline for FY25 is January 24
 - Cassidy Gale – outreach
Cassidy.Gale@vt.nacdnet.net



GARC RATES FY2025



		Access - Public ROW			Access - No Public ROW		
	Category	Non-Ag Wetland	Other	GARC Percentage	Non-Ag Wetland	Other	GARC Percentage
Region	Central (10-200 acres)	\$ 2,664	\$ 3,429	90%	\$ 2,835	\$ 2,619	90%
	South (10-200 acres)	\$ 3,069	\$ 4,123	95%	\$ 2,024	\$ 2,394	95%
	West (10-300 acres)	\$ 3,069	\$ 4,912	95%	\$ 3,164	\$ 2,898	95%
	Northeast (any acreage)	Appraisal Only		95%	Appraisal Only		95%

LAND USE CATEGORIES

Tier 1: Access is adjacent to a public right of way (the parcel abuts a town or state highway)

Tier 2: Access is non-adjacent to a public right of way (the parcel does not directly abut a town or state highway)

Land Uses:

1) Non-Agricultural Wetland

Forested wetlands or Scrub-shrub. Wetlands with majority woody vegetation, where the land is not open agricultural fields, cropland, hay land, or pastureland.

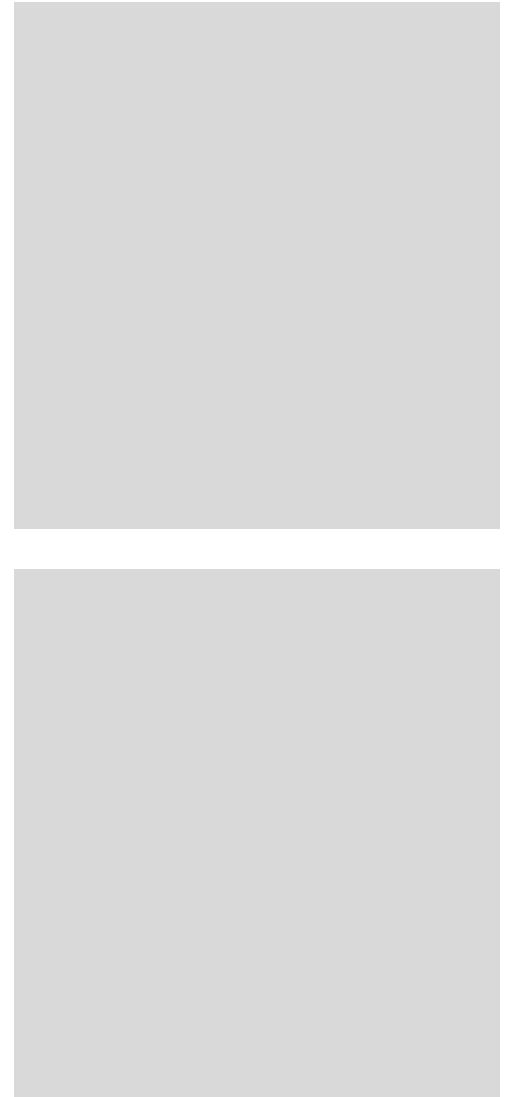
2) Other

All other land types not identified as forested or scrub-shrub wetlands, to include undeveloped uplands, residential/developed land agricultural land, and agricultural use wetland.



How to Get Involved

- Sign up for Gov Delivery
- Connect with Partnerships Team for RCPP opportunities
 - Luis.Aponte@usda.gov – ASTC – Partnership
 - Adam.Dellinger@usda.gov – RCPP Coordinator







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Questions



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Stephi Drago Stephanie.Drago@usda.gov



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NRCS Programs Update



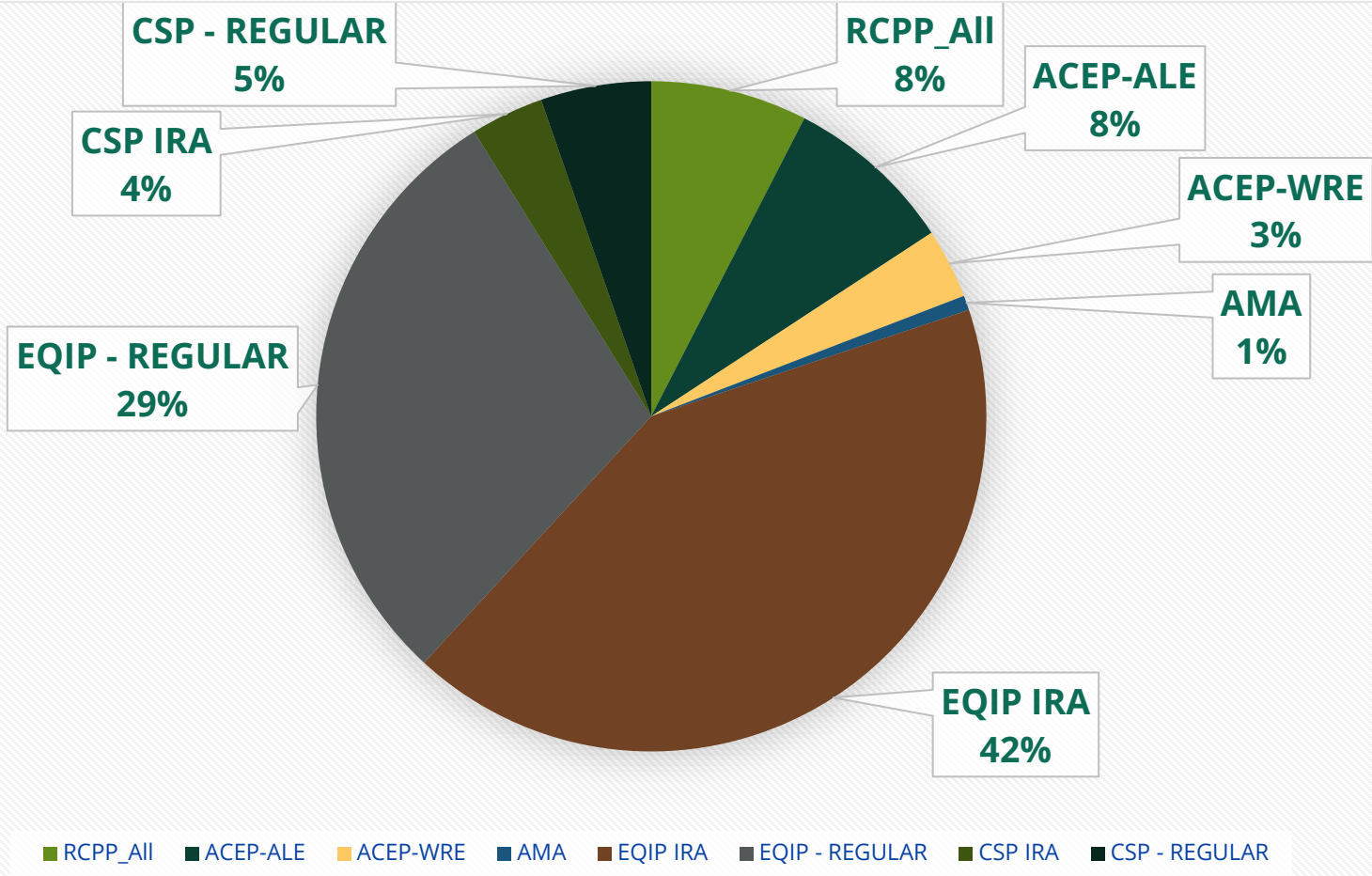
FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
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FY24 Final Obligation Summary

Program	Number of Contracts	Total Obligation	Acres
RCPP-ACEP	2	\$78,878.00	40.8
RCPP_2132_LMR_Producer	14	\$1,804,895.00	3741.18
RCPP_2280_LMR_Producer	1	\$36,875.00	43.80
RCPP_2311_LMR_Producer	10	\$308,070.00	221.76
ACEP-ALE	11	\$2,423,088.00	2441.1
ACEP-WRE	2	\$995,221.00	315.5
AMA	11	\$207,787.87	61.5
EQIP IRA	143	\$12,385,656.56	21,448.8
EQIP - REGULAR	178	\$8,635,571.26	11,458.9
CSP IRA	24	\$1,041,034.00	5,077.8
CSP - REGULAR	46	\$1,572,191.00	6,414.4
TOTALS	442	\$29,489,267.69	51,265



FY24 Final Obligation Summary



RCPP Update

FY25 Call for Proposals

- FY25 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO) likely be published winter/spring 2025
- Maximum funding available for any project (combined financial and technical assistance) was \$25 million last year
- What if a partner you know has a good idea for a new project?
 - Applicants are highly encouraged to schedule a meeting with NRCS staff early on so we can offer guidance
- Upcoming Webinars for Applicants
 - January 28, 2025, 2:00-3:00 pm ET - General Introduction to RCPP
 - February 25, 2025, 2:00-3:00 pm ET – Introduction to the RCPP Application Process
 - More information and Register here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program/how-to-apply>



Funding Opportunity: ACT NOW

- Act Now was designed to accelerate the timeframe from program application to contract obligation and create a process where producers could receive a funding decision close to when they apply to help get conservation on the ground quickly and efficiently.
- Applications are ranked according to local resource concerns, the amount of conservation benefits the work will provide, and the needs of applicants as they are submitted.
- Using its “Act Now” authority, NRCS can now pre-approve applications when they meet or exceed a state’s pre-determined minimum ranking score. Applications for eligible practices that meet or exceed state-determined minimum ranking thresholds will be considered for priority funding when applying to FA programs
- This means funding decisions can be made without having to wait for all applications to be reviewed and ranked. This can potentially allow farmers to start conservation projects earlier instead of waiting long periods to know if a project will be funded.

Act Now- Vermont

■ Funding Available

- \$8,269,232 for Targeted Cropland practices
- \$80,873 for CPA/DIA/CEMAs

■ Sign Up Period

- Applications accepted February 2, 2025 to March 30, 2025
- Applications that meet the minimum threshold ranking score will be selected for funding until all funds are expended.
- Need to be registered and eligible with FSA

■ Targeted Practices

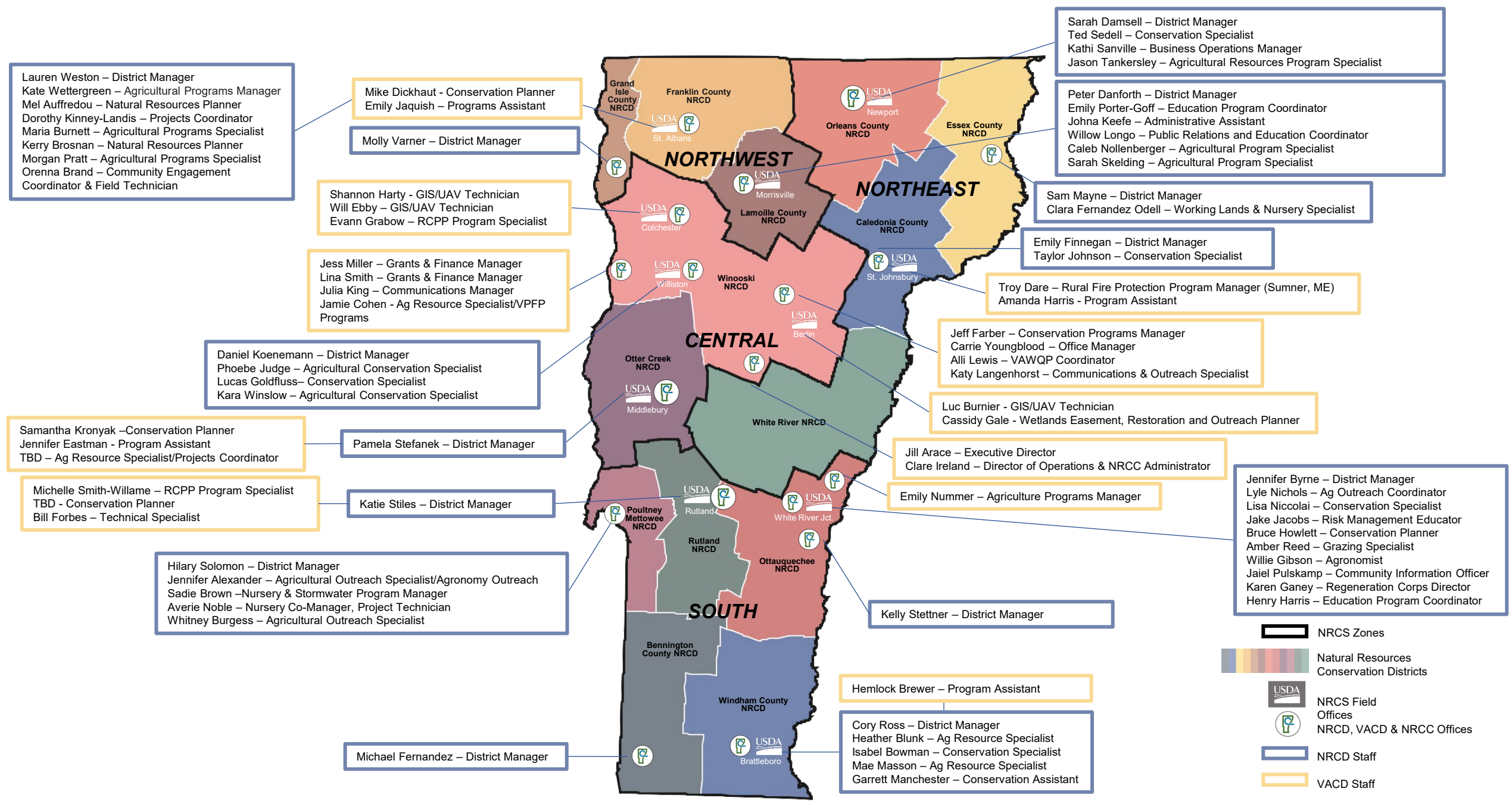
- 340 Cover Crop
- 329 No-till
- 345 Residue Management
- 512 Hay Planting
- 590 Nutrient Management
- 336 Soil Amendment
- All available CPA/DIA/CEMA's available to Vermont; such as Forest Management Plans and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans



FY25 EQIP & CSP Payment Limitations

- At this time EQIP & CSP contracts will not be subject to payment limitations identified in the 2018 Farm Bill
- The regulatory contract limits will still apply for each contract
- If a participant has maxed out on 2018 Farm Bill payment limitations, this is an opportunity to receive additional funding through another contract.

Program	Individuals, LLC, INC, 501C-3	Group Projects and Joint Operations (FSA Business Types 2 and 3)	Water Management Entities*	Tribes
EQIP	\$450,000	\$900,000 with waiver	\$900,000/ \$1,800,000 with waiver	none
EQIP-CIC	\$200,000	\$400,000	NA	none
CSP	\$200,000	\$400,000	NA	none





VT Department of Environmental Conservation

NRCS State Technical Committee

January 22, 2025

RCPP Timeline

DEC – RCPPs:

- 2020: \$10M extension for the Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural and Forestry Conservation Practices. **ACTIVE and known as Project 2132**
- 2024: \$10,731,707.00 for the Vermont Water Quality Collaborative Partnership. **ACTIVE and known as Project 3273**

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Accelerating the Implementation of Ag and Forestry BMPs

2021-2026 \$10 million

Financial Assistance (FA)
\$7M

- Over 3 million in ag BMPs
- Over \$300k in forestry BMPs
Offering small forestry round now (~\$200k)
- \$3.25 million for easements
 - Landowners selected for highly and moderately restrictive.
Finalizing contract language for minimally restrictive now.

Technical Assistance-
Implementation (TA-I)
\$1.8M

- 1.5 million contracted for TA with partners
Includes engineering
- 40,000 to FPR for watershed position and outreach

Technical Assistance-
Enhancement (TA-E)
\$700K

- RCPP project coordinator
- Forestry outreach materials
- Water quality monitoring
- RCPP comm materials/SWCS
- *Outcomes analysis*

Over \$13,000 acres and 74,000 feet of practices contracted

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Vermont Water Quality Collaborative Partnership

2024-2029 \$10.7 million

- Project initiatives are water quality, habitat, and flood resilience
\$8.1m of direct funding for practice implementation
- August 2024 application round/ranking in February 2025 – likely to fund ~\$1.5m
Prioritizing applications that address overlap of project priorities
- \$2.2m for technical assistance (TA-I/TA-E) including a social outcomes review associated with easements

Vermont Climate Action Plan Update

Vermont Climate Council & Subcommittees

Spring and Summer 2024

Council orients update and subcommittees begin work

Fall 2024

Subcommittees draft updates to Pathways, Strategies, and Actions.
Subcommittees submit recommendations to Council in **December**

Winter 2025

Council compiles a draft updated plan

Spring 2025

Council revises and finalizes plan based on public input.
Plan delivered by July 1, 2025

Engagement and Outreach



Public kick-off meetings



Eight input sessions



Public consultation on draft plan



Agriculture and Ecosystems

Core Focus Areas

1. Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and sequester carbon from agricultural and forestry practices.
2. Support adaptation, viability, recovery, economies, and workforce.
3. Incentivize climate-resilient land use practices that support the role of land in flood prevention, biodiversity, conservation, and related goals.

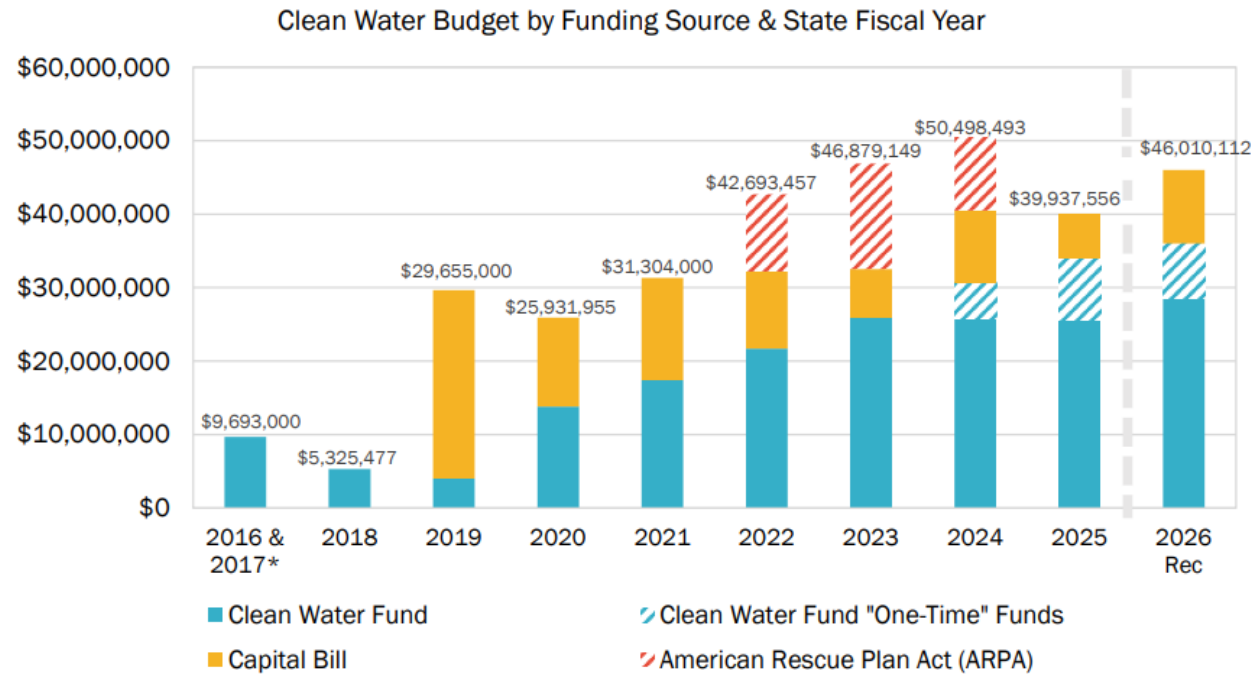
Vermont Clean Water Budget

State Fiscal Year 2026 Clean Water Budget at a Glance

State Fiscal Year 2026 Clean Water Budget by Funding Source



Clean Water Budget by Funding Source and State Fiscal Year

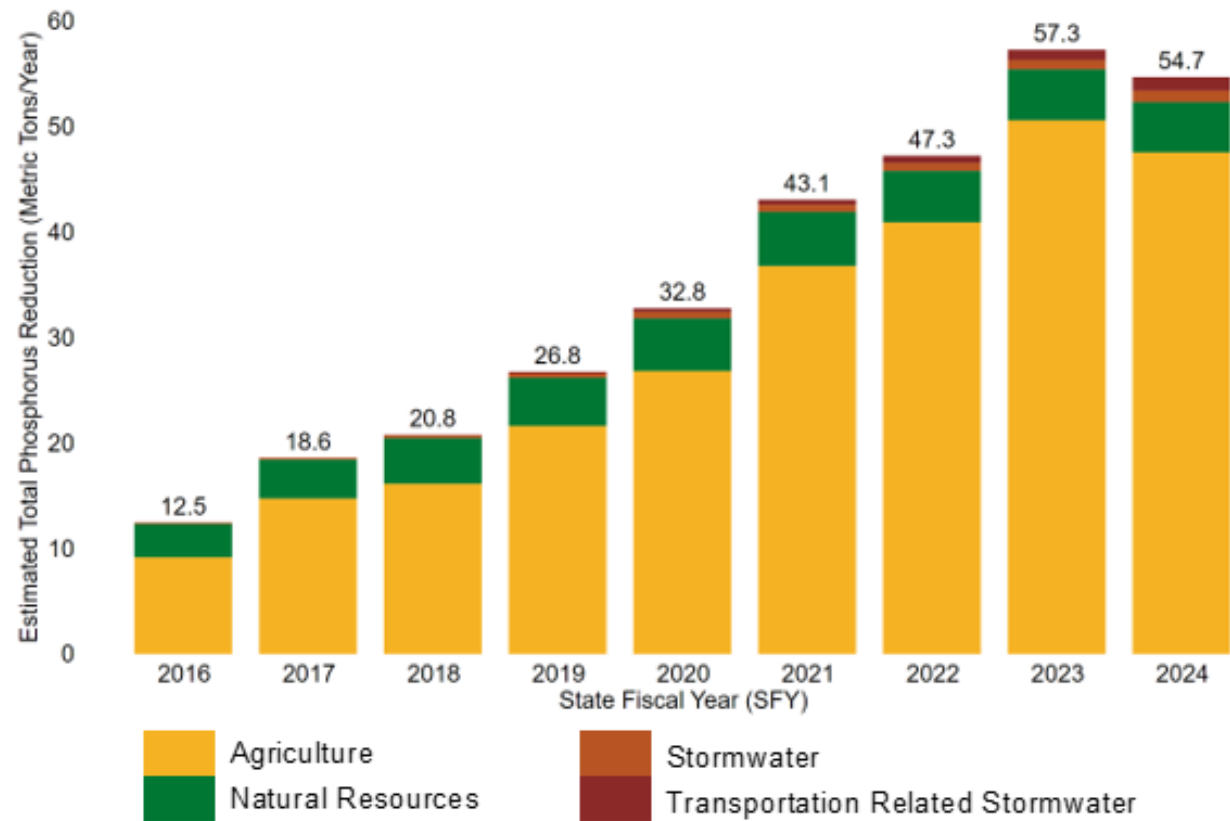




View of Lake Champlain from Mt. Philo State Park in Charlotte, Vermont.

Vermont Clean Water Initiative 2024 Performance Report

Published:
January 15, 2025



Annual estimated total phosphorus load reductions (MT/year) associated with projects implemented through state and federal funding and regulatory programs in the Lake Champlain basin in effect during SFY 2016–2024 by land use sector.

Land Use Sector	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Agriculture	9.2	14.8	16.2	21.6	26.8	36.8	40.9	50.6	47.6
Natural Resources	3.2	3.7	4.3	4.6	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.8	4.8
Stormwater	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.9	1.1
Transportation Related Stormwater	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.3
Total	12.5	18.6	20.8	26.8	32.8	43.1	47.3	57.3	54.7

Upcoming State Tech Committee Meetings

- May 14, 2025
- July 16, 2025
- October 22, 2025

