

**Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee
of the Vermont Climate Council
December 5, 2024 Meeting – Agenda**

Location:	The meeting was recorded and posted online here .
Subcommittee Members Present:	Billy Coster, Jaiel Pulskamp, Judy Dow, Ryan Patch, Andrew Milliken, Stephen Leslie, Jake Claro, Alissa White, Earl Hatley, Senja Erickson
State Agency Staff Present:	David Plumb (CBI) Marli Rupe, Judson Peck, Liz Amler
Minutes by:	Liz Amler

10:00 a.m. Welcome, Approve Agenda, Approve Minutes, Updates

- David Plumb welcomed the Subcommittee and shared the agenda for the day. David shared that the Subcommittee will not have time to address the second bullet in the discussion of task group priorities, “Are there any concerns about other content from this task group?”
- Judy Dow shared that she discussed biomass with Jane Lazorchak from the Climate Action Office and mentioned that biomass would be on the agenda today but is not seeing it. Judy mentioned that there were specific amendments for biomass, including a study, but these were accidentally left out of the matrix for the 2024 update.
 - Billy Coster and David Plumb shared there will be time to discuss biomass in task group 3.
 - [Vermont Climate Council Recommendations for the Use of Biomass Adopted in December 2023](#) were shared.

10:10 a.m. Task Group 1 – Reduce GHG Emissions and Sequester Carbon
All, led by Task Group 1

- Ryan Patch shared the top five priorities for this task group.
 - Continue investing in state agriculture and forestry programs with climate mitigation co-benefits.
 - Continue to invest in agriculture Payment for Ecological Services (PES) programs and develop forestry PES programs.
 - Invest in climate change education, outreach, research, and technical assistance programs.
 - Protect agricultural soils and forestland from development.
 - If Vermont farmers and loggers are not economically viable, they cannot provide the above climate mitigation and resilience benefits.
- Earl Hatley asked for clarification about PES and carbon trading.
 - Ryan Patch shared information on existing PES programs for farmers and clarified that Vermont’s PES programs are not carbon trading. Funding comes from Congress, USDA, and the Vermont General Assembly appropriations.
 - David Plumb proposed further conversation about understanding PES and carbon trading to occur outside of this subcommittee meeting.

- Judy Dow expressed concern about this process being rushed and the conversation being moved to a side because she also has concerns about PES and carbon trading.
- Judy Dow shared concerns about coordination between the State and US Forest Service and the absence of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).
 - Ryan Patch ensured that TEK is included in these priorities.
- Jaiel Pulskamp shared context about the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and suggested expanding this program.
- Stephen Leslie shared thoughts on hoping farmers move to agroecological and regenerative practices to protect soil health. Stephen also noted he is happy to see the forest sector be given equal weight for the necessary support.

10:30 a.m. Public Comment #1

- Zack Porter hoped to see more specific recommendations. Zack shared information on the impact of emissions and logging on the U.S. Forest Service's Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project to highlight the actions that can be taken at a State level.
- Cheryl Joy Lipton shared that she did not think that there should be PES for forest management involved in biomass.

10:35 a.m. Priorities for Task Group 2 – Support Adaptation, Viability, Recovery, Economies and Workforce
All, led by Task Group 2

- Jake Claro shared the top priorities for this task group.
 - Billy Coster asked if some of the priorities could be built out on the forestry side, noting the agriculture side is already included.
 - Earl Hatley suggested adding indigenous/tribes into fostering partnerships.
- Judy Dow asked about strategic abandonment and relocation of agricultural fields from floodplains rather than paying for continual crop loss.
 - Jake Claro clarified that some of these lands are the most productive, and it's also hard to just move a field.
- Judy Dow also shared concerns over the language “natural and working lands.”
 - Jake Claro referenced the [Working Lands Enterprise Initiative](#). Jake also shared that other lands are included in different actions
- Judy Dow asked whether current state and regional policies and plans related to the Vermont food supply are working.
 - Jake Claro noted that they are working and have been proven to work but need further scaling and support to become the norm.
- Andrew Milliken shared that there is an opportunity to combine education and technical assistance across task groups.
 - Jake Claro agreed.
- Ryan Patch noted that there is complexity in floodplains and urged the subcommittee to think beyond floods—much of Vermont is in drought, and irrigation is going to become a more common practice with the changing climate.

- Billy Coster reiterated that it would be nice to see the forest sector included in some of these actions, for example, incorporating local wood products into relief programs.
- Jaiel Pulskamp expressed issues with the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI) and is unsure if the program is doing what we want. Jaiel suggested funding and enhancing food assistance programs such as Crop Cash.
 - Jake Claro mentioned that there have been many applications for an underfunded WLEI, which is why this task group sees this as a priority to bolster the program.
 - Ryan Patch shared information and funding about WLEI and why it deserves more support.
- Earl Hatley shared concerns about contaminated waters and floodwaters. Earl also shared thoughts about changing the language from “working lands” to “managed lands.”

10:55 a.m. Public Comment #2

- No public comment.

11:00 a.m. Priorities for Task Group 3 – Support Climate-Resilient Land Use Practices
All, led by Task Group 3

- Andrew Milliken shared the top priorities for this task group. Andrew noted again that there is some overlap with other task groups regarding education and technical assistance. Below are just summaries, but the Excel has the full details:
 - Climate adaptation education and technical assistance to land and water caretakers
 - Incentivizing NBS and TEK/IK to address climate change impacts.
 - Management of natural and working lands to address climate change and achieve multiple goals.
 - Utilize and incentivize nature-based solutions for flood resilience.
 - Strategic conservation of connected lands and waters, forest blocks, and sacred sites.
 - Siting and avoiding impacts of renewable energy.
- Judy Dow expressed concern about biomass being absent from the priority action groups.
 - Andrew Milliken clarified that it’s in the Excel.
 - David Plumb suggested that biomass recommendations could be a separate priority from the other renewable energy actions to emphasize the task group’s support for this.
 - Earl Hatley asked to include a moratorium on developing new biomass facilities.
 - Billy Coster suggested that this subcommittee could put funding and undertaking the recommended study as a top priority.
 - Jaiel Pulskamp suggested that this group put forward a recommendation not to fund the study, noting that money could be better used elsewhere. Instead, Jaiel recommended a transition away from biomass.
- Jaiel Pulskamp asked for a recommendation to keep farmland as farmland as farmers transition and to prevent development on that land.
- Judy Dow emphasized that the summary shared does not reflect the complete work of the task group.
- Jake Claro shared that there is an opportunity to include stronger language about protecting prime agricultural soils in relation to renewable energy.

- David Plumb summarized the different views in the subcommittee regarding biomass.
- Earl Hatley shared that adding a moratorium on new biomass facilities should be included.
- Jaiel Pulskamp commented that Use Value Appraisal (UVA) should be reconsidered for more folks.
- Judy Dow asked for biomass to receive time in the next subcommittee meeting.
- Billy Coster asked for intergenerational transfer of forestland to be included in addition to farmland. Billy also noted that digging into UVA is a complicated process and asked for more dialogue on that issue before any action is taken.

11:20 a.m. Public Comment #3

- Annette Smith asked for increased incentives for renewable energy in developed areas and de-incentivize development on forests and agricultural lands.
- Cheryl Joy Lipton agreed with Annette Smith and provided an example of solar being used over parking lots.

11:25 a.m. Pulling it all together and next steps

- David Plumb wrapped up the subcommittee meeting and asked the subcommittee to look at their emails for future scheduling.

12:00 p.m. Adjourn