

Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Charge

Advancing Vermont Working Landscape Policy and Investment

Introduction

The Vermont Working Landscape Partnership (VWLP) is designed to implement key policy and program efforts to advance Vermont's working landscape.

Founded and produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), the Partnership consists of Vermont leaders and organizations sharing a dedication to the long term future of the working landscape and united to promote and implement a core set of strategies to realize that future.

In Vermont we have often divided policy around the working landscape into issues related to agriculture or forest-based enterprises and sub-sectors of both; we believe that it is time to look at working landscape issues all together and to define a unified Working Landscape Policy for Vermont's future.

Challenge Statement

"When most people talk about the "Working Landscape" they are referring to the land actively used in productive agriculture and forestry. Yet, to many Vermonters the working landscape also means additional public values it provides, including aesthetics, contributions to the tourism economy, and its central role in building a common sense of place and the Vermont quality of life. These values are all hard to quantify, but vital to the personal identity of Vermonters."

–From [Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision for the Future](#), the final report of the Council on the Future of Vermont

There is a major gap between the values expressed by Vermonters around their support for the future of the working landscape and the difficult realities facing the businesses and families that steward that landscape. According to the final report of the Council on the Future of Vermont (CFV), if current trends continue, we will lose the working landscape as we know it in the next 20 years. Vermonters rank "the working landscape and its heritage" more highly as a common value than any other. The CFV found that, in many ways, *Vermont's working landscape defines us, but that if existing trends continue, it will not exist for our children and children's children.*

The economy that built and has maintained Vermont's distinctive pattern of working fields and forests is in a long crisis. The loss of family dairy farms is paralleled by the closing of mills and decline of forest-based enterprises. The decline of the economic viability of working lands has been gradual but cumulative and threatens to undermine Vermont's distinctiveness, core brand for tourism and business attraction, and many of the key values that unify Vermont.

Vermont faces a fundamental contradiction: while the public desires a strong working landscape for all its scenic, cultural, environmental and recreational attributes, state and local public policy has not defined the working landscape effectively or built a strategic plan of action and investment commensurate with its importance.

Vermonters value the multiple cultural, aesthetic, ecological, climate change abatement, and health benefits and services of the working landscape, but the traditional market economy does not recognize them, or necessarily contribute to them. It is time for Vermont leadership to take a far-sighted look at the economics behind the Vermont working landscape and unite to build the public policies needed to ensure the economic vitality that produces and maintains the landscape for the future.

Despite the challenges we face, we recognize the dynamism and leadership of forest and farm enterprises today. Vermont has good soils and receptive climate. There is an increased focus today on locally-sourced, sustainably-produced forest products. We have extensive non-profit and business support networks. Vermonters and visitors are strong supporters of the working landscape. We see tremendous opportunities in agricultural and forest product development, and we look to a new generation of successful farm and forest entrepreneurs to renew the economy and advance the heritage and stewardship of Vermont's working landscape. What conditions will be needed to support their success?

VWLP Program Goals

- Advance the alignment between public values and public, private, and enterprise behavior around the working landscape
- Advance the economic profitability of the working landscape and the viability of farm and forest enterprises
- Create a unity of vision, direction, and goals between economic activity, land and resource conservation, and public regulation
- To realize these ends, advance key elements of the five point Working Landscape Partnership Action Plan

VWLP Phases

The Vermont Working Landscape Partnership program will have three phases:

First, and already accomplished, the **VCRD Working Landscape Steering Committee** analyzed relevant studies and recommendations for working landscape policy in Vermont, evaluated unrealized objectives and synthesized key elements. The committee oversaw research on best practice models from outside of Vermont. The committee evaluated public and stakeholder testimony from Council on the Future of Vermont inputs and additional VCRD staff interviews. Then the committee built a draft **Working Landscape Partnership Action Plan**.

Second, On December 10, 2010 VCRD will hold a **Vermont Working Landscape Summit** to invite together Vermont community leaders, stewards of the landscape, state and federal agencies, private sector interests and non-profit organizations. Summit attendees will consider the Policy Platform, suggest additions, deletions, amendments and improvements, and have the opportunity to sign on as **Members** of the **Vermont Working Landscape Partnership (VWLP)** in support of the policy platform. Partners in the VWLP will act to advance the common plans of the VWLP within their organizations and area of action, and also encourage action by other state, federal, philanthropic, non-profit and private sector partners.

Third, VCRD will convene and manage the work of the **Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Council (VWLPC)**, a collaboration of individual and organizational stakeholders committed to advancing key provisions of the Vermont Working Landscape Action Plan policy and investment into programmatic reality. Their 18 month effort is charged by this document with several key functions:

1. To provide leadership in advancing the Working Landscape Action Plan.
2. To further articulate programmatic elements for implementation of the five elements of the Action Plan—going from general platform elements to more advanced implementation plans.
3. To identify organizations to take leadership in the variety of tasks needed to implement the platform.
4. To rally members of the Partnership as a whole, stakeholders, and the people of Vermont to promote the implementation and investment of the action plan.

Membership in the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Council will be selected by VCRD from members of the Partnership as a whole to represent the leadership of Working Landscape enterprises and key federal, state, and local policy leaders with expertise in issues pertaining to farm and forest enterprises and rural development in Vermont.

The Role of the Vermont Council on Rural Development

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is charged by the federal Farm Bill to serve as a neutral convener and facilitator of public processes at both the community and state level to advance rural community development.

VCRD will found, structure, manage, staff and facilitate the Vermont Working Landscape Partnership; but all content and policy decisions will be made in the initial two phases by the VCRD Working Landscape Steering Committee and in Phase 3 by the Partnership Council (VWLPC).

Through this Charge Document, the VCRD Board establishes the parameters for the **Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Council**. VCRD will select membership for the Council, appoint its chair, and manage its general operations. With the Chair, VCRD will build and advance monthly agendas to ensure the decisiveness and efficiency of each session and the process as a whole. The Partnership will have independence from the VCRD board in advancing all its policy positions.

Timeline

Working Landscape Steering Committee Established	August 2009
Core Research Digest of VT Policy	Sept. to December 2009
Core Research on Policy Outside VT	Sept. to December 2009
Working Landscape Action Plan Completed	October 2010
VCRD Working Landscape Summit	December 2010
Vermont Working Landscape Partnership (VWLP) Established	December 2010
Vermont Working Landscape Partnership Council Established	January 2011
Partnership Action toward Implementation	Jan. 2011 to July 2012

VCRD Working Landscape Steering Committee

Bob Ackland, Consultant

Roger Allbee, VT Secretary of Agriculture Food and Markets

Deb Brighton, Consultant

Gil Livingston, President, Vermont Land Trust

Jonathan Wood, VT Secretary of Agency of Natural Resources

Greg Brown, former Commissioner, Housing and Community Development

STAFF:

Paul Costello, VCRD Executive Director

Margaret McCoy, VCRD Operations and Communications Manager



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