



**White River
Natural
Resources
Conservation
District**

28 Farmvu Drive
White River Junction, VT 05001
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(802) 369-3167

**White River NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting
Act 59 District Supervisor Listening Session
March 19, 2026, 12 - 2:30 pm
Hybrid**

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

White River NRCD

- Alvina Harvey – Supervisor, Chair, White River NRCD
- Anna Hubbard – Supervisor, White River NRCD
- Kate Willard – Supervisor, White River NRCD
- Sabra Ewing – Supervisor, White River NRCD
- Jaiel Pulskamp – Staff, White River NRCD; Farmer
- Jennifer Byrne – District Manager, White River NRCD (Facilitator)
- Karen Ganey – Staff, White River NRCD
- Willie Gibson – Staff, White River NRCD

Ottauquechee NRCD

- Kelly Stettner – District Manager, Ottauquechee NRCD
- Ron Rhodes – Supervisor, Ottauquechee NRCD; Staff, Connecticut River Conservancy
- Earl Hatley – President, Ottauquechee Water Protectors Association; Indigenous representative (Abenaki/Shawnee/Cherokee heritage)

Winooski NRCD

- Russ Barrett – Supervisor, Winooski NRCD
- Henry Harris – Associate Supervisor, Winooski NRCD

Overview:

The Act 59 Listening Session focused on reviewing the state's conservation plan with particular attention to its applicability in urban and suburban areas. Board members and participants emphasized the importance of expanding conservation efforts beyond traditionally protected lands and ensuring stronger alignment with local needs, equity, and community participation.

Key Discussion Points:



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- **Broadening Conservation Scope:** Participants highlighted the need to include urban and suburban landscapes in conservation strategies, along with incentives to support landowner participation.
- **Equity and Community Engagement:** Concerns were raised about insufficient funding and lack of compensation for community members engaged in conservation work. Emphasis was placed on equitable participation and valuing local knowledge.
- **Indigenous Coordination:** Strong support was expressed for involving Indigenous communities in leadership roles, including shaping guiding principles for conservation efforts.
- **Critique of Top-Down Approach:** The current conservation plan was widely viewed as overly centralized, lacking clear implementation pathways, and insufficiently incorporating grassroots input, conservation districts, and existing partnerships.
- **Need for Local Control:** Participants stressed the importance of locally driven conservation models that support local production, stewardship, and long-term ecological health.
- **Existing Tools and Gaps:** Discussion included current use programs, ecological service payments, and carbon markets, with recognition that these tools require adaptation to better serve local and regional needs.
- **Innovative Easement Model:** A proposed conservation district-based easement model for perennial food systems was introduced. This approach could support land stewardship and food sovereignty while reducing financial burdens on landowners, potentially through cooperative structures.

Key Themes:

- Integration of conservation districts into statewide planning
- Investment in community-based conservation
- Recognition of Indigenous leadership and knowledge
- Transition toward regenerative, locally controlled land systems
- Exploration of new economic models (e.g., ecological payments, cooperative ownership)

Action Items:

- Proposal to discuss the concept of localized “conservation farms and fiber commissions” at a future board meeting.
- Follow up with Vermont Law School regarding legal analysis of tying conservation easement models to property deeds and report back with findings.



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Next Steps:

The board emphasized the need for stronger inclusion of conservation districts in Act 59 planning processes and identified opportunities for securing funding (potentially up to \$1 million) to support localized conservation planning and implementation.

Report as submitted to VHCB April 1, 2026:

<https://www.whiterivernrcd.org/conservation-district-supervisor-feedback-session-on-vermont-conservation-plan-act-59>