

From the Secretary's Desk: An Overview of Current Legislative Initiatives

Last week I had the honor of speaking at a conference sponsored by the Georgetown Climate Center on "Lessons in Resilience." I talked about Vermont's experience with Irene, recounting the challenges we faced responding to the disaster and the long path to recovery. I observed that, in Vermont, we are focused now on making our communities and our landscape more resilient to future floods.

Research shows that people with strong social networks are more resilient than those without them – and when communities already have an infrastructure of civic participation, then when disaster strikes, people will come together to rebuild, and great innovation can result. In Vermont we are lucky because we lead the country in civic engagement; from Town Meeting, to volunteering, to voting, Vermonters participate. We know that by speaking up and getting involved we can make a meaningful difference.

People from other states are often amazed at how accessible our elected representatives are. Indeed, the State House is the people's house. The public is welcome to listen and learn about what is going on, and they can easily influence the conversation by speaking directly with the decision makers.

This month, the ANR newsletter Ripples includes articles about some of the pieces of legislation being considered by our Representatives and Senators this year. There are many important issues being discussed in the Senate and House Natural Resources Committees and in House Fish and Wildlife. Here are some examples:

- **Clean Water** – There are a number of bills that focus on what we need to do to clean up our lakes and ponds, and how we might pay for the infrastructure investments that will improve water quality. The foundation of the discussion is a comprehensive report by ANR (Referred to as the Act 138 report.) [Read this report here.](#)
- **Land Use Planning and Changes to Act 250.** There are legislative proposals that would require statewide land use planning and that would reopen and modernize some of the criteria in Act 250, Vermont's state land use regulations.
- **Shoreline Protection** – It is in all of our interest to have lakes and ponds that are swimmable, fishable and support diverse species. Unfortunately, we have discovered that technical assistance, public outreach and local government controls have been insufficient to achieve this goal. As a result, the water quality in Vermont's lakes and ponds has declined and today a large percentage of our lakes and ponds are in significantly poorer condition than those in other states in the region. Natural vegetation on a shoreline is the most effective way of protecting the shoreline. Bills in the House and Senate propose to create requirements, like those that have been successfully implemented in Maine and New Hampshire, to establish zones along shorelines and set minimum vegetation requirements for each zone. Existing development will be grandfathered and those who wish to put in new development will have a variety of choices as to how they meet the requirements of the law. It is entirely possible to have beautiful homes with stunning views of the water, access for swimming and docks, and still have sufficient natural vegetation on the shoreline to stabilize and protect the shoreline against erosion, and filter out water pollution.

- **Brownfields** – Legislation has been introduced that will make it easier to develop contaminated sites in Vermont. This will be a great boost to some of Vermont's communities because it will encourage the redevelopment of blighted properties.
- **Electric Vehicles** – An initiative called "Drive Electric Vermont," spearheaded by Efficiency Vermont, developed a package of legislative ideas intended to promote the use of electric vehicles. These include clarifying the statutes to make sure there is no question that we can implement the California zero emission vehicle requirements, promoting electric vehicle use by state agencies, and creating a new electric vehicle license plate.
- **Petroleum Cleanup Fund** - Proposed legislation would require single-walled tanks to be phased out over the next few years. These tanks, all of which are beyond their design life, are the greatest risk to groundwater and to the financial health of the petroleum cleanup fund of any tanks in the state. The proposed approach gives tank owners time to transition to the modern double wall tanks.

Take a look at the following articles and decide which issues resonate with you – and then get involved. Your participation matters!