

Executive Summary

The Vermont Climate Council adopted its Initial Climate Action Plan in late 2021. In the nearly four years since the Plan was finished Vermont has experienced – and in many cases Councilors have personally lived through – a series of climate disasters, with many Vermonters still reeling from the disastrous flooding events across the state in the summers of 2023 and 2024. And while these flood events were particularly prominent, Vermonters are also experiencing other impacts of our changing climate including increased wildland fire activity in Vermont as well as air quality impacts from much larger wildfires burning elsewhere, impacts on livelihoods of farm and forest sector, algal blooms that limit access to a number of lakes and ponds and impact drinking water quality, and winter ice storms and rain-on-snow events that damage electric infrastructure causing some Vermonters to lose power for days. On top of this, there have been more days with high heat for which most Vermont homes are ill-equipped, putting the health of vulnerable Vermonters at risk. These are the consequences of climate pollution; they are relentless and will continue to worsen.

In enacting the Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA or Act 153) in 2020, the General Assembly reaffirmed and made binding Vermont’s responsibility to reduce harmful climate emissions. The GWSA created the Vermont Climate Council (the Council) and directed the Council to prepare a Climate Action Plan, to be updated every four years, that identifies and analyzes the strategies and programs necessary to three milestone dates: 2025, 2030, and 2050.

The next milestone is to achieve GHG emission levels no less than 40% below Vermont’s 1990 emissions by January 1, 2030; the proposed actions the Council presents in this update to Vermont’s Climate Action Plan are intended to match the scope and ambition necessary to meet this milestone and address other obligations created by the GWSA related to creating a more resilient Vermont and supporting a just transition in the way these actions would be implemented.

Council’s Charge and Work

The 23-member Council, comprised of eight administration officials and 15 members appointed by the Legislature to represent various sectors and interests, is charged with:

- Identify, analyze and evaluate 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;
- Adopt and then update at least once every four years the Vermont Climate Action Plan at least every 4 years, that sets forth specific initiative, programs and strategies to reduce GHG emissions consistent with the GWSA and help build resilience in Vermont's communities, infrastructure and the economy; and
- Put in place a system for tracking the state's progress towards meeting the GHG emissions reduction requirements, evaluating the cost-effectiveness and impact of initiatives, programs and strategies included in the Plan, better understanding the effect of climate change on wildlife, climate and natural resources of the State, and supporting the efforts to improve Vermont's landscape-level resilience and ability to adapt to the current and anticipated effects of climate change.

The GWSA also established four Subcommittees and charged them to assist in the work needed to develop the Climate Action Plan. The four Subcommittees specifically identified in the GWSA are: Rural Resilience and Adaptation; Cross-Sector Mitigation; Just Transitions; and Agriculture and Ecosystems. The GWSA also allowed the Council to create additional Subcommittees to advise the Council. To address the technical complexity and data needed for this effort, the Council created a fifth Subcommittee: Science and Data.

The core function of the Subcommittees is to evaluate and recommend draft initiatives, programs, and strategies for the Council to review, refine and compile into Vermont's Climate Action Plan. As described in the GWSA, Subcommittee recommendations should also:

- Prioritize the most cost-effective, technologically feasible, and equitable GHG emissions reduction pathways, adaptation and preparedness strategies;
- Provide for GHG emissions reductions that reflect the relative contribution of emissions from different sectors;

- Minimize negative impacts on marginalized and rural communities and individuals with low and moderate incomes;
- Ensure that all regions of the state benefit from GHG emissions reductions;
- Support economic sectors and regions of the state that face the greatest barriers to emissions reductions, especially rural and economically distressed regions and industries;
- Support industries, technology, and training that will allow workers and businesses in the state to benefit from GHG reduction solutions;
- Support the use of natural and working lands to reduce GHG, sequester carbon and increase resilience; and
- Maximize the state's involvement in interstate and regional initiatives and programs designed to reduce GHG emissions, and build upon state, national, and international partnerships and programs.

To ensure the Subcommittees had the right composition to accomplish their charges, members were recruited both from within the Council as well as other members of the public in an effort to have relevant expertise necessary to create the work as well as geographic representation from across Vermont and members that could speak to specific challenges faced by marginalized and rural communities and individuals with low and moderate incomes.

The recommendations put forward in this Plan reflect the collective work of these Subcommittees. Subcommittee recommendations were handed off to the Council in December 2024, at which point the full Council began to vet, discuss, revise and prioritize this work in order to arrive at the set of necessary actions needed to fulfill the requirements of the GWSA.

The recommendations are organized around four areas:

- Emissions reductions;
- Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont's natural and working lands;

- Building resilience and adaptation in Vermont's communities and built environment; and
- Cross-cutting pathways (Education, Workforce, and Financing).

Throughout the development of these recommendations, the Just Transitions Subcommittee supported the work by providing input and feedback on how the strategies and initiatives should be framed to benefit and support all residents of the State of Vermont fairly and equitably. The strategy to do so has been centered on creating space for equity-centered discussions in every meeting, tackling structural challenges by enhancing the representation of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), low-income, rural, and other frontline communities, and promoting widespread public engagement. Despite the underrepresentation and power imbalance of the Council and its Subcommittees, efforts have focused on diversifying membership. The Climate Council is dedicated to collaborating with everyone living in Vermont to ensure that equity is woven into every step of the climate action plan.

The Council acknowledges that to realize the transformative change that is needed to meet the goals of the GWSA, ongoing engagement with Vermonters is essential - both to receive broad-based input on possible approaches and better understand the barriers to implementation. One important lesson from the Initial Climate Action Plan was the need to involve Vermonters continuously and include their input throughout the entire update process. To achieve this in the Climate Action Plan update, engagement started in early 2024 and continued until the Plan was finished. Community input was shared with the Climate Council every three months via the [Vermont Voices on Climate engagement summaries](#). This state agency-led engagement also aims to influence ongoing climate-related programs and systems in Vermont, beyond this update to the Climate Action Plan.

The Vermont Climate Council hosted events throughout the development of the Climate Action Plan to share information, answer questions, hear new ideas, consider community priorities, and receive feedback on work-to-date. These sessions focused on different themes from the various subcommittees and at key moments, community-based organizations and Regional

Planning Commissions supported and collaborated on these events. The timing intentionally lined up with key decision-making and drafting periods of the planning process.

More than 850 public participants took part in a virtual or in-person input session. In addition to events, approximately 250 Vermonters or Vermont-based organizations submitted 119 written comments by email or through the Public Comment Portal during the public input process.

After April's engagement on the draft plan, the Council and Steering Committee met many times in May and June to consider input from public meetings and public comment and revise the Plan. Detailed considerations and changes can be found in the public engagement chapter.

Priority Actions

In the following chapters, the Council presents a significant and broad set of recommendations intended to guide climate action over the next four years. At the heart of our efforts is a commitment not only to fulfill the obligations of the GWSA, but also to ensure Vermont remains a vibrant, healthy place for current and future generations. Recognizing the breadth of the work that includes more than 250 recommended actions, in this update to the Plan the Council has highlighted 52 priority actions as well as a short list of 10 highest priority actions. Creating a short list of highest priority actions was done in direct response to public input. These highest priority actions intentionally address investments needed to both reduce climate pollution and help Vermont communities become more resilient. This plan emphasizes actions that:

- Support Vermonters in adopting more efficient and less climate polluting sources of home heat and transportation, with particular attention to the needs of Vermonters living on low and moderate incomes.
- Make investments in resilience, preparedness, and community development that will reduce climate impacts, help Vermonters recover more quickly and save money and lives as Vermont faces future climate hazards.
- Invest in building the workforce essential to robust climate action.

- Identify sustainable, long-term funding to support the significant investments needed to fulfill the vision of this plan and the GWSA.

Over the next four years, as the recommendations in this Plan are advanced, the Council encourages the legislative and executive branches to be mindful of the following in designing the policies and programmatic solutions:

- Minimize the financial hardship for low- and middle-income Vermonters through the intentional design, prioritization, and pacing of the programs recommended in the plan, including how revenue needed to support these programs is raised and invested/distributed.
- Ensure balanced investments in both the efforts needed to reduce climate pollution and adaptation measures to strengthen resilience against current climate impacts.
- When evaluating the costs of programs and policies, take into account the costs of not acting, including Vermonters' continued dependency on price-volatile fossil fuels for home heat and transportation and the cost of rebuilding following all-but-certain future climate disasters.
- Ensure adequate funding to underwrite state agency capacity, create the administrative framework, and undertake the work needed to advance the actions in this updated Climate Action Plan.
- Identify revenue sources that don't work against Vermonters' adoption and implementation of key climate actions, such as adoption of electric heating and transportation options, by raising the cost of electricity.
- Ensure necessary supporting investments are being funded and implemented (e.g., residential electric panel upgrades, expanded availability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, etc.)
- Support and develop enough trained workers in the state to implement the actions.

This updated plan includes immediate actions as well as critical steps to advance more complex and far-reaching solutions which will serve Vermont in the medium and long term. Similarly, the plan urges the legislature and administration to find funding sources that can be deployed

immediately towards climate action, while concurrently taking action to secure sustainable, long-term funding for climate action. As we undertake this work, we recognize that Vermont has a history of innovation to draw and build upon. The can-do ethos of Vermonters sees not only challenges but opportunities -- including the opportunity to act together and nimbly as a small state.

While the Legislature, the Agency of Natural Resources, and other agencies of state government will need to work to advance the actions put forward in this plan through legislative action and rulemaking, the Council will continue to:

- Monitor and track the progress of implementation of the Climate Action Plan;
- Identify and champion additional work needed to ensure the Plan actionable;
- Convene Climate Council meetings on a quarterly basis to engage with the public; and
- Bring Subcommittees together as needed to support the work of the Climate Council.

These efforts and other related work will be reflected in the next update to the Climate Action Plan, scheduled to be delivered in July 2029.