

Cleaning Up the Crown Jewel of Vermont

- By Kari Dolan, Manager of the Vermont DEC Ecosystem Restoration Program



It was a historic moment when Governor Peter Shumlin unveiled his legislative agenda at last week's inaugural address to the state's General Assembly. In an important gesture of support for clean water, he stated that, "we love our rivers and lakes, from Lake Memphremagog to the Battenkill, from the Lamoille River to Lake Bomoseen, from Otter

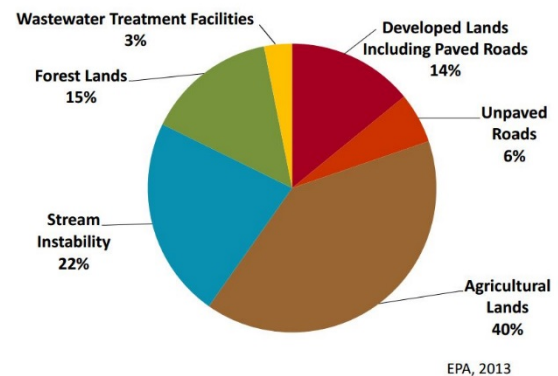
Creek to the river I grew up on, the Connecticut. And we all revere our crown jewel, Lake Champlain, which supports hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity every year."

The Governor acknowledged the challenges in meeting the public's call for cleaner water. "We know everything we hold precious is under threat from climate change and pollution...We are rapidly losing the battle for clean water." Vermont is a small state, with a small tax base. Finding the necessary funding and resources to address such a large and dispersed issue has historically been a major obstacle.

However, thanks to the persistence of a "can-do" Governor and administration, Senators Leahy and Sanders, Congressman Welch, federal partners (particularly the USDA Vermont office), municipalities, local partners, and a bit of that "abundance of hope," Vermont has secured previously unheard of levels of federal support and federal dollars committed. Recognizing that Vermont needs to do its part, the Governor announced a Clean Water Fund, which will support the expansion of existing state grant and loan programs, such as the Ecosystem Restoration Program, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, the Vermont Better Back Roads Program, and Agricultural Best Management Practices.

He then followed up with a resounding commitment: "We must all take our share of responsibility and work together...to get the job done. I need your support to ensure that the State of Vermont does its part, and ...to launch a new era of clean water in Vermont."

While it truly is a new era of shared responsibility and clean water, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is already deeply immersed in the work of creating a cleaner Lake Champlain. Since 2013, the State of Vermont and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have been in the process of developing and implementing a new restoration plan for Lake Champlain and its tributaries. This restoration plan focuses specifically on phosphorus pollution reduction targets for the Lake, also known as Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). Phosphorus is one of the nutrient pollutants found in runoff, and arguably the greatest threat to clean water in Lake Champlain. It also comes from eroding stream banks caused by stream channel instability. Too much phosphorus pollution stimulates excessive growth of algae, which can turn lake water green, and even be toxic to people and pets.



Sources of phosphorus into Lake Champlain by sector

As part of the TMDL development process, the State of Vermont submitted to the EPA its comprehensive Lake Champlain Restoration Plan to meet those targets in May 2014. The plan includes initiatives to address the multiple sources of phosphorus within the Lake, including:

- New and expanded stormwater permits that control runoff from state roads, municipal roads and developed lands;
- Stronger rules defining accepted agricultural practices including a small-farm certification and outreach program to control runoff from small to mid-sized farms;
- Expansion of wetland, river corridor, and floodplain restoration and protection;
- Updated accepted management practices on forest lands; and
- Maintaining and improving pollution controls at wastewater treatment plants.

It is never too late for the public to get involved. Check out the VDEC's Restoring Lake Champlain web page, which includes dates and locations of public meetings, a clickable library of all documents related to the TMDL process, [Frequently Asked](#)

[Questions, \(FAQ\)](#), a [watershed map](#), an [implementation timeline](#), and a [log of comments submitted by the public](#). There is also a collection of fact sheets on key elements of the Lake Champlain Phosphorus TMDL Phase 1 Implementation Draft Plan, including [Agriculture Lands Management](#), [Forest Lands Management](#), [River and Floodplain Protection](#), [Road-Related Stormwater Management](#), [Stormwater Management](#), and [Wetlands Management](#).

The US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) website is another great source of information. This site, [Lake Champlain Phosphorus TMDL: A Commitment to Clean Water](#), contains a chronological list of important documents, public meeting presentations given by the EPA, and documentation of the EPA's responses to Vermont's proposals. There is also a collection of technical reports used to determine the current quality of Lake Champlain's waters.

There is also a more formal way for the public to weigh in on the conversation. The EPA is scheduled to issue a Draft TMDL for Lake Champlain for public comment in the spring of 2015. Following the final issuance of the TMDL (expected in June), Phase II will be about implementation via the State's tactical basin planning process. Tactical Basin Planning offers the public a chance to get involved at a more local, "watershed" level. Check out the VDEC's website on [Tactical Basin Planning](#) for more information about basin planning in your region.

The overarching goal of Vermont's Clean Water Initiative is about providing clean water for all Vermonters statewide. Water pollution comes from so many varied sources and locations. Therefore, success will depend on the coming together of many state agencies, municipalities, other local partners, and above all, the public. This partnership assures a coordinated approach with strategic implementation that targets the highest priorities first, and relies on Vermont's collaborative spirit to get things done. We are truly entering into an exciting new era of clean water in Vermont, and we invite you to join in.