

Submission of Written Testimony  
VERMONT House APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
FY 2016 Budget

Wednesday February 25, 2015

Submitted by:

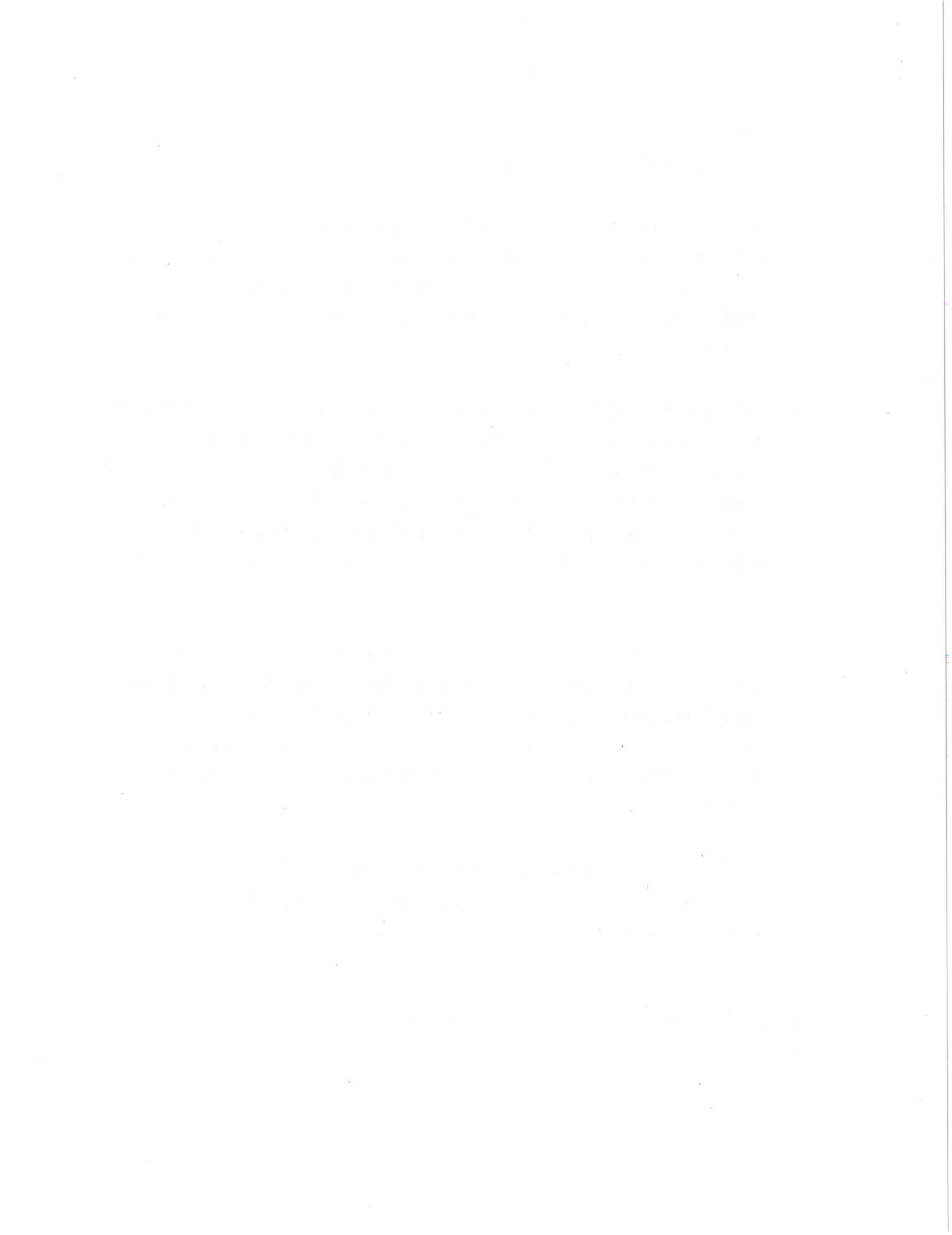
Rodger Krussman, Vermont State Director  
The Trust for Public Land

- Good morning, my name is Rodger Krussman. I am the Vermont State Director for The Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation organization with a mission of creating parks and protecting land for people, ensuring healthy, liveable communities for generations to come.
- In the past 20 years, The Trust for Public Land has protected over 55,000 acres of forestland across Vermont. This work has included protection of important local forests like the 355 acre LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest in Hinesburg. This town owned forest is now an asset to the local community, providing local recreation and educational opportunities, as well as helping to protect the overall quality of the Lake Champlain watershed.
- I am here today as one of the four Co-Chairs representing the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition.
- First of all, Thank you for your incredible support and sustained leadership that has allowed us – the VHCC members -- to focus on supporting communities with high value investments in conservation and affordable housing needs across Vermont.

- As you know our work is made up of land conservation and affordable housing projects that are the very foundation of Vermont's economy. The work of VHCC organizations is at the nexus of the social, economic and environmental values of our state- it is the desire to achieve this triple bottom line that makes Vermont so unique and resilient.
- **VHCB's public investments create amazing leverage** of other public and private funds and result in jobs, immediate and long term economic activity, and enrich the quality of life in our communities; and because the structure of this 25 year effort has been flexible and nimble we have been able to act quickly to take advantage of one time opportunities to conserve properties and assure their future as public assets.
- **Our projects are local.** As one example, right now we are working to create the new Jim Jeffords State Forest, a new state forest in Mendon and Shrewsbury, that will protect recreational access for a variety of uses such as hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing and snowmobiling. At 1,300 acres of forest land, it will also provide important wildlife habitat, capture carbon, and act as a natural filter for flood resiliency. (see attachment)
- Another example can be found in West Windsor with an opportunity to protect the recreational assets at Mount Ascutney. There is an incredible recreational trail system that is in jeopardy of being lost. According to the Chair of the town select board, with financial support from VHCB, the town can move ahead with the protection of over 1,700 acres, guaranteeing public access, and in turn helping to revitalize the region's economy.

- These are just two of many important opportunities that VHCB funding could impact in our communities across the state.
- Right now there are 74 farms in our “pipeline” of projects as well as another 70 forestland and natural area conservation projects. Thousands of acres of forestland are at risk and we’re evaluating what we have the resources to protect. The current total need is almost \$30 million.
- 75% of the farmland conservation projects funded in FY 14 and FY 15 that contained surface waters included water quality protections in the easement. AND 80% of the farms in the current VHCB pipeline have surface waters that will be protected with special easement provisions and/or through enrollment in other state or federal buffer programs. (see hand out on water quality protection)
- It is vital that we continue to protect the irreplaceable places that distinguish Vermont and enhance our quality of life and make it an important destination for travelers. The steady VHCB investments, often the first dollars committed to a project, are the key to leveraged dollars that make your appropriations go further.
- I am here to ask that you support the Governors’ recommended Budget for level support for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

Thank you for your time and your continued support for this very important program.



# THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND

LAND FOR PEOPLE



## Jim Jeffords State Forest

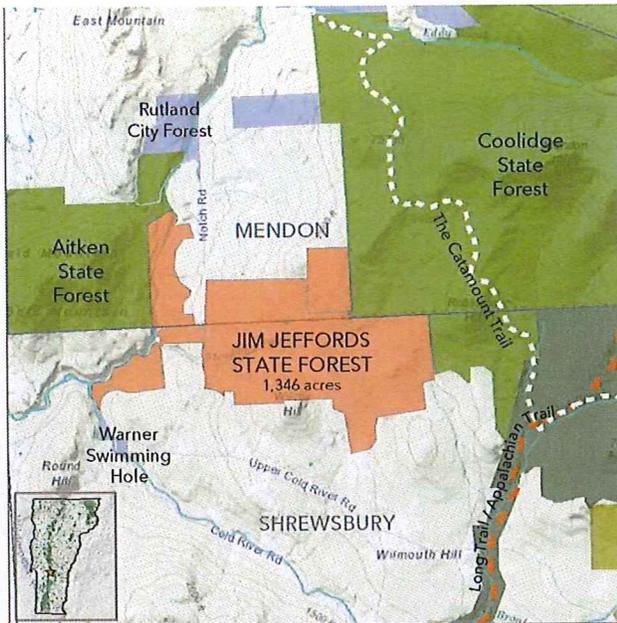
*Mendon & Shrewsbury, VT*

The Trust for Public Land, in partnership with the State of Vermont, is working to acquire 1,346 acres to create the Jim Jeffords State Forest as a tribute to Senator Jeffords' leadership in land and water conservation as well as his more than three decades of dedicated representation of the State of Vermont. The new State Forest forms a crucial link between Coolidge State Forest and Aitken State Forest, resulting in a 188,000-acre permanently conserved block of recreationally and ecologically significant land in central Vermont. The main goal of this acquisition is to provide permanent forested habitat for the movement of free-ranging species such as black bear, moose, fisher, and bobcat along the spine and foothills of the Green Mountains. Conservation of this property will also protect wetlands, Mendon Brook, and the Cold River, which will enhance flood resiliency upstream of the City of Rutland.

### **Conservation Values**

With a beautiful 2-mile trail along the North Branch of the Cold River and 6 miles of forest roads and VAST trails, the property is rich in recreational opportunities for hikers, skiers, mountain bikers and snowmobilers. Home to a large number of moose, deer, turkey, and other game species, the property will also be a valuable resource to hunters who have seen access to land decreasing, as new owners subdivide and post their land.

The property serves as a travel corridor for bears between Aitken State Forest—a key fall feeding area—east to Parker's Gore and the Green Mountain Bear Corridor. It also contains two miles of Mendon Brook, a wild trout stream, and 3.2 miles of the Cold River, considered a "Critical River" by The Nature Conservancy for its ecological quality and aquatic connectivity.



This large, unfragmented forest also provides significant habitat for interior-forest birds such as black-throated blue warbler, veery and eastern wood-pewee, all Species of Greatest Conservation Need. This property remains at risk of development and fragmentation due to its proximity to Killington and Rutland and its stunning views of the Bird Mountain Range and the surrounding Green Mountains.

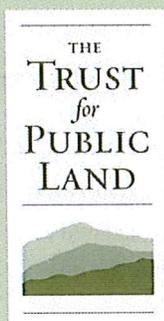
State acquisition of this property also enhances management of current state lands by providing new access to Coolidge State Forest from the west, and new access to Aitken State Forest from the south. The public, including current recreational users, can play a part in the creation of the management plan for the property, through the typical public process held by the State.

### Proposed Funding

The total cost to complete the project is \$1,150,000, which includes land acquisition and project costs. The Trust for Public Land and Vermont Forests, Parks & Recreation have secured \$840,000 of public funds and \$41,000 in private funds to date. In addition, more than \$400,000 of land value has been generously donated by the landowners. We are now working to raise the remaining \$269,000 from public and private sources to complete the project by autumn of 2015.

### The Trust for Public Land

In the past 4 decades, The Trust for Public Land has conserved more than 3.2 million acres nationwide, and 54,000 acres of important forestland in Vermont, protecting clean drinking water, recreational access, important wildlife habitat, high quality of life, and sustainable economies.



*The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.*

[tpl.org](http://tpl.org)

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Photos: Jerry Monkman.  
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## Current Conservation Investments Mean Protecting Water Quality

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The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), the Vermont Land Trust (VLT), and their conservation partners, including the Vermont River Conservancy, have been actively engaged in surface water protection for many years. They have also recently responded quickly and effectively to the State of Vermont's concern with the quality of water entering Lake Champlain.

Urbanization, wastewater treatment plants, agriculture, and streambank erosion are sources of phosphorus to our state's surface waters, and ultimately the causes of water quality issues such as algae blooms in Lake Champlain.

Through the protection of river corridors, establishing and maintaining river buffers, targeted floodplain protection, and upland forest protection, VHCB's investments in land protection are protecting and enhancing water quality, and reducing flood and erosion risks. Conservation lands serve as green infrastructure, helping avoid the costs of development related to impervious surfaces and resulting runoff.



*Farmland along the Winooski River in Essex.*

## **VHCB's and VLT's Conservation Work Has Responded to the Need to Protect Water Quality**

VHCB's investments result in projects that enhance water quality and promote flood resiliency.

- In fiscal years 2014 and 2015, 75% of VHCB's farmland conservation projects containing surface waters included water-quality protection practices in the conservation easement.
- 80% of the farms in VHCB's current pipeline of projects contain surface waters that will be protected with special easement provisions or through state or federal buffer programs.

In Highgate, a 240-acre dairy farm converted to organic production and now produces grass and hay. The farm has a 50-foot forested buffer on a half mile of the Rock River, an impaired waterway that has been targeted for cleanup.

In Enosburgh, a river corridor easement was placed on a farm in conjunction with a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program buffer to reduce local flood and erosion risks, allowing the Missisquoi River to re-establish its natural meandering course.

Conserved forestland protects water quality by slowing runoff and by holding soils in the forest that filter sediment and nutrients. Forested land typically contributes less surface water pollution than other types of land uses.

VHCB's Farm and Forest Viability Program is committed to helping farmers and forestland owners plan for water quality investments. Enrollees receive technical assistance and financial planning for implementing pollution control measures.

## **An Investment in VHCB Means More Money in Match**

VHCB receives matching funds from the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on a 1:1 basis on all farm conservation projects. As a requirement of NRCS funding, all farms must abide by a comprehensive resource management plan prepared by NRCS, a component of which is water quality.

VHCB Conservation and Farm Viability funding are integral to the \$16 million grant that Vermont was recently awarded through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to improve water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin. The State pledged \$6.5 million of VHCB conservation funding over the next five years to match funds for RCPP, an innovative partnership including Vermont's state agencies of agriculture and natural resources, watershed groups, conservation organizations, and businesses.

*Prepared by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition and the Vermont Land Trust*