



Vermont Voices on Climate Change

Vermont Climate Action Office

Report Overview

This is a summary of outreach activities conducted by the Vermont Climate Action Office with contractual support from April through June 2026. Quotes from Vermonters are not intended to represent the views of the Climate Action Office.

During this quarter, outreach focused on sharing information about climate resilience and the Climate Action Plan through public presentations and community events, while gathering feedback from residents and businesses about climate priorities, energy affordability, resilience, and economic challenges facing communities across Vermont.

Published:

8.7.2026

Cover photo: Island Pond, Brighton



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Objectives

Provide information and knowledge that helps people prepare for climate impacts, take action, and access programs that can benefit them.

Lift up the voices and viewpoints of communities into the implementation of climate-related initiatives and the ongoing work of the Climate Action Office and other key entities, including the Vermont Climate Council, so that a diverse group of Vermonters can influence this work.

Build relationships and communication channels that will help Vermonters work collaboratively on future climate action with the state.



Cobleigh Public Library Presentation

Lyndonville, VT

April 17, 2026

Climate Action Office (CAO) staff presented on climate resilience and heard from residents, who described flooding eroding their land, drought impacting apple trees, and concerns about ticks and milder winters. Lyndonville is participating in CAO's Municipal Climate Planning Framework pilot program. This program supports municipalities in incorporating climate resilience into existing planning processes and will produce guidance that can be used by communities across Vermont. Staff shared information about this program with participants, as well as resources for protecting and rebuilding downtown areas from flood impacts.

"I lost a chunk of land to the river during a flood. If I don't get the bank stabilized, it could affect my well and get closer to my house. I have asked the town and many organizations for help, but I still haven't found any answers or financial assistance. It's also hard to find contractors willing to do this kind of work."

Event Participant



Herricks Cove Wildlife Festival

Rockingham, VT
May 3, 2026



Photo: A wildlife handler holds a live sturgeon.

At the annual Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival in Rockingham, wind and rain did not deter families from having fun with turtles, fish, raptors, and even a skunk. Climate Action Office staff talked with Vermonters about the concept of net-zero emissions.

We asked festival-goers this quiz question: Do Vermont's forests currently take up a quarter, a half, or all of the climate pollution Vermont creates through activities like driving and heating our homes. If you guessed "half", you're correct! Through a process called sequestration, trees and plants absorb carbon dioxide and store the carbon in their trunks, leaves, roots, and soil, effectively removing it from the atmosphere. Net-zero means that the amount of carbon dioxide Vermont produces by burning fossil fuels is balanced out by the amount of carbon dioxide that Vermont's forests and lands take out of the atmosphere. Vermont has a goal of reaching net-zero by 2050.

Conversations often shifted to household energy choices. One person expressed concern about the current high gas prices impacting food costs and commutes in ways that are most harmful to those already struggling. Two participants shared that they had already installed heat pumps but found solar panels too expensive. One noted that solar would have helped offset the increased electricity costs of the heat pumps.



We also spoke with a home heating company that has started installing home batteries for back-up power. They are seeing customers increasingly interested in home battery systems for backup power during outages. They also noted that batteries can reduce electricity costs for homes with solar panels by storing energy generated when the sun is shining. They noted a common hurdle: the ability to install these batteries is dependent upon whether the electricity infrastructure near the home can handle the added power load.

"They're installing solar panels in agricultural fields near me—I support solar, but don't think it belongs on good farmland. There's controversy in Vermont about a proposal for battery energy storage at the former VT Yankee site—they need to make sure they're hearing from townspeople."

Festival Participant

"We weatherized our home with SEVCA [Southeast Vermont Community Action] and got the kind of furnace used in trailer homes, even though our house is not a trailer home. That furnace is much more efficient because it doesn't have ducts, it is in the middle of our space and sends the heat directly into the space without wasting any. It saves us a lot of money, but the house still needs a lot of work."

Festival Participant



Southern Vermont Economy Summit

Dover, VT
May 12, 2026



Photo: Climate Action Office event table.

The Southern Vermont Economy Summit is hosted by the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) and the Southern Vermont Economy Project. This year's theme was "Envision. Act. Grow!" and centered on regional strategies for empowering rural businesses, addressing population needs, and fostering economic resiliency.

Participants described resilience as being built through experience, strong local networks, and community relationships while emphasizing the ingenuity of Vermont businesses. We heard the following themes:

- Regulatory complexity and excessive requirements were frequently identified as barriers to growth and business development.
- Vermont offers fewer grants and incentives than neighboring states for climate-friendly, sustainable building/construction projects, leaving many efforts unfunded or financially infeasible.
- Businesses need a centralized, user-friendly resource hub that would simplify information about starting, growing, or selling a business in Vermont.
- Vermont's aging population and rural character present unique succession challenges. Participants discussed the importance of creating mechanisms to



connect retiring business owners with prospective buyers and facilitating mentorship or consulting arrangements to preserve institutional knowledge.

- Workforce development and timing were critical concerns. Delays in training or project availability can result in workers pursuing other career paths, particularly in weatherization, making it difficult to rebuild the workforce once talent is lost.
- Tourism remains a foundational industry, with many participants indicating that local businesses depend heavily on visitor spending to remain viable.
- A broader concern expressed by some attendees was that Vermont is becoming increasingly difficult for Vermonters themselves, raising questions about affordability, demographic change, and maintaining vibrant local communities.

When asked whether their business or organization was adequately prepared for climate-related disasters, the overwhelming majority responded that they were not. Of 22 responses, only two said they felt prepared. This indicates an opportunity to expand climate preparedness support and resources for Vermont businesses.

Common challenges were taxes, workforce shortages, regulatory barriers, and the realities of operating in a rural state. Despite these challenges, participants consistently emphasized the strength of community connections and the resilience of Vermonters as essential assets for building a thriving and sustainable economy.

"Trying to make a living in Vermont, especially in a rural community is brutal. You really need to love it here. There's a lack of basic services needed for any quality of life; there's certainly a lack of childcare. You become so dependent on your community because otherwise you just won't be able to survive. But I guess there's a beauty to that also."

Summit Participant

"So many issues with workforce development. If 8 students graduate the weatherization program, two or three might get jobs right away in weatherization, but the rest of the graduates need a paycheck as well, so we end up losing them to whatever comes along the quickest. Maybe they'll pick up a construction job and they get comfortable there and we lose them to it."

Summit Participant

"We live and work near a ski area, but our kids don't get to enjoy skiing or snowboarding because that's for the rich out-of-towners mostly... Just think about how much more beneficial it would be for these resorts or ski areas to offer real discounts to locals, even in the off-season, and since our climate is so out of whack lately, isn't some money better than no money?"

Summit Participant



Island Pond Car Show & Market Day

Brighton, VT
June 27, 2026



Photo: Winners of the Island Pond Car Show with their classic car.

The Vermont Climate Action Office participated in a community tabling event at Island Pond Market Day. The event attracted a strong turnout and included local vendors, artisans, and residents. Simultaneously, a community car show was taking place across the street, providing another opportunity to speak with residents.

Throughout the day, Climate Action Office staff spoke with a wide variety of Vermonters to gather feedback on climate-related priorities, state investments, policies, and the challenges facing residents, particularly in the Northeast Kingdom.

Key themes from community conversations included:

- **Energy affordability and reliability:** Residents raised concerns about high home heating costs, the price of firewood, and frequent power outages that can disrupt daily life and caregiving.
- **Clean energy and home improvements:** Many questioned the practicality of electric vehicles in the Northeast Kingdom, while weatherization and heat pumps received stronger support.



- **Government efficiency:** Participants expressed frustration with slow permitting, repeated studies, and regulatory processes that delay projects, increase costs, and reduce government efficiency.
- **Practical, affordable climate policy:** Residents emphasized that climate policies should be equitable, affordable, and reflect the realities of rural Vermont.
- **Flood recovery support:** Community members highlighted the value of local organizations in helping residents navigate FEMA and other disaster recovery funding, describing these programs as complex and difficult to access.
- **Consumer protection and contractors:** Participants raised concerns about weak consumer protections, contractor reliability, and the difficulty of completing home repairs and weatherization projects in rural communities.
- **Access to essential services:** Residents described challenges accessing emergency medical care and other essential services, citing long response times and limited rural infrastructure.
- **Aging population:** Many stressed the need for healthcare, transportation, housing, and community services that better support Vermont's growing older adult population.
- **Community priorities:** Across conversations, residents called for more efficient government, greater accountability, and practical investments, while expressing appreciation for the opportunity to engage directly with the Climate Action Office.

"I think electric vehicle rebates should focus on small vehicles like snowmobiles, ATVs, dirt bikes, and electric bikes. This would be a great benefit to our recreational economy, reduce the noise and pollution from motorsports, plus it helps get kids off of their screen and active outside."

Event Participant

"I moved to Vermont in part because of water scarcity in Utah. I volunteered with Northeast Kingdom Organizing, and they do a good job finding out where the gap is when people are trying to access flood recovery resources. Local organizations like this should be supported."

Event Participant

"It's hard to balance resilience and reducing emissions. Vermont is a small contributor to global emissions, but we can make a real difference by protecting people here."

Event Participant



Upcoming Outreach Activities

Outreach and engagement activities will continue throughout the upcoming quarter. Our priority is to understand Vermonters' opinions and priorities when it comes to state investments in reducing climate pollution, especially energy-related programs and policies. This work will align closely with engagement for Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan, which is required to be updated in 2028. This plan is closely aligned with the Climate Action Plan but also includes energy system planning for grid infrastructure, how to meet energy demands, and how to keep electric rates down. It has a focus on clean and renewable energy development, as well as affordability.

Planned activities include:

- Speaking with Vermonters at community events and food distribution sites in rural areas we have not yet engaged.
- A statewide survey coupled with in-person and virtual focus groups.

Contact Information

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