



All this Talk about Water Quality: A New Plan to Clean up Lake Champlain

By Caitrin Maloney, Executive Director

Lake Champlain: Vermont's "Great" Lake

It's not surprising that Lake Champlain is held in high esteem by many

Vermonters. The lake offers a wide suite of recreational, economic, and ecological values. With a watershed that spans nearly half of the state, many Vermont communities are connected to the lake via rivers and streams. Stowe is located in the Winooski Basin, one of the major tributaries.

Water Quality Problems Not New to the Lake

Lake Champlain has faced various contamination issues for decades. PCBs were found in Cumberland Bay in the 1980's, requiring an extensive clean-up effort. Elevated mercury levels in fish resulted in fish consumption advisories starting in the 1990's. In fact, our land use patterns have been impacting the lake for centuries: at the peak of agricultural land clearing in the mid-19th cen-

tury, tons of sediment washed from the hillsides at a rate estimated to be 100 times faster than during pre-European settlement times. These "legacy" effects are still playing out in the ecosystem of Lake Champlain.

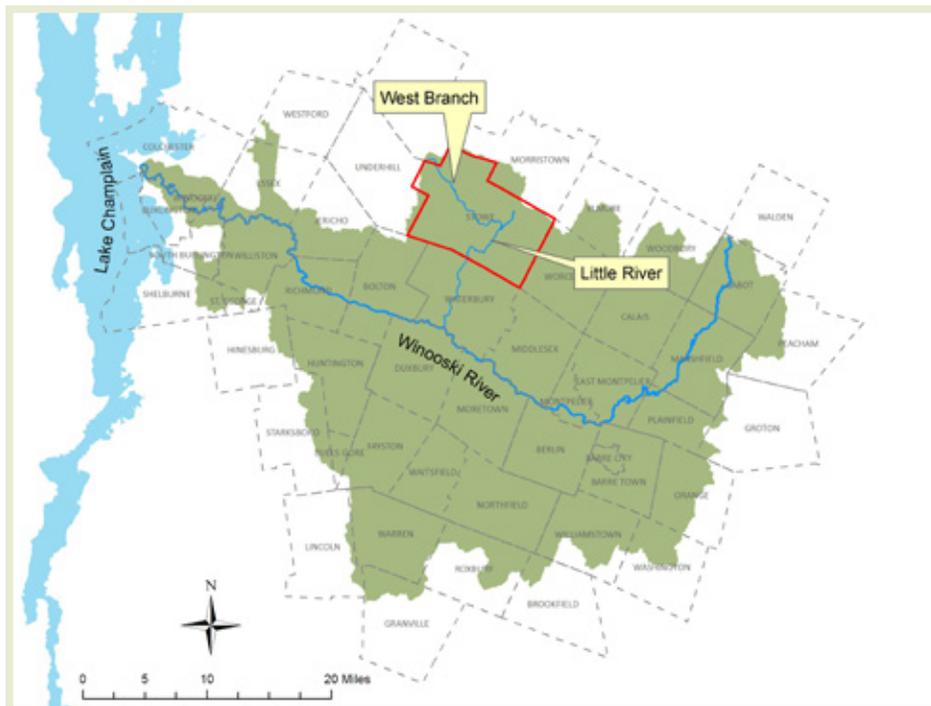
Starting in the late 1990's, unsightly blue-green algae blooms, fed by high phosphorus levels, began periodically turning areas of the lake into a disgusting pea soup. Concerns were heightened when it was discovered that the algae were not only gross to look at and recreate in, but they also could make people and animals sick. Compounds produced by the algae can cause gastro-intestinal illness and itching and irritation of skin, eyes, nose, or throat. The deaths of two dogs during the summers of 1999 and 2000 were attributed to blue-green algae poisoning from Lake Champlain water.

The Problem with Phosphorus

Cleaning up phosphorus in Lake Champlain is not a simple task, as countless sources are spread across the entire basin. Sources include fertilizers, manure, stormwater and soil eroding from stream banks, farm fields, and roadside ditches. A 2013 study estimates that the lion's share of phosphorus entering the lake is attributed to agriculture, dirt roads, urban/suburban stormwater, and stream bank erosion. These sources, known as "non-point sources" are not generated in one specific location, but are widespread across the landscape. Non-point sources are much more difficult to regulate (and address) than point sources such as wastewater treatment plants.

A New Plan to Clean up the Lake

Efforts to clean up Lake Champlain date back several decades. In 1988, leaders from NY, VT, and Quebec signed an agreement to cooperate in reducing lake pollution, an agreement that was renewed earlier this year. In 2003, VT Governor Jim Douglas unveiled the Clean and Clear Action Plan; implementation cost over a billion (federal and state funding). In 2008, a performance audit concluded the



While Stowe is an hour from Lake Champlain by car, the town is connected to Lake Champlain via tributaries to the Winooski River (the West Branch and the Little River). Although it's hard to imagine, everyday decisions we make here in Stowe – such as whether to use fertilizers on our lawn, or whether to scoop Fido's poop – can affect the water quality of Lake Champlain.

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Stowe Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation of scenic, recreational, and productive farm and forest lands for the benefit of the greater Stowe community.

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STOWE LAND TRUST

From the Board Chair



Greetings,

This spring Stowe Land Trust is hitting the ground running with a freshly minted Strategic Plan to guide us through the next three years. After over twenty-five years of work in land protection, and protecting 30 properties on 3,500 acres, the organization has come to a transition point. Land protection, a main focus of the organization, is now sharing the stage with Stewardship. Stewardship is our obligation in perpetuity to take care of the land we protected – monitoring the properties, maintaining trail networks, managing invasive species, and working with landowners of conserved lands to enhance wildlife habitat. The Strategic Plan sets a vision for land protection and stewardship in Stowe, and lays out a roadmap for accomplishing this vision, in partnership with the community. The plan is available on our website: <http://www.stowelandtrust.org/about-us/strategicplan/>

As a supporter of conservation, you know that there is a long list of benefits – community, environmental, aesthetic, and otherwise – when land is protected. On this list is “protecting water quality”, an emerging issue of statewide importance. Spurred by the mandate for a new plan to clean-up Lake Champlain, water quality has been a main focus of the 2015 legislative session. Our cover story outlines the proposed strategies to improve water quality, the implications for Stowe, and the role conservation can play.

As always, our spring issue brings you our annual report – highlighting what you helped make possible over the last year. In 2014, we officially opened the Mill Trail Cabin to public use, offering open houses as part of our Summer Naturalist program. We increased the staff time and resources dedicated to the ongoing stewardship of our conserved lands to ensure that these lands continue to be outstanding resources and stellar examples of conservation. We are grateful for the continued dedication and support of our members and volunteers, and for the ongoing support of our Corporate Partners – Topnotch Resort and Trapp Family Lodge. This critical backing fuels our work to protect and care for the best places Stowe has to offer. Thank you!

Sincerely,

David Norden
Chair, Board of Directors

Cool SLT Stuff

Stock up on old friends like our classic baseball hats or our Vita ChicoBags made from recycled plastic bottles. Time for something new? Try our new eco trucker hat made with recycled polyester and organic cotton available in red, orange poppy, emerald green, navy, and black. Stop by our office at 699 South Main St in Stowe or give us a call at (802) 253-7221 to order.

WWW.STOWELANDTRUST.ORG



Water Quality - continued

program had done little to reduce phosphorus in the lake, though it did point out the lag time between “action” and “outcomes”.

In 2013, in response to a lawsuit filed by the Conservation Law Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency deemed Vermont’s existing plan for managing phosphorus pollution into the lake inadequate, mandating an update to the plan. Recognizing the majority of pollution in the lake comes from non-point sources, state officials are focusing the new plan on agricultural and stormwater runoff.

In April, the Vermont House of Representatives gave preliminary approval to a bill, H.35 that includes clean-up specific strategies. A main area of focus is agriculture and the “Accepted Agricultural Practices” (AAPs). AAP regulations, originally adopted in 1995, address animal waste management, erosion and sediment control, vegetative buffer zones along surface waters, fertilizer management and pesticide management. The regulations were last updated in 2006.

“Agriculture, as a whole, preserves open land, provides us healthy local foods and is an essential part of Vermont’s identity. At the same time, Vermont’s waters are critical to our economy and our quality of life. We do not have to trade one for the other.”

-- Chuck Ross, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets

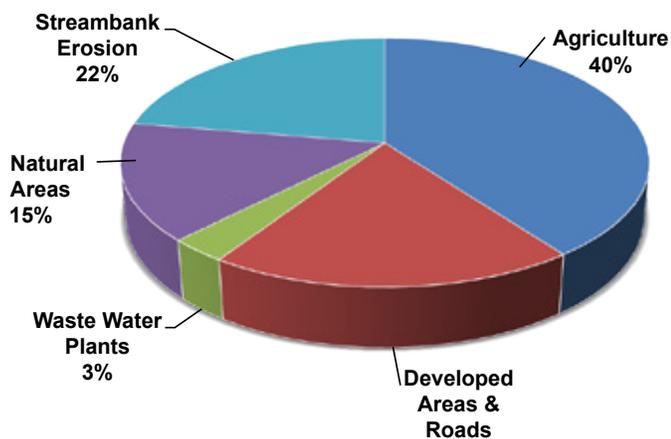
Currently, all farmers are required to comply with the AAPs. However, only medium and large farms operating under permits are monitored for compliance (enforcement). H.35 proposes expanding the requirements so that small farms will also be monitored for compliance. Currently, out of the roughly 7,000 farms operating in Vermont, only 166 qualify as medium or large farm operations and

are monitored for compliance.

H.35 also proposes updating the AAPs to include requirements such as fencing livestock out of streams, increasing the width of buffers along ditches and streams, and using conservation practices such as cover cropping on farm fields to reduce soil erosion. The tax-fairness program, Current Use, will be tied to water quality compliance. Of course H.35 comes with a hefty price tag, as additional staff will be needed to assist with the implementation of new practices, and monitor compliance. Funding options, including new taxes on fertilizers and commercial land, are being debated.

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Sources of phosphorus in the VT portion of the Lake Champlain basin from EPA - Tetra Tech, 2013



Streambank Erosion

Stabilize stream channels through working towards attaining natural balance in river systems:

- Re-establish floodplain access
- Protect river corridor in key areas with easements

Strategies to reduce phosphorus in the lake being considered by state officials

Agriculture

- Make Accepted Agricultural Practices more stringent ; enforce more efficiently and at more farms
- Tie Current Use program to water quality
- Build state capacity assist with education and enforcement

Developed Areas & Roads

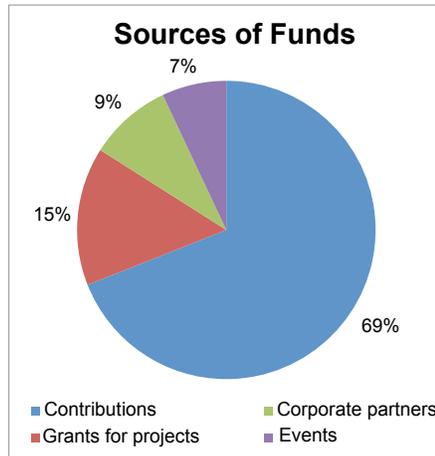
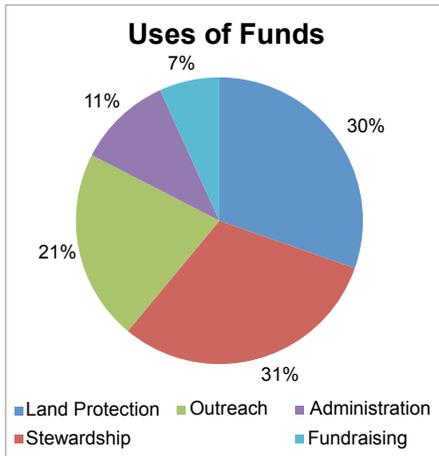
- Add new programs to regulate stormwater:
 - On state highways and local roads
 - In some communities not currently being regulated
- Additional phosphorus reductions in communities where stormwater is already regulated.

Natural Areas*

- By conserving key forested watersheds, wetlands, river corridors and buffers, water quality can be protected into the future

**Runoff from forests and wetlands contains phosphorus, but at levels much lower than from developed or agricultural land*

Annual Report FY'14



Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

For the Year ended September 30, 2014

Assets

Cash & Other Assets	\$68,307
Investments	\$712,674
Building Improvements (Mill Trail Cabin)	\$76,833
Land	\$2,125,040
Total	\$2,982,854

Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$6,178
Accrued expenses	\$4,798
Total	\$10,976

Net Assets

Beginning Net Assets	
Unrestricted & Board	
Designated	\$350,026
Temporarily Restricted	\$312,704
Permanently Restricted	\$2,165,540
Net Income	\$143,608
Ending Net Assets	\$2,971,878

Total Liabilities and Net Assets

\$2,982,854

To Our Supporters:

Stowe Land Trust (SLT) has worked to conserve the most special places in Stowe since 1987—protecting spectacular viewsheds, extensive trail networks, and the working farms and forests that are Vermont’s heritage. This important work has been sustained primarily by the generous support of individual donors. Thank you for your support!

SLT’s financial records are reviewed annually by Marckres, Norder & Company, Inc., Certified Public Accountants. A complete copy of the annual financial review may be obtained by written request to Stowe Land Trust, PO Box 284, Stowe, VT 05672.

Water Quality - continued

A Role for Land Trusts

Many different organizations and individuals will be involved in implementing the plan to clean up Lake Champlain: the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, the Department of Environmental Conservation, local conservation districts, watershed groups, farmers, business owners, homeowners, towns, and road crews.

Land trusts continue to play a crucial role in protecting water quality by completing projects that protect large blocks of intact forests, including riparian buffer provisions in farm easements, and protecting key river corridor areas with easements. Recently, additional emphasis has been placed on water quality by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), the entity that oversees the allocation of state-dedicated funds for land conservation projects. These funds, allocated each year from property tax transfer revenues, help compensate landowners who decide to protect their land from development in perpetuity through a legal agreement called a conservation easement. A main focus of conservation funding has been agriculture. Since VHCB’s inception, with their local partners they have conserved 644 farms on over 154,000 acres of land throughout Vermont.

In 2014, VHCB updated their policies to place an increased importance on protecting water quality. Farms that do a great job protecting water quality will receive special consideration for funding. And at a minimum, all farms receiving conservation funding are now required to meet the Accepted Agricultural Practices. There is also technical assistance to farmers interested in improving their practices through VHCB’s Farm and Forest Viability Program. These are critical steps taken by VHCB, and will ensure that Vermonters

are getting more for their conservation investments – by making these changes we are not only investing in keeping farmland open and working, but also in ensuring that the farming practices on conserved land are helping us meet our water quality goals.



Photo Credit: Kristen Sharpless

Tom Jackman, Director of Planning for the Town of Stowe, measures and marks the location of the riparian buffer at the town-owned Mayo Farm. On May 9th, the Stowe Conservation Commission is partnering with the Intervale Conservation Nursery, Stowe Land Trust, and Keurig Green Mountain to plant trees in the buffer along a tributary of the West Branch that runs through the farm (see back cover for details about the event). Paul Percy leases 136 acres (of the total 235 acres) to grow corn and hay, and pasture cows. The Mayo Farm was purchased by SLT in 1989 and transferred to the Town of Stowe; SLT now holds a 25-year easement on the farm.

Happy Birthday Cady Hill Forest!

Cady Hill Forest (CHF) turns three-years-old on May 30. On this day in 2012 – thanks to lots of hard work and a huge outpouring of community support – 280 acres of forest were permanently protected, conveyed to the Town of Stowe, and merged with the 60-acre Town-owned Macutchan Forest. Today, the 320-acre CHF is owned and managed by the Town of Stowe via the Conservation Commission. The Stowe Mountain Bike Club (SMBC) serves as the official trail manager for the property. Stowe Land Trust, who holds the conservation easement, monitors the property and supports partners in caring for its conservation values over the long-term.



maintenance efforts to ensure that the trails and environment hold up well to intensive use over the long-term.

Making Multi-Use Work: Although CHF continues to be exceptionally popular with mountain bikers, at least 200 of the 1000 people counted during those two weeks in June last year were traveling on foot, indicating that the trails are also popular with hikers and runners. Committed to providing safe, enjoyable experiences for pedestrians as well as bikers of all abilities, the Town has created a map that identifies trails that are especially well-suited for walking and others that are recommended for bikes only, and signs on the ground help guide visitors to pick the best routes.

CHF's first three years have included lots of activity and some changes. **As we celebrate the anniversary of conserving CHF, this is a good time to share some updates on what has been accomplished during the Forest's first three years, where things stand now, and what's on the horizon:**

Easier Access: Even if you only drive by the access on Mountain Road, you will have seen the 20-car parking area, property sign, and informational kiosk that were added in 2012. A new access trail – Cady Hill Climb – gets your heart pumping as you ascend out of the parking area into the forest.

New Trails: The trail network at CHF has always been extensive. Since 2012, it has been rerouted and improved in several places, and expanded by two miles with the addition of "Florence" and "Snake," two curvy trails designed for intermediate-to-advanced bike riders. Two small connector trails and improvements to existing trails are planned for 2015-16. After that work is complete, the Town and SMBC's focus will be on maintaining and caring for the entire network to ensure it holds up to intensive use over the long-term.

Increased Popularity: In addition to keeping trails open for use by locals, a primary goal of protecting Cady Hill was to attract visitors – particularly mountain bikers – who support Stowe's recreation-based economy. With better access and increased promotion, the word is out that Cady Hill is a great place to visit, and use has increased. A counter placed at the trailhead recorded more than 1000 people heading out on the trails during two weeks in June of 2014. The Town and SMBC are working proactively to educate users about proper trail etiquette (e.g. bikers yield to pedestrians) and are ramping up trail

Caring for CHF over the long term is already proving to be a rewarding challenge, and will likely continue to be so as uses, conditions, and the Stowe community evolves. What will always remain true – thanks to our community's conservation actions three years ago - is that the land will remain open for the benefit of the public. As a publicly-owned town forest, we all have the opportunity to have a say in what happens to CHF. If you have a question, comment, or concern, share it. We want to hear from you.

- **Tom Jackman**, Town Planner, Stowe Conservation Commission tjackman@townofstovevermont.org
- **Leslie Gauff**, Executive Director, Stowe Mountain Bike Club leslie@lesliegauff.com
- **Kristen Sharpless** Conservation Program Manager, Stowe Land Trust, kristen@stowelandtrust.org



CHF's 11-mile trail network is increasingly popular with bikers & hikers alike.

Pinnacle Society

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Preservationist

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Italics denotes Life Members

Pinnacle Society donations received after April 10th will be recognized in the fall/winter issue of Mountain Views. Please let us know if we have listed your name incorrectly.

Grow Your Legacy

“Every day I am reminded that I live in a special and beautiful place. I feel a responsibility to help preserve and protect this beauty, which is why I support the Stowe Land Trust now and in the future with a bequest to help them carry on the valuable work they do.”
- Kitty Coppock



We invite you to make land conservation a part of your personal legacy by including a gift to Stowe Land Trust in your estate plans. There are many ways to give to Stowe Land Trust that can deliver benefits to local conservation and tax benefits to you.

Stowe's majestic scenic vistas, abundant recreation trails, and rich agricultural heritage create a sense of place for the community and support a vibrant local economy. Your legacy can be part of Stowe's future.

If you've already included Stowe Land Trust in your estate plans, thank you very much—and please let Executive Director Caitrin Maloney know. Sharing your plans helps us to better assess our financial picture and make informed decisions.

Stowe Land Trust will work with you and your professional advisors to set up the best type of fund so you can make a lasting gift that supports land conservation for generations to come. Just be in touch with Executive Director Caitrin Maloney, and she'll help you explore the available options: caitrin@stowelandtrust.org (802)253-7221.

Welcome Back, Krista!

After spending the school year teaching science at Crossett Brook Middle School, SLT's Summer Naturalist, **Krista Battles** will be back at the Mill Trail starting at the end of June. Like last summer, Krista will be hosting guided public walks and open houses at the Mill Trail cabin on Saturdays, coordinating volunteers to help with stewardship projects, and engaging people of all ages in learning about and exploring the wonders of Stowe's natural and cultural history. Be sure to check out our Summer Naturalist page at <http://www.stowelandtrust.org/summernaturalist/> for information on the **Summer Naturalist Program** and join Krista on the trail!



High School Class Studies Wiessner Woods

Don McDowell's AP Environmental Studies class set up a new forest study at Wiessner Woods in January to track changes in the forest and habitat over time. Students tagged, measured, and identified trees in a section of the forest, then summarized information on tree size, species, and age for SLT. An impressive finding: many of the trees sampled are greater than 20 inches in diameter, some exceed 30 inches, which is a characteristic of old forests. Big trees combined with other structural features documented by the students including logs, cavity trees, a developing understory all point to an older, more complex forest than occurs across much of VT.



Pet Waste Pick-up: Thank you Poo Crews!

A big thank you to our fantastic Poo Crews - **Jeff Sharat, Sheila Goss, and Jess Russell** - who faithfully monitored and promoted the pick-up of pet waste at Kirchner and Wiessner Woods this past winter and spring. Even though the spring thaw revealed lots of poop that had been left behind in the snow, we heard positive feedback from regular visitors that the amount of waste on trails seemed to be down from previous years for the winter thanks to the Poo Crews' efforts. Please keep scooping the poop to ensure our trails, water, and forests remain clean, safe, and enjoyable for all!



Volunteer Opportunity: Become an SLT Land Steward

Would you like to play a key role in caring for conserved land while gaining an insider's view of SLT? Consider becoming a volunteer Land Steward! Learn more about what Land Stewards do and the important contribution these volunteers make by visiting our website: <http://www.stowelandtrust.org/support/getinvolved/> Join us for an annual informational session for new and veteran Land Stewards on Thursday, May 28 from 5-7:30 pm in the Stowe Free Library. Hands-on training in stewardship skills also offered. RSVP to Kristen at kristen@stowelandtrust.org or 253-7221.



What's Going On? SLT Outings and Events

For a full list of our events and outings visit: www.stowelandtrust.org/newsevents

Kirchner Woods Bird Walk

Saturday, May 16th , 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM; Kirchner Woods

Join naturalist and birding enthusiast, Jan Axtell, on a guided bird watch in Kirchner Woods. May is a great time of year for bird watching as many species migrate back to their northern breeding grounds.

Summer Naturalist Program

Saturdays starting June 20th through August

10:30 AM & 1:00 PM; Mill Trail

Discover the rich natural and cultural history of the Mill Trail on an interactive naturalist-led walk. We will tour the remains of a historic sheep farm, the site of the old Turner Saw Mill, a restored historic ski cabin, and so much more.

Craft Brew Race

Saturday, May 30th, 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM; Stoweflake Resort

SLT has been selected to be the charitable beneficiary for this year's race! A relaxed 5k for runners and walkers begins at noon followed by a craft brew festival at the finish line for all 21+ participants. More info & sign up: www.craftbrewraces.com/stowe

National Trails Work Day

Saturday, June 6th, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM; Kirchner Woods

Come celebrate the importance of trails in our community and help with spring trail and clean-up work. Bring work gloves. Tools and lunch will be provided. Please RSVP info@stowelandtrust.org or 802-253-7221.

Swimming Hole Excursion

Saturday, July 25th, 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Join SLT board member, Biddle Duke, for a family-friendly excursion to one of the best swimming spots in town. Wear good walking shoes and dress to get in the water. Bring a towel, lunch, and water.

Hike the Skyline Trail via Pinnacle Meadow

Saturday, August 15th , 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join SLT board member, Dave Hosmer, on a hike along one of Vermont's most scenic ridges. The trail will lead us through mossy forest floors and rocky outcrops.



For more information about an outing or event call 802-253-7221 or email info@stowelandtrust.org.

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