

Introduction to Priority Actions

In preparing this updated plan, the Council sought to focus the state's action by calling special attention to 52 priority actions as well as a short list of the 10 highest priority actions. These prioritized actions are comprehensive, providing important recommendations for how Vermont communities can become more resilient and reduce climate pollution, while recognizing the changing context for this work.

The context for this updated plan

A period of unprecedented federal investment in climate action is abruptly ending, requiring significant changes to underlying assumptions about how climate action is supported and what entities will have the financial and operational capacity to do this work, impacting Vermont's efforts to reduce emissions as well as support disaster recovery and resilience initiatives.

Simultaneous with federal efforts curtailing funding, the federal government is also pulling back on key policies, such as support for electrification of vehicles and deployment of renewable energy that were intended to drive climate action. Even before this challenging context came into focus, Vermont faced a heavy lift to achieve its 2030 emissions reductions requirements under the GWSA and has struggled to fully recover from recent disasters. Reduced federal funding, coupled with the finite financial capacity of Vermonters and their municipalities, will require the state to weigh multiple criteria as it considers how to raise revenue and prioritize investments in reducing emissions and making the state more resilient.

Even in this moment, the reality of the climate hazards facing the state and urgent need for action drives us to take responsibility for Vermont's own contribution to this crisis. This plan identifies a series of meaningful actions Vermont can take to reduce emissions and become more resilient. This plan emphasizes actions that:

- Make investments in resilience, preparedness, and community development that will help Vermonters recover more quickly and save money and lives as Vermont faces future climate hazards
- Make homes more efficient and help Vermonters switch to price-stable and affordable sources of heat and transportation, particularly for Vermonters living on low and moderate incomes.
- Invest in building the workforce needed to implement these actions
- Identify sustainable, long-term funding to support the actions.

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. In the context of current federal opposition to energy efficiency, clean energy, hazard mitigation, and other climate action, we recognize an increased responsibility for state-level action and an imperative for collaboration across states. Important progress can be achieved through partnerships with other states, such as Vermont's continued involvement with the U.S. Climate Alliance and evaluating opportunities to join multi-state programs such as the Western Climate Initiative. As we lean into new state and multi-state action, we believe we can and should advance solutions that reduce costs and deliver benefits, especially for households with lower and middle incomes. In sum, the actions in this plan represent opportunities to effect positive changes in a challenging context.

Criteria for action

The Council offers the following criteria as especially important when designing policy and implementing climate action:

- First, reduce financial hardship for low- and middle-income Vermonters in 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.

- In addition, be intentional in making investments both in the efforts needed to reduce emissions and the urgent adaptation measures to strengthen resilience against current climate impacts.
- Importantly, when evaluating the costs of programs and policies, also take into account the costs of not acting, considering Vermonters' continued dependency on price-volatile fossil fuels to heat their homes and get around, and the cost of failing to invest in resiliency measures that will help communities and municipalities reduce losses and recover more quickly from 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. Also, 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.
- Take steps to support and develop enough trained workers in the state to implement the actions. In addition, ensuring necessary supporting investments are being funded and implemented (e.g. residential electric panel upgrades, expanded availability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, etc.).

Sequence of actions

For emissions reductions: this updated plan includes actions that will reduce emissions now as well as critical steps on more complex efforts such as cap and invest, 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, such as developing and implementing a cap and invest program.