

## Supporting the Vermont Brand – An Economic Argument for Clean Water Actions

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Tourism is a big part of Vermont's economy. In 2011, nearly 14 million people visited the State, spending \$1.7 billion which supported over 26,000 jobs. A contributing factor in making Vermont an important tourist destination is her natural environment. Attractive landscapes, a clean environment, and rural, agrarian communities have been part of the "Vermont Brand" for generations, perhaps articulated first in this state-sanctioned promotional advertisement, published back in 1891 (Tom Slayton, 2003):



**Beautiful Lake Champlain**

A place of rural beauty, a place where farms produce wholesome food and where mountains, lakes and trails offer vigorous, refreshing outdoor recreation, a place where history is important and relationship to the land still means something.

The Vermont Brand is built on the State's reputed commitment to the quality of its products, the quality of the tourist experience, and quality of life of her residents. Fundamental to maintaining the Vermont Brand and sustaining Vermont's tourism and recreation-based economy is the State's on-going commitment to a quality natural environment.

Precious among Vermont's natural environment are her lakes, rivers, ponds, and wetlands. Vermont has some 7,100 miles of rivers and streams, 300,000 acres of wetlands, and over 800 lakes and ponds that total over 230,000 acres. Visitors are drawn to the state each year to enjoy the scenic landscapes and take part in recreational opportunities, such as fishing, boating, swimming, and hunting. Thus, the health of these waters are critical to maintaining a robust tourism economy.

In addition to supporting tourism and recreational uses, clean water provides for safe municipal drinking water supplies and maintains property values. Clean water also supports commercial uses, ranging from agricultural operations to high-tech industries.

A growing concern, however, is the increased vulnerability of Vermont's waters to ecological degradation. These threats underscore the importance of environmental stewardship, which is not a new idea to the State. Vermonters value and support efforts to keep our waters clean. However, when the risk of ecological degradation increases, as with the current condition of Lake Champlain, environmental stewardship involves making stronger commitments to target greater investments in actions that will address these threats.

Equally important as a motivating factor to invest in clean water is the understanding that environmental stewardship is good for business. Brand management requires taking necessary actions to protect and enhance that brand. The success of the Vermont Brand in upholding Vermont's reputation for quality goods and services requires that we take steps to take care of that brand. Investing in clean water is one very important step. These investments pay dividends to Vermont's tourism and recreation-based economy, as well as safeguard clean water for this and future generations--of Vermonters and visitors alike -- to enjoy.