**Vermont Climate Action Plan Requirements**

**The Vermont Global Warming Solutions Act of 2020**

On September 22, 2020, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 153, the Vermont Global Warming Solutions Act of 2020 (GWSA) that created the Vermont Climate Council (hereinafter the Council) and set forth specific greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction requirements for the State to achieve. (link to Act)

The Council is charged with three tasks:

* identification, analysis and evaluation of strategies and programs to reduce GHG emissions, to achieve the State’s GHG reduction requirements, and to prepare the State’s communities, infrastructure and economy to adapt to current and future effects of climate change.
* adoption of the Vermont Climate Action Plan by December 1, 2021, to be updated at least every 4 years, that sets forth specific initiative, programs and strategies that the State will pursue to reduce GHG emissions, achieve the reduction requirements, and build resilience in communities, infrastructure and the economy; and
* identification of accurate means to measure the state’s GHG emissions and progress towards meeting the reduction requirements; effectiveness of initiatives, programs and strategies included in the Plan; the effect of climate change on wildlife, climate and natural resources of the State, and the State’s existing resilience and progress towards improving resilience and adaptation.

In carrying out its above tasks, the Council is charged with:

* Creating an inventory and assessing the efficacy, technical feasibility and cost effectiveness of all existing programs that impact greenhouse gas emissions;
* Identifying, evaluating, and analyzing new strategies and programs that are based upon emerging scientific and technical information;
* Identifying which strategies and programs will result in the largest greenhouse gas emissions reductions in the most cost-effective manner after analyses of the sources of greenhouse gas emissions;
* Identifying, analyzing, and evaluating public and private financing strategies to support the transition to a reduced greenhouse gas emissions economy and a more resilient State; and
* Evaluating and analyzing existing and new strategies and programs that build resilience, to prepare the State’s communities, infrastructure, and economy to adapt to the current and anticipated effects

**The Vermont Climate Action Plan–Required Content**

The GWSA specifies that the Vermont Climate Action Plan shall include specific items,

including initiatives, programs, and strategies that will:

* Reduce GHG emissions from the transportation, buildings, regulated utility, industrial, commercial, and agricultural sectors;
* Encourage smart growth and related strategies;
* Achieve long-term sequestration and storage of carbon and promote best management practices to achieve climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience on natural working lands;
* Achieve net zero emissions by 2050 across all sectors;
* Reduce energy burdens for rural and marginalized communities;
* Limit the use of chemicals, substances, or products that contribute to climate change; and
* Build and encourage climate adaptation and resilience of Vermont communities and natural systems.

Once the Plan is adopted, the Joint Fiscal Office of the Vermont General Assembly is required “to hire a consultant to prepare an analysis of the economic, budgetary and fiscal costs and benefits of the Plan.”

**GWSA Rule-making Requirement**

If a plan is adopted, the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources is required to adopt rules consistent with the Vermont Climate Action Plan, as adopted, on or before December 1, 2022 and achieve the 2025 emission reductions requirements in the GWSA. Should a plan not be adopted by the Council, the Secretary is required to adopt rules to achieve the emissions reduction requirements in the GWSA by July, 2022.

The GWSA provides any person the right to sue the Secretary of the Agency of Natural. Resources (ANR) if rules are not adopted as required by the GWSA. It also authorizes any person to sue the Secretary by filing a lawsuit that alleges that the rules adopted by the Secretary failed to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions requirements pursuant to the GWSA.

**The Vermont Climate Council--Additional Duties**

In addition to the development adoption of the a Climate Action Plan, the Council is charged with recommending necessary legislation to the General Assembly concerning:

* Adopting of a market-based or alternative compliance mechanisms as part of the State’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategies;
* changes to land use and development, including to chapter 151 of Act 153 and 30 V.S.A. § 248, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote resilience in response to climate change;
* statutory authority necessary to implement the Plan; and
* any other matter the Council deems appropriate.

**Emissions Reduction Requirements in the GWSA**

The Act requires reductions in Vermont’s GHG emissions tied to three time periods: 2025, 2030, and 2050. Pursuant to the State’s membership in the United States Climate Alliance and commitment to implement policies to achieve the objectives of the 2016 Paris Agreement, Vermont is required to reduce its GHG emissions by no less than 26% below 2005 GHG emission levels by January 1, 2025.

Pursuant to the State’s 2016 Comprehensive Energy Plan, Vermont is required to reduce its GHG emissions by no less than 40% below 1990 GHG emission levels by January 1, 2030 and no less than 80% below 1990 GHG emission levels by January 1, 2050.

**Measurable resilience, adaptation and sequestration goals developed by the Council**

In addition to the GHG emission reduction requirements set forth in the GWSA, the Climate Council is working to develop metrics to assess progress with respect to our actions around building resilience and adaptation and enhancing sequestration and storage. The Measuring and Assessing Progress section of this plan speaks to the development of a framework for assessing adaptation and resilience goals. In addition, the section of the plan for the carbon budget speaks to future work to consider carbon sequestration forecasting which will help determine how effective strategies and actions are at impacting our natural and working land’s ability to sequester and store carbon.