# Conservation Action Plan

**Name of District:** Franklin County NRCD
**Geographic Territory:** Franklin County, VT
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## Introduction

The Vermont Locally Led Conservation Process is designed to help Vermont's Natural Resources Conservation Districts bring together local community members to collectively identify problems, brainstorm solutions, and direct resources towards achieving those solutions. This process has been going on for years and recently has become more formalized and streamlined with input from partner agencies and funders.

For this effort, since September 2024, the three Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDs) comprising the Northwest Zone of Vermont (Franklin County, Lamoille County, and Grand Isle County) have conducted a research and review process to assess the current state of natural resources and conservation needs in their Districts, each producing a Conservation Needs Assessment. The three Districts have also coordinated a public participation process by conducting a Local Led Conservation Survey which received over 140 responses from community members and hosting two community meetings, a Locally Led Conservation Dinner and a Local Working Group Meeting, to solicit input into priority natural resource concerns and conservation practices. Additionally, each District shared their approach and findings with their Board of Supervisors. The following Conservation Action Plan and attached Conservation Needs Assessment are a summary of the priorities identified by the community and ideas about how to collectively take action to achieve a shared vision for the future.

Through this process, the community of Franklin County described visions of local, sustainable agriculture, support for farmers, food sovereignty and security, preserving farmland, and environmental sustainability related to their hopes for agriculture and food security. The challenges facing this vision that community members named include farm economic viability, flooding and climate change, food insecurity and affordability, land development pressure, and water pollution. Regarding visions for natural resources and the environment, community members hoped for clean water, sustainable agriculture, land access, land conservation, and community involvement and education. The challenges standing in the way of that vision that community members identified include water pollution, flooding and climate change, development and land use, invasive species and habitat loss, and waste management and littering. The community also indicated that all these visions and values were important to them to preserve Vermont's rural character and identity, protect the landscape for future generations and leave a positive legacy, meet the urgency of climate change, protect human health and well-being, and enhance quality of life.

This Conservation Action Plan is broken out into the seven following categories: Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals, Energy, Humans which align with the categorization of concerns by the USDA-NRCS. Action in all categories will be needed to create the landscapes and systems that the Franklin County community needs and deserves.

# Soil

## Overview of Natural Resources:

Franklin County's soil composition reflects its diverse geology, which is shaped by two distinct regions: the Champlain Valley lowlands in the west and the hillier Northern Green Mountains in the east. The soils of the Champlain Valley are underlain by shale, slate, limestone, and dolostone, and include well-drained soils in the uplands and old lake plains. These sandy and clay-rich soils give way to glacial till over bedrock and the elevation increases in the eastern foothills, where soils are often shallow and rocky, underlain by phyllite, greenstone, slate, and quartzite. Prime Agricultural Soils make up 5.6% of the county's soil.

## Barriers and Challenges:

**Soil Health and Environmental Concerns**

- Soil health degradation in disturbed landscapes due to unsustainable cultural practices
- Tillage, continuous cropping, and synthetic fertilizer-use contribute to sediment and nutrient runoff and topsoil loss at rates exceeding natural soil development.
- Compaction of soils from wind, rain, snow, vehicles, and cropping practices increases runoff and nutrient leaching.
- Increasing precipitation rates due to climate change make agricultural soils more vulnerable to flooding and erosion.
- Presence of contaminants:
    - PFAS and other "forever chemicals"
    - Application of "sludge" on fields
    - Microplastics accumulating in soils
- Lack of funds for essential soil amendments

**Land Use and Resource Pressure**

- Prime soils, essential for economical crop production, are also highly suitable for development and at risk of farmland conversion and fragmentation, threatening long-term availability.
- Increasing amounts of farmland are being leased, raising concerns about:
    - Who is responsible for stewardship
    - The potential for overworking and degrading leased land

**Socioeconomic and Structural Challenges**

- Farmers, while highly connected to their land and soils, often lack financial resources to adopt soil conservation practices.
- Agricultural scale is increasing, resulting in fewer land stewards across the landscape.
- Small farms face viability challenges, making it difficult to sustain operations and invest in long-term conservation efforts.
- Lack of crop diversity impacts soil resilience and farm sustainability.
- Low awareness of soil health issues and solutions across all communities

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

**Community-wide**

- Education/outreach/programs for everyone

**Agricultural Sector**

- **Decreasing socioeconomic barriers for farmers to implement soil conservation practices**
- Easier grant applications
- More TA for grant writing assistance
- More funding in pools to pay farmers for practice implementation
- More funding for farmers to hire out skilled custom operators to perform BMPs on their fields
- Higher caps/limits for individual farmers to annually perform BMPs
- Extended time limitations for farmers to be able to get paid for the same practice (not expiring after 5 years)
- Improved relationships / leases / legal support for farmers who are renting fields from others to be able to invest in soil health and know that they will receive a return on the investment
- Cooperative farming models to encourage farmers to share fields/trade access to fields that may be geographically closer to another farms operations to reduce costs of travel associated with performed high quality soil practices and timely harvesting and nutrient management operations
- Increased access to precision ag resources to use prescriptions on a sub-field basis to improve precision nutrient applications based on sub-field level soil tests
- Providing additional soil testing, soil health testing, and interpretation services for farmers at low or no costs, regardless of farm size
- Addressing manure storage needs through increased funding for waste management solutions so that farmers are able to apply the nutrients they have at the best time for the fields regardless of weather
- Creation of increased insurance programs related to flooding, drought, and extreme weather so that farmers can remain economically viable and afford to take care of their soils in the event of extreme weather damaging their crops.
- Properly incentivize farmers to retire farmland that regularly experiences unsuitable field conditions

**Developed Lands Sector**

- Enhanced education and outreach to non-farm land stewards regarding soil health and function to improve stewardship and increase BMP adoption
- Sustainable development decision making and zoning related to creation of impervious surfaces and buildings, and adoption of stormwater best management practices to reduce soil loss

**Forest Lands Sector**

- Support forestland stewards to follow Accepted Management Practices to reduce soil erosion in forests

**Rivers and Lakes Sector**

- Support stream/river landowners to understand natural stream and floodplain functions
- Implement riparian buffers to reduce bank erosion
- Help lakeshore landowners become Lake Wise with buffers, stormwater management, and proper lakeshore bank stabilization practices

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

**Agriculture Sector**

- Funds being received by farmers to implement BMPs that are appropriate for their context
- Acreage of BMPs on farms and non-farm lands
- Water infiltration rates on individual fields
- Soil organic matter building on individual fields
- Soil compaction reduction on individual fields

**All Sectors**

- Reduced nutrient loading into watersheds – water quality testing
- Water infiltration rate, soil organic matter, and soil compaction testing
- Visual inspection and geographic mapping of erosion: gullies, incision, eroding banks

## Conservation Technology Needed

**Agriculture Sector**

- Contour farming
- Terraced farming
- Cover crop seeders (broadcast and inter-seeders)
- No-till seed drills
- Manure injectors
- Drag line systems for manure application
- Precision agriculture equipment
- More and improved soil tests

**All Sectors**

- Proper landscape design

## Programs and Services

- NRCDs – Resource Connection, NMPs, Grant writing assistance, Soil Health Training Program
- NRCS – EQIP, CSP, AMA, WRE, RCPPs
- VAAFM – FAP, BMP, AgCWIP, CEAP, PFP, other grants, RAPs
- VTANR – Lake Wise, Tactical Basin Planning, Clean Water Investment Program
- LCBP – Stream Wise, Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystem Projects
- UVM Extension – Soil health programs, equipment rental programs, research, education and outreach, grant writing assistance, implementation assistance, soil health testing and interpretation
- NOFA-VT and other similar organizations – grants, TA, grant writing assistance
- American Farmland Trust
- Land for Good

## Need for New Programs or Processes

- Comprehensive application portal for all VT state grants for farmers that also assists farmers with understanding which grants and opportunities may apply to them
- Soil Health Training Program for TA providers, farmers, land stewards, etc.
- Equipment access and experienced operators/equipment maintainers
- Long-term management plans
- Multi-year soil health building incentives
- Alternative methods for cover crop termination without tilling and herbicide
- Non-synthetic fertilizer alternatives that repurpose waste
- Increased collaboration between farmers and researchers
- Increased funding for all opportunities, especially equipment

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# Water

## Overview of Natural Resources

Franklin County is primarily situated within the Missisquoi Bay Watershed, but parts of the county overlap with the Lamoille River Watershed and the Northern Lake Champlain Direct Drainages (North Lake Basin). Only 8% of the county's area is water, but high agricultural land use has resulted in significant phosphorus loading into these three watersheds, causing cyanobacteria blooms, impairing aquatic life, and reducing recreational use. To reduce excessive nutrient inputs, Tactical Basin Plans and Best Management Practices have been created to provide guidance for reducing excessive nutrient inputs and thus ensure future public use and enjoyment of these waters and their ecological health.

## Barriers and Challenges

**Land Use and Ownership**

- Much of Vermont's land is privately owned, making conservation efforts dependent on voluntary participation
- Development leading to loss of ag and/or forested land and wetlands

**Infrastructure**

- Aging infrastructure and cost burden for upgrades
- Aging stormwater infrastructure
- Poor/outdated septic systems
- Wastewater overflows from treatment facilities
- Out of date flood maps leading to poor planning

**Water Quality and Contamination**

- Sediment laden waterways and legacy phosphorus in shallow bays; delta creation in lakes
- Chemical concerns in waterways
- Road salt in waterways
- Polluted/contaminated drinking water sources

**Hydrology and Water Management**

- Limited water access in drought
- Previous straightening of streams and ditches
- "Maintenance" of ditches and channels as sediment aggrades over time

**Climate and Environmental Change**

- Climate change

**Workforce and Capacity**

- Capacity of "clean water workforce" to develop, design, and implement clean water projects

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

**Financial Support**

- Financial assistance to farms and landowners to implement water quality practices

- Funding for stormwater infrastructure improvements and maintenance

**Sustainable Development**

- Encouraging sustainable development practices to minimize impervious surfaces and centralize development to community centers
- Balancing development and preservation of natural spaces
- Implementing erosion control measures on roads and development sites

**Community Engagement**

- Community buy-in, engagement, and funding to address conservation practices on private properties

**Water and Wastewater Management**

- Wastewater Treatment System upgrades
- Sustainable management of underground water resources

**Forests and Vegetation**

- Responsible forestland stewardship
- Increased tree plantings and canopy cover

**Pollution Prevention**

- Reduction of litter and waste entering waterways

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

- Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) - sets water quality goals by defining the maximum amount of a pollutant a water body can receive while still meeting standards. The state monitors progress through water sampling, modeling, and tracking pollution reductions, ensuring compliance with the Clean Water Act.
- Hours of education provided are assigned to state fiscal years based on the date of the event.
- State investments by dollars obligated or awarded to clean water efforts by State of Vermont agencies through a variety of funding and financing mechanisms.
- Reduced nutrient loading into watersheds – water quality testing
- Surface and groundwater withdrawal tracking

## Conservation Technology Needed

- Centralized wastewater treatment systems
- Low Tech Process Based Restoration projects and case studies for Vermont context
- Improved gauging of river systems to understand flooding regimes
- Improved sizing of stormwater infrastructure, specifically culverts and bridges

## Programs and Services

- USDA-NRCS
- VAAFM Water Quality Division
- ANR-DEC
- Local Partners including NRCDs, MRBA, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, Franklin Watershed Committee, Cold Hollow to Canada, Regional Planning Commissions, etc.

- Clean Water Service Providers
- Water quality monitoring – Lake Champlain Committee, Lake Champlain Basin Program, LaRosa Partnership Program, Vermont Department of Public Health, etc.
- LCBP State oh the Lake Report
- VAAFM flooding resources
- Clean Water Service Providers (NRPC, CCRPC)
- ANR Clean Water Portal: Clean Water Project Explorer, Clean Water Interactive Dashboard, Clean Water Initiative Report
- Village Wastewater Solutions Initiative (VT DEC)

## Need for New Programs or Processes

- Soliciting input from local partner organizations to design improved funding opportunities
- Improved tracking systems for activities such as:
    - Private road erosion remediation
    - Private wastewater system upgrades
- Additional programs that compensate land stewards for water quality conservation practices, like Pay for Performance or Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

# Air

## Overview of Natural Resources

As with the rest of Vermont, Franklin County enjoys good air quality due to low population density, natural landscapes, and robust state and federal regulations. Air quality in Franklin County has improved in tandem with national trends, with average particulate matter emissions dropping 39% since 2001. In Vermont, most air pollutants are man-made and come from motorized vehicles. In recent years, wildlife smoke from Canada has also been a leading cause of air pollution. As the climate continues to warm, Vermont's air quality may become increasingly volatile with more frequent and intense wildfire events.

## Barriers and Challenges

- Increasing wildfire smoke
- Dependence on vehicles, including diesel vehicles
- Increasing drought
- Climate change
- Increasing and worsening wind events and erosion; microbursts
- Large farm equipment creates dust and debris

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

- Making electric/zero-emissions tractors more accessible
- Reducing diesel emissions
- Reducing distances between fields for farmers through improved rental agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Encouraging adoption of solar and wind energy production where possible
- Increasing carbon storage through cover crops, reforestation, healthy soils etc.
- Improved public transportation systems to reduce single person vehicle trips
- Reduce emissions in line with statewide emissions reduction goals
- Funding for and implementation of commercial and residential energy efficiency programs

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

- Greenhouse gas emission rates
- Air quality testing
- Number of miles travelled in vehicles using various forms of energy
- Number of EV charging stations installed and in use
- Number of shared rides

## Conservation Technology Needed

- Electric Tractors
- High speed rail
- EV charging station infrastructure

- Improved ride-sharing apps

## Programs and Services

- VT DEC - Vermont Environmental Public Health Tracking Program
- VT DEC - Vermont Diesel Emissions Reduction Grant Program
- Ozone Transport Commission
- Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative
- NRPC Transportation Planning

## Need for New Programs or Processes

- Improved fuel efficiencies for vehicles and buildings (geothermal)

# Plants

## Overview of Natural Resources:

Franklin County is home to a diverse array of plant life shaped by its unique topography, climate, and soil conditions. 49% of the county is forested, and 9.5% are wetlands. The county's plant communities are strongly influenced by its two distinct biophysical regions: the Champlain Valley in the west and the Northern Green Mountains in the east.

The Champlain Valley is characterized by low elevation, warm temperatures, and relatively dry conditions, and is one of the most agriculturally productive regions in Vermont, with crops such as forage, corn, and soybeans dominating the landscape. The historic Mesic Clayplain Forests, which used to cover the valley, have almost been entirely cleared for agriculture. The cooler temperatures and higher elevations of the Northern Green Mountains support Northern Hardwood Forests, with trees such as sugar maple, beech, yellow birch, and black cherry.

## Barriers and Challenges

**Invasive and Introduced Species**

- Presence of invasive species can disqualify landowners from conservation programs
- Knowledge of identification and treatment of invasive species
- Reliance on chemical treatment for invasive species
- Survivorship of native trees and shrubs may be low if invasives are not properly treated beforehand, which requires additional funding and expertise
- Aquatic invasive species

**Native Planting and Restoration**

- Survivorship of planted trees and shrubs can be low due to plants being imported from other ecoregions without local genetics and adaptations
- Cost of seed

**Land Use and Ownership**

- Competing interests between working lands, hunting/trapping and recreation, conservation and housing development
- High percentage of private ownership, greater forest fragmentation as development increases

**Climate and Ecosystem Change**

- Climate change impacting plant hardiness zones and what species will thrive and survive in different regions
- Manipulation of wetlands and ecosystems over time, deforestation
- Reforestation/forest management following influence of sheep farming and deforestation

**Biodiversity and Land Transition**

- Species diversity vs monocultures
- In areas where farmland is no longer being managed, what plant communities are coming up?

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

- Financial assistance for farmers and landowners
- More agroforestry, home gardens, community gardens/food forests
- More upland planting projects
- Riparian buffers
- Early successional habitat
- Invasive species removal
- Forest Management plans
- More boat greeter programs and aquatic invasive species tracking, removal, and prevention
- Repurpose invasive and introduced species where possible (building materials, energy, food, medicine)
- Pollinator plantings

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

- Number of trees planted
- Parcels enrolled in Use Value Appraisal (Current Use)
- Percent of forested land
- Size of forest blocks
- Funding for projects
- Reduction of invasive species
- Carbon sequestration
- Community engagement/buy-in

## Conservation Technology Needed

- Mechanical management of invasive species/timing of mowing
- Vermont Conservation Design - identify high priority habitat and areas for connectivity
- Mycorrhizal inoculation

## Programs and Services

- NRCS
- ANR-DEC
- USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife
- VT Dept of Forest, Parks, and Recreation; County Foresters
- NOFA-VT
- The Nature Conservancy
- Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Collective (FEMC)
- MRBA – Knockout Knotweed project
- ANR – Invasive Species webpages
- Master Gardeners
- Vermont Garden Network

## Need for New Programs or Processes

- More funds for trees
- Education about invasive species, biodiversity, habitat connectivity
- Forestry assisted migration
- Programs for homeowners/grouping smaller parcels together
- Integrative/holistic management teams
- More local nurseries growing locally adapted plants
- Improvements related to growing shorter day corn
- Growing and processing local grains
- More research and case studies around agroforestry

# Animals

## Overview of Natural Resources

In Franklin County, large wetland complexes of marsh, swamp, and floodplain associated with Lake Champlain and open agricultural fields provide regionally significant waterfowl and marsh bird habitat. The extensive forests of the eastern region of Franklin County provide habitat for many species of wildlife that thrive in remote, interior forest conditions. The high elevation forests of the Northern Green Mountain region provide habitat for several species of birds, including Bicknell's thrush, Swainson's thrush, and blackpoll warbler.

Notably, Franklin County is home to more than 90,000 domesticated farm animals, including livestock and poultry. It is important for farmers to adopt site-specific BMPs to ensure that farm animals have minimal negative impacts to the natural environment. Common conservation practices include rotational grazing and associated infrastructure, manure storage, bedded pack facilities, barnyard run-off collection, and laneway development and stream crossings.

## Barriers and Challenges

**Habitat Loss and Fragmentation**

- Wildlife habitat fragmentation and risks
- New development is pushing wildlife out of their habitats
- Habitat alteration
- Habitat conversion
- Conversion of forest and grassland habitat to utility scale wind and solar energy generation
- Impacts of roads and transportation systems – trampling and direct impacts

**Species Decline and Disease**

- Reduction in populations of rare, threatened, or endangered species/Species of Greatest Concern
- White Nose Syndrome in bats
- Avian flu and other diseases
- Lack of information about species of concern, especially physically smaller species

**Pollution and Chemical Impacts**

- Impact of herbicides/chemicals on pollinators
- Pollution and sedimentation

**Invasive Species and Introduced Threats**

- Invasive and introduced species
- Introduction of nonindigenous fishes, including associated aquatic pathogens and parasites

**Climate Change**

- Climate change

**Funding and Resource Gaps**

- Lack of funding available for feed management

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

**Habitat Restoration and Conservation**

- Habitat loss is the top threat to wildlife in Vermont. This includes loss of agricultural land or increased management intensity on hay and pastureland.
- Restore or enhance floodplain and riparian buffers at key locations.
- Restore and maintain natural habitats in linkage areas between large habitat blocks – smaller undeveloped forest blocks between larger natural areas, which allow wildlife to travel more freely.
- Restore and maintain grassland habitats - Vermont's largest and most contiguous grasslands occur in the Champlain Valley. Many of the larger examples are the result of current or past agricultural practices. Grassland habitat can also include sandplain communities.

**Pollinator and Wildlife Support**

- Increase technical and financial access to resources and practices that improve habitat for pollinator species by ensuring a diverse array of flowering plants throughout the active season.

**Sustainable Land Management**

- Collaborate with local farmers and landowners to promote sustainable agricultural and forestry practices
- More than 80% of Vermont's land base is privately owned and land use decision-making is a municipal responsibility (there are 273 municipalities each with separate land use plans and planning authorities). With so much land in private hands guided by local decision making, helping landowners and municipalities make good decisions is critical to protecting and conserving wildlife.

**Wildlife Management**

- Deer overpopulation due to lack of predators, leading to higher vehicle incidents, browse of plants, lime disease

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

- Metrics for connectivity blocks, interior forest blocks, diversity blocks and riparian areas
- Wildlife watching percentage based on surveys
- Economic impact of fish- and wildlife-based recreation based on surveys

## Conservation Technology Needed

- Vermont Conservation Design - ecologically functional and connected landscape as a cost-effective and holistic approach to conserving Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats.
- Developing metrics for connectivity blocks, interior forest blocks, diversity blocks and riparian areas

## Programs and Services

- USDA-NRCS
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife

- Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge
- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- Vermont Center for Ecostudies
- Audubon Vermont
- Northeast Wilderness Trust

## Need for New Programs or Processes

- Pollinator Pathway Program
- Greater education about management
- Grassland Bird Habitat Programs
- NRCS EQIP - invasive control, forestry work, and brush hogging
- Education about invasive species, biodiversity, habitat connectivity
- VFWD is currently working with UVM researchers and municipal planning partners to develop a conceptual model of community-based decision- making processes which can then be used to develop better indicators, measures and success metrics.

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# Energy

## Overview of Natural Resources

Vermont's total energy consumption per capita is low, with transportation accounting for 34% of consumption, followed by residential (33%) and commercial (20%) sectors. Parts of Franklin County experience a high energy burden (percentage of total household income spent on energy costs).

## Barriers and Challenges

- Concentration of wealth in western towns near interstate, where there are more public transportation options
- Lack of public transportation options in more rural areas where there is greater overall vulnerability
- In areas with higher energy burden, home ownership is less likely than renting, presenting more barriers to home improvements that decrease energy usage
- Need significant investment in energy infrastructure at all levels of government
    - Disconnect between constituents and gov't
- Cold climate requires heating
- Climate change increasing need for air conditioning
- Overreliance on fossil fuels
- Aging infrastructure and equipment in rural areas
- Low energy production compared to consumption within the State

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

- Public transportation
- Adoption of electric vehicles
- Local renewable energy production
- Grid optimization, including better integration of renewable energy
- Increased use of heat pumps and other electric heating options
- Weatherization

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

- Reliable and extensive public transportation
- 100% carbon-free electricity by 2032, with at least 75% of this coming from renewable energy sources
- 30% share of renewable thermal energy by 2025 and 70% by 2042
- 10% of the transportation sector's energy needs from renewable sources by 2025, growing to 45% by 2040

## Conservation Technology Needed

- Electric car charging stations
- Electric vehicles

- Solar power
- Wind power

## Programs and Services

- Efficiency Vermont
- VT Dept of Public Service
- Dept of Energy's Comprehensive Energy Plan

## Need for New Programs or Processes

- Community-integrated energy planning at the regional planning commission-level

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# Humans

## Overview of Natural Resources

Franklin County is the fifth most populous county in Vermont. Demographically, it is similar to statewide averages, except that rates of college education are lower. Like in other rural counties, common vulnerabilities include transportation, childcare, housing, and internet access. Overall social vulnerability is greater in northeastern towns.

## Barriers and Challenges

**Agricultural Viability and Farm Succession**

- Succession planning and transition planning for farmers
- Limited resource/equipment sharing opportunities
- Land rental issues
- Low opportunity to access land
- Younger generations in family farms are less and less likely to take over farm operations
- Maybe too much emphasis on dairy farming in regards to resources and technical assistance
- Lack of support for new farmers

**Climate, Disaster, and Infrastructure Resilience**

- Flooding and climate change risks to human health and well being
- Lack of responsiveness to urgent and evolving emergencies such as flooding
- Insufficient disaster assistance

**Housing and Demographics**

- Lack of affordable housing
- Aging population due to lack of affordable housing, lower rates of immigration, and higher rates of emigration

**Education, Skills, and Workforce**

- Education system in rural areas changing
- Lack of skills and training across generations related to food production
- Relatively lower education rates

**Youth and Migration**

- Younger folks leaving the region to pursue higher paying career opportunities

**Community and Social Challenges**

- Mistrust
- Community accountability and buy in
- Substance use disorder
- Lack of understanding of new cultures and people

**Technology and Access**

- Limited internet and technology access

## Priorities for Addressing Conservation Needs

**Basic Needs and Infrastructure**

- Affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, internet, transportation

- Accessible social services
- Vermont needs to build thousands of homes per year to ease our housing crunch, put downward pressure on prices, and increase affordability for all Vermonters
- Expanded municipal infrastructure

**Food Systems and Sovereignty**

- Access to local food
- Food sovereignty
- Diversity of backgrounds of folks producing food and goods
- Agrarian commons, cooperative land ownership

**Support for Farmers**

- Creating Farm Teams to help farmers access resources in a comprehensive and efficient manner (including Guide to Assistance for Agricultural Producers of Vermont)

**Collaboration and Efficiency**

- More collaboration between groups doing similar things to centralize efforts to increase efficiency
- Reducing the timeline of lengthy bureaucratic processes to implement conservation
- Stop adding more and more regulations, instead, focus on improving implementation and enforcement

**Community Engagement and Participation**

- Promotion of local products to encourage tourism
- Collaboration with youth groups such as the Cub Scouts
- Increased volunteering

## Measurable Conservation Goals and Objectives

- Increased development of affordable housing

## Conservation Technology Needed

- Proper regulations
- Strategic Projects for Advancing Rural Communities (SPARC)
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

## Programs and Services

- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- Rural Vermont
- Farm Service Agency
- VT Dept of Forest, Parks, and Recreation
- Northwest Regional Planning Commission
- Land Access and Opportunity Board
- Act 250
- Public Utility Commission
- Vermont Housing Needs Assessment
- Housing Development Dashboard

**Need for New Programs or Processes**

- Local chapter of New England Feeding New England
- Listening Sessions for each town