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Gov. Shumlin, Regional Leaders Resolve to Conserve Forests in Face of Climate Change

MONTPELIER, Vt. – Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin joined four other New England governors and five eastern Canadian premiers to sign a resolution this week committing to conserve three major multistate and provincial forests and waterways in the face of climate change. Together they resolved to work across borders to maintain connected forests from the northern Appalachian Mountains through the Gulf of St. Lawrence. These intact forests foster a healthy working landscape and strong rural economy, as well as provide habitat for irreplaceable native fish, wildlife and migratory species while helping to reduce the effects of climate change.

The resolution was signed during the Annual Conference of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, held this year in Boston on August 28 and 29.

Gov. Shumlin spearheaded the effort, citing the importance of healthy forests and waterways to Vermont's economy, history and culture.

"Vermonters live close to the land. They care about the health of the natural environment and understand the connection to their own health and well-being," said Gov. Shumlin. "Conserving intact forested lands is the best way to ensure that our economy remains strong, fish and wildlife species stay abundant, and that we're able to maintain our rural way of life despite the pressures of climate change."

The resolution recognizes the global significance of the region's landscape as containing one of the largest unbroken temperate broadleaf forests on earth and establishes the importance of connected natural areas for fish and wildlife to move and thrive as climate change alters the landscape. It notes the importance of the working landscape to the region's economy, including the tourism, outdoor recreation, and forest products industries. And it acknowledges that forests not only decrease the effects of climate change by soaking up excess flood waters and filtering runoff, but also by absorbing carbon dioxide emissions directly from the air.

By signing the resolution, the governors and premiers commit to collaborating across state and provincial lines to maintain healthy, connected natural areas. They are pledging to incorporate objectives to maintain connected forests and waterways in their land use planning and policies, including transportation and public infrastructure designs. And they are calling on their internal Committee on the Environment to report back on progress in the effort every two years through 2020.

The Nature Conservancy in Vermont was instrumental in prioritizing this initiative and drafting the language of the resolution, as were biologists with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. Multiple partnerships that include government and nonprofit organizations are currently actively working to sustain intact, connected natural landscapes in the region, including the Staying Connected Initiative; Two Countries, One Forest; The North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative; and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture.

“We are grateful to Governor Shumlin for his leadership on this important initiative. Keeping our forests and waterways connected in Vermont and across our borders is key to sustaining the landscape we love and depend on. This visionary action by our region’s Governors and Premiers provides a vital platform to achieve that goal and will help ensure the vitality of nature and human communities for future generations,” stated Heather Furman, The Nature Conservancy Vermont State Director.