

## **Each One Of Us Has Something To Offer**

By Deb Markowitz, Secretary

A few months ago I had the privilege of hearing EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson address a group of environmental regulators. What she said did not surprise me-- she told us that we could not wait for help from Washington; that the challenges we face are far too great, and the likelihood of meaningful action from our dysfunctional Congress, far too small. Despite this news, hers was a message of hope. The optimism Administrator Jackson expressed came from experiencing the passion of citizens across the country who are committed to solving the world's most pressing problems - access to clean water and clean air and the threats from climate change. She told us that it was up to us, in each of our states, to be innovative. To take action.

Last week, with the swearing in of the governor and legislature, we began a fresh biennium. Over the next two years we can expect legislative discussions about important environmental issues. In his opening address to the legislature, Speaker Shap Smith directed his committees to consider the impacts of climate change on Vermont. House Natural Resources Chair Tony Klein announced that he would be focusing on land use planning and regulation since this is a capstone issue affecting everything from how we build our communities to how we plan for our future transportation needs. House Fish and Wildlife chair David Dean and the new chair of the Senate Natural Resources Committee Bob Hartwell both said that a top priority will be to consider the best way to clean up our waterways and how to pay for those efforts, and the Senate and House Natural Resources committees have already scheduled a joint committee meeting on climate change.

While there is a lot we can accomplish in Montpelier, I take the message from Administrator Jackson to heart. We cannot rely solely on government to address our environmental challenges. The real power is with our communities and with the people. We won't reduce our contributions to greenhouse gas emissions until we, and our neighbors, weatherize our homes and drive less. We won't clean up Lake Champlain until we ensure our rooftops, roads, farm fields and parking lots don't send polluted runoff to drain into ditches, brooks and streams that carry the pollution into the lake. We won't protect Vermont's biodiversity unless landowners, conservation commissions and nonprofits join the state in protecting and conserving our undeveloped land and critical habitat.

In future months I will keep you informed about the conversation in the legislature about our environmental priorities. The rest of this month's newsletter will be devoted to sharing with you information about some of the opportunities for you and your community to get involved and to be a part of the solution.

Not surprisingly, after four years of getting beaten up by Congress, Lisa Jackson announced she would be stepping down as EPA Administrator. In her parting message she urged us, in each of our states to stay involved. To search for innovative local solutions to the challenges we face as a country and to learn from each other's successes. Who better to lead the way than Vermont? Who better to take meaningful action than you and me?