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The Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program:

Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural & Forestry
Conservation Practices in the Lake Champlain
Watershed of Vermont and New York



Semi-Annual Report for the USDA NRCS
Reporting Timeframe: December 1st 2015 – May 30th 2016

1 June 2016

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December 1, 2015 – May 30, 2016 Report

The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is pleased to submit this semi-annual report to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Progress since December 1, 2015 is documented below in the format requested by NRCS. DEC thanks the partners of the DEC RCPP for their match efforts, including the invaluable narrative reports that are utilized in the compilation of this document. Please see attachments for additional information where indicated.

Program Administration Activities

To capture the great accomplishments occurring through the Lake Champlain RCPP, DEC requires participating partners to provide quarterly financial and narrative match reports. MOUs have been developed with partners to identify deliverables and reporting requirements. DEC worked with the Vermont NRCS business office to provide federal financial reports.

DEC developed the outreach plan for the DEC RCPP. Please see attached.

The Vermont DEC Clean Water Initiative Program (CWIP) staff, in coordination with NRCS and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff, released an RFP for a contractor who will provide outreach, pilot the incentive payment calculator, and facilitate landowner incentive payment for wetland easement projects through the NRCS ACEP-WRE program. Five responses to the RFP were received and a selection committee consisting of DEC, NRCS, and USFWS staff reviewed and scored proposals. Arrowwood Environmental, in collaboration with Stone Environmental, Inc. and Fitzgerald Environmental Associates, LLC was awarded the contract. The contract was signed May 25, 2016 and includes as deliverables updating potential wetland restoration data; creating project packets of project opportunities for landowners, including NRCS payment rates and incentive payments using the DEC Wetlands Incentive Calculator; inputting prior and new outreach data into the Agricultural BMP Database; and conducting outreach visits to at project sites. The contractor will coordinate closely with VT NRCS.

DEC finalized a contract with the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) to provide conservation and nutrient management planning assistance to farms that have or are in the process of committing to land conservation easements on their farms, to conduct resource inventories on farms using NRCS tools and evaluation materials, and to work as a case manager with producers. Three RCPP conservation planners located in the South Lake region, the North East Kingdom and North Western region of the Lake Champlain Basin are currently providing technical assistance.

DEC staff collaborated with NRCS staff to create an RCPP NRCS program process for agricultural and forestry EQIP practices. The flow chart includes each step of the NRCS process, from application to project certification and payment. It is color coded to demonstrate which partners are responsible for each task. Please see attached.

DEC has been assisting the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAFM) in the development of the Vermont Environmental Stewardship Program (VESP). VESP will provide incentives for farmers who are protecting their natural resources at a level of excellence

above and beyond any state or federal standards. Participants will need to meet specific environmental targets in areas such as soil health, nutrient and sediment loss, and possibly carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emissions in the future, to become a certified environmental steward. A VESP pilot is entering the final stages of development and is on track to accept competitive applications in early July, with assessments beginning in the fall of 2016. The goal is to transition the pilot program into a fully funded program by 2019. This pilot will leverage a partnership of technical and financial service providers to assess and certify accepted program participants, and will offer certified participants recognition-based rewards such as signs, decals, and apparel. Participants that are actively working towards certification will receive additional financial and technical assistance.

The previously developed RCPP Applicant and Information Release Form was updated to include key RCPP partners and allow for agricultural producers to share information related to VAAFM North Lake farm assessments or inspections, which aids conservation planning.

Education/Outreach

Outreach Events and Materials

The RCPP general handout and the RCPP forestry handout were available at the VAAFM, VACD, and NRCS tables at the Vermont Farm Show. A more specific producer-oriented handout was also developed and has been utilized by the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) staff when conducting annual visits to conserved farms.

The RCPP general handout has been available at the Required Agricultural Practices (RAP) public meetings, and will be at future meetings as the public comment process proceeds.

Copies of the forestry RCPP handout were provided at the annual Vermont Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation Forest Health Meeting in Woodstock, Vermont. More than 100 forestry and natural resource professionals attended the event. NRCS & RCPP Forester for the southern Lake Champlain Basin, AJ Follensbee, presented about NRCS EQIP practices and the DEC RCPP at this event.

An overview of forestry practices available through the DEC RCPP was provided to Vermont Family Forests, a non-profit forest conservation organization in Addison County of Vermont.

DEC continues to work with NRCS to share information with all the NRCS field offices via weekly emails and on the NRCS RCPP website (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>).

RCPP Project Coordinator, RCPP Conservation Planners and the Vermont Land Trust developed a prioritized list of landowners of conserved property in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont to better target outreach by the RCPP Conservation Planners.

DEC posted a blog article on World Wetlands Day celebrating Vermont wetlands (<https://vtwatershedblog.com/2016/02/02/celebrate-world-wetland-day-2/>). The article highlights why wetlands are such a valuable resource, the Vermont NRCS wetlands video (<http://bit.ly/VermontWetlands>), and the DEC RCPP grant and its wetland incentive payment calculator. USFWS, an RCPP supporter, also released an article on their website about wetlands that included the Vermont NRCS wetlands video (<https://usfwsnortheast.wordpress.com/2016/05/06/whats-in-a-wetland/>).

The RCPP Program Manager and Coordinator have initiated a monthly conference call with RCPP Conservation Planners to ensure efficient workload planning and regular program updates.

Number of Media Outlets Reached

In addition to the blog post and article about wetlands on the USFWS website, materials about the DEC RCPP are available on the Vermont NRCS RCPP website, (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>).

DEC, in coordination with NRCS, issued a press release about the first RCPP forestry project completed to a variety of media outlets and NRCS headquarters for circulation. See attached forestry press release and list of media outlets notified.

VACD issued a press release announcing their contract to provide individualized technical assistance to farms participating in the DEC RCPP program. See attached VACD press release and list of media outlets notified.

Number of People Reached and Unique Outreach

Number of people reached through RCPP technical assistance funds is indicated below under implementation.

Most of this RCPP effort will focus on farms that are conserved and therefore are not new to NRCS. However, our partners are providing outreach through match that reaches additional farmers and forest landowners. VLT technical staff have been communicating the resources available under the DEC RCPP when conducting annual farm visits. Annually, VLT visits approximately 500 conserved agricultural properties statewide, a significant contribution of which are in the Lake Champlain Basin.

Ten VAAFM employees have been providing outreach, education, and technical assistance to over 158 farmers in the Lake Champlain Basin, many of whom operate small farms and have not traditionally worked with NRCS.

VAAFM has contracted with three organizations, The Farmers Watershed Alliance, The Friends of the Northern Lake Champlain, and Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, to offer outreach and technical assistance to agricultural producers identified as high priority through AAFM's North Lake Survey. These contractors will work directly with the producers to implement projects to reduce their water quality resource concerns. The RCPP Program

Coordinator worked with the three contractors to identify which of these high priority farms are conserved and transferred them to the RCPP planners, thereby increasing the program's coverage. The North Lake Survey has provided the unique opportunity to target those farms that are the highest priority for water quality improvement, and are, in most cases, small farms that have had less experience with NRCS.

A key partner, VLT, is also providing prioritized lists of farms for RCPP planner outreach, and as part of its annual site visits to conserved farms will be identifying high priority issues for immediate attention by planners.

The partners with the DEC RCPP program have gone above and beyond their commitments specified in their partner agreements. It has been inspiring to see so many of our partners come together to improve water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin.

Relationship Building with Partners

Almost all of the Lake Champlain RCPP partner organizations that have committed match are actively working on RCPP efforts (though not all are currently reflected in the match documentation report). These include VAAFM, Vermont Department of Forest Parks and Recreation (FPR), Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), Vermont Land Trust (VLT), VACD, DEC, NY Washington and Essex Natural Resource Conservation Districts, St. Albans Dairy Cooperative, AgriMark Cooperative and Dairy Marketing Services, Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP), Friends of Northern Lake Champlain (FNLC), Farm to Plate (F2P), Farm & Forest Viability Program (FFV), and Commonwealth Dairy. Other partner efforts are under development.

The Lake Champlain RCPP provides opportunities for building relationships between partners through the RCPP Advisory Board, subcommittees on ACEP-ALE and WRE projects, monthly meetings with FPR and VACD, as well as the development of the Vermont Environmental Stewardship Program. At these meetings partners are actively describing priorities and goals, identifying and overcoming challenges to improve water quality and protect and restore natural resources. The success of that relationship building is evident as partners work together to make the Lake Champlain RCPP a cohesive and effective program while gaining a better understanding of partner's program. Some of the partnerships within RCPP are traditional while others are new. New partners include the dairy cooperatives: St. Albans Cooperative, AgriMark Cooperative, and Dairy Marketing Services.

Opportunities for new collaborative partnerships have emerged, such as information sharing about RCPP opportunities for agricultural producers through Ben and Jerry's *Caring Dairy* program. In addition, VAAFM contractors are sharing information about RCPP opportunities while working with agricultural producers in the Lake Champlain Basin.

Success Stories

As a substantial match contribution, DEC provided partners the opportunity to improve the conservation easement partnership process by hosting a Lean event. The purpose of a Lean event

is to map current processes and identify opportunities to add value to the customer while increasing efficiencies. Further information regarding DEC's Lean Initiatives can be found at <http://anrconnect/sites/Projects/Lean/SitePages/Home.aspx>. VHCB invited staff from its key farmland conservation partners (VAAFM, VLT, UVLT, DEC, and NRCS) to participate in this three-day event in February, facilitated by trained staff from the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and DEC. The goal was to streamline the process for conserving farmland, to focus more systematically on resource concerns by improving environmental stewardship on farms in the process of selling development rights. This event was highly successful and the members of the LEAN team are now implementing the "future state" plan developed at the February event. Some changes have already been implemented at the staff level of various organizations. Others require VHCB Board approval and that process is underway. Implementation of the LEAN plan will benefit the RCPP ACEP-ALE projects by helping to streamline and better coordinate the workload.

The timing of the second round of applications for ACEP-ALE funding created a tight turnaround period for completing the NRCS Hazardous Waste Assessment and Landowner Interview. To facilitate the applications through this NRCS process, RCPP Conservation Planners were trained by NRCS to conduct the assessments, which helped address the need created by the short timeframe. In total, nine hazardous waste assessments and landowner interviews were conducted.

The RCPP Project Coordinator traveled to Hartford, Connecticut to present at the 27th Annual Non-Point Source Pollution Conference. Over 100 individuals were in attendance, questions were extensive, and there was follow-up from several participants after the conference. RCPP was a focal component of presentations centered around fostering unique partnerships.

RCPP has been a pilot for and integral part of VT DEC's development of tracking tools for water quality and TMDL implementation. DEC and RCPP Partners have been involved in discussions and planning for tracking statewide implementation of best management practices to improve water quality, including RCPP efforts such as agricultural, forestry, and wetland best management practices.

The RCPP Project Coordinator is an Eco AmeriCorps mentor to a member who is serving in a Vermont NRCS office. The mentor role was developed to provide support and assist with professional development. A second Eco-AmeriCorps member is working with DEC CWIP, and is helping with communication of all programs, including RCPP.

Implementation

Note: Some of the information below occurred prior to this reporting period, however, related information was received from partners after the last semi-annual report and as a result is included here.

Projects Funded Outside Traditional NRCS Programs

Projects funded outside traditional NRCS programs included \$72,375 for farm agronomic practices, \$5,000 for nutrient management planning and \$1,109,304 for best management practices from our partner VAAFM, and \$65,384 in Dairy Improvement Grants through our partner VHCB/Commonwealth Dairy for water quality related projects including building a grazing system, manure pit renovation, increasing no-till corn planting and manure solids separation. Commonwealth Dairy has focused its annual allocations on water quality as part of its commitment to RCPP, and next year expects to have approximately \$400,000 in grants to award.

Contracts and Practices Implemented

Two forestry contracts were signed in 2015 for forest trails and landing practices. In the late fall of 2015 one of the contracts was completed with 2,639 linear feet of forest roads and two stream crossings improved. See attached press release regarding the project. An additional nineteen forestry applications were received for the sign-up period ending in April 2016 with a total estimated cost of \$330,000.

Two applications totaling \$262,606 for the ACEP-WRE program were received in the last round. These projects will include a calculation using the State of Vermont Wetlands Incentive Calculator to determine the above and beyond payment the landowner could receive. Additional incentive payments will be provided as match by VT DEC.

Seventeen parcels are currently in the ACEP-ALE program, with six applications submitted the first round and nine submitted in the second round totaling \$4,194,000 (a combination of NRCS and VHCB funds). Contracts will be signed over the next year as further program requirements are completed. RCPP planners are assisting with many of these requirements.

Fifteen farmstead applications were received through the RCPP EQIP program for the sign-up period ending April 2016 with a total estimated cost of \$1,976,000. As of May 30th, ranking has not yet been completed to identify how many will be funded.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easements

Significant time is spent on agricultural land easement projects including researching farm and forestland conservation opportunities in the Lake Champlain Basin to identify and assess priority conservation projects (often through GIS mapping and grant list research), and outreach to farmland owners.

VLT's Stewardship staff worked with conserved landowners on water quality improvement efforts by reviewing proposed activities as well as educating and directing landowners to technical assistance and cost-share programs.

Water quality improvements embedded within perpetual conservation easements designed for these projects include riparian buffer zones, wetland protection, ALE Plan requirements and limits on building zones and percentage of impervious surfaces.

On May 1 2015, VHCB submitted an application to NRCS for RCPP ACEP-ALE funding for six farm projects. Unfortunately, NRCS was not able to complete the significant internal controls now required for each project prior to the end of the federal fiscal year on Sept. 30, 2015. A cooperative agreement between VHCB and NRCS was executed in March 9, 2016. There was an unforeseen delay in obligating funds for these projects. The agricultural easement Lean event will be addressing some of the challenges incurred. Four RCPP-ALE projects are moving toward easement closing and two others have received RCPP-ALE funding.

In May and September 2015, the VHCB's Agricultural Advisory Committee committed funding to four projects in Newport, Pawlet, Lowell, and Troy. In April 2016 the committee reviewed and approved six pre-applications in the RCPP priority watersheds.

On November 18, 2015, VHCB's Agricultural Advisory Committee met to review 33 farm pre-applications, including eight in the targeted sub-watersheds of the Mississquoi Bay, St. Albans Bay, and South Lake. All eight projects were approved.

On March 1, 2016, VHCB submitted a second RCPP-ALE application to NRCS for \$1.2 million, for nine projects, all approved as pre-applications by VHCB and approved as potential RCPP ACEP-ALE projects by the RCPP Advisory Board. These nine projects contain 16 parcels totaling 1,282 acres and all have current or potential for significant water quality projection and/or improvement due to proximity to surface water.

The RCPP Conservation Planners collaborated with NRCS staff to conduct the hazardous waste assessments, landowner interviews, and landowner eligibility checks on the nine proposed projects. VHCB expects to sign an amendment to the existing RCPP ACEP-ALE Cooperative Agreement for project funds by September 2016.

Several RCPP ACEP-ALE projects thus far have presented considerable opportunities for technical assistance and collaboration through partners such as DEC, VHCB, VLT, VAAFM, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Friends of the Northern Lake Champlain (FNLC). One such project is directly on Lake Champlain and as a result of this easement and the technical assistance allowed by RCPP, will include stormwater management, addressing flow runoff through ditches and gullies that contribute substantial erosion to the Lake. The project will also increase the buffers and land management in this high priority area. A second project involved substantial technical assistance support to evaluate the land and environmental capacity of a farm in another high priority region. While ultimately the easement has been cancelled, the focus of the assistance was to ensure that the long-term environmental sustainability of this project was addressed and as a result, a stronger project will be developed for the future.

In an effort for continued improvements to the agricultural land conservation process and its customers, the RCPP program is piloting the idea of a “pre-assessment.” Providing technical assistance early in the conservation easement process helps landowners understand potential resource concerns and their responsibilities if they choose to move forward with a land conservation easement. This ALE plan requirement is intended to decrease the number of landowners who cancel their commitment later in the process, causing a substantial loss of time and effort. Since RCPP also has the technical and financial assistance to help address these concerns, the goal of the pre-assessment is to also help the landowner address the resource concerns positively and with strong support.

RCPP partner VLT is developing nine River Corridor Management Area (RCMA) projects within the Lake Champlain Basin that include significant river corridor protection in addition to buffer implementation. These projects are primarily overlays on existing conserved farms to add restrictions to strengthen water quality protection. One of these projects is a current RCPP ACEP-ALE farm conservation project for which this additional protection will enhance the overall water quality impacts.

VLT has spent considerable time and resources to revise their internal Riparian and Wetland Buffer Policy and to coordinate with land conservation partners on implementation of a consistent approach to riparian buffer assessment and design.

VLT is assessing and implementing conservation projects on 68 properties across the Lake Champlain Basin. These projects are in various stages of development and while largely involving farmland with water quality impacts, there are also several involving primarily forestland conservation.

Farm & Forest Viability

Sixty-one farms are currently enrolled in the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program. Twenty-five (41%) are located in the Lake Champlain Basin and are developing a business plan or ownership transfer plan with a viability business advisor. An additional twenty-five farms in the Lake Champlain Basin are in their second or third year of the program, receiving support to update and implement their business or transfer plans. The RCPP Program Manager has been working closely with Farm Viability to directly connect RCPP farms to the Farm & Forest Viability program and increase the use of this critical program throughout the Lake Champlain Basin. The Farm & Forest Viability program has provided RCPP Conservation Planners with outreach materials, and will be providing training at one of the monthly planner conference calls.

Technical Assistance for Implementation

The three RCPP Conservation Planners have been working on 17 projects and have provided 23 technical assistance visits to those farms in addition to technical assistance provided by NRCS staff. Their efforts include conducting hazardous waste assessments and interviews, developing Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) plans, developing Land Treatment Plans (LTPs), assisting

with signups for Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) development, and acting as the “case manager” to producers navigating programs to implement clean water activities and comply with state and federal regulations. Thus far the RCPP Conservation Planners have:

- Completed and/or Currently Finalizing Three Agricultural Land Easement Plans
- Developed One Land Treatment Plan
- Assisted One Producer Through the UVM Extension “Digging In” Course to Develop A Nutrient Management Plan
- Completed Nine Hazardous Waste Assessments and Landowner Interviews

The RCPP Conservation Planners are working closely with NRCS staff and the RCPP Project Coordinator to prioritize workload. During the upcoming field season, they will have at least two Land Treatment Plans to develop, one Land Treatment Plan to update and three Agricultural Land Easement Plans to develop.

The RCPP foresters are providing technical assistance in project development utilizing stream crossing practice standard 578, stream crossing stabilization practice standard 655, and forest trails and landings practice standard 655. This planning work involved field visits, communication with the landowner, stream crossing survey work, and processing stream crossing data. As a result of this assistance, five timber bridges, two stone ford crossings, 21 stream crossings, and approximately 22,000 linear feet of forest trails and landings practices are either planned or installed.

The foresters have experienced workload challenges due to the high surveying and planning needs associated with stream crossings. Additionally, there is a large agricultural engineering workload that is affecting implementation. VT DEC is coordinating with NRCS and FPR to target RCPP technical assistance dollars for fund engineering assistance that addresses both areas of concern. An RFP is being developed.

Adjustment of Terms

The Adjustment of Terms in the contract for the Lake Champlain RCPP would have allowed a rolling signup with no batching – a positive outcome as landowners could immediately begin the screening and planning process after sign-up. However, due to a backlog of applications in the regular NRCS programs, NRCS determined this to be unfair to prior applicants, some of whom had been waiting for services for extended periods. RCPP applicants can sign up any time, but will not be screened or ranked before any other program.

Use of Funds

EQIP dollars for agricultural practices are available to conserved farms in the three target watersheds of Missisquoi Bay, St. Albans Bay, and South Lake. Wetland and Forestry EQIP dollars are available to any landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin. Technical assistance

funding supports three RCPP Conservation Planners and the two RCPP Foresters, who are assisting landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin.

There was a successful expenditure of \$5,801 for the completed forestry trails and landings contract. See attached press release for details.

The most recent application sign-up deadline was in April 2016 and the ranking deadline for those applications was May 30, 2016. Sign-up as of the date of this report was for almost \$2,000,000; however, not all applications had been ranked nor funds allocated. The challenges of multiple pools were addressed by the RCPP Program Coordinator working closely with the RCPP Planners and NRCS staff to ensure that producers were in the appropriate pools and able to access the best funding source for their needs.

Measurement of Results

DEC is working on developing a Water Quality Monitoring Plan to assess the impacts of the RCPP projects. We wish to coordinate this with the TMDL approval and the Lake Champlain Implementation plan, as well as our current summer lay monitoring and new tile drain monitoring, therefore we intend to have the plan available for review by July 30, 2016.

Ranking & Targeting

EQIP dollars for agricultural practices are available to conserved farms in the Lake Champlain Basin with priority given to the three targeted watersheds of Missisquoi Bay, St. Albans Bay, and South Lake. Wetland and Forestry EQIP dollars are available to all landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin. Please see the attached screening and ranking criteria.

Trainings

Following the three successful daylong Water Quality Cross-Trainings in April 2015 organized by VHCB, VLT, DEC, VAAFM, VACD, UVM, NRCS and other partners, VLT organized a specific, in-depth daylong training on May 5, 2015 for their staff as well as two VHCB staff.

RCPP partners organized a full day training on May 6, 2015 for VLT, VHCB, VACD, VAAFM, and DEC. The training included an indoor session on water quality issues on farms, as well as details about federal and state resources. This was followed by an outdoor session at two area farms where cropping issues and alternatives, farmstead issues, and buffer design and implementation were addressed.

On June 22, 2015, RCPP partner Farm to Plate held workgroups on Farmland Access and Stewardship (co-chaired by VHCB staff Nancy Everhart) and Production & Processing held a joint water quality-focused meeting and site visit to two farms in Orwell and Sudbury, as a follow-up to the April cross-trainings. This meeting was well-attended by farmers and staff from various government, educational, and non-profit organizations, and included a good discussion

about the impending Required Agricultural Practices, and the tension that sometimes exists between a farm's economic viability and the need to comply with stricter environmental rules.

In the 2015 field season, an NRCS engineer provided 12 hours of training for the two RCPP foresters and the FPR RCPP liaison on NRCS Conservation Practice 578. The training focused on field data collection, surveying stream crossings, processing the field data, developing stream profiles, and designing crossings to meet standards. In addition, the foresters attended the NRCS Conservation Planner training which focused on project planning and the administrative component of NRCS EQIP programs.

DEC developed a conservation resource manual and conducted a training to identify water quality resource concerns with the three RCPP Conservation Planners in December 2016. A sampling of materials in the conservation resource manual include:

- RCPP Outreach Materials
- Program Eligibility Information
- RCPP Screening and Ranking Criteria
- List of RCPP Partners
- Water Quality Improvement Efforts and Resources in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont
- ANR Watershed Management Division Monitoring Map
- Watersheds of the Lake Champlain Basin Map
- Conserved Lands Within Lake Champlain Basin Map
- RCPP Applicant Sign-Up Instructions and Forms
- NRCS Program Requirements & Guidelines
- NRCS Nine-Step Planning Process
- NRCS Question and Answer Document
- Introduction to Nutrient Management Planning
- Understanding an NMP versus a CNMP
- LTP Planning Checklist
- RCPP Grants of Vermont
- UVM Extension's "Digging In" Nutrient Management Planning Program Information
- Soil and Manure/Compost Testing Information & Test Submission Forms
- NRCS ACEP Program Information
- ACEP Handout
- ALE Pre-Assessment Checklist
- ALE Plan Development Checklist
- VAAFM's SFO, MFO and LFO Program Information
- Accepted Agricultural Practices
- Draft Required Agricultural Practices
- CREP Program Information
- Example NRCS Practice Standards

- Acronym List
- Outreach Materials for Partner Programs
- VACD BMP Booklet

In January of 2016, DEC developed and presented an RCPP webinar for all partners and members of the community. Over 120 participated and a video was posted to YouTube (https://youtu.be/wPng5bEA_Pw), as well as a supporting frequently asked questions document. Please see attached.

The RCPP Program Manager provided training at an NRCS technical staff meeting about the DEC RCPP in February 2016.

The RCPP Project Coordinator provided a training about the DEC RCPP at the VACD RCPP Spring Training Event in April 2016. VACD, NRCS, VAAFM, and DEC partners attended.

In April 2016 the RCPP Project Manager provided training on the history of Lake Champlain water quality, water quality resource concern identification, the DEC RCPP, and resources available to the dairy cooperatives within the Lake Champlain Basin.

The RCPP Project Coordinator provided a DEC RCPP training for new VAAFM water quality program employees in May 2016.

Vermont NRCS State Soil Scientist provided training on Vermont Prime Agricultural Soils at the May 2016 RCPP Advisory Board Meeting to DEC, NRCS, VHCB, and VLT partners.

RCPP partners DEC, VHCB, VLT, VAAFM, and NRCS are collaborating on a water quality training scheduled for June 9, 2016. This training will cover such topics as the RCPP program, outreach materials, the wetlands incentive calculator, the new Required Agricultural Practices, tile drain research, water quality resource concern identification and resources available.

Partners Who Contributed to this Report

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

Vermont Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation

Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Vermont Land Trust

Project ID 449 – Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

Reporting Item	Responsible Entity	
	NRCS	Partner
1. The number and types of eligible partners, landowners, and producers participating in the partnership agreements selected.	6 Eligible Partner (DEC, VHCB, VLT, VAAFM, VACD, FPR), 1 landowner with EQIP contract, 9 landowners with proposed ALE easements, 2 landowners with proposed WRE easements, 6 landowners with Cooperative Agreements through ACEP-ALE, 15 Farmstead EQIP applications, 19 Forestry EQIP applications.	*
2. The number of producers and landowners receiving assistance.	The landowners of 17 ACEP-ALE parcels are receiving technical assistance, 2 landowners are receiving technical assistance pertaining to ACEP-WRE, 4 landowners are receiving technical assistance pertaining to EQIP Farmstead and 20 landowners are receiving technical assistance pertaining to EQIP Forestry.	*
3. The number of new producers and landowners reached (i.e., those who have not previously participated in NRCS programs) and if any beginning farmers or ranchers, limited resource farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, eligible veteran farmers or ranchers, or Indian Tribes received assistance.	4 Historically Underserved.	X
4. Total funding committed to projects, including from Federal and non-Federal resources.	\$4,194,000 in total commitment for 17 ACEP-ALE Parcels (NRCS contributes \$2,097,000 and VHCB contributes \$2,097,000). No funding committed (obligated) for EQIP. An estimated \$262,606 committed by NRCS for 2 ACEP-WRE easements.	X
5. A description of how the funds are being administered under an alternative funding arrangement.	There is no alternative funding arrangement.	X
6. Means for tracking adherence to any applicable provisions for payment eligibility.	X	*
7. Any oversight mechanisms implemented.	X	*
8. The process through which program appeals by program participants are resolved.	X	

LAKE CHAMPLAIN REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND/OR QUESTIONS FROM THE WEBINAR EVENT

What is the Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program?

The State of Vermont, in partnership with 25 organizations, agencies, businesses and non-profits, has received funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service through the new *Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)*. The \$16 million grant was the second largest in the country and will help landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont and New York invest in the best conservation practices to help improve water quality.

This project will provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural and forest landowners over the next five years, to help with development and implementation of site-specific farm and forest projects that will directly improve water quality in streams and rivers that flow into the Lake Champlain watershed. RCPP funds will also help conserve important and environmentally critical agricultural lands, and restore and protect wetlands that are crucial to absorbing runoff and slowing floodwaters.

A key priority to the State's RCPP is to coordinate efforts to ensure maximum implementation and efficiency on the highest priority projects.

Program Questions

Easements

Will ALE Plans include assessment of woodlots and sugar bushes as well as the agricultural land use?

The ALE assessment will cover all the natural resources on the conserved parcel. If the conserved parcel contains any woodlots and sugar bushes those areas will be assessed for any water quality improvement opportunities and forestry technical assistance providers will be available to help. If a landowner is interested in further opportunities for conservation, we will provide technical assistance in evaluating other areas outside the conserved parcel for water quality improvement opportunities.

Can a conservation easement contain all forest land?

Through the USDA NRCS EQIP ACEP-ALE program, a conservation easement can have up to 2/3 forested cover included in the easement.

Wetlands

Will RCPP fund WRE or WREP/WRP projects?

RCPP funds for wetlands are only available through the Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

Forestry

Forestry funding is available through the RCPP. How is this different from the regular NRCS forestry funding pool?

Forestry applicants in the Lake Champlain Basin seeking financial and/or technical assistance for practices outlined in the “Improving Forest Water Quality in the Lake Champlain Basin” handout should be signed up (if they are eligible) under the VT DEC RCPP funding pool because funding and technical assistance is immediately available.

Do landowners need to have a Forest Management Plan (FMP) to implement RCPP funded forestry practices?

Yes, landowners must have a valid and current Forest Management Plan (signed by a County Forester) that meets UVA (Use Value Appraisal, or “current use”) standards. Forest land in the UVA program is administered by VT FPR through the County Foresters. Consulting Foresters typically write FMPs and the County Foresters review and sign them (making them current for ten years). CAP funds for forest management plans are available through traditional NRCS EQIP only. The local County Forester or NRCS field office should be contacted with further questions.

Agricultural

Agricultural funding is available through the RCPP EQIP. How is this different from the regular NRCS agricultural funding pool?

Funding for agricultural practices under the RCPP EQIP is for the development and implementation of conservation plans and improvements on farms with **conserved lands**. Benefits of the RCPP funding pool are less competition and opportunity for higher cost-share of up to 90% (with a combination of USDA NRCS and VAAFM funds). Farms are also able to receive funding sooner, since there will be a rolling enrollment and allocation of funds. Farms will receive “case manager” type technical assistance from RCPP planners who will continue with the farmer throughout the process.

Does the up to 90% cost share cover the practices of cover-crop, no-till, etc.?

Agricultural structural practices that improve water quality are eligible for up to 90% cost-share. Agronomic practices are not eligible.

General Programmatic

What kind of timeline can be expected for the development of a plan that is needed to install a practice (for example, CNMP, FMP, etc.) before funding is available for a practice?

As with normal NRCS practices, if someone is implementing a practice or practices that involve nutrient or manure management, a **CNMP is required to be in place** before any practices can be implemented. The screening criteria is written to address this. One of the advantages of RCPP is that we have extra conservation planners available to provide technical assistance to help facilitate getting these plans developed as quickly as possible. We cannot provide a specific time of how long that process will take; however, the development of these plans will be prioritized to move landowners forward through the process. The development of plans other than CNMPs, will depend on the requirements of those specific plans. For example, ALE plans must be developed and completed prior to the signing of the land conservation easement.

What are the ranking, signup, contract deadlines?

That information is available through the normal NRCS channels. The next application signup deadline is February 19, 2016 with tentative ranking and obligation deadlines of April 16, 2016 and June 17, 2016, respectively.

Does RCPP use the same conservation practice list as that used for regular EQIP?

Yes, for the agricultural practices. All agricultural practices are eligible for RCPP funding.

Only forestry practices that improve water quality are available for RCPP forestry funding. These are:

- ❖ Forest Trails & Landings (655)
- ❖ Stream Crossings (578)
- ❖ Riparian Forest Buffer (391)
- ❖ Mulching (484)

General forestry practices such as timber stand improvement are not available for RCPP funding. CAP funding for Forest Management Plans is not included in RCPP forestry funding.

Eligibility Questions

Who is eligible for services under the RCPP?

Funding is available for agricultural practices and technical assistance on farms with conserved lands in the Lake Champlain Basin with higher ranking for those falling in the three target watersheds of St. Albans Bay, Missisquoi Bay, and South Lake (A & B).

Wetland and forestry funds are available to all landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin.

Does the whole farm have to be conserved to be eligible for RCPP?

No, only a parcel of land needs to be conserved for the whole farm to be eligible for RCPP funds.

At what stage of the easement process are the farmers eligible?

Landowners must be eligible with NRCS prior the VHCB/VLT signing of the cooperative agreement with NRCS for the RCPP/ALE money to be available.

Once a parcel to be conserved has been approved by NRCS and is included in the signing of a cooperative agreement between NRCS & VHCB, they will be eligible to sign up for agricultural practices under the RCPP.

There is an ACEP-ALE flowchart available, please contact allison.compagna@vermont.gov.

Can a farmer apply for practices on both the conserved or non-conserved parcels if only a portion of that land is conserved?

Yes, if a landowner has a portion of the land conserved, the entire farm is eligible for RCPP. For example, if a farmer wants to install livestock exclusion throughout the property, both on the conserved & non-conserved parcel, they are eligible to do that.

Do farmers have to apply for practices on both the conserved and non-conserved parcels?

No, if a farmer has a conserved piece of property but there's not a resource concern on that tract of land, and there are resource concerns on other tracts of land (that are not conserved), the farmer can apply for funding to address the issues on the non-conserved parcel. They do not have to apply for practices on both the conserved and non-conserved parcels to be eligible. The parcel where the practice is being implemented does not need to be connected to the conserved parcel, or even in the same town, just under the same ownership.

Watersheds

What are the RCPP Target Watersheds?

Through the RCPP there are targeted watersheds, and projects that fall within these watersheds will receive high ranking points. The watersheds are St. Albans Bay, Missisquoi Bay and South Lake (A&B).

Does this include the Rock River Watershed?

Yes, the Rock River falls in the Lake Champlain Basin. It is not an RCPP target watershed but it is one of the four sub-watersheds for NRCS's targeted funding this year. Any producer in the Rock River watershed should speak directly with a conservation planner in the St. Albans NRCS office to determine which pool is the best option for him or her.

Are there plans to correct blue line stream data, information that is crucial to this effort that may not be correct in terms of ground-truth location?

There are no plans in the RCPP grant program to correct that data but certainly as planners are on the ground and see these concerns, they're going to be brought to the appropriate people who can move that process forward. We're aware that there are some challenges there and one of the advantages to having more boots on the ground is that we'll find more of those errors that we can hopefully correct.

Technical Assistance Questions

How is the point of contact for the farmer determined?

If the farmer is already working with someone and would prefer to continue to, such as UVM Extension or conservation district staff member, they can do that. If they are not already working with someone, the three conservation planners (Justin Michaud, David Arnold & Annalise Carington) who are working on the RCPP grant through VACD will be the point of contact for the farmer to assist them through the various programs and help to facilitate the coordination with the NRCS folks.

How will you evaluate high erosion risk? Are you aware that some K values may change for some soils over the coming few years?

Yes we are aware of that and evaluation of the high erosion risk will be done using current NRCS methods. In the future if calculation methods are updated, RCPP will continue to use the same process as NRCS.

Financial Assistance Questions

How does the up to 90% cost-share work?

NRCS provides reimbursement for practices based on standard payment rates already set for each practice. As match to RCPP, VAAFM can supplement those payments to provide cost share up to 90%. VAAFM provides payment based on the actual cost of the project installation, this means the total of all invoices (so keep your receipts!).

For example, a project costs \$425 and NRCS's payment rate was \$276.25. That would mean that the NRCS payment rate covered 65% of the actual cost for the project installation. VAAFM would then provide an additional 25% (\$106.25) of the total cost to increase the cost-share rate to 90%.

Total cost of the project - \$425

NRCS portion - \$276.25 (65%)

VAAFM portion - \$106.25 (25%)

Total payment provided to the farmer of \$382.50 at 90% cost-share.

One caveat, based on Vermont statute and VAAFM rules, is that VAAFM can provide up to 90% cost-share but cannot exceed 35% of the total project cost.

For example, a project costs \$425 but the NRCS payment rate was \$191.25. That would mean that the NRCS payment rate covered 45% of the actual cost for the project installation. VAAFM would then provide an additional 35% (\$148.75) of the total cost to increase the cost-share rate to 80%.

Total cost of the project - \$425

NRCS portion - \$191.25 (45%)

VAAFM portion - \$148.75 (35%)

Total payment provided to the farmer of \$340 at 80% cost-share.

Will “foregone income” be counted towards the 90% cost-share?

No, foregone income cannot be counted in the cost of a project for the purposes of reimbursement from the AAFM BMP funds.

Is RCPP money limited by the \$450,000 spending cap under the 2014 Farm Bill if used in combination with EQIP?

Yes, landowners who receive funding under RCPP are still limited under that same cap per statute. Non-RCPP funds and RCPP funds are counted together towards that cap.

Partner Questions

Are watershed groups involved in this effort?

Many of them are; for example, Friends of Northern Lake Champlain is a partner not only in assistance but in match support. The Farmers Watershed Alliance and Champlain Valley Farmers Coalition did not provide match but will be partners in sharing information with fellow landowners. RCPP is a dynamic program, and while we had match commitment to put in the application to receive the grant reward, we are still receiving opportunities for match and for other ways partners can be involved in the program. We are always open to those who want to participate and any ideas partners may want to share with us.

Can you describe some of the proposed partner match activities?

There is a lot of exciting match activities going on from our partners and one of the exciting parts of RCPP is the diversity of match. Many of the partners we have already done a lot of coordination with, such as VHCB which is providing funding and assistance in partnership with NRCS and VLT for agricultural land conservation. UVM Extension is not funded partner but provides substantial technical assistance and is assisting with outreach, as are several other partners.

There are also quite a few non-traditional partners that many of us have not worked with in the past. The dairy cooperatives and farm lenders are partners in this program and their role will be to help get information out to landowners when they're doing visits. One of the things we wanted to do through this program was to increase the amount of knowledge of the people who are working with farmers on a regular basis. As we all know there are a lot of people that stop by farms (the dairy inspectors, the dairy cooperatives and the lenders), and the goal is to get as much information out there through various people and opportunities. Our goal is to share not just the RCPP program but any other resources that are available for addressing water quality concerns. We have a huge task ahead of us in dealing with the water quality issues identified in the Lake Champlain TMDL and it needs to be an all-in, "all hands on deck" effort to get water quality improvement practices on the ground.

The dairy cooperatives and the lenders, for example, have agreed to have their staff participate in some intensive training so they will be able to recognize water quality concerns and practice opportunities when they are on the farms. In addition these folks will have many of the outreach materials available to hand out available to provide to the landowner.

Organizational Questions

How will NRCS staff easily be able to tell if a customer is signed up for VT DEC RCPP or traditional NRCS funds?

All staff and partners working with customers who are seeking financial and/or technical assistance through the RCPP will need to ensure the customer completes the RCPP Applicant & Information Release Form. This form will be kept with the customer's NRCS files and will communicate that the customer is seeking financial and/or technical assistance under the Lake Champlain RCPP versus other funding pools.

When should the RCPP Applicant & Information Release Form be completed?

State of Vermont foresters and hired VACD conservation planners will have customers complete the release form and submit it to the NRCS if the customer has not yet contacted NRCS.

NRCS staff assisting customers who come into the office pursuing RCPP funded practices and/or technical assistance, who have not yet worked with other RCPP technical assistance staff, should have the customer complete the applicant release form.

A copy should be filed at the NRCS field office the customer will be working with and an electronic copy should be sent to Alli Compagna, VT DEC, allison.compagna@vermont.gov.

If there are applications put in the RCPP DEC EQIP and EQIP simultaneously, will there be any chance for duplication of efforts?

No, there are several places where checks and balances exist, with the primary one being the NRCS office where they are very vigilant about keeping track of applications. The advantage to applying for EQIP in both categories would be in case one of the funding pools were to run out. Although the RCPP grant at \$16,000,000 seems like a lot of money, when broken down over five years, two states, four programs and multiple practices, it will run out quickly. We want to make sure that if a landowner does apply and is interested in doing a practice within a year that if there is funding available in some other pot, they are able to access it.

What program forms are specific to NRCS and what forms are specific to RCPP?

There is a CPA 1200 and Applicant & Information Release Form that are specific to the Lake Champlain RCPP and these documents can be found on the zip file. Alternatively from what was stated in the webinar, there is not an RCPP specific CPA 52 form. The CPA 52 is the national or state form used throughout all EQIP programs. For further questions, contact Bob Sylvester of NRCS.

What is the NRCS flowchart?

As we stepped into the process of starting this program it became very clear that there were a lot of questions about who would be responsible for the multiple aspects of the conservation planning process from the producer walking in the door, if not before, straight through to the actual documentation, implementation and completion of the project. A group of NRCS and DEC folks worked together to ensure that we looked through every single aspect of going through that planning process. DEC developed a flowchart and we think that all partners involved will find it very helpful as it clearly shows which partner is responsible for each aspect of the program process.

Resources Available

What materials are available for landowners and agricultural producers interested in the RCPP?

Currently the “RCPP: Coming Together for Conservation” and “Improving Forest Water Quality in the Lake Champlain Basin” handouts are available for public distribution. Additionally, there are several NRCS materials available: an ACEP-ALE Fact Sheet, EQIP Fact Sheet, Cultural Resource Review Fact Sheet and What is a CNMP fact sheet.

Programs other than the Lake Champlain RCPP

Is the VACD RCPP NMP training program only for small farms or is any farm eligible?

The NMP training program is through the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) RCPP and is focused on small livestock operations; however, the program is not limited based on animal numbers. The program uses NRCS NMP funding levels based on acres treated. An informational handout is available in the zip file.

Is the CREP program available for producers to be covered under the RCPP?

No, CREP is a different program and is not available through this RCPP. RCPP covers EQIP, ACEP-ALE and ACEP-WRE. If you're working with a farm that is eligible for the CREP program, there is nothing to prevent them for signing up for CREP in addition to RCPP. It would involve a separate application process and project selection process. One of the goals of this program is that we have a planner connected with landowners so that they have one individual to help them through the various programs they are interested in. These planners are going to be aware of the CREP program, among others, and are going to point out opportunities for implementing water quality improvement opportunities such as the CREP program and will help landowners in connecting with those resources.

For additional information, please contact:

RCPP Project Coordinator, VT DEC, Allison.Compagna@vermont.gov; 802-490-6124

Vermont NRCS 2016 Financial Assistance Program - EQIP-RCPP-DEC (project #449) Screening Criteria Worksheet

Applications that are eligible in the participant information screen in ProTracts and have applied to either of the EQIP-RCPP-DEC funding pools must be evaluated using this worksheet.

Instructions:

This screening worksheet must be completed for each eligible application applying for funding consideration in only the EQIP-RCPP-DEC funding pools. Applications are not eligible until they are labeled as such in the application information screen in ProTracts. The goal of this screening tool is to ensure that conservation technical assistance and program benefits are efficiently allocated to address prioritized conservation needs. Completion of this worksheet and documentation does not constitute agreement to provide NRCS FA program benefits nor approval of a FA program contract. This screening worksheet should be filed with the applicant's case file and an electronic version uploaded to the Document Management System (DMS) with the screening priority (High, Medium, or Low) being recorded in ProTracts. This worksheet should be reviewed and updated for each unfunded contract upon change in ranking period. Upon request, a copy of the screening worksheet will be provided to the applicant.

Screening Criteria Worksheet - Complete for each eligible EQIP-RCPP-DEC applicant

Applicant Name:	County:	
Application Number:	Field Office:	
Evaluator Name:	Date:	

Step 1 - Evaluation		Yes?	Action	No?	Action
A	Is this application for practices within the Lake Champlain Basin?		Yes: Keep Going to Question B		No: STOP - the application is Low Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - do not rank
B	Is this application for practices on a farm that has conserved land or has been approved for conservation easement funding?		Yes: keep going and proceed to Question C		No: STOP - the application is Low Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - do not rank
C	Is this application for practices on a farm with less than 200 cows (or equivalent numbers for other species as described in Vermont state MFO regulations)?		Yes: keep going and proceed to Question D		No: STOP - the application is Low Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - do not rank
D	Is this application for a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)?		Yes: STOP - mark as High Priority in Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - proceed to ranking. Conservation Activity Plans must be stand alone contracts		No: keep going and proceed to Question E
E	Does the application fall under one or more categories covered by the 2016 screening policy?		Yes: the application falls under one or more of the categories covered under the 2016 screening policy - keep going and proceed to Question E-1		No: the application is not required to be reviewed under a category covered under the 2016 screening policy - keep going and proceed to Question F
E-1	Will the training be completed, or milestones met by the ranking deadline?		Yes: the applicant will attend the specialized training and/or meet any required project milestones by the ranking deadline? - keep going and proceed to Question F		No: STOP - the application is Low Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - do not rank
F	Does EQIP policy require written management plan(s) from either NRCS or a TSP needed in order to support planned practices in their contract?		Yes: EQIP policy requires a written management plan to support planned practices in the application - Keep going and proceed to Question G		No or N/A: EQIP policy does NOT require a written management plan(s) in order to support planned practices - STOP - the application is High Priority - do not answer any additional screening questions - proceed to ranking
G	Please select the appropriate category of the required EQIP management plan and status at the ranking deadline:		Plan Type is CNMP - the CNMP will be 100% complete by the ranking deadline - keep Going and proceed to Question H		Plan type is Other than CNMP - the plan(s) will be 100% complete by the ranking date - STOP - the application is High Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - proceed to ranking
			Plan type is CNMP - however the NMP portion will not be complete by the ranking date but the producer has evidence of having the NMP completed within 6 months of the application date - STOP - the application is Medium Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions - proceed to ranking		
			Plan type is CNMP - the plan is not in one of the conditions described above - STOP - the application is Low Priority - proceed to Step 2 - do not answer any additional screening questions. Exception: If the applicant has an alleged notification of violation from the State of Vermont, mark as Medium Priority - proceed to Step 2 and ranking		
H	Please select the status of the wastewater/waste management designs as expected by the ranking deadline. This will also be used to help determine the priority of the project.		A preliminary design is expected to be delivered by the ranking deadline - Keep going and proceed to Question I		
			A preliminary design is not expected to be ready until after the contract is signed - STOP - the application is Medium Priority - proceed to Step 2 and ranking		
I	Farmstead size and expansion: Does the applicant propose to expand their herd beyond 10% of existing animal units?		If No expansion will occur the application is High Priority - proceed to Step 2 and ranking		
			If the applicant proposes to expand their herd beyond 10% of existing animal units - STOP - the application is Medium priority - proceed to Step 2 and ranking		

Step 2 - Priority determination in ProTracts

The priority of this application is:	(Write in High, Medium, or Low and record in ProTracts. Load to DMS)
<p>High Priority: Applications must be ranked by the applicable ranking Deadlines and include an estimated cost. Medium Priority: Applications must be ranked by the applicable ranking Deadlines and include an estimated cost. Low Priority: applications do not need to be ranked unless the State Office indicates otherwise. All applications must have this form completed and uploaded to the Document Management System (DMS) regardless of ranking priority. Designated Conservationists are to inform the State Office of the reasons for any application not being High priority by the ranking deadline.</p>	

Soil Conservationist or DEC Planner Signature and Date:	Notes:
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Natural Resources Conservation Service

Application Ranking Summary

Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural and For

Program:	Ranking Date:	Application Number:
Ranking Tool: Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural and For	Applicant:	
Final Ranking Score:	Address:	
Planner:	Telephone:	
Farm Location:		

National Priorities Addressed

Issue Questions	Responses
If the application is for development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering "Yes" to the following question. Answering "Yes" to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the national priority category.	
1. a. Is the program application to support the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)? If answer is "Yes", do not answer any other national level questions. If answer is "No", proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Water Quality Degradation – Will the proposed project improve water quality by: (select all that apply)	
2. a. Implementing the practices in a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
2. b. Implementing the practices in a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
2. c. Reducing impacts from sediment, nutrients, salinity, or pesticides on land adjoining a designated "impaired water body" (TMDL, 303d listed waterbody, or other State designation)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
2. d. Reducing the impacts from sediment, nutrients, salinity, or pesticides in a "non-impaired water body"?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
2. e. Implementing practices that improve water quality through animal mortality and carcass management?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Water Conservation – Will the proposed project conserve water by: (select all that apply)	
3. a. Implementing irrigation practices that reduce aquifer overdraft.	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
3. b. Implementing irrigation practices that reduce on-farm water use?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
3. c. Implementing practices in an area where the applicant participates in a geographically established or watershed-wide project?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
3. d. Implementing practices that reduce on-farm water use as a result of changing to crops with lower water consumptive use, the rotation of crops, or the modification of cultural operations?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Air Quality - Will the proposed project improve air quality by: (select all that apply)	
4. a. Meeting on-farm regulatory requirements relating to air quality or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
4. b. Implementing practices that reduce on-farm emissions of particulate matter (PM2.5, PM10)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
4. c. Implementing practices that reduce on-farm generated greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), and nitrous oxide (N2O)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
4. d. Implementing practices that increase on-farm carbon sequestration?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Soil Health:– Will the proposed project improve soil health by: (select all that apply)	
5. a. Reduce erosion to tolerable limits (Soil "T")?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
5. b. Increasing organic matter and carbon content, and improving soil tilth and structure?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Wildlife Habitat – Will the proposed project improve wildlife habitat by: (select all that apply)	
6. a. Implementing practices benefitting threatened and endangered, at-risk, candidate, or species of concern.	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>

6. b. Implementing practices that retain wildlife and plant habitat on land exiting the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or other set-aside program?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
6. c. Implementing practices benefitting honey bee populations or other pollinators?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
6. d. Implementing land-based practices that improve habitat for aquatic wildlife?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Plant and Animal Communities: Will the proposed project improve plant and animal communities by: (select all that apply)	
7. a. Implementing practices that result in the management control of noxious or invasive plant species on non-cropland?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
7. b. Implementing practice in an Integrated Pest Management Plan (IPM)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Energy Conservation– Will the proposed project reduce energy use by: (select all that apply)	
8. a. Reducing on-farm energy consumption?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
8. b. Implementing practice(s) identified in an approved AgEMP or energy audit, which meet ASABE S612 criteria?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Business Lines – Will the practices to be scheduled in the “EQIP Plan of Operations” result in:	
9. a. Enhancement of existing conservation practice(s) or conservation systems already in place at the time the application is received?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>

State Issues Addressed

Issue Questions	Responses
FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS WILL ANSWER QUESTIONS 1-4 ONLY. ALL OTHER APPLICATIONS WILL ANSWER QUESTIONS 5-16 ONLY Forestry Soil Erosion Location - Answer yes to either 1 or 2	
1. Will this application address water quality concerns due to forest management in the Lake Champlain Challenged Watersheds?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
2. Will this application address water quality concerns due to forest management outside of in the Lake Champlain Challenged Watersheds?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS WILL ANSWER QUESTIONS 1-4 ONLY. ALL OTHER APPLICATIONS WILL ANSWER QUESTIONS 5-16 ONLY Forestry Soil Erosion Level of Improvement - Answer yes to either 3 or 4	
3. Significant Level of Improvement: Will the treatment(s) result in a significant improvement to a soil erosion concern?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
4. Moderate Level of Improvement: Will the treatment(s) result in a moderate improvement to the resource?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 5. Location of Non-Forestry Soil Erosion Applications	
5. Will this application address water quality concerns in a watershed designated as a priority for RCPP funding (Missisquoi Bay, St. Albans Bay or South Lake)?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 6-8. Percent of the fields enrolled in this non-forestry soil erosion application that are high or very high CSA or erosion risk potential	
6. 1-25%	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
7. 26-50%	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
8. 51-100%	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 9. Development of a CNMP, Non-forestry soil erosion application	
9. Does this application include development of a CNMP if a current one does not already exist?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 10. Significant Contributor, Non-forestry soil erosion application	
10. Will the implementation of any of the practices within the application allow the producer, regardless of the size of the operation, to address a significant contribution of pollutants to waters of the US?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 11. Compliance with water quality regulations, Non-forestry soil erosion application	

11. Will the implementation of practices within this application result in the applicant achieving compliance with state and federal water quality regulations?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 12-14. Provide points based on the number of the following practices included in this application (grassed waterways, feed management, conservation tillage, livestock exclusion, phosphorus removal system, or increased buffers). Application can include multiple practices to qualify for points.	
12. 1-2 practices	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
13. 3-5 practices	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
14. 5+ practices	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 15. Benefits beyond current management, Non-forestry soil erosion application	
15. Will the application provide for implementation of agronomic or other cropland management practices that will provide increased soil erosion reduction or soil health benefit, beyond current management?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
ONLY NON FORESTRY SOIL EROSION APPLICATIONS ANSWER QUESTION 16. Historically Underserved, Non-forestry soil erosion application	
16. Is this applicant historically underserved?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>

Local Issues Addressed

Issue Questions	Responses
Forestry Soil Erosion Local Questions	
1. Does this practice reduce or prevent sediment from entering into a waterway?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
2. Will this application address soil erosion through the installation of stream crossing, forest trails and landings and/or grade stabilization structures?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
3. Does this application protect streams from erosion and runoff from forestry equipment travel?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
4. Does the project involve upgrades to or maintenance of forest trails, landings and/or access roads and will these actions positively affect water quality?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
5. Will this practice improve riparian forest buffers and stream stabilization?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
Non-Forestry Soil Erosion Local Questions	
6. Does this application prevent or reduce direct discharge of nutrients to a waterway?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
7. Does this application include practices to control livestock access to surface water?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>
8. Will this application address water quality concerns occurring within 100' of a blue line stream, and/or will it address water quality concerns impacting a critical resource area?	Yes <input type="radio"/> or No <input type="radio"/>

Land Use:

Resource Concerns	Practices
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Ranking Score

Efficiency: Local Issues: State Issues: National Issues: Final Ranking Score:
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This ranking report is for your information. It does not in any way guarantee funding. When funding becomes available, you will be notified if your application is selected for funding. Some changes to the application may be required before a final contract is awarded.

Notes:

NRCS Representative:	Applicant Signature Not Required on this report for Contract Development unless required by State policy:
Signature Date:	Signature Date:



Agency of Natural Resources
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The Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program: Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural & Forestry Conservation Practices in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and New York Outreach Plan



30 November 2015

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Situation statement

Lake Champlain is the sixth largest naturally formed lake in the United States. Its watershed drains 8,234 square miles (5,269,760 acres) in Vermont (VT), New York (NY) and Quebec (QC), with a majority of the watershed in the State of VT (56%). Partly as a function of its large and diverse watershed, Lake Champlain is impaired by phosphorus pollution from a variety of sources, resulting in algal blooms that can harm animals and people, as well as compromise recreational uses, and diminish aesthetic enjoyment. These concerns have been identified and documented in the multi-state and multi-national *Opportunities for Action* plan (LCBP), the Lake Champlain Special Designation Act of 1990, and the 2002 Lake Champlain Total Maximum Daily Load plan (TMDL) as required by the federal Clean Water Act, all of which specifically outline the phosphorus loading in the Lake Champlain Basin, the sources and the upward trends in loading despite prior remediation efforts. An updated 2015 draft TMDL is currently awaiting approval by the Environmental Protection Agency. Upon approval, the State of Vermont will then begin the approval process for its Phase 1 implementation plan. Many aspects of the Phase 1 plan have already been codified into state law through Act 64, the Vermont Clean Water Act, passed by the Vermont legislature in 2015.

Vermont agricultural runoff is estimated to be the most significant cause of phosphorus impairment in the updated TMDL, contributing more than 40% of the phosphorus load entering the Lake overall, and up to 65% in specific watersheds. RCPP funding in Vermont and New York will help farmers and forest landowners address the most critical areas of the watershed for the highest possible cost-effective impacts on water quality. \$16 million of funding from the USDA is available for producers on conserved farms in the Lake Champlain Basin in Vermont, and for all agricultural producers in the South Lake segment of the Lake Champlain Basin in New York.

This plan provides the details of the outreach process to effectively and efficiently implement these funds on the highest water quality improvement needs in the priority areas of the Lake Champlain Basin.

Goals

The primary goal of RCPP is to improve water quality in the Lake Champlain Basin (LCB) by accelerating the implementation of agricultural and forestry conservation practices in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and New York. After consultation with NRCS and partners and with the scientific modeling of the TMDL, prioritization for ACEP/ALE and EQIP was given to producers on conserved farms in the St. Albans Bay, Missisquoi Bay and South Lake sub-watersheds of Vermont, and to agricultural producers in the South Lake sub-watershed of New York. Ranking questions have been developed and implemented to rank producers for funding.

Forestry and wetland outreach is also targeted to the priority subwatersheds of Vermont. Additional outreach will be conducted to ensure access to the RCPP project by beginning farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, limited resource farmers or ranchers, Indian Tribes, and veteran farmers and ranchers within the project area.

Under this primary goal, the following secondary goals will be addressed through this outreach plan:

1. Awareness of RCPP among all conserved farms and forest landowners in LC basin of VT
2. Awareness of RCPP among all agricultural producers in South Lake region in NY
3. Increased knowledge and understanding of NRCS programs and available resources throughout LCB by non-RCPP farmers, forest landowners, and partners
4. Increased coordination among partners working towards agricultural water quality goals
5. Increased farm-specific understanding and long-term commitment to water quality issues
6. Increased understanding in the public of water quality work and implementation

Target audience

The primary target audiences for RCPP funds are agricultural and forestry landowners outlined as follows.

Primary (2015-16 focus)

ACEP/ALE

- Conserved lands in priority subwatersheds currently in the ACEP application process (for development of required ALE plans)
- Potential easements with surface water proximity or high impact potential in priority subwatersheds in VT (for new ACEP/ALE easements)

ACEP/WRE

- Previously identified priority wetland projects as determined by prior assessments and field verification.

EQIP

- Farms in priority areas with significant water quality improvement potential as ranked by the RCPP ranking process
- Forestland owners in LCB with water quality improvement potential as identified by ANR forester outreach.

New York

- Ag producers in SL/NY with most severe water quality concerns as determined by prioritization process (TBD – working with New York partners)

Secondary (as possible after 2016)

ACEP/ALE

- Focus on implementation of ALE plans
- Develop ALE plans for prior conserved farms

EQIP

- Water quality improvement needs on prior conserved farms without ALE plans

Secondary audiences for outreach include agricultural landowners on non-conserved farms who will benefit from the increased education about water quality improvement issues and opportunities, partners who will increase their knowledge of these issues and can share with their clients, and the general public. Methods and tools for these audiences are indicated below.

Method, tools and timeline – Primary audiences

In addressing the primary goal of improving water quality in the LCB, the following methods will be used to conduct outreach to agricultural and forestry landowners for RPP implementation.

General

April, 2015	Water quality education meetings with partners (pre-contract)
May, 2015	Signing of contract with NRCS
July, 2015	Development of general RCPP handout Development of RCPP Q&A handout Development of forestry factsheet (copy on website, shared with NRCS and Forest, Parks and Rec county foresters)
September, 2015	Development of RCPP advisory committee Presentation to 2015 annual Consulting Foresters meeting Presentation to Southern NRCS staff (by foresters)
October 2015	Sharing of handouts with NRCS Forestry information shared with <i>Vermont Family Forests</i> , a non-profit forest conservation organization in Addison County.
December, 2015	Press release of first completed forestry projects
January, 2016	Webinar for NRCS, partners Development of RCPP webpage (under VT DEC Clean Water Initiative Program website – date estimated based on DEC IT availability)
April, 2016	Presentation to NEWIPCC annual conference (abstract submitted) – CT

General ongoing outreach efforts

- Partner outreach – handouts, mailings, in-person meetings (further details below)
- Ongoing technical outreach to landowners by conservation planners and foresters
- Press releases of completed projects – minimum of 6 per year
- Participation in Long Island Sound RCPP advisory board
- Coordination with VACD state RCPP for nutrient management
- Annual partner trainings (late winter/early spring)

Program specific

EQIP

Forestry outreach

- Technical outreach to landowners through current use and other opportunities for landowner access
- Presentation to meeting of county foresters (upcoming)
- Semi-annual outreach with flyer to consulting foresters
- Meeting with Vermont Woodlands Association
- Quarterly meetings with forestry staff for updates and discussion

Agricultural outreach

We do not expect needing to do extensive outreach for EQIP. The conservation planners will be working with farms to develop ALE plans, and will continue as case managers with these farms, and with additional farms (see ALE outreach) throughout the RCPP program. We anticipate more than adequate program interest and signup.

New York outreach –

- Included in Essex and Washington county newsletters
- Email listserves

- Press releases
- District websites

Note: annual reports will include documentation and copies.

ACEP-WRE

October, 2015 –Development of a WRE/wetlands advisory group

November, 2015 – Development of RFP for wetlands consultant

February, 2016 – Hiring of wetlands consultant (full-time with state match funds)

Spring, 2016 - Outreach to priority landowners through direct contact. Consultant will directly approach landowners on areas prioritized by a wetlands subcommittee with the assistance of the Wetland consultant will be responsible for most direct contact and will coordinate closely with NRCS.

ACEP-ALE

October, 2015 – Development of an ALE advisory group

November, 2015 – 2016 - One-on-one outreach to farmers needing ALE plans through direct contact by contracted conservation partners. Partners (VT Land Trust and VT Housing and Conservation Board) will provide information about farms needing plans.

2017 – Outreach to prior conserved farms for ALE plan implementation

- Direct mail/visits – targeted to priory farms based on location and recommendation from the ALE advisory group (prior knowledge, compliance needs)
- Press release
- Handout for NRCS office and partners

Maps of prior conserved farms have been provided to us by NRCS staff, and outreach to these farms will be done directly by contracted conservation planners.

Method, tools and timeline – Secondary audiences

While implementation of conservation plans and practices is the primary goal, this RCPP project provides unique and extensive opportunities for achieving other priorities that will benefit long-term water quality improvement beyond this project period, such as improved partnerships and increased knowledge among partners. The above methods will inform agricultural and forest landowners, however, a high priority for the State is the ability to increase understanding and cooperation among water quality partners. Recent focus on water quality issues has highlighted the need for the highest level of coordination and information sharing, and the match for RCPP provides that opportunity.

The following are outreach and education methods beyond landowner contact:

1. RCPP advisory board – this group will meet quarterly and in addition to prioritizing technical issues and funding priorities, will consider needs related to partner capacity building.
2. Subcommittees of RCPP (ALE and WRE) have already demonstrated the value of increased information sharing. These groups will meet quarterly (at a minimum) throughout the project. The ALE subcommittee is meeting monthly at this time.

3. Clean Water Initiative Program website updates. ANR's new *Clean Water Initiative Program* has created a new website that is for all four agencies involved in the TMDL efforts statewide (Agency of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Transportation and Commerce and Community Development). The site currently hosts general TMDL information as well as agency/issue-specific factsheets, presentations and general information (cleanwater.vermont.gov). Pages specific to RCPP will be added within the next 2 months.
4. Non-traditional partners. This RCPP project included many less common partners in agricultural water quality efforts. Now that the early efforts of the RCPP implementation have been achieved, the focus in the next 6 months will be on outreach to these groups. The primary goals will be education about water quality issues and opportunities for collaboration to provide assistance to landowners.
Dairy Cooperatives – meeting with Green Mountain Dairy Producers (Dec 2015) and representatives from Agri-Mark, St. Albans Co-op, DFA and Ben and Jerry's in January/February 2016.
Lenders – meeting with Yankee Farm Credit and VEDA at board meetings in February/March.
VT River Conservancy – VRC has reached out to ANR to coordinate their involvement in easements and buffer activities. Meetings will begin in January.
The Nature Conservancy – TNC, Keurig and ANR are jointly working on efforts to increase easement work and modeling to help prioritize project areas. Meetings were held in October, 2015 and will resume in mid-winter.
Eco-Americorps (ServeVT) – 6 positions have been placed in areas related to agricultural water quality including ANR (communications helping with website and press releases), VACD (communications) and VHCB.
5. Annual Trainings – Annual trainings on water quality issues and resources will be held in the late winter/early spring with all partner in the RCPP project. Continuous outreach to other partners will be done to include them in this training.
In addition, issue and organizational specific trainings will be done as opportunities arise. Examples include annual meetings (VACD, TNC, VRC, VHCB) and other organizational meetings (UVM Extension, Champlain Valley Farmers Cooperative, Farmers Watershed Alliance).

Note: The RCPP plan of work requires the submission of an outreach plan at this time. However, the project coordinators see this as a dynamic document and intend to update this plan in semi-annual narrative reports, and with an updated outreach plan by Jan 1, 2018 or before as needed.



The State of Vermont's Lake Champlain RCPP Program

The Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program is a \$16 million grant that will help landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont and New York invest in the best conservation practices to help improve water quality.

The Lake Champlain RCPP will provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural and forest landowners over the next five years, to help with the development and implementation of site-specific farm and forest projects that will directly improve water quality in streams and rivers that flow towards Lake Champlain.

Financial Assistance

RCPP funds are available through USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs. There is the opportunity to receive up to 90% cost-share for water quality improvement projects with a combination of funding from NRCS and Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

Opportunities for Conserved Lands

Funding is available through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for agricultural and forestry water quality improvements. All agricultural funding is for the development and implementation of conservation plans and improvements on *conserved* lands. Only a portion of the farm has to be conserved for the *entire farm* to be eligible to participate. As specified above, up to 90% cost-share is available for agricultural practices.

Opportunities for Those Interested in Conserving Agricultural Lands

Vermont's farmland conservation program partners with Vermont Land Trust to offer conservation easements through the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Farms that participate agree to permanently conserve agricultural land, and as of 2014,

are required to have and implement a conservation plan that addresses natural resource concerns on the farm.

Vermont's wetland restoration and conservation program offers Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) through NRCS' ACEP which compensates landowners for retiring land from agriculture in perpetuity, and restoring wetland functions and values. As match to this grant, the State of Vermont has developed a *Wetlands Incentive Payment Calculator* that will determine an incentive payment to accelerate landowner participation in high priority wetland, riparian and floodplain restoration projects. The State is also providing *cash payments* to pilot test this innovative approach.

Technical Assistance

In addition to direct payments to farmers for the programs listed above, RCPP also provides technical assistance to help landowners develop and implement these valuable conservation practices.

Participant Eligibility

- Agricultural EQIP funding is available for conserved farms in the Lake Champlain Basin or farms that are in the process of selling development rights.
- Forestry EQIP funding is available to all landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin.
- Agricultural & wetlands easement funding is available to all landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin.
- Small farms are a high priority.

Ranking

- Higher ranking points are given to producers or landowners that fall within the St. Albans Bay, Missisquoi Bay & South Lake watersheds.
- Higher ranking is given to applications based on the inclusion and number of agronomic practices, those that improve water quality, air quality, water conservation, soil health, wildlife habitat, plant and animal communities and energy conservation.

More Information

Landowners who are interested in the Lake Champlain RCPP program are encouraged to apply at their local USDA service center. Vermont NRCS County office locations can be found online at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/contact/>

For additional information, please contact:

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NRCS website: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/vt/home/>

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Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Improves Water Quality in the Otter Creek Watershed of the Lake Champlain Basin

Through the State of Vermont's Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant, forest landowners in the Otter Creek Watershed of the Lake Champlain Basin installed forestry practices that created major water quality benefits for the Otter Creek, and ultimately, Lake Champlain.

The landowners collaborated with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and technical assistance staff from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (FPR) to implement these practices. Owners of Beebee Farm, LLC utilized technical and financial assistance through the Lake Champlain RCPP to improve impaired forest trails and stream crossings on their property in Dorset, Vermont.

Prior to the project, the forest trails included moderate to steeply sloped forest roads with unstable and eroding sections. In addition to the forest roads, two stream crossings were included in the project due to their eroding, unstable and muddied state.

Technical Assistance Forester staff, A.J. Follensbee (FPR & NRCS), worked with the landowners to identify resource concerns, develop the project plans, flag the site and work with the contractor to ensure the job was completed to NRCS and Vermont Acceptable Management Practices (AMPs)* standards.

Project improvements included the grading, shaping, seeding and mulching of the forest roads, as well as the installation of water bars.** The two stream crossing channels were redefined, reinforced with stone, seeded and mulched with local hay. In total, 2,639 feet of forest roads and two stream crossings were improved.

Future management for this section of forest land includes maintenance and upkeep of the water bars, improved stream crossings and erosion prevention measures. Additionally, the steepest sections of the road network will have reduced or discontinued access.



The Lake Champlain RCPP will provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural and forest landowners over the next five years, to help with the development and implementation of site-specific farm and forest projects that will directly improve water quality in streams and rivers of the Lake Champlain Basin. RCPP funds will also help to conserve important and environmentally critical agricultural lands, and restore and protect wetlands that are crucial to absorbing runoff and slowing floodwaters.

For further information please contact:

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*The Acceptable Management Practices (AMPs) are a set of practices for loggers and landowners to follow when conducting logging operations. The AMPs are intended to prevent discharges of sediment, petroleum products and woody debris (logging slash) from entering streams and other bodies of water, to control soil erosion and to maintain natural water temperature. Copies of the AMPs may be found at: http://fpr.vermont.gov/forest/vermonts_forests/amps.

**A water bar is a forestry best management practice (BMP). This constructed road diversion controls soil erosion and protects water quality by diverting surface runoff from forest roads and trails into a vegetated filter area.

3 February 2016

Media Outlets Reached with VT DEC RCPP Press Release

Daily

Addison County Independent - news@addisonindependent.com
AP-Associated Press - apvermont@ap.org
Bob Audette, Bratt Reformer - raudette@reformer.com
Brattleboro Reformer - news@reformer.com
Brian Marovich - bmarovich@aol.com
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Williston Observer editor@willistonobserver.com
World editor@vt-world.com

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Jill Arace, VACD Executive Director, 802-496-5162, jill.arace@vacd.org

Conservation Districts Receive Two Grants to Help Farmers Improve Water Quality

WAITSFIELD, May 6, 2016 –The Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) recently received two grants totaling \$446,680 from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation to help farmers improve water quality in Lake Champlain.

The first grant, for \$150,000, was awarded through the Ecosystem Restoration Program, recently renamed the Vermont Clean Water Initiative. This grant will assist farmers in Rutland and Addison counties, particularly in the Poultney River, Mettowee River, and McKenzie Brook watersheds, as well as Lake Champlain direct.

The second grant, totaling \$296,680, is part of the \$16 million Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCCP) funded by the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS is the largest funder of agricultural water quality initiatives in the country, through what is known as the Farm Bill. The RCCP program will support water quality initiatives on conserved farms, forest land, and wetlands throughout the Lake Champlain Basin.

“By coordinating the efforts of local, state and federal organizations, we can strengthen the benefits of our joint efforts,” said VACD Executive Director Jill Arace. “There is a strong spirit of collaboration among implementing partners and the agricultural community.”

Both grants will help farmers reduce agricultural runoff that contributes to phosphorus loading into Lake Champlain, leading to algae blooms and other environmental concerns. The grants will pay for conservation planners who will help farmers better understand their landscape – including soil quality, erosion potential, and nutrients for their crops – and identify specific water quality concerns on the farm and possible solutions. The planners will then assist farmers in accessing state and federal financial assistance to help defray for the costs of implementing conservation projects, also known as best management practices.

The planners will work out of offices in Middlebury, St. Albans and Newport. “Our technical staff are based at the local level and are able to form long-term working relationships with agricultural producers,” said Arace. “Together they can address water quality concerns while also helping improve the farmer’s bottom line.”

The Vermont Association of Conservation Districts is the membership association of Vermont’s fourteen Natural Resources Conservation Districts. For over 75 years Vermont’s Conservation Districts have been helping landowners protect soil and water quality through a wide range of programs in agriculture, watershed protection, forestry, stormwater and education. Conservation Districts were originally created after the Dust Bowl in the late 1930’s to help farmers improve soil and water quality. There are nearly 3,000 Conservation Districts nation-wide.

Media Outlets for VACD DEC Press Release 5/6/2016

St. Albans Messenger

Newport Daily Express

Newport Dispatch

Burlington Free Press

Seven Days

Times Argus

VT Digger

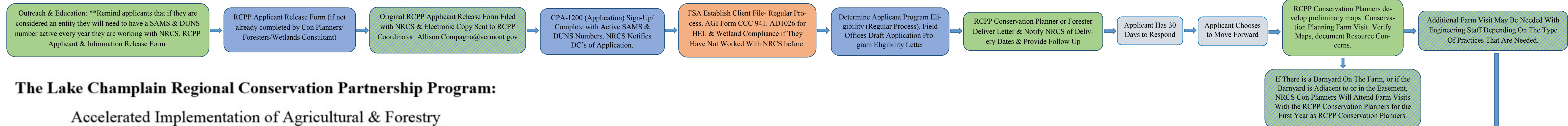
Valley Reporter

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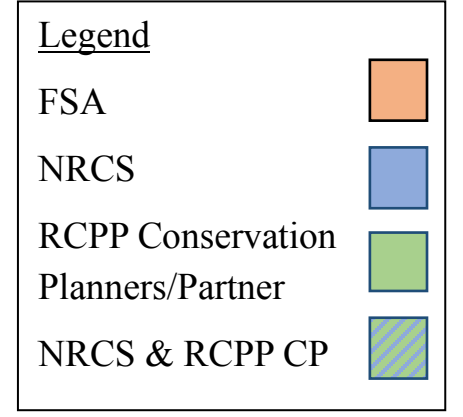
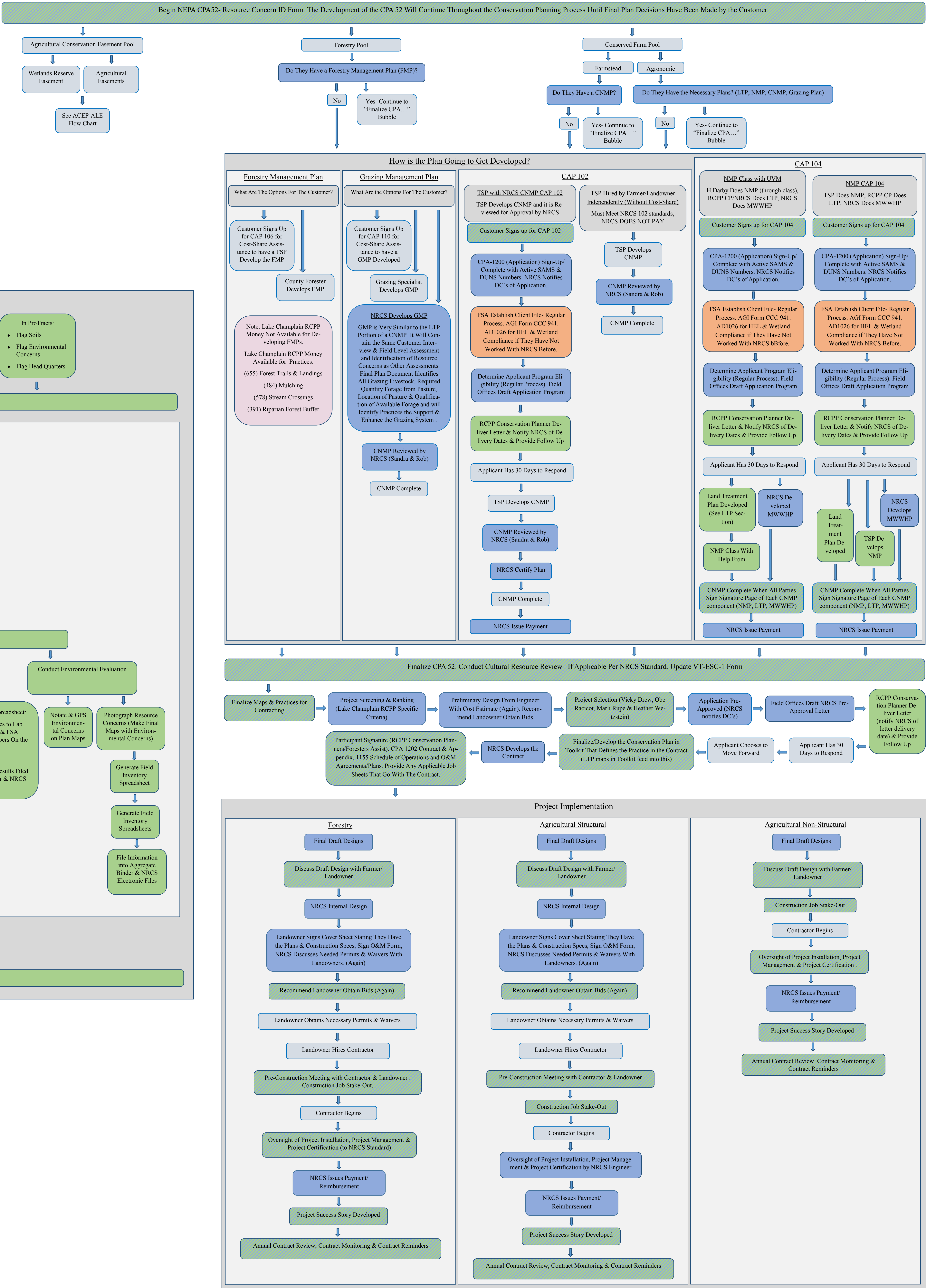
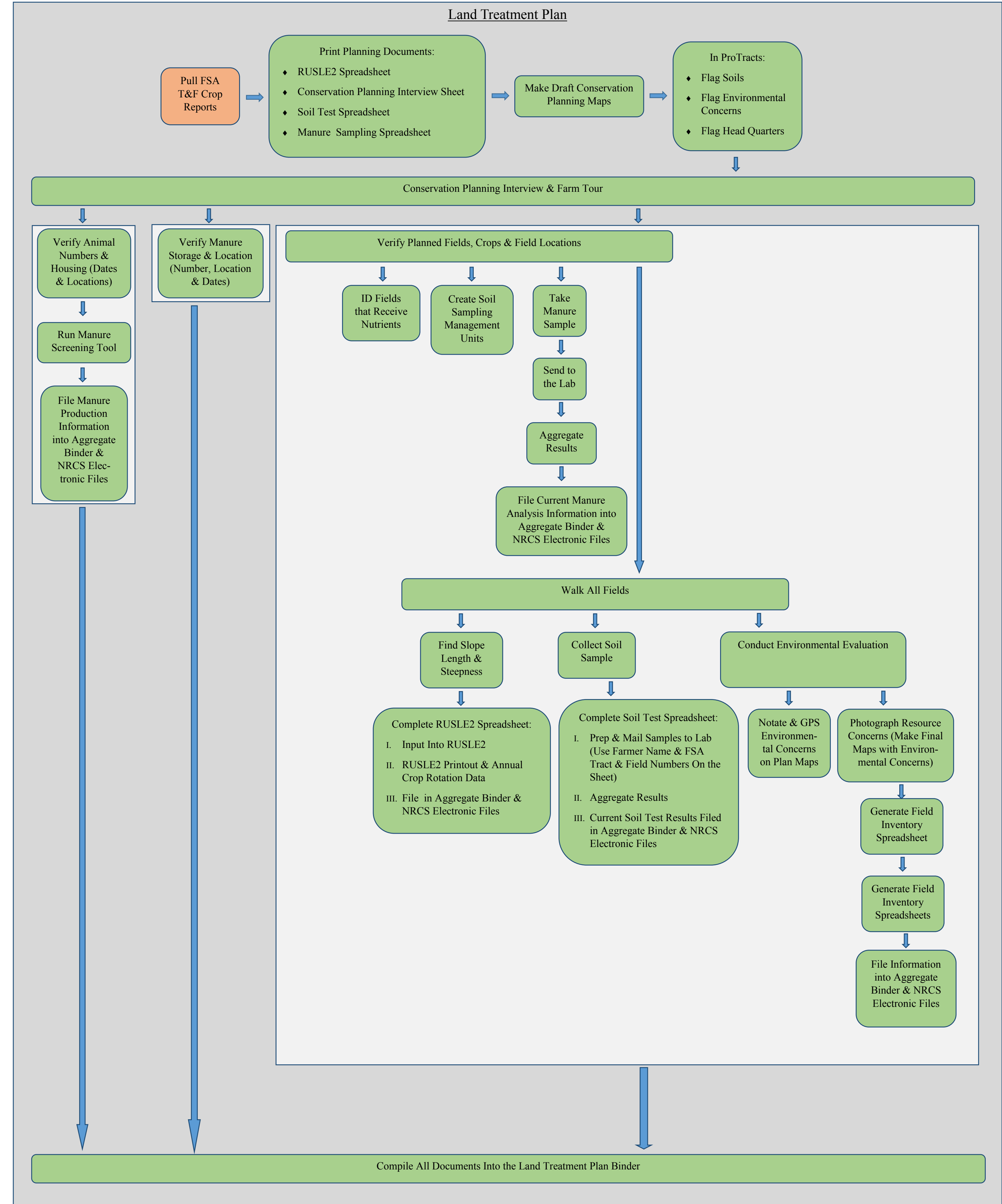
Lakes Region Free Press

Lake Champlain RCPP Workflow



The Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program:

Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural & Forestry Conservation Practices in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and New York



Agricultural Land Easement Lean Future State

