

From the Secretary's Desk: Year in Review



ANR Secretary Deb Markowitz

As the year is coming to a close, I have been reflecting on all that ANR has accomplished over the last 12 months. I am grateful to all of the individuals, businesses, legislators, sister agencies, environmental and conservation organizations, local governments and, of course, our great staff, whose daily contributions help us to take meaningful steps to protect our natural environment so that Vermont can continue to be a great place to live. Some of the highlights from the past year include:

- Protecting the shorelines of our lakes and ponds by limiting the removal of trees and bushes. This work will ensure that our children will enjoy the same ability to fish, hunt, boat, and observe wildlife on these jewels across Vermont's landscape as previous generations.
- Streamlining the annual bag limit and permit number processes for moose, deer and migratory bird hunting to provide better customer service to hunters.
- Enhancing service to Vermonters using innovative and effective approaches for doing our work more quickly and efficiently. Using methods developed in the car manufacturing industry, termed "Lean," and by tapping into the best thinking of our staff and others, we have developed many terrific ideas which are producing concrete results.
- Conserving nearly a thousand acres of land for public access and environmental stewardship.
- Supporting the deployment of new renewable energy in Vermont by increasing transparency and consistency in how we work with developers to ensure siting in the right places.

- Promoting development in downtowns through eliminating the public health and environmental risks associated with contaminated sites in partnership with the Agencies of Transportation and Commerce and Community Development. Working with municipalities, regional planning commissions, regional development corporations, and developers to cleanup priority brownfields sites as we were able to return them to economic use.

- Increasing the protections for our floodplains and river corridors by developing new standards that apply to projects exempt from zoning, to help address the risks and opportunities to protect communities based on what we learned following the floods of 2011 and Tropical Storm Irene. We are working with local governments to encourage them to adopt similar standards and have made a host of helpful information available to local officials on our new Flood Ready website (<http://floodready.vermont.gov/>) including new river corridor maps.

- Reducing regional carbon emissions and raising millions of dollars to support Vermont's energy efficiency programs through the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

- Getting more families than ever outside and into our parks, with nearly a million visitors to our parks this year - a 25 year record!

- Writing a plan for restoring Lake Champlain in a shared effort with municipalities, businesses, farmers and other state agencies responsible for agriculture, community development, and transportation. We also identified the steps we need to take to implement this plan including the creation of a new clean water fund.

- Investing millions of dollars into our farm and forest economies through the Working Lands Investment Fund.

- Implementing our new Universal Recycling law to ensure that all Vermonters have access to recycling services. We also worked with supermarkets, hospitals and others

responsible for large volumes of food waste - to keep this organic matter out of landfills where it generates pollution, and by diverting it into composting and bio-digester facilities where it results in a useful product and is also feeding a growing business sector in Vermont.

- Expanding opportunities for more disabled veterans to participate in hunting and fishing by offering them free lifetime licenses.

- Offering three new conservation license plates that underscore the importance of protecting non-game species, improving local streams, and supporting conservation education.

The environmental challenges we are facing are multiple and complex, and 2015 promises more of the same, with budget challenges in Vermont and continued gridlock in Washington DC. But we must not be deterred. We know that Vermont's prosperity and our quality of life depends upon our continued commitment to protecting our air, land, water and wildlife. I look forward to continuing this important work – with your help – in the coming year.