

From the Secretary's Desk: A Healthy Environment Sustains A Healthy Economy

There was more good news this month for Vermont– with unemployment numbers reaching a low of 4% and the news that Vermonters are first in the nation for eating our vegetables and getting exercise. It's no wonder. At ANR we are deeply aware of the connection between healthy lifestyles, our pristine natural environment with easily accessible mountains, forests, lakes and streams, and a thriving local economy.

Vermont tops the nation in green jobs. These include green energy jobs (we are ranked number one for solar job creation), agriculture (Vermont sales of agricultural products has grown 15% in the last five years and the number of

farms and acres in production is expanding significantly every year) and forestry. Forest-based manufacturing in Vermont provided 12% of the manufacturing payroll and employed 16% of manufacturing employees in 2005. Not only did the industry contribute \$1.0 billion in value of shipments to the economy, while employing more than 6,300 people, but forests also provide the backdrop for Vermont's tourism and outdoor recreation industries.

Outdoor recreation accounts for more than 12% of the gross state product and also contributes to our good jobs record – including more than 35,000 jobs. Outdoor recreation accounts for nearly \$200 million in annual state tax revenue and produces more than \$2.5 billion annually in retail sales and services across Vermont. And it's no wonder – Vermont's Department of Tourism boasts that Vermont has more than 1,000 miles of hiking trails; there are more than 50 state parks, 100 campgrounds and 8,000 campsites; there are 19 downhill ski areas, nine with more than a 2,000-foot vertical drop, and more than 30 cross-country ski areas. Vermont has 18 mountain biking clubs and a statewide network of trails and there are more than 6,000 miles of snowmobile trails. People from all over the world come to Vermont to fish in our lakes, ponds and streams and to hunt for deer, moose, turkey and waterfowl. Vermont also ranks first in the lower 48 states in fish- and wildlife-related recreation and brings more than \$704 million to the state in revenue from these activities.

Vermont's land-based economy and its promise of a prosperous future for our children and grandchildren did not happen by accident. Vermont's land use planning laws help us to maintain our traditional settlement patterns of a village center surrounded by working lands and forests. Our commitment to meaningful environmental regulations ensures that our land, air and water remain clean for future generations (and it drives us to clean up areas that may have suffered from historic pollution.) Investments in our state park and state forest systems and our commitment to tax policies and land conservation programs that encourage landowners to keep their land undeveloped have been essential to our success; and broad support for the partner organizations that develop trail networks and create recreational opportunities all make a difference.

It is often said that when the economy booms, Vermont lags behind. It is also true that when the economy crashed we do better than our neighbor states. A reliance on a land-based economy creates a stability that is good for Vermonters, helping to making our state a leader in health, outdoor recreation and economic stability.



ANR Secretary Deb Markowitz