

# South Hero Conservation Commission

Jens Hilke – Conservation Planner

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department



# The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

*The mission of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is the conservation of our fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont*





# Community Wildlife Program



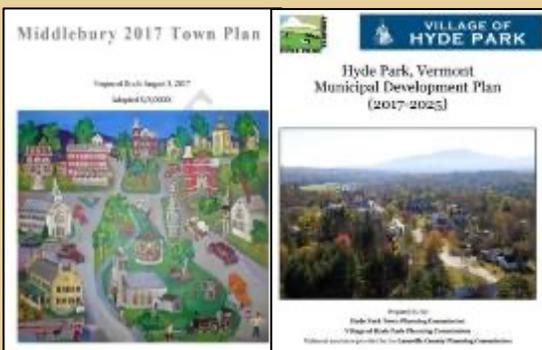
Presentations & Workshops



Support for Planning



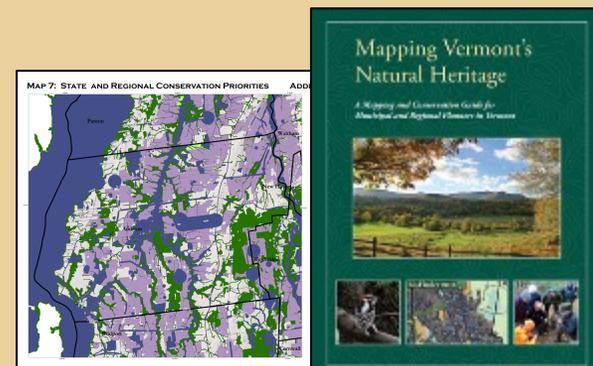
Support for Conservation



Connecting Communities to Each Other



Understanding Ecological and Community Context



Creation/Interpretation of Resources



# Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions



- Networking
- Annual Summit
- Tiny Grants
- Success Stories

<http://vtconservation.com/>

<https://vtconservation.com/handbook/>

# What is a Conservation Commission?

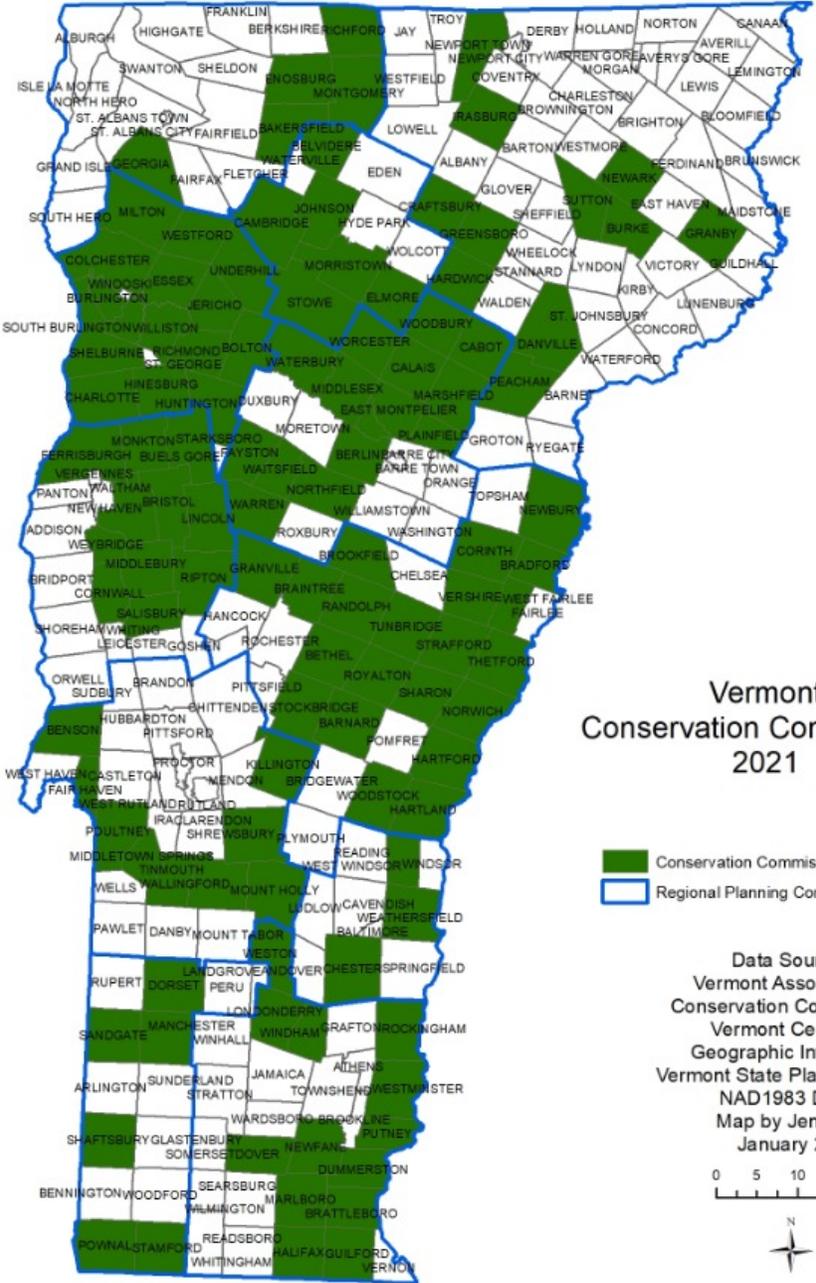
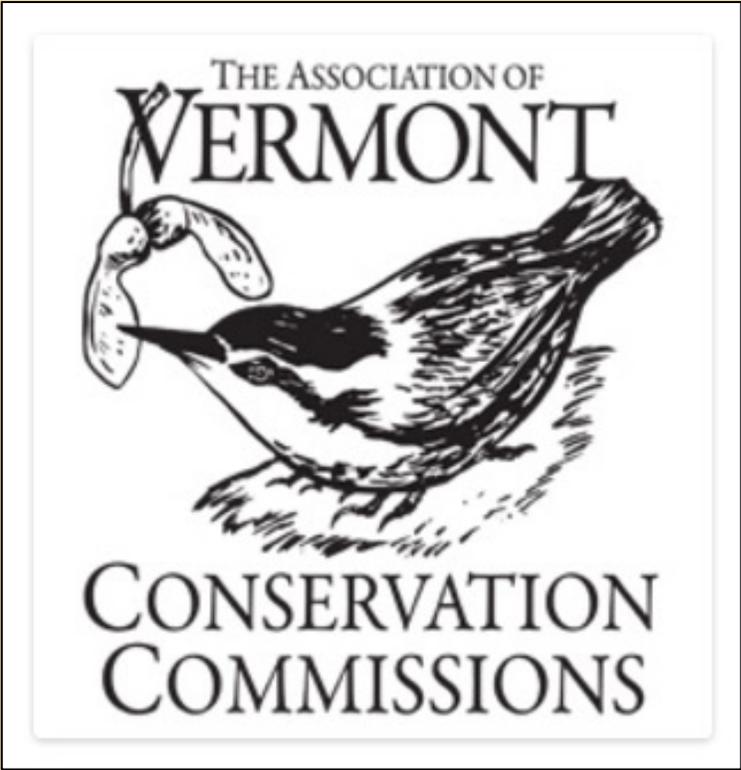
- Volunteer group organized to speak on behalf of the environment.
- VT Statutes - Title 24, Chapter 118 (24 VS.A. §4501)
- advisory, not regulatory,

touch the lives of Vermonters and of future generations by helping to shape and implement a vision for their communities

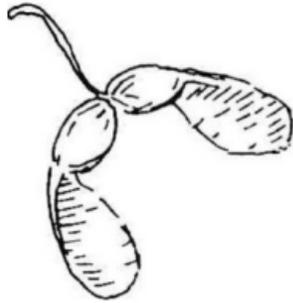
As of 2021, 120 towns have established conservation commissions or similar committees



# Existing CCs



# VERMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION HANDBOOK



**2021 Edition:**  
Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions

**1998 Edition:**  
Virginia J. Rasch  
Executive Director  
Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions

**Front Illustration:**  
Libby Walker Davidson

[Handbook website](https://vtconservation.com/handbook/)

[Handbook as a single printable PDF](https://vtconservation.com/handbook/)

<https://vtconservation.com/handbook/>

# Responsibilities

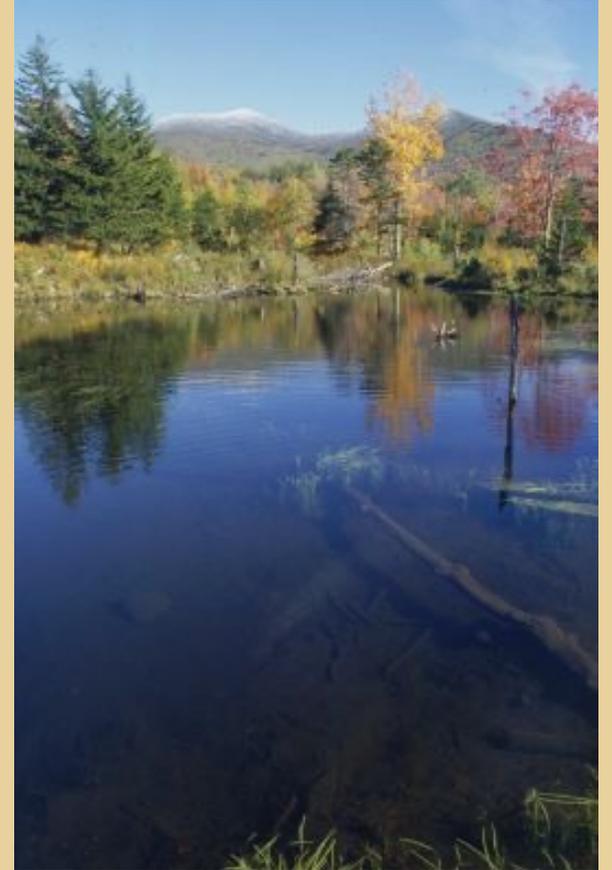
- ▶ (a) Agreed-upon rules
- ▶ (b) Meetings open to the public,  
Times and places of meetings of a CC shall be publicly posted
- ▶ (c) record minutes as public record

Example: Thetford Conservation Commission's Rules  
<https://vtconservation.com/handbook/chapter7/#Appendix>



# Powers and duties

- ▶ (1) make an inventory and conduct continuing studies
  - ▣ (A) air, surface and ground waters, and pollution thereof;
  - ▣ (B) soils and their capabilities;
  - ▣ (C) mineral and other earth resources;
  - ▣ (D) streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and floodplains;
  - ▣ (E) unique or fragile biologic sites;
  - ▣ (F) scenic and recreational resources;
  - ▣ (G) plant and animal life, especially the rare and endangered species;
  - ▣ (H) prime agricultural and forest land, and other open lands;
- ▶ (2) make and maintain an inventory of lands within the municipality which have historic, educational, cultural, scientific, architectural, or archaeological values in which the public has an interest;



# Powers and duties

- ▶ (3) recommend to the legislative body the purchase or the receipt of gifts of land or rights thereto,
- ▶ (4) receive appropriations for operating expenses
- ▶ (5) receive money, grants or private gifts from any source. Grants and gifts received by the trustee of public funds shall be carried in a conservation fund from year to year to be expended only for purposes of this chapter;
- ▶ (6) receive gifts of land or other property for the purposes of this chapter, by consent of the legislative body or by the affirmative vote of the municipality;
- ▶ (7) administer the lands, properties and other rights which have been acquired by the municipality for the purposes of this chapter;



# Powers and duties

- ▶ (8) assist the local planning commission or zoning board of adjustment, by providing advisory environmental evaluations where pertinent to applications made to those bodies,
- ▶ (9) cooperate with the local legislative body, planning commission, road committee, on matters affecting the natural resources;



# Legal Responsibilities

- ▶ (10) prepare, collect, publish, advertise and distribute relevant books, maps and other documents and maintain communication with similar organizations; and encourage through educational activities the public understanding of local natural resources and conservation needs;
- ▶ (11) make a brief annual report to the municipality of its finances and transactions for the year just passed, and its plans and prospects for the ensuing year. (Added 1977, No. 250 (Adj. Sess.), § 1.)

## **Town of Middlebury Annual Report**



For Fiscal Year Ending  
June 30, 2021

# What makes people want to engage?

They want to...

- Make a difference
- Know their efforts won't be wasted
- Be part of a successful enterprise
- See concrete results
- Build relationships
- Learn and be challenged



*Does your town provide these opportunities?*

# Celebration!

- ❑ Guided tours or outings
- ❑ walks and talks
- ❑ Events (with food)
- ❑ Photo contests
- ❑ It's OK to have fun



# From Pizza Party To Art Contest, Bolton Innovates To Involve Residents In Town Planning

By AMY KOLB NOYES • JAN 9, 2016

PROGRAM  
VPR News



Share



Tweet

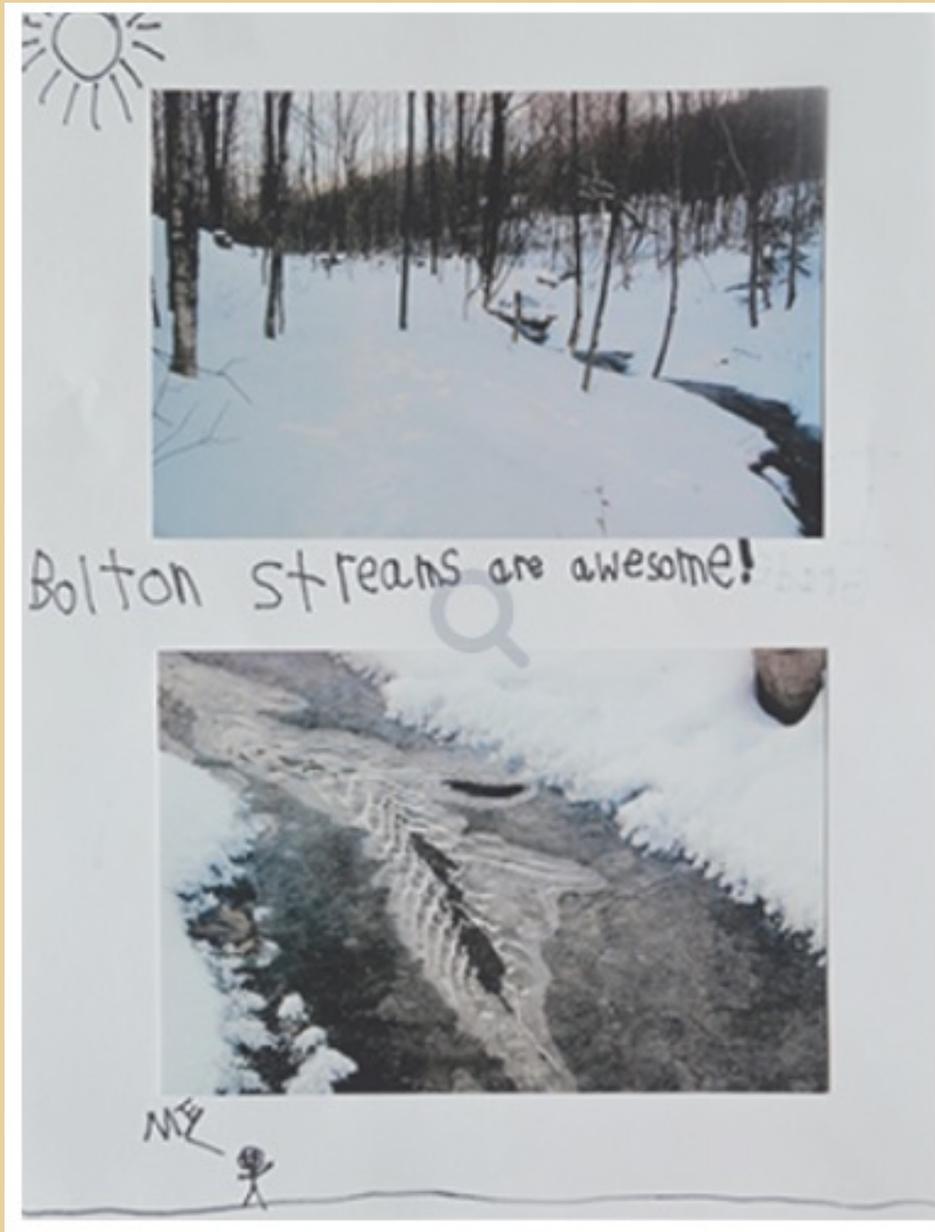


Email



Bolton Planning Commissioner Deb Shelby (left) and Assistant Town Clerk Carol Devlin take a look at a town map where residents, including elementary school students, have posted planning priorities and comments.

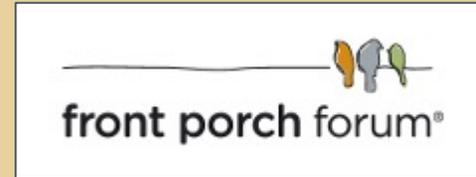
AMY KOLB NOYES / VPR



"BOULDERS AND BEARS" BY JULIE LONGSTRETH,

# Get the word out and gather input

- Web, email
- Social media
- “Old” media
- Webinars
- Focus groups and surveys
- Talking to people
- Hands on activities, like mapping



**LEARN  
MORE**

Vermont Planning Manual

# Community Engagement

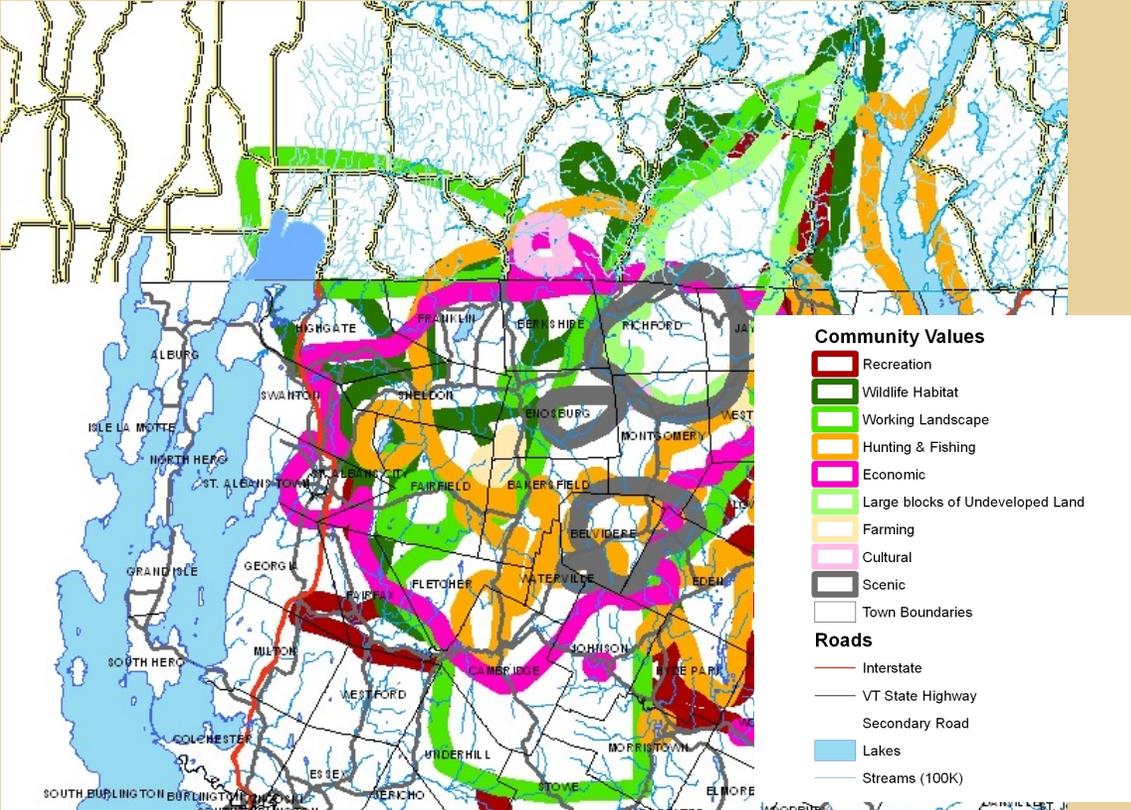


VNRC Staff Photo

Creating and re-affirming a shared vision

## Ask the Community

- Community Survey
- Value Mapping



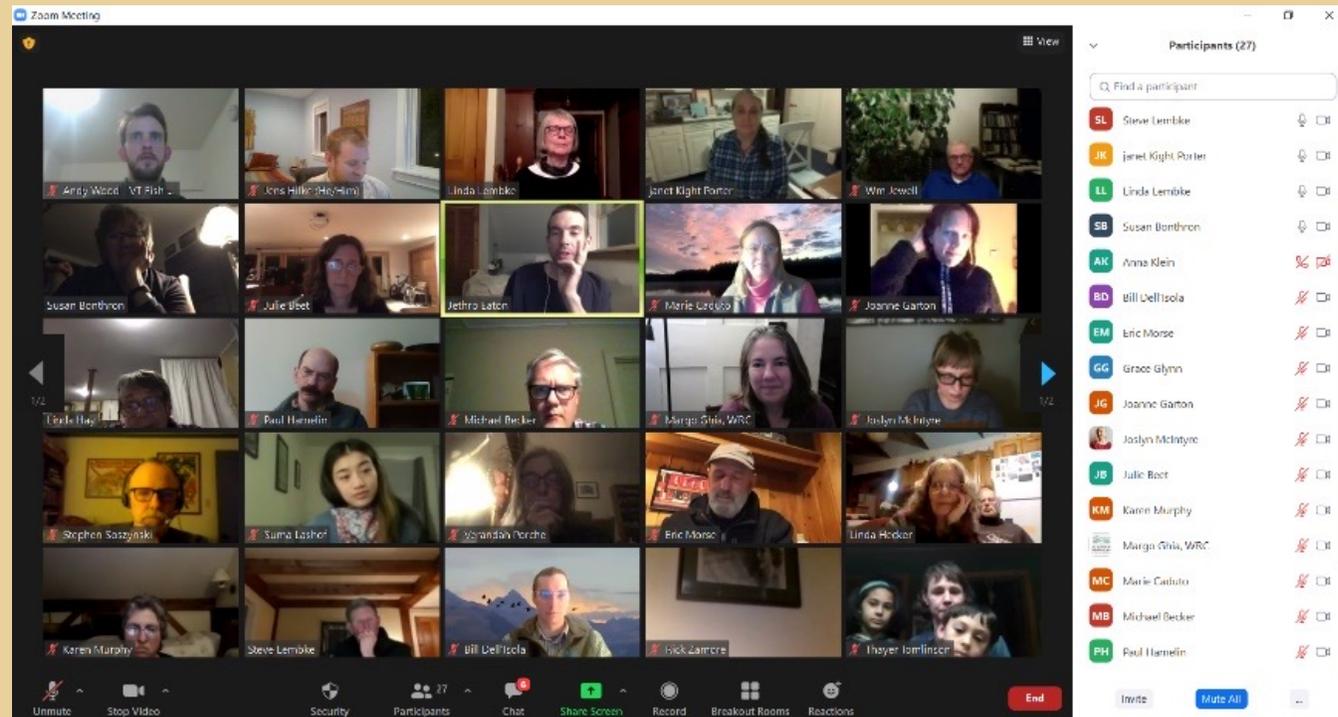
# New Tools to reach People

- Using the best of online tools to move forward



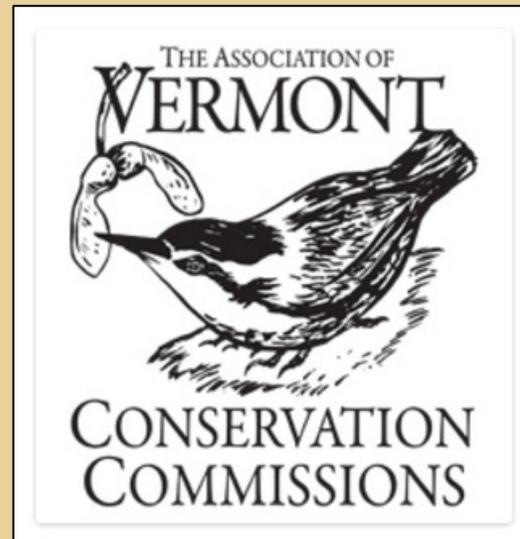
Microsoft Teams

The Zoom logo, consisting of the word 'zoom' in a bold, blue, lowercase sans-serif font.



# Resources

- Planning Manual
- Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Handbook
  - [CHAPTER 2: STARTING AND BUILDING A CONSERVATION COMMISSION](#)



# Building Local Conservation Capacity

Start a  
Conservation  
Commission

Assemble your team

Conduct a  
Natural  
Resources  
Inventory

Figure out your ecological & community priorities

Start a  
Conservation  
Fund

Work with partners to pay for conservation

# What is a Natural Resources Inventory?

## Survey of noteworthy natural resources

- ▣ Wetlands & Vernal Pools
- ▣ Streams, Lakes & Ponds
- ▣ Natural Communities
- ▣ Rare/Threatened/Endangered/Uncommon Species
- ▣ Special Wildlife Habitats
- ▣ Wildlife Corridors
- ▣ Habitat Blocks & Connectivity
- ▣ Wells and groundwater resources
- ▣ And More...

*Example:*

# Inventories in Three Communities

## SALISBURY: Citizen Science



- *Who:* Conservation commission, volunteers, F&W, RPCs
- *Why:* Concern about road crossings and genetic exchange
- *Result:* Town plan map, website, workshops, videos

## BURKE: Desktop survey



- *Who:* F&W, Regional Planning Commission
- *Why:* Concern about ski area growth; protect wildlife, views
- *Result:* Natural Resources Overlay District (zoning)

## PLAINFIELD: Formal survey

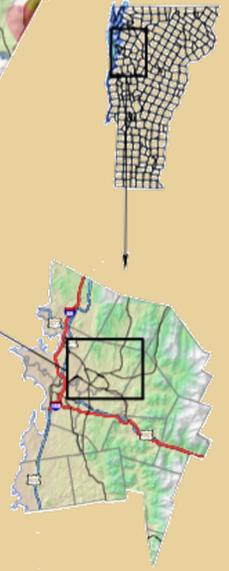
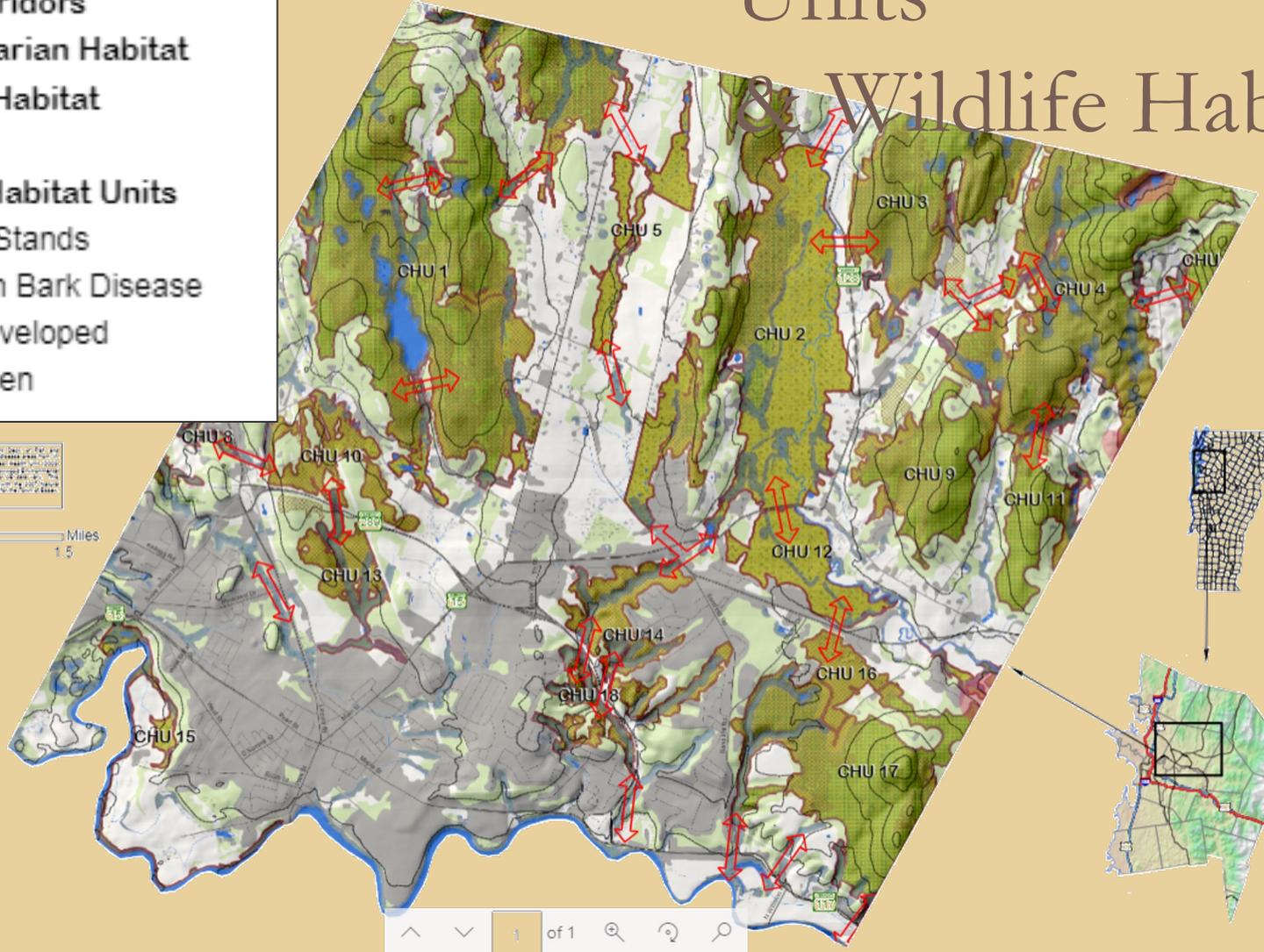


- *Who:* Conservation & Planning Commissions; consulting ecologist
- *Why:* Map natural communities for town planning
- *Result:* Plainfield Ecological Inventory; zoning changes

# Essex Contiguous Habitat Units & Wildlife Habitat

## Wildlife Habitat Features

- Wetlands
- Potential Corridors
- Forested Riparian Habitat
- Deer Winter Habitat
- Core Forest
- Contiguous Habitat Units
- Vt F&W Mast Stands
- VT FPR Beech Bark Disease
- Landcover- developed
- Landcover- open





# What is a Town Conservation Fund?

## Authority under 24 V.S.A. § 2804

- § 2804. Reserve funds;
  - (a) At an annual or special meeting duly warned, a municipality may establish a reserve fund to be under the control and direction of the legislative branch of the municipality. The reserve fund shall be kept in a separate account and invested as are other public funds and may be expended for such purposes for which established, or when authorized by a majority of the voters present and voting at an annual or special meeting duly warned, for other purposes.

## Authority under 24 V.S.A. §4505

- § 4505. Powers and duties of conservation commissions
  - Any conservation commission created under this chapter may:
    - (5) receive money, grants or private gifts from any source, for the purposes of this chapter. Grants and gifts received by the trustee of public funds shall be carried in a conservation fund from year to year to be expended only for purposes of this chapter;

# Why Do You Need One?

- Enables town to engage and focus on local conservation priorities.
- Savings account that can be carried forward.
- Flexibility to act on fast-moving projects.
- Important for leveraging other funds and eligibility for grant applications.
- Evidence of local support.
- Makes it easier for conservation partners (landowners, nonprofits, community groups) to conserve land in your town.



**Forest!**

Economic benefits of  
recreation and tourism

Prevent erosion and  
reduce flooding

Provide working lands for  
forest industry

Provide land for hunting,  
fishing, wildlife viewing (and \$\$)

# Benefits of Large Forests

Clean air &  
water

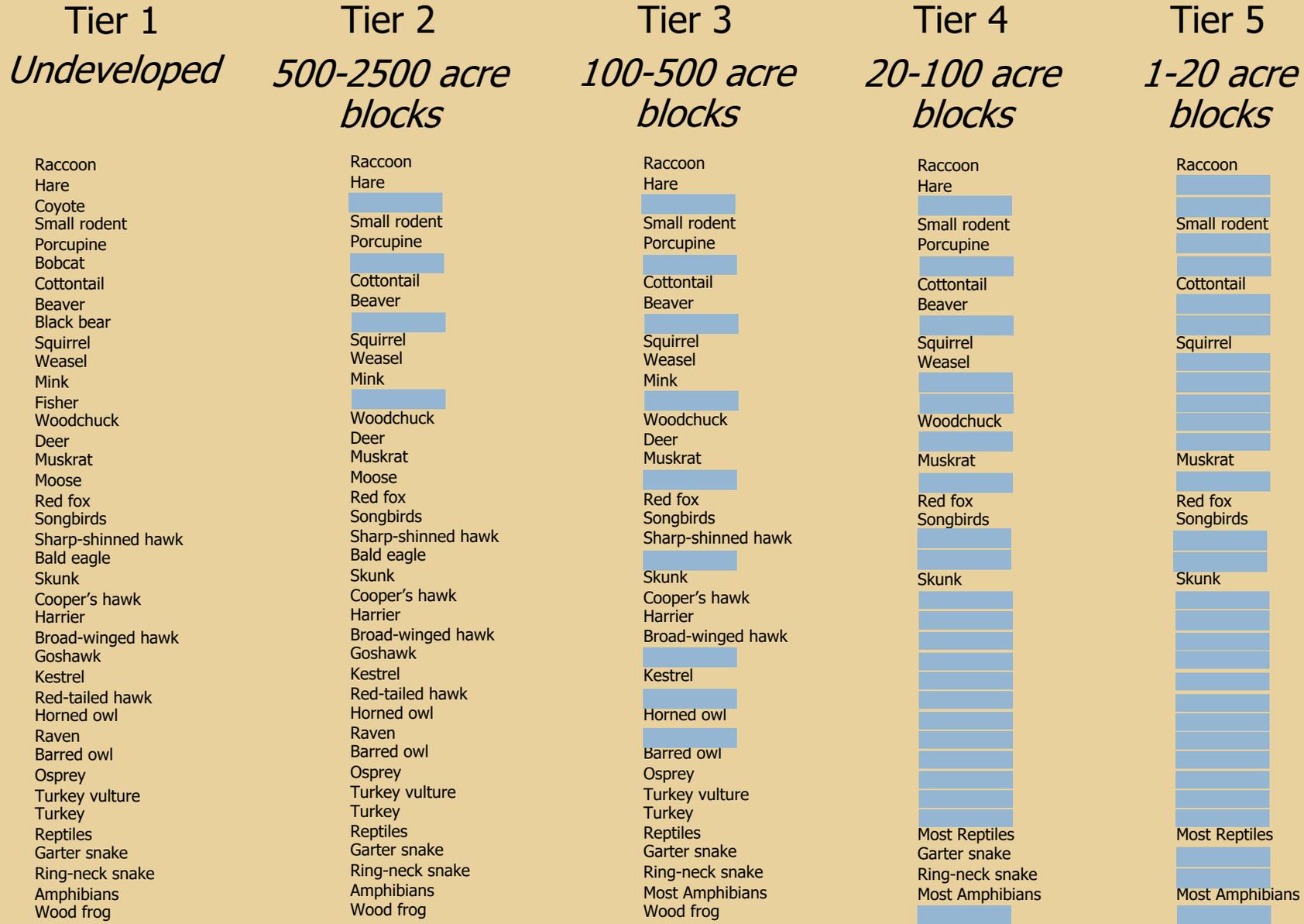
Transmit fewer tick-  
borne illnesses

Scenery

Biological  
diversity

Sequester carbon and  
absorb harmful gases

# Wildlife Present in Forest Patches



12% of Vermont's GDP  
20,000 jobs.

Fall foliage tourism is  
25% of the tourist  
income to Vermont

# Forests Power Vermont's Economy

Forest products  
add \$1.5 billion

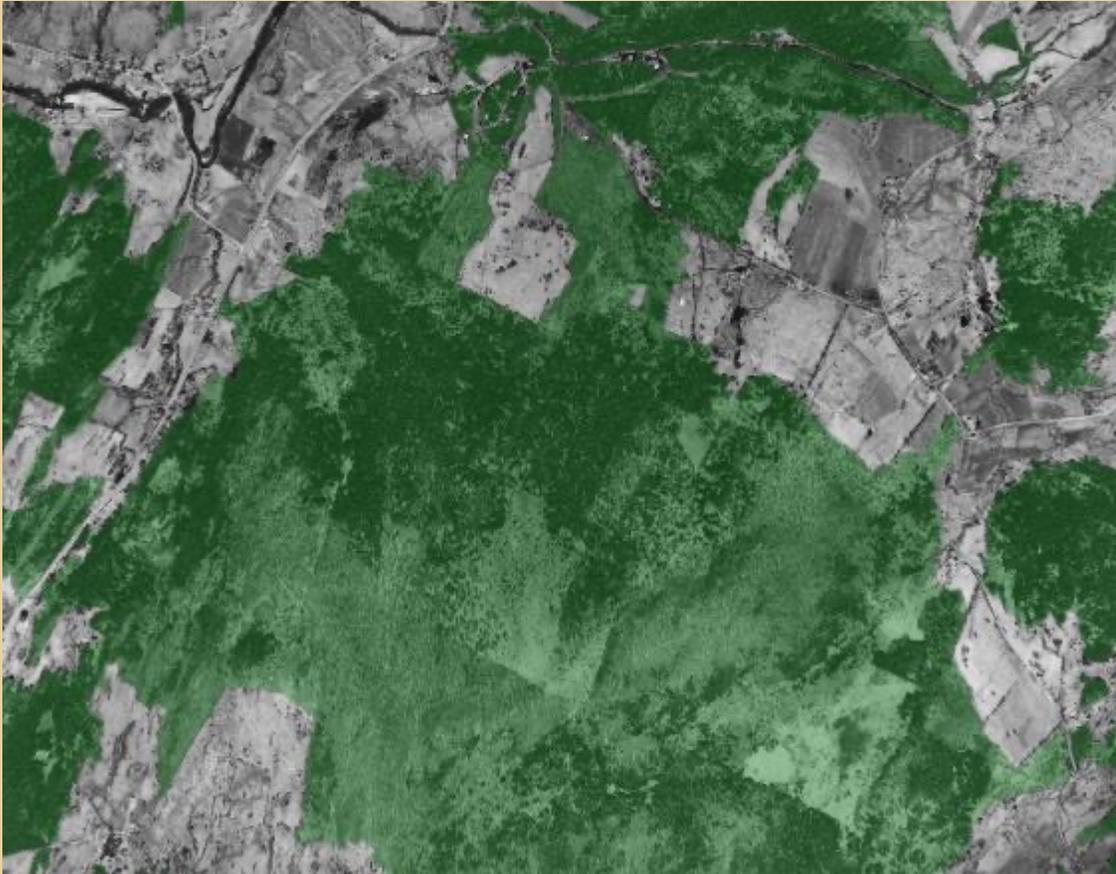
Hunting, fishing,  
and wildlife  
viewing = \$685  
million

Forest recreation and  
tourism provide \$1.9  
billion to Vermont  
annually

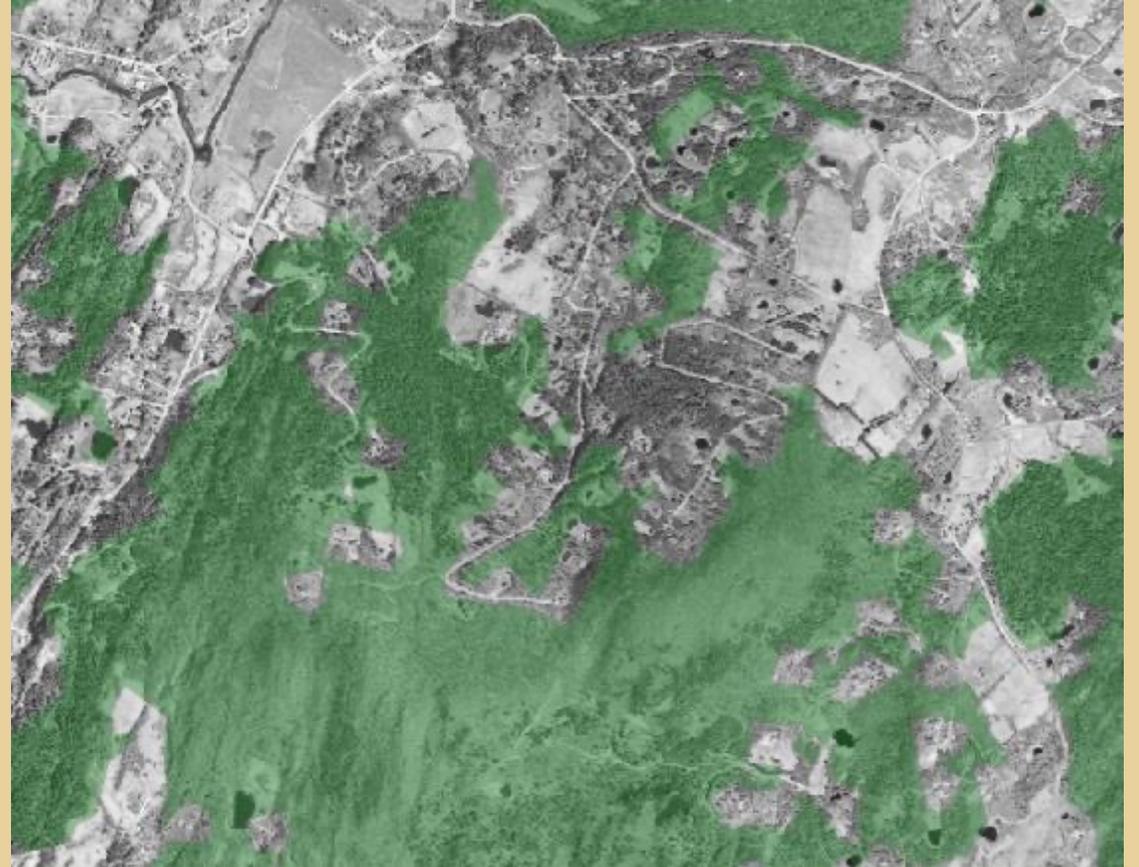
Intact wetlands and  
riparian areas reduce  
damage from floods

# Losing Wildlife Habitat & Working Forest

1962



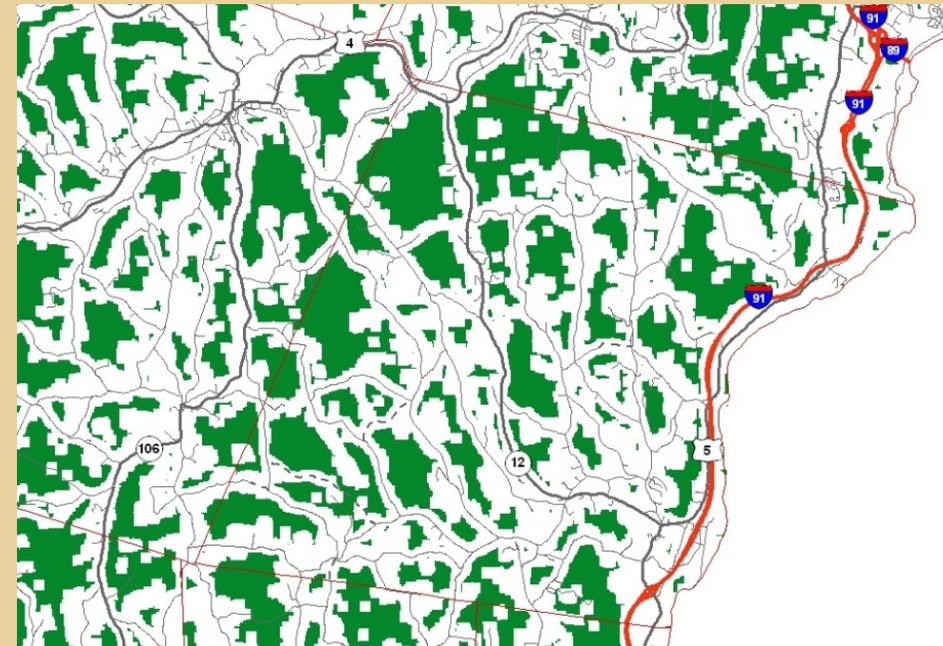
2011



# Pattern Matters



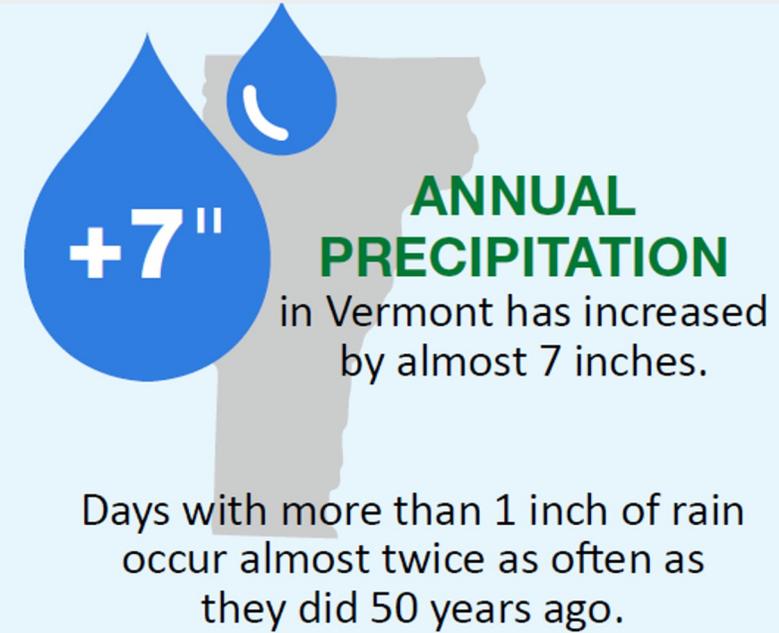
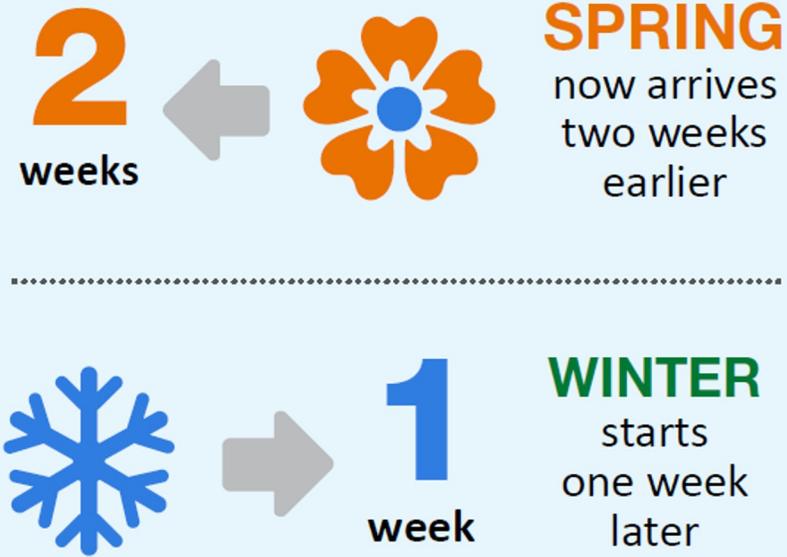
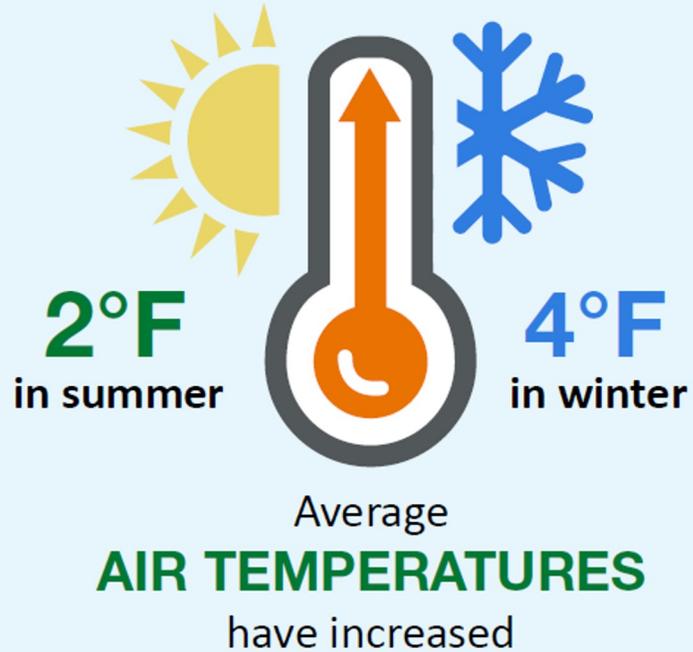
Less fragmented forest in a rural community



More intense fragmented forest in a rural community

# CLIMATE CHANGE IN VERMONT

*More rain and flooding, changes to agriculture, different forests*



 *Not everyone is impacted equally*

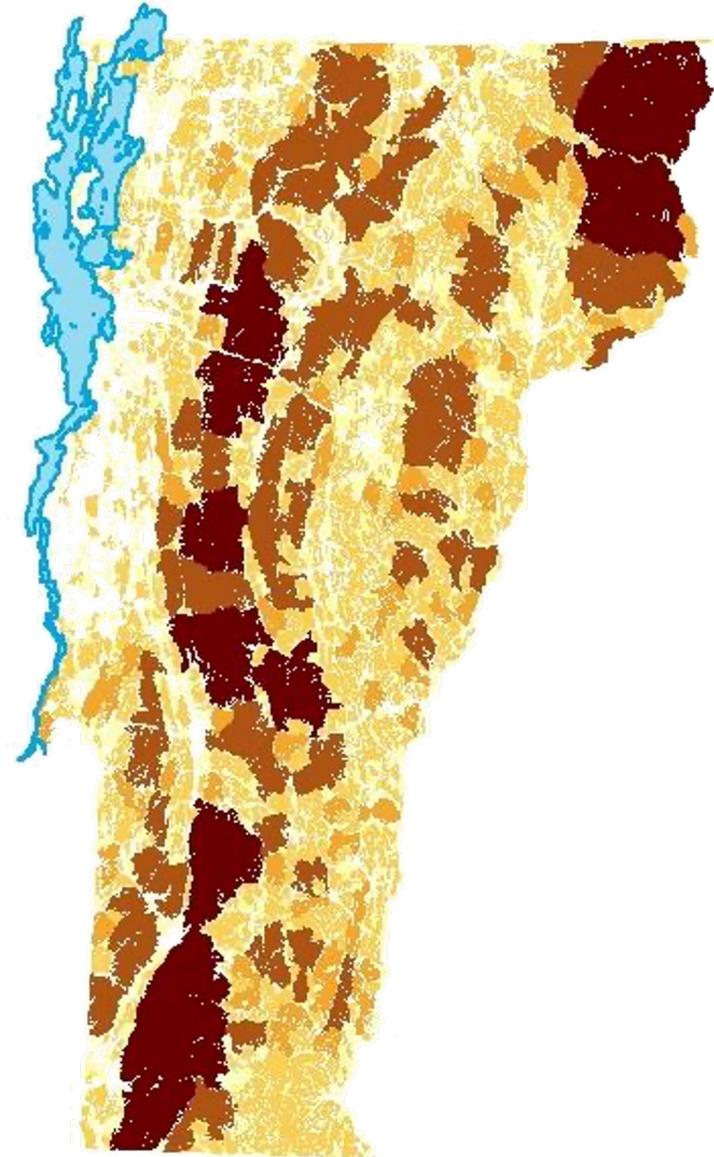
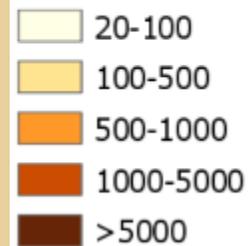
# Forest/Habitat Blocks

*Areas of natural  
cover*

(no roads,  
development or  
agriculture)

## Habitat Block Size

(IN ACRES)

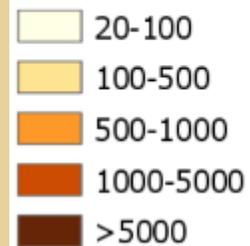


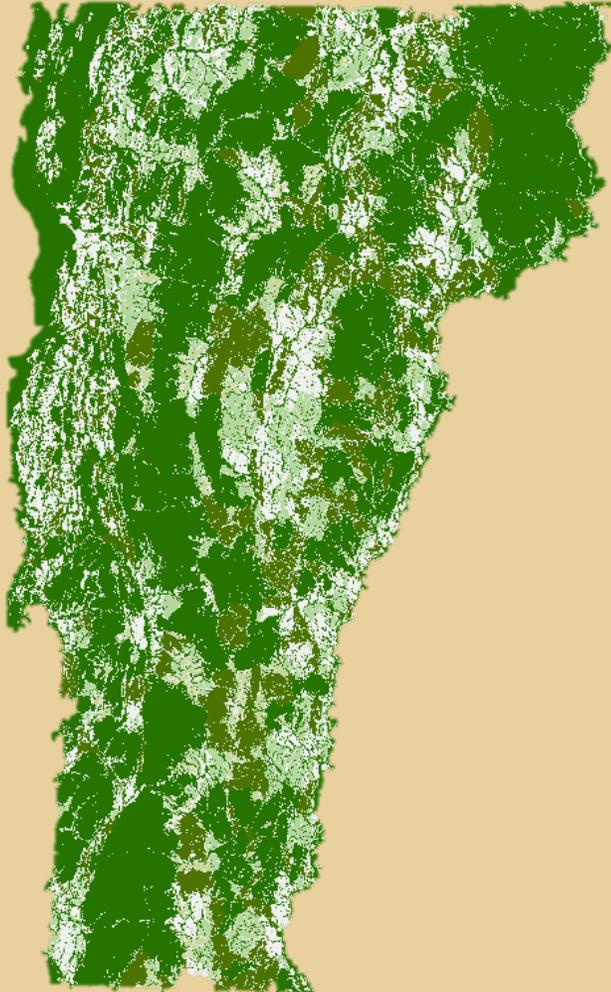
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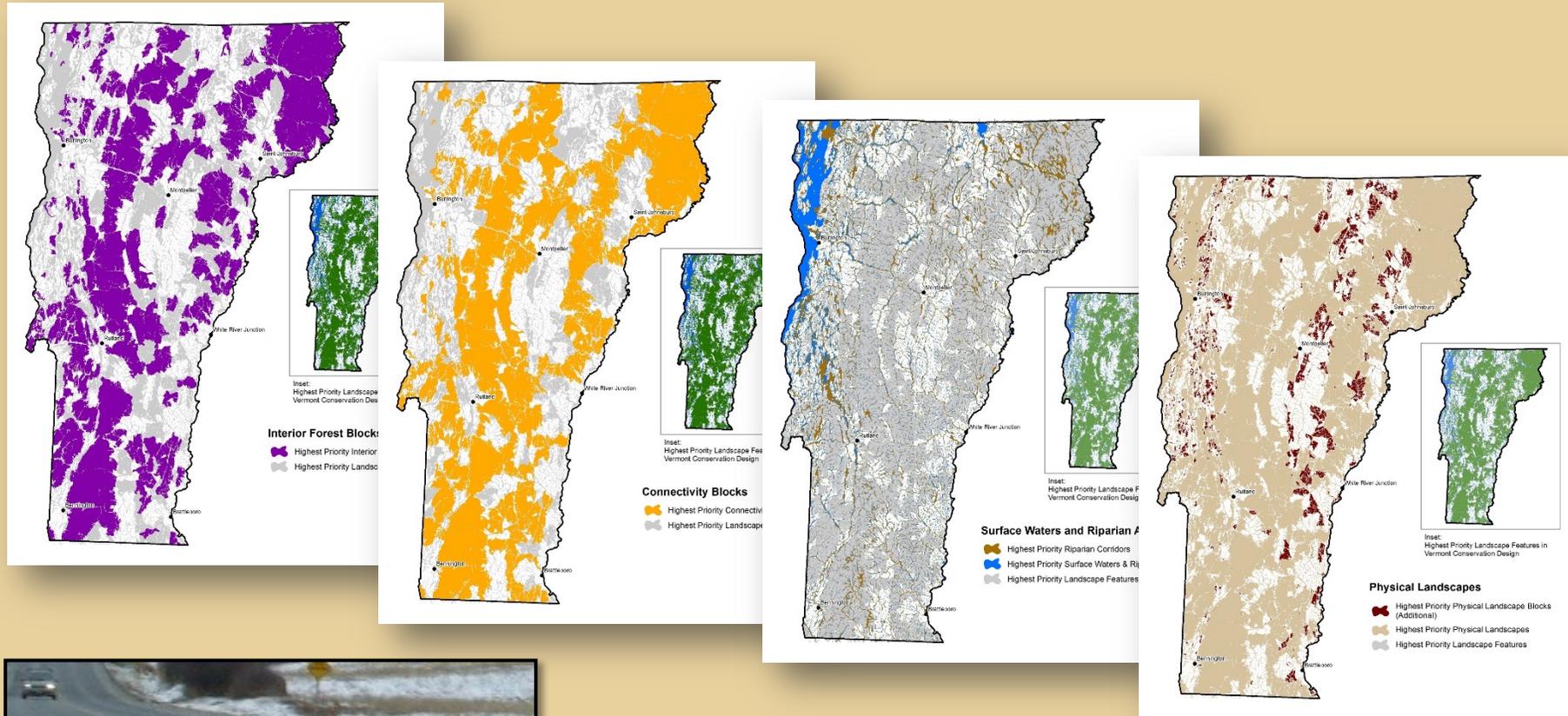




most important lands and waters for  
maintaining ecological function now  
and into the future

- Intact
- Connected
- Diverse

# LANDSCAPE PRIORITIES



***Maintain the specific functions of each element***

# Vermont Conservation Design



The screenshot displays the BioFinder web application interface. The browser address bar shows the URL [anmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder/](http://anmaps.vermont.gov/websites/BioFinder/). The page header includes the Vermont logo and the text "BioFinder Vermont Agency of Natural Resources".

On the left side, there is a "Layers" panel with a search bar and a "Quick Tools..." button. The "Filter Layers..." section lists the following layers:

- Overall Priorities: Vermont Conservation Design
  - Community & Species Scale
  - Landscape Scale
- Community & Species Components
- Landscape Components
- Vermont Conservation Design - Targets
- Buildings
- ANR Easemap Data
- Color Imagery by Year
- Vermont Orthophotos

The main map area shows a satellite-style view of a region in Vermont. A red line highlights a specific path or boundary across the landscape. A blue line follows a river or stream. The map includes a scale bar at the bottom left (0, 0.5, 1km) and a footer with various GIS-related links and logos.

**Core Forest  
Blocks**

**Wildlife  
Road  
Crossings**

**Small,  
“stepping  
stone”  
forests**

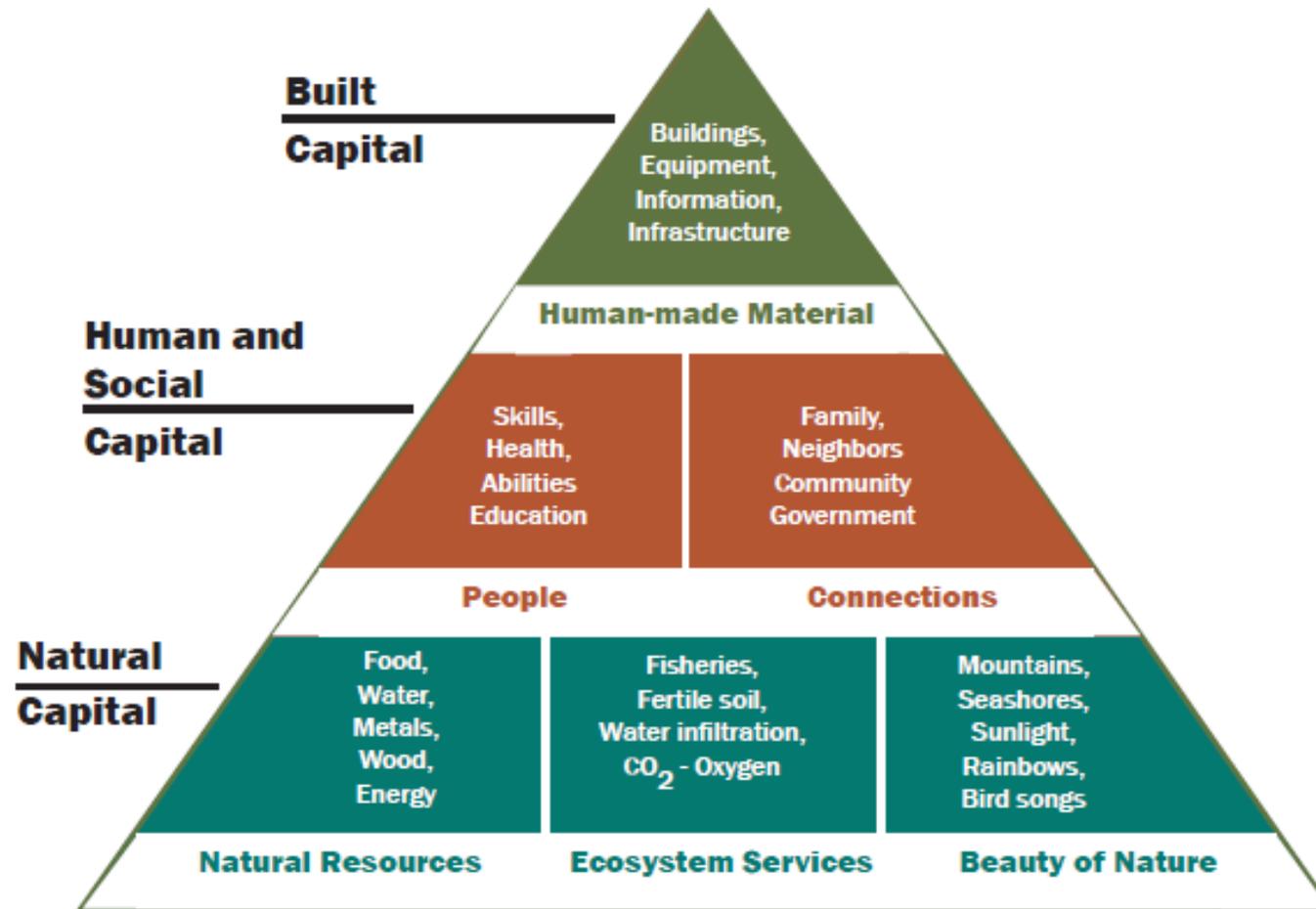
**Streamside  
Connectors**



# Whole Communities



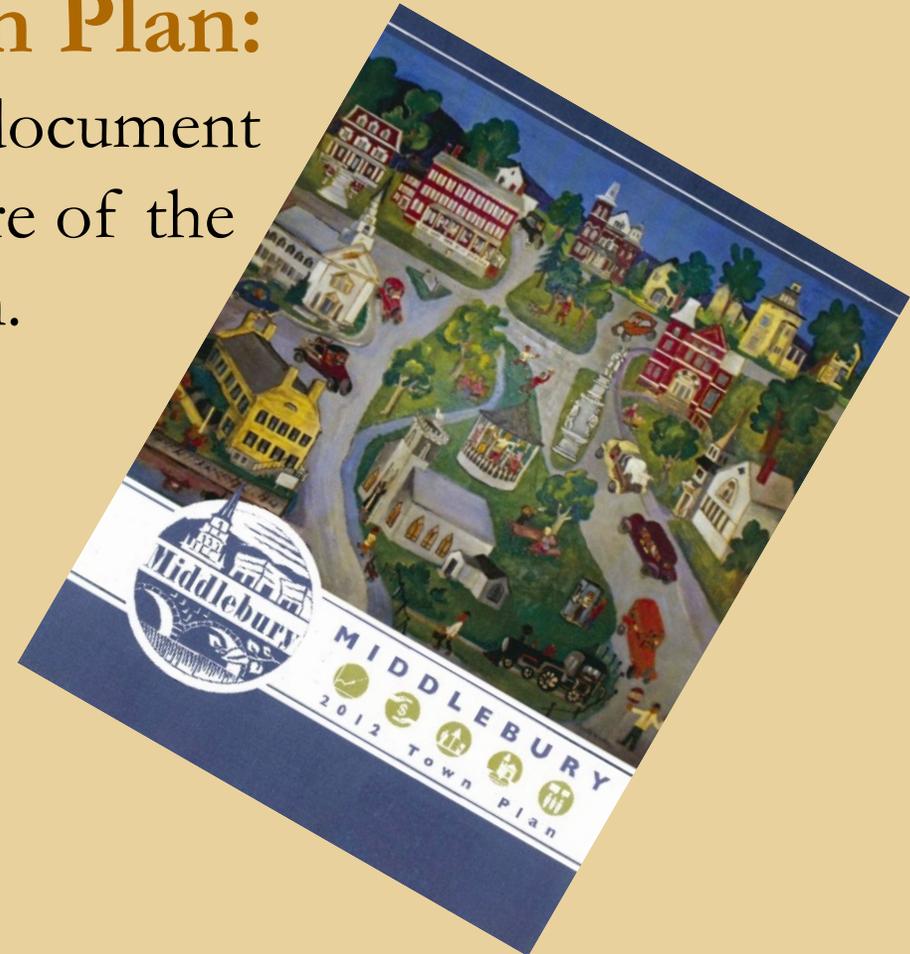
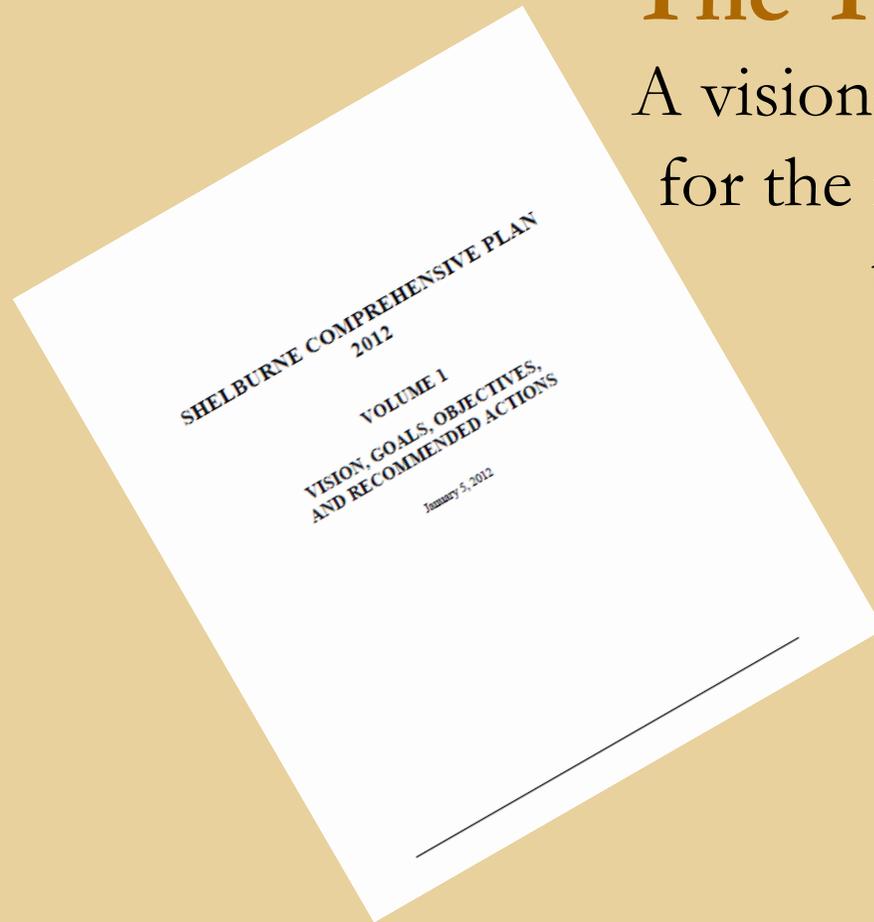
# Community Capitol



Community receives benefits from and relies on for continued existence.  
An investment is to manage in a way so it improves its value.

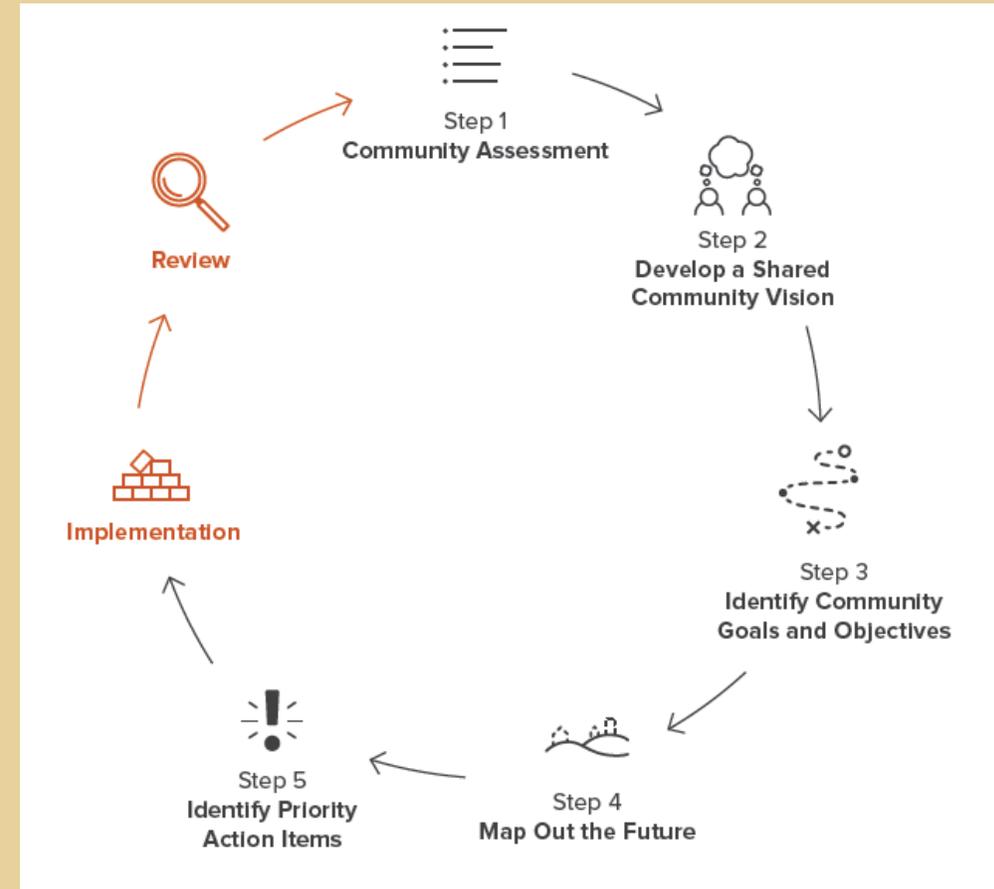
# It All Comes Together

**The Town Plan:**  
A visionary document  
for the future of the  
town.



Public Process | Trends | Various Plan Elements | Maps

# Five Step Process



State Planning Manual

□ Working with Existing Plans

# Land Use planning

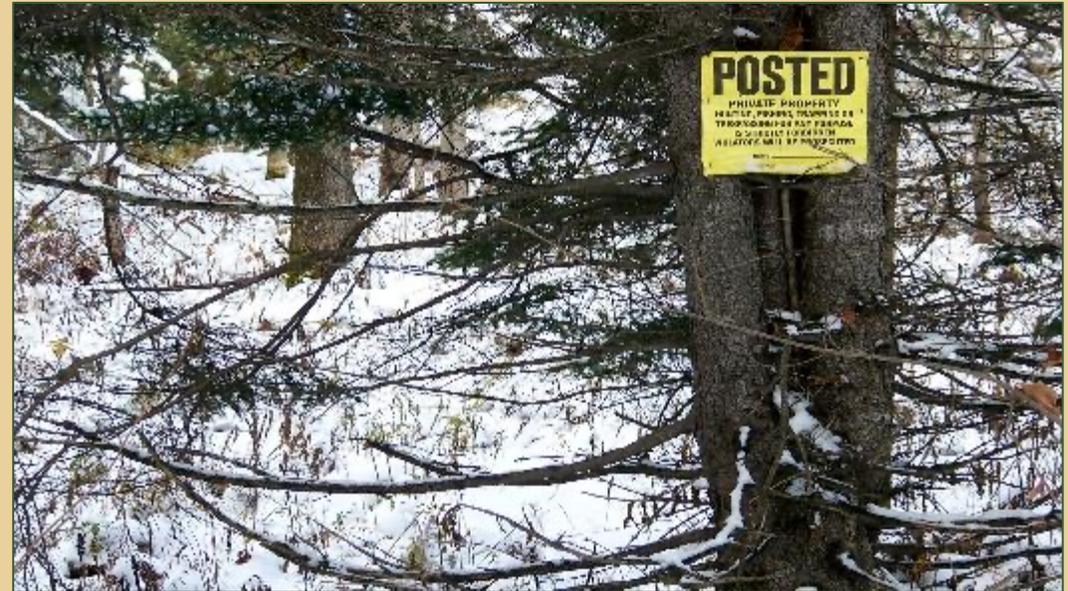


## Sprawl

= dispersed, auto-dependent development outside of compact urban and village centers, along highways, and in rural countryside.

"Photos from Above and Beyond." Campoli, J., Humstone, E., & MacLean, A. 2002.

# Planning involves balancing community priorities



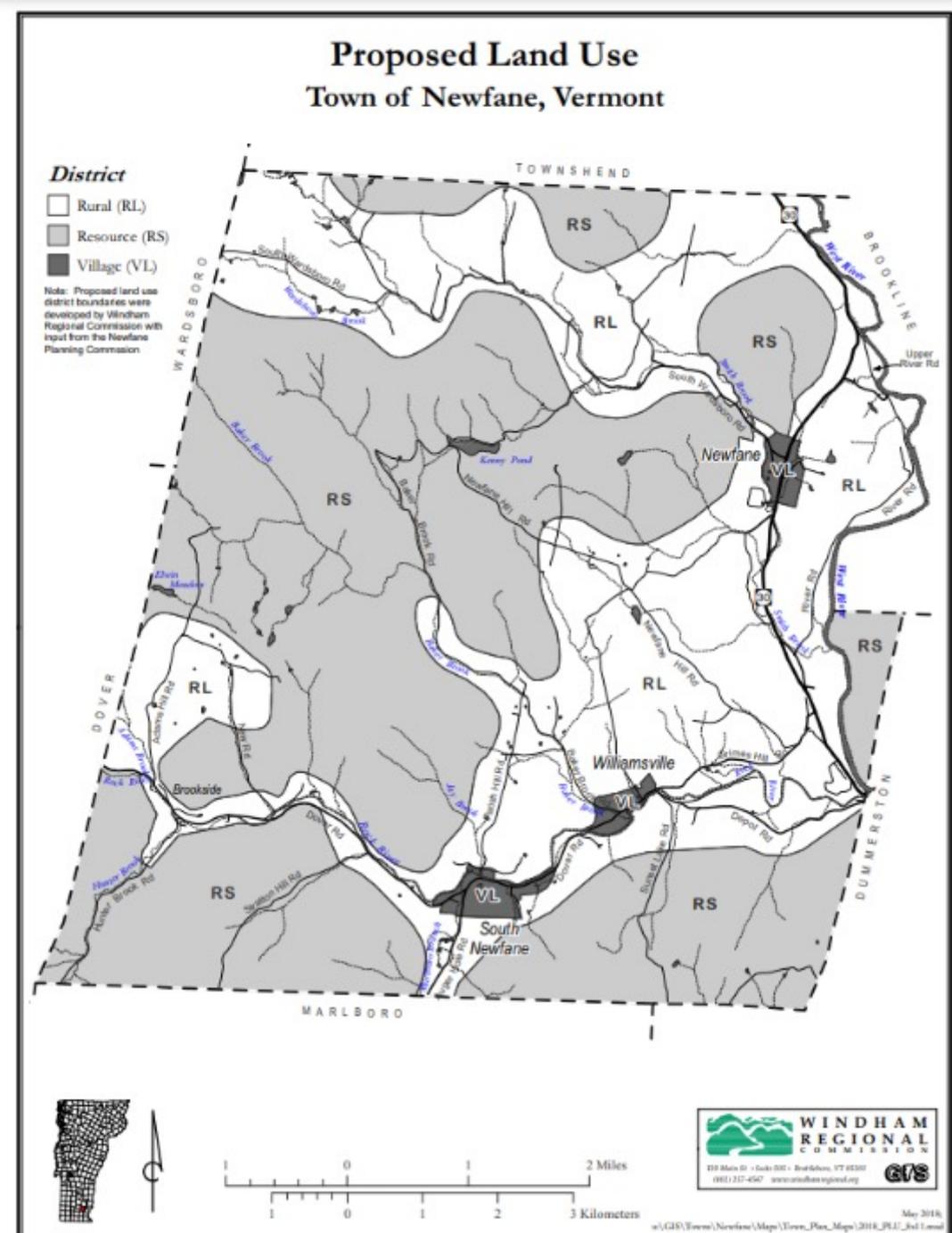


# Proposed Land Use

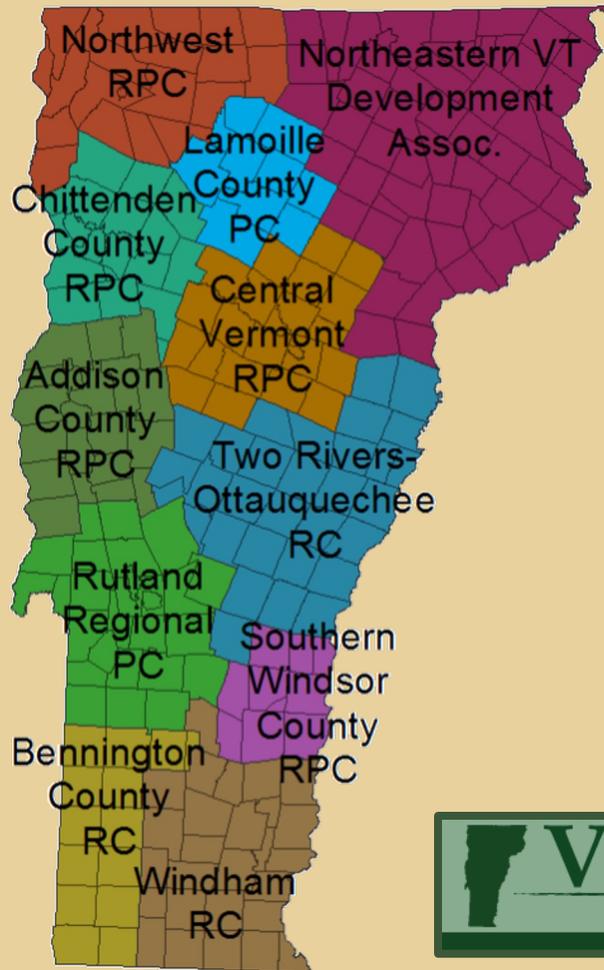
The **Resource District** includes large areas of land that serve as watershed areas and/or are characterized by the presence of steep slopes, shallow soils, important wildlife habitat, and large blocks of un-fragmented forest.

These areas should be placed in the least intensive zoning classification

The **Rural District** comprises areas which are already committed to development, easily accessible from the existing road system, or which appear capable to be developed. Residential uses dominate the Rural District. There is a mix of commercial development along Route 30 that includes retail, service and office uses.



# Regional Planning Commissions



- Regional Plan
- Technical Assistance
- Data Repository

# Working Together

To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process.

## Roles & Responsibilities

- Planning Commission
- Town planner
- Conservation Commission
- Selectboard
- Development Review Board
- Zoning Administrator
- Town manager



# Many Ways of Moving Forward

## Range of options

### Landowner

Education

Landowner  
Management  
decisions

Incentive  
Programs

Management  
Agreements

Conservation  
Easements

Land Acquisition

### Municipal

Education  
& Outreach

Inventory

Town  
Plan

Conservation  
Plan

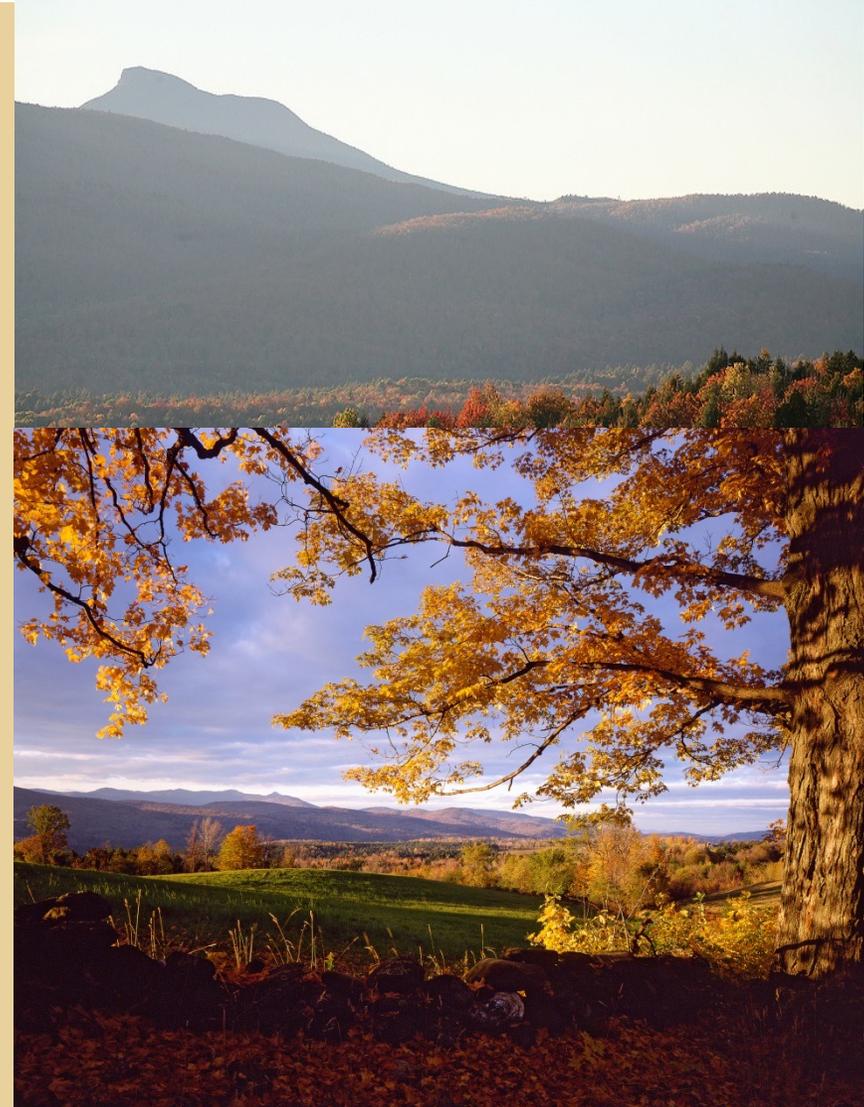
Bylaws

Zoning

No one tool is right for every landowner or town

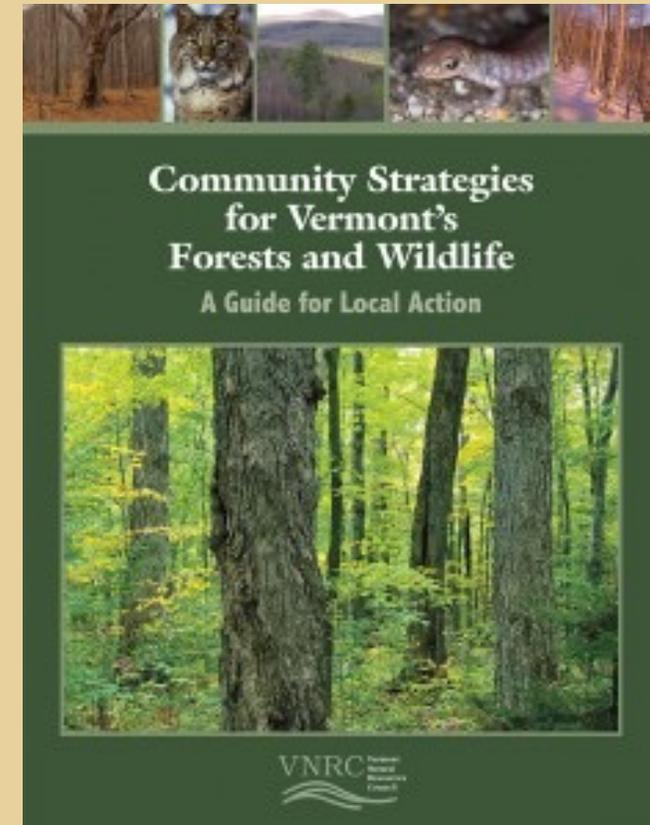
# Non-Regulatory Approaches

- ❑ Use Value Appraisal (Current Use)
- ❑ Conservation easements and land trusts
- ❑ Site design around mapped natural resource features – biological inventories, management plans
- ❑ Landowner Cooperatives
- ❑ Compact, village-style development
- ❑ Town Forests

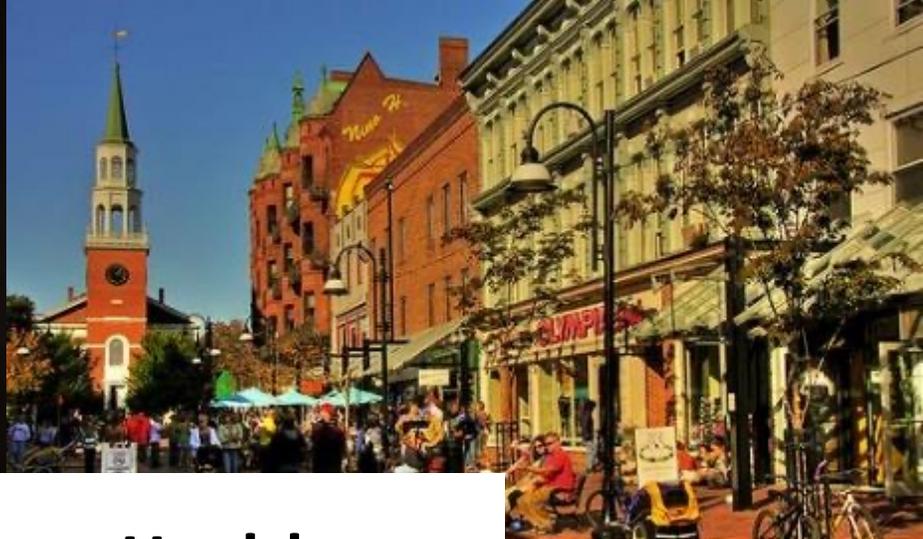


# Regulatory Approaches

- ❑ Conservation/forest zoning districts
- ❑ Overlay districts
- ❑ Subdivision regulations
- ❑ Planned Unit Developments
- ❑ Clustering and conservation subdivisions



Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: *A Guide for Local Action*

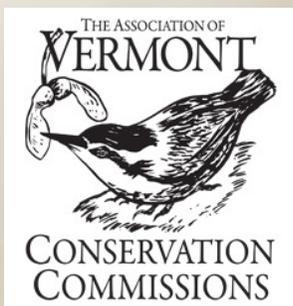


**Healthy Forests, Healthy  
Economy Healthy Community**



# Resources

- Community Wildlife Program CC prioritization spreadsheet & tech assistance
- Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions Handbook
- ACCD Planning Manual
- Vermont Natural Resources Council Community Strategies



Thank You!

Contact:

Jens.Hilke@Vermont.gov