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White River Basin

Water Quality Management – Tactical Basin Plan

Essex Junction, Vt. - Today, the Agency of Natural Resources announced the approval of the new White River Tactical Basin Plan. This plan capitalizes on nearly a decade of prior water quality improvement work in the White River Basin, and sets forth a suite of new directions for restoration of waters with pollution problems, and protection of waters that are of very high quality. Secretary Markowitz said, “I am proud of the work done by our basin planner Jim Ryan. His excellent work with the communities in the White River Basin has resulted in a plan that will allow Vermont to protect and improve the water quality in the area for years to come.”

The White River Tactical Basin Plan provides an overview of the health of the basin and a description of the priority future and ongoing steps to restore and protect the quality of its surface waters. According to Ryan, “This plan is a reflection of State and local priorities for surface waters in the ‘White.’ In the Plan, the work of many local and regional associations, municipalities, State and Federal agencies, and other stakeholders is integrated in a strategic and prioritized fashion. The Agency specifically recognizes two non-governmental organizations who played key roles in the development of the plan. The White River Partnership was instrumental in bringing together constituencies and conducting water monitoring activities, while the Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission provided analyses and project identification efforts that significantly improved the plan.

According to Mary Russ, Executive Director of the White River Partnership, “Over the past year and a half, Jim Ryan engaged a diverse group of watershed stakeholders to identify the issues and to develop the priorities outlined in the White River Tactical Basin Plan. As a result, I think the Plan will be a useful tool for anyone interested in improving the long-term health of the White River watershed, including individuals, towns, local groups, regional organizations, and state and federal agencies.

Peter Gregory, Director of the Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Commission adds: “Our rivers and streams are important natural and economic resources. This plan identifies and will help address the problem areas, but also safeguard the mostly high quality of the waters we have so that they continue to refresh us on hot days and make the watershed a special place. We look forward to working with the Agency and the White River Partnership to carry out many of the plan’s recommendations.”

The central component of the water quality management plan is the implementation table, which includes specific actions to address threats to surface waters in the basin. Examples of some of the priority actions in the plan include: implementing steps to address bacteria in the Branches of the White River; conducting Agricultural Environmental Management assessments to target outreach and cost-share to farmers; mapping stormwater systems and detecting illicit discharges in village centers; and, working with towns to apply for Better Backroad grants and to include

protections for fluvial erosion hazard zones and buffer zones in local zoning. Complementing these restoration and flood resiliency activities is a set of recommendations for targeted water quality protections that include ecologically significant streams and lakes, and a proposal for Outstanding Resource Water designation for the mainstem White River.

The draft plan was released for public comment in May of 2013 and meetings were held May 30th through June 6th to receive public comment. Public comments have been addressed in a responsiveness summary – Appendix I of the plan. The final plan and appendix are available online at: <http://www.vtwaterquality.org/> or by contacting Jim Ryan at (802) 476-0132 or jim.ryan@state.vt.us.