

**Deb Markowitz**

*Secretary, Agency of Natural Resources*



Every Earth Day, I take time to reflect on the importance of the work we do at the Agency of Natural Resources, and how much I appreciate the passion and commitment of our over 600 employees. For most ANR staff, our work to protect the environment is not just a job, but it also provides a life of meaning and purpose. We love Vermont and its great outdoors, so we work together to make sure we protect its beauty, culture and heritage. We conserve land to protect important natural places and to connect people to their homes. We ensure our soil, air and water are clean. We make it easier for Vermonters to get outside to hunt, fish and recreate. And we plan carefully for a future that reduces our contributions to climate change and prepares us for its impacts.

We can feel proud of our multiple successes over the past years. Many staff contributed to the significant new laws that advance environmental protection in Vermont. These laws safeguard our groundwater and ensure we protect and clean up, where necessary, our lakes and ponds. They recognize that wildlife belongs to all of us and add protections for species that are threatened and endangered. They make it easier for us to recycle and help protect our communities from the risk of flooding. And by encouraging investments in renewable energy alternatives, we have helped to create new jobs and an energy future independent of fossil fuels.

Agency staff have also successfully managed Vermont's public lands, adding thousands of acres to our state portfolio and carefully balancing the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, demands of the public. Other staff spend their days working in communities across the state to help Vermonters and the state address the many and varied challenges we face – from preventing and managing invasive species, to growing the wood products industry, to carefully planning our future development so that we protect our natural resources.

Despite our successes we still face some significant challenges. The PFOA pollution in the drinking water in Bennington County has underscored the need to better understand and regulate the many chemicals in our environment, as well as the need to invest in our environmental cleanup fund so we are prepared to help communities when the need arises. The toxic algae blooms in Lake Champlain remind us that we must do more to control pollution that is carried into our waterways by stormwater. And, as our weather continues to change, we are prompted to do more to prevent and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

There is no doubt in my mind that this agency exists to promote the Vermont that we all love best. From protecting critical wildlife habitat to investing in compact downtowns, we are committed to living in an environment that provides for us while sustaining itself. This issue of Ripples highlights six of our staff who work hard to promote the key values that this Agency embodies. Respect. Protect. Enjoy. That's what we strive for at ANR, and with your help, we're doing all three.