Vermont Climate Council
Draft Priority Actions
~~April~~ May 18, 2025

This draft document contains priority actions under discussion for recommendations and directives by the Vermont Climate Council to the legislature and executive branch agencies. These draft ideas do not yet reflect a final decision by Councilors, who have a range of views on them.

Councilors offered suggested edits after reading the public comment and input from public meetings in April and early May 2025. A handful of Councilors attempted to consolidate those suggestions into specific revisions for review by the entire Council.

This draft contains those suggested revisions for full Council review. The principal edits in this document are:

Cross-Sector Mitigation

- Consolidate the overarching policy recommendation under cap-and-invest (#1). This means adjusting the language in the cap-and-invest recommendation, and weaving in the thermal policy recommendation (formerly recommendation #7)
    - Note that Councilors have a wide range of views on this still. Any potential eventual consensus recommendation would likely require some additional preamble language that addresses the range of concerns.
- In Advanced Clean Cars II and Advanced Clean Trucks, there was a suggestion to mention compliance flexibility. Councilors did not discuss this in depth. The suggestion is in this draft.
- Merge the transportation recommendation in Compact Settlement into recommendation #3
- Because cap-and-invest would now be the main policy recommendation, the Clean Fuels Standard recommendation is modified to "Analyze options for…"

Education, Workforce, Finance

- Change the order of the education recommendations and rework some language for clarity
- Consolidate several of the workforce recommendations under a single recommendation that emphasizes the Climate-Ready Workforce Initiative

Rural Resilience and Adaptation

- Councilors recommended some preamble language around the shifting funding landscape and need to secure funding.
- Switch out the "Create and facilitate a business support network…" recommendation for a more specific recommendation citing the Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program.
- Switch out the municipal infrastructure investment recommendation (#10) for the text of the same idea in the compact settlement section (which has been folded into this section and the transportation recommendation).
- Improve the language for clarity in the recommendation for a "framework…to identify prioritized state investments in resilience projects…" (#12)

Ag & Ecosystems

- Add "forestry" and "foresters" into several places that only referenced agriculture
- Remove the detailed funding numbers from supply chain and food security recommendation (#6)
- One Councilor offered a suggestion that the renewable energy siting recommendation not include the final sentence about disincentives (Councilors left the sentence in for now).
- In the landscape connectivity recommendation, in the paragraph that cites Vermont Conservation Design, add the amount of targeted young forest, as well as old growth forest.

(NOTE: If we are seeking broad consensus on the council, we likely need to some preamble text that speaks to affordability and the achievability of 2030 targets, as important context for the emissions reduction recommendations, together with mention of the cost of not acting.)

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1) J~~Through legislation and administrative action, j~~**oin a cap-and-invest program, such as the New York Cap and Invest (NYCI) or Western Climate Initiative, covering emissions from multiple economic sectors (~~from Vermont's~~ transportation ~~fuels,~~ thermal and potentially other sectors.) Necessary steps prior to joining include~~, and potentially other sectors, once necessary preparatory steps are taken~~**:

~~In preparation for joining, take necessary supporting steps including:~~

- ~~Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) will develop~~ Develop a framework for the reporting of greenhouse gas emissions data from fuel suppliers and other significant emitters of climate pollution. ANR plans to ~~and~~ recommend to the Legislature ~~statutory~~ by December 15, 2025, statutory changes needed to support streamlined reporting requirements and a stepped implementation plan.
- Determine the most appropriate and feasible mechanism(s) for addressing affordability concerns related to the implementation of a cap-and-invest program.
  - A significant portion of cap-and-invest revenues should be used to provide direct payments or rebates in as close to real time as possible to Vermonters with low- and middle-incomes. Another significant portion of revenues should be used to provide direct incentives to support low- and middle-income households in reducing pollution and saving money via increased energy efficiency and adoption of no or low-carbon technologies.
  - ANR, in collaboration with the Public Service Department, ~~and~~ the Vermont Agency of Transportation, ~~and collaboration with~~ and the Vermont Climate Council, will advance a ~~technical~~ study that will make specific technical recommendations around achieving affordability, including potential limits on allowance prices (i.e. a price ceiling). ~~to determine the most appropriate and feasible mechanism(s) for addressing affordability concerns related to the implementation of a cap-and-invest program, including:~~

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- Monitor cap-and-invest programs and continue to track updated economic analysis to understand the costs and benefits on implementing the program in Vermont.

A final note: The Council believes that a cap-and-invest program would be the best and most cost-effective overarching policy to provide predictable and substantial emissions

reductions in Vermont. If a cap-and-invest initiative were not able to deliver sufficient reductions in the thermal sector, the Council recommends the adoption of complementary policies to accelerate the transition to non-fossil heating fuels. Options include a thermal energy benefit charge and thermal sector performance standards, which could include a modified clean heat standard[1], equipment standards, and fuel standards.

- ~~Distributing dividends from allowance sales directly to Low- and Moderate-Income households in close to real-time;~~
- ~~Using proceeds from allowance sales reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to provide direct incentives to support increasing energy efficiency and the adoption of low-carbon technologies, particularly for low- and moderate-income households;~~
- ~~Setting limits on allowance prices (i.e., a price ceiling) to provide certainty about maximum costs.~~

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- ~~ANR and members of the Council will continue to monitor cap-and-invest programs in other jurisdictions, including New York, California, Quebec, and Washington. Updates will be provided at quarterly Council meetings.~~

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2) **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles by:**

i. Continuing to monitor and maintain Vermont's adoption of the California Advanced Clean Cars II (ACC II) and Advanced Clean Trucks.

ii. Adopt rule amendments adopted by CARB that provide increased compliance flexibility. [Councilors didn't discuss this in depth]

iii. Supporting vehicle electrification ensuring long-term, consistent funding for EV incentives to low- and moderate-income car purchasers which aligns with estimates provided for the VT Agency of Transportation's February 2024 Clean Transportation Incentive Programs Report; as well as guidance from the February 2025 Legislative Report on Vermont Clean Transportation Incentive Programs.

iv~~iii~~. Supporting vehicle electrification investment for the equitable deployment of fast charging and Level 2 charging stations to levels needed to meet the modeling done in the Pathways 2.0 Report and as estimated in the Agency of Transportation's January 2025 report.

3) **Invest in public, active, shared, and multimodal transportation, such as transit, micro transit~~, passenger rail~~, biking and walking.**

- Use VTrans' July 2024 Vermont Smart Growth, Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), and GHG Research Project Report and the November 2023 VT Agency of Transportation Carbon Reduction Strategy and associated GHG Sketch Tool to guide investments, ~~in order~~ to~~:~~

[1] A modified Clean Heat Standard would have a starting price and a price cap. It would seek to make progress now within a program that is scalable over time. Complementary policies would be needed to further reduce thermal sector emissions.

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- ~~o~~ ~~Minimize~~ reduce the need for single occupancy vehicles, also known as reducing vehicle miles traveled, which has important co-benefits such as cost savings to individuals and families, access to jobs, and health and environmental benefits.
- ~~o~~ Leverage the Downtown Transportation Fund in a manner that most effectively accelerates this policy~~Support compact settlement patterns which enable public, active, and shared transportation~~.

4) **Support cost-effective load management, grid hardening, and optimization, e.g., through advanced metering, storage, targeted siting of generation, rate design, and distributed energy resource management systems statewide to enable customer programs and avoid or delay more expensive physical upgrades.**
   - Continued Public Utilit~~y~~~~ies~~ Commission (PUC) oversight of utility load management programs, investments, and rate designs, and consideration of regulatory approval improvements for efficient generation and infrastructure siting**.**
5) **Review and implement as appropriate recommendations from Act 179 study regarding evolution of community-level renewable energy programs, especially for low-income customers.**
   - With community and customer input, utilities ~~and/or Public Utilities Commission (PUC)~~ continue, or consider, ~~should~~ creat~~e~~inge procurement and customer enrollment programs to support community-based renewable energy projects. Primary considerations for any such program should be ~~Consider~~ cost-containment actions, funding avenues that are not electric customer supported, and how approval for community-based project siting occurs.
6) **Support existing programs and expand as needed ~~Deploy programs that~~ to ensure the electric grid supports customer electrification necessary to meet Global Warming Solutions Act goals, including service drops, transformers, smart panels, EV chargers, storage, etc.** Highlight importance of cost-effectiveness and equity in design, implementation, and affordable funding.
   - Continued Public Utilit~~y~~~~ies~~ Commission oversight of utility programs (e.g. Tier III); consider expanding credit in Tier II for these purposes; seek state or federal sourced funding where possible; strive for deployment across utility territories with ability to participate for all customers, including rural/low-income.
7) ~~**Adopt one or more sector-wide policy:**~~

~~Option A: Through legislation or administrative action, adopt a modified Clean Heat Standard, designed for gradual implementation, and containing a cost cap provision with a starting price.~~

- ~~The recommendation seeks to make progress now, within a program that is scalable over time, and that lives within a cost cap.~~
  - ~~Gradual implementation: Implies that the mechanism would get as close as possible to Global Warming Solutions Act targets and that complementary policies will necessarily need to carry a larger proportion of Residential, Commercial and Industrial emissions reductions to meet GWSA targets, and~~

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Commented [DP1]: This is now covered in Cap and Invest

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- ~~Containing a price cap provision with an explicitly stated starting price.~~

~~and/or~~

~~Option B: Through legislation and administrative action, join a cap-and-invest program.~~

- ~~See the combined Transportation & Buildings priority action on cap-and-invest~~

8) **Secure funding for comprehensive weatherization focused on low- and moderate- income households.**

   Through legislation or administrative action, ensure 79,000 additional homes are comprehensively weatherized as soon as practicable, with a priority on low- and moderate-income households.

   - The weatherization work should recognize energy efficiency broadly. It should include traditional energy efficiency measures, electrical, health, and safety measures needed to comply with codes, and needed infrastructure upgrades such as wiring and service panels to enable electric vehicle charging, the adoption of heat pumps for space and water heating, and other strategic electrification opportunities.
   - Between 2000 and 2024, it is estimated that 41,000 Vermont homes were weatherized; current programs (funding and workforce) are able to weatherize approximately 4,000 homes per year at an average cost of $11,000 per unit. Much of the recent funding has come from federal sources, which are unlikely to be renewed. The initial Climate Action Plan established a goal of weatherizing a total of 120,000 homes by 2030, which would require an investment of more than $850 million along with more than a tripling of Vermont's weatherization workforce – putting this target out of reach.
   - It is essential, however, that Vermont take steps to maintain and accelerate its current pace of weatherization in order to complete the additional 79,000 units as soon as practicable.
   - This will require securing a sustainable source of funding, measures to develop a well-trained workforce sufficient to address the demand, as well as funding to eliminate barriers (e.g. required prerequisite home repairs including, but not limited to, vermiculite removal, knob-and-tube mitigation, etc.) that prevent or delay weatherization activities from occurring in low- and moderate-income homes.

9) **Through legislation or administrative action, ensure X* additional commercial, industrial, municipal, and non-residential buildings are comprehensively weatherized by 2030, and secure the funding needed to achieve the target.**

   - Including "weatherization ready" project needs
   - With priority for supporting/expanding existing programs (i.e. the Municipal Energy Resilience Program, Municipal Technical Assistance Program, Building Communities, etc.).
     - *Waiting on modeling to inform this number

Commented [DP2]: Likely to move this detail to the chapter

10) S**ecure funding for electrification of space & water heating for low-and moderate-income households.**
    - Develop programs for implementation regarding 200-amp service and related building upgrades, coordinated with weatherization, efficiency, and equipment incentive programs (EV chargers, heat pumps, storage, etc.), and ensure that any potentially related statewide program (such as Clean Heat Standard, if adopted, or enhanced weatherization efforts) includes building electrical upgrades in their design and funding models in order to enable decarbonization.
11) **Conduct a study that considers the technological options and market feasibility for emissions-based equipment standards for various types of heating.** The purpose is to better understand the feasibility and considerations of Vermont adopting thermal equipment emissions standard(s), either for oxides of nitrogen or, more broadly for GreenHouse Gases.
    - The legislature needs to fund the study
    - The Agency of Natural Resources needs to file a report with the Vermont Climate Council by June 30, 2027
    - The study shall consider:
        - adoption by other states,
        - the means by which equipment standards can influence market activity,
        - the most equitable approaches, and
        - how to secure the greatest emissions reductions

    Study is contingent on securing funding.

~~12) **Through legislative and administrative action, adopt~~**Analyze options for ~~-~~**a performance- based Clean Fuels Standard that implements a declining carbon intensity (CI) score eligibility requirement for residential, commercial, and industrial (RCI) fuels and can be implemented gradually alongside other complementary policies that would be necessary**. As a potential alternative,

~~13)~~12) ~~Alternate approach if recommended action is not deemed feasible (not performance based): Through legislative and administrative action,~~ analyze institut~~e~~ing ~~e~~ a minimum percentage clean fuel blending requirement for all residential, commercial, and industrial liquid and gaseous fuels, utilizing an approved list of eligible clean fuels.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Education, ~~Compact Settlement~~, Workforce Development, Financing

Education & Workforce

1) **Amend the Vermont State Board of Education's Education Quality Standards to incorporate environmental and climate change education at all grade levels ~~(consider folding under "Science" and "Social Studies" curricula).~~**

~~1) **Build off existing resources and programs to create an open source, accessible, and interdisciplinary climate change curriculum for Vermont educators.**~~**Create an open source, accessible, and interdisciplinary climate change curriculum for Vermont educators that builds off existing resources and programs to enable teaching across subject areas.**

~~2) **Amend the Vermont State Board of Education's Education Quality Standards to incorporate environmental and climate change education at all grade levels (consider folding under "Science" and "Social Studies" curricula).**~~

~~3) **Maintain funding for programs to educate Vermonters about their energy choice and funding options to increase energy efficiency in residential homes, including the energy Coaches and Navigator Program.**~~

~~4) **Increase investment in municipalities to improve, expand and build new drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and other infrastructure to support compact development, especially growing away from climate hazards such as flooding, and ensure the assets' long-term operation and maintenance.**~~

~~5) **Increase capacity for multimodal transportation planning and implementation in downtown and designated areas, such as making village centers permanently eligible for the downtown transportation fund that builds infrastructure needed to increase walking, biking and transit.**~~

~~3)~~2) ~~**Continue to implement Act 181* and monitor for progress.** Increase investment in compact settlements as needed. *https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2024/H.687~~

3) **Maintain funding for programs to educate Vermonters about their energy choices and funding options to increase energy efficiency in residential homes, including the energy Coaches and Navigator Program.**

4) ~~**Advance**~~ **Implement the** ~~**the new initiative**~~ **Climate-Ready Workforce Initiative to** ~~**which aims to**~~ **grow career pathways in climate change and clean energy fields, support new and existing workers, ensure job quality and safety, strengthen workforce diversity, and train workers in service of the collective** ~~**alliance**~~ **U.S. Climate Alliance goal of 1 million new registered apprentices across 24** ~~**U.S. Climate Alliance**~~ **states by 2035.**

- **Increase the number of registered apprenticeships that can be supported in the state by Vermont State University, the Department of Labor, and other registered apprenticeship programs, especially in plumbing/HVAC, electrical, and weatherization.**
- **Support training from middle school through adult education and Service-Learning programs for a wide variety of audiences, including through the weatherization training center and the many existing training programs**

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- Target outreach, training, support, and Service-Learning systems for existing Vermont residents to enter and stay in climate change careers, including farm and forestry, clean energy, outdoor recreation, and resilience careers.
- Invest in instructors and physical infrastructure to increase the number of students who can be supported in the Career and Tech Ed system in the state including electrician, plumbing, building trades programs, agriculture and forestry sectors.

5) Support programs for people to start and build their own businesses in the trades, including those offered by sustainable business development and climate change career programs.

~~7)~~

~~8) Support training from middle school through adult education programs for a wide variety of audiences, including through the weatherization training center and the many existing training programs.~~

~~9) Target outreach, training, support systems for existing Vermont residents to enter and stay in climate change careers, including farm and forestry, clean energy and resilience careers.~~

~~10) Increase the number of students who can be supported in the Career and Tech Ed system in the state including electrician, plumbing, building trades programs, agriculture and working land sectors.~~

6) **By tracking leading data indicators, monitor the impacts of decarbonization on the workforce and create programs to support impacted workers.**

~~11)~~ **Financing**

~~12) Increase the number of registered apprenticeships that can be supported in the state by Vermont State University and the Department of Labor, especially in plumbing/HVAC, electrical, and weatherization.~~

~~13) Support programs for people to start and build their own businesses in the trades, including those offered by sustainable business development and climate change career programs.~~

~~14)~~7) **Building off recent Climate Infrastructure Financing efforts, the Vermont State Treasurer, in consultation with the Climate Action Office and Climate Council, should explore opportunities to further leverage public and private capital to make needed clean energy, resilience and adaptation investments. This effort should focus on reducing hurdles facing Vermonters in accessing and affording cleaner and more energy efficient technologies, weatherization, and necessary infrastructure and resilience investments. It should seek to build off existing structures and institutions to leverage programs, partners and capital (e.g. credit unions and banks), as well as explore other potentially useful strategies (such as on-bill utility financing, bonding and insurance markets).**

- Stakeholders could include, but would not be limited to, the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, together with bond banks, economic development associations, distribution and

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efficiency utilities, credit unions, and key state agencies, such as the Public Utility Commission, among others.

[NOTE: This section will benefit from some introductory language about funding. Such as: *It is important to note that as of this writing, the evolving federal policy and funding landscape may require significant changes to underlying assumptions about how this is paid for and what entities will have the financial and operational capacity to do this work.* Also, the introductory language should note the importance of identifying funding for all these actions.]

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1) **Increase State capacity to manage funding programs and provide technical assistance for the development and implementation of climate resilience plans, with a focus on maximizing the efficacy of Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, and augmenting existing programs with the Municipal Planning and Resilience Grant Program, the Municipal Climate Planning Framework and Guide, and the Municipal Climate Toolkit.**
2) **Establish permanent, dedicated funding for Regional Planning Commissions to hire and retain staff for climate resilience and natural resources planning work, hazard mitigation application development, and management of hazard mitigation grants on behalf of municipalities or other eligible grant recipients as well as cover overhead costs related to completing Local Hazard Mitigation Plans.**
3) **Secure sustainable, long-term funding to expand and maintain a permanent Flood Resilient Communities Fund (Community Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Fund) for the design and implementation of local and regional climate change adaptation projects and community resilience.** Funding may be used as local match for federally funded hazard mitigation programs as well as non-FEMA eligible hazard mitigation activities.
4) **Expand the Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program (BEGAP) to provide financial support and one-on-one coaching to businesses and nonprofits before a disaster in addition to providing funding to businesses who are impacted by climate disasters and disruptions.**
~~4) Create and facilitate a business support network that connects and engages local economic development and small business support organizations for the purpose of developing and providing coordinated support for business and local economic resilience and disaster response.~~
5) **Integrating regional housing targets and ongoing mapping, including Flood Insurance Rate Map updates, River Corridors, and landslide hazards, identify areas that are suitable for new, climate safe housing, and increase funding mechanisms where communities are investing in development-ready infrastructure.**
6) **The State, through the Public Utility Commission and Public Service Department, should complete the ~~investigate~~ resilience planning investigation underway, including whether and how to defin~~e~~ing, valu~~e~~ing, measur~~e~~ing, and set ~~ting~~ targets for grid resilience. Utilities should continue to integrate resilience planning into their ~~Integrated Resource Plans based on guidance resulting from this proceeding~~operations.**

7) **Expand upon the Municipal Vulnerability Indicators tool to create a Municipal Vulnerability Index that can be used by state agencies and others as a resource to assist in prioritizing infrastructure resilience investments across the state based on specific vulnerabilities or combinations of vulnerabilities.** Ensure it includes currently missing data such as historic utility outage data, to the extent available, and the Agency of Natural Resource's Environmental Justice mapping tool, when complete.

8) **Create a transportation flood resilience funding program to design and construct transportation projects identified as high priority locations via use of the most relevant risk and vulnerability assessment tools.**

9) **Replace or harden ~~aging~~ electric and communication infrastructure with the most appropriate resilient alternative when cost effective.** For example, for aging ~~and~~ or unreliable lines, utilities should continue to evaluate improving resilience by relocating lines underground or through other options, where demonstrated to be feasible and cost effective to ~~ratepayers~~electric customers.

   - Planning frameworks, valuation tools, and metrics resulting from the Resilience Investigation (Case No. 25-0339-PET) being conducted by the Public Utility Commission should be used to inform this evaluation.

10) ~~**Increase investment in municipalities to address prioritized vulnerabilities by improving, expanding, and building new drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and other infrastructure to support compact development, including asset management tools to support long-term operation and maintenance**~~**Increase investment in municipalities to improve, expand and build new drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and other infrastructure to support compact development, especially growing away from climate hazards such as flooding, and ensure the assets' long-term operation and maintenance.**~~.~~

11) **Continue to implement Act 181* by increasing investment in walkable and livable communities while also reducing sprawl and protecting critical natural resources.**
***https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2024/H.687**

~~11)~~12) **Develop a framework that creates a fiscally constrained plan to identify prioritized state investments in resilience projects, similar to the State Transportation Improvement Program and building upon the State Hazard Mitigation Planning and Hazard Mitigation Project Review processes. The purpose of this action is to have a standing list of projects, vetted through an interagency prioritization and public engagement process, that could be implemented as funding is available.** ~~**Building upon the State Hazard Mitigation Planning and Hazard Mitigation Project Review processes, develop a framework similar to the State Transportation Improvement Program that creates a fiscally constrained plan to identify prioritized state investments in resilience projects.**~~

~~12)~~13) **Provide increased capacity to strengthen messaging and awareness of local and state emergency preparedness, response, and recovery structures.**

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~~13)~~14) **Provide funding and technical assistance to municipalities and local partner organizations to support adaptation and preparedness planning in communities, with specific focus on disproportionately affected and vulnerable populations**; including the identification, adaptation, and equipping of facilities to serve as community resilience hubs that serve as places for learning, collaboration, resource access, and refuge in response to climate-related hazards and other community needs.

~~14)~~15) **Provide funding for resilience equipment, supplies, and services (including trees and other vegetative shade, window treatments (i.e. screens, shade, thermal barriers), efficient air conditioning (or heat pumps), fans, air purifiers, mechanical ventilation (e.g. Energy Recovery Ventilator), water intrusion and moisture mitigation & management, backup power, private drinking water testing and treatment, etc.) that help reduce the health impact of climate-related hazards for income-qualifying households.**

~~15)~~16) **Provide state-contracted community mental health services partners more capacity to address anxiety, depression, distress, and trauma caused by climate change and climate-related disasters.**

1) **Increase funding, enhance, and adapt existing State of Vermont programs that support greenhouse gas emissions reductions, soil carbon sequestration, and/or climate adaptation and resiliency on working lands.** Coordinate with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programming to defend and accelerate the implementation of federally funded climate mitigation and resilience practices in Vermont.
    - Enhance and adapt programs to better incorporate nature-based solutions as well as Traditional, Ecological and Indigenous Knowledge.
    - Example State programs include, but are not limited to: Agency of Agriculture Farms and Markets (AAFM): Agriculture-Clean Water Initiative Performance (Ag-CWIP), Best Management Practice (BMP), Forestry Acceptable Management Practices (AMP), Capital Equipment Assistance Program (CEAP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Farm Agronomic Practice (FAP), Grassed Waterway and Filter Strip (GWFS), Pasture and Surface Water Fencing (PSWF), Vermont Pay for Phosphorus (VPFP), The Vermont Farmer Ecosystem Stewardship Program (VFESP); land acquisition, river corridor easements, wetland conservation, County Forester Program, and the recommendations in the ANR report, "Maintaining and Creating Resilient Forests (2015)."
2) **Utilize best practices to account for carbon sequestration and emission reductions from agriculture and forestry.**
3) **Fund and implement Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) programs for lands to encourage landowners and land and water caretakers[2] to implement practices that improve soil health, crop and forest resilience, increase carbon storage, increase stormwater storage capacity, and reduce runoff.** Fund existing agricultural PES programs and expand to include or develop new programs for forestry. Note: Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) programs recognize and reward land and water caretakers for practices that enhance ecological function and community well-being, rooted in both traditional stewardship values and modern land management. These programs do not include carbon markets or trading.
4) **Leverage the power of peer learning to advance climate resilience by funding a Request RFP that provides funds to support Vermont Natural Resources Conservation Districts, farmer organizations, and non-profit organizations with the specific objective of allowing them to reach other farmers and foresters and do ~~farmer-to-farmer~~ peer-to-peer education about improved soil and manure management strategies that enhance climate resilience.**
5) **Create a dedicated climate impact emergency recovery fund for farms and forestry operations or related infrastructure (or ensure the agriculture and forestry sectors are given specific considerations in ~~general state~~ the Vermont Cclimate Iimpact Rrecovery Ffund), support leverage**

[2] The Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee used the word "caretakers" to refer to any individual who makes decisions around the land and water. This could include land and water managers and stewards, as well as land owners.

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of federal funds and expansion of programs to support the adaptive capacity and restoration of farms and forests, and promote insurance for farm and forest landowners and businesses, to ensure that they can equitably and viably recover from climate induced disasters.

- The fund should be simple to access, deploy sufficient funds quickly following a disaster, be flexible, equitable, and proportional to meet the diverse needs of the farming and forestry community, and be sustained over time with predictable and consistent funding.

6) **Dedicate robust funding for farm and forest supply chain resilience and state food security, including significant investment in storage, processing, and distribution infrastructure.** Prioritize investments in farm, food, and forestry businesses, cooperatives, non-profits, tribes, and community projects that have climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation goals.
    - Funding should include a ~~minimum dedicated~~ substantial increase in base funding ~~of $1.5 million~~ for the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI), ~~$18 million over a three-year period for~~ the Agriculture Development Grant program, ~~$500,000 in base funding for~~ as well as the Crop Cash Plus and Farm Share, dedicated appropriations for distribution and food hub operations and infrastructure, and appropriations for research, development, and support for siting and permitting process improvements that recognize the vital conservation benefits of market expansion opportunities for local wood products processing and manufacturing in Vermont.
7) **Improve funding opportunities and create equitable access for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farm, food, and forest organizations and businesses by developing multi-year unrestricted BIPOC-centered grants and loan programs.** This includes uplifting and resourcing the work of the Vermont Abenaki and other Indigenous Peoples in the State, Land Access and Opportunity Board (LAOB), and other BIPOC peoples and organizations in Vermont.
8) **Promote and incentivize the use of agricultural and sustainably harvested wood-based construction materials (subject to existing certification criteria or procurement standards to be developed) over imported wood imported from long-distances from locations without required sustainable harvest requirements, and/or non-wood materials with high carbon footprints (such as steel, concrete, etc.).**
    - This could include using state procurement standards to require that publicly funded building projects, or those subsidized through low-interest loans or tax benefits, use chain-of-custody certified wood products (mass timber, cellulose insulation, advanced wood heating, etc.) and prioritize building materials—such as sustainably harvested wood—that align with climate goals and ecological values, while reducing reliance on high-carbon, non-renewable materials like steel and concrete.
    - Continue to research and develop the life-cycle accounting of these products for the greatest impact.

9) **State agencies should utilize financial incentives, siting policies, and regulations to incentivize, support, and preferentially site ~~solar and wind~~ energy capacity on new buildings, parking lots (by installing solar roofs), in compact settlement areas, including renewable energy and charging facilities at rental housing, as well as in previously disturbed / developed areas where feasible.**
    - Use disincentives to avoid forest clearing, particularly clearing of ecologically sensitive forest blocks, and conversion of active agricultural land, particularly prime agricultural soils.

10) **State agencies should ~~prioritize and~~ incentivize (through various financial mechanisms) nature-based climate solutions (NbS), Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and Indigenous Knowledge (IK) by considering how to gauge their effectiveness and incorporate them into assessments, planning efforts, prioritization frameworks, and funding programs to address climate change impacts.**

11) **State land management agencies should continue to adapt their management of lands using nature-based climate solutions (NbS) to address climate impacts, increase ecosystem resilience, enhance biological diversity, and improve water quality.** State land management agencies should also enhance technical assistance and resilience funds to support the financial capacity of other land and water caretakers to achieve these goals.

12) **State agencies and the legislature should identify gaps and opportunities to expand and improve current programs that promote healthy, connected river corridors, floodplains, and wetlands, prioritize restoration and conservation, and incentivize water storage in headwaters and natural areas to promote flood resilience and biodiversity through expansion of wetland, floodplain, riparian forest and~~/or~~ river corridor easements that better compensate land and water caretakers for restoring, managing and conserving these natural water storage areas (including opportunities presented by Act 121).**

13) **State agencies should work with partners, and the legislature should fund the state agencies as necessary, to promote strategic and equitable statewide landscape connectivity and the conservation of priority forest blocks, farmland, and other actively and passively managed lands through planning and implementation toward 30x30 goals, and 50x50 goals in alignment with Act 59 of 2023.** This work should use the best available data and mapping, including Vermont Conservation Design, while braiding in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK).
    - Conservation planning and implementation should meet the targets set forth in Vermont Conservation Design. These goals include managing forests to achieve a target of 3-5% young forest and allow at least 9% of Vermont's forest to become (or be maintained as) old forest, specifically targeting 15% of the matrix forest within the highest priority forest blocks—including National Forests—to achieve the old growth ~~this~~ condition and ensure the protection of sacred sites or other historically or culturally important areas as determined by the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation.

Commented [DP3]: There was a suggestion to remove this sentence.

- At the same time, protecting farmland and managed forestlands from development through land conservation and protection programs is essential to ensure these land uses continue to provide climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience benefits. Existing State land use protection programs—such as the Vermont Farmland Conservation Program and f~~F~~orest c~~C~~onservation e~~E~~asements—should be enhanced to improve farmland access and the protection of agricultural soils and working forests.

14) **Enhance education, outreach, research, and technical assistance programming to encourage farmers, foresters, and other land and water caretakers to adopt strategies that increase climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.** State agencies should work with and support efforts to fund partners and higher education, such as University of Vermont (UVM) Extension and Natural Resource Conservation Districts (NRCDs).
    - These efforts should be incorporated into current programs, braiding Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK), recognizing the value these bring to better understanding and taking care of the land. Initiatives should be designed to represent diverse perspectives while addressing a diversity of audiences and age groups. Simplify and assist with application processes for funding and support programs.

15) **Fund and undertake as soon as possible the study previously requested by the Vermont Climate Council on the use of woody biomass for utility-scale electric energy facilities[3]. ** In addition, use the guidance previously provided by the Council to the Vermont Public Utility~~ies~~ Commission (PUC) regarding biomass.
    - The Council's biomass addendum is here: https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/climatecouncil/Shared%20Documents/Biomass%20recommendations%20-%20Final%20Approved%20Version%20-%20December%202023.pdf

[3] This study is not aimed at smaller-scale biomass such as advanced wood heat and agricultural waste methane generation.

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