The Lake Champlain Regional Conservation Partnership Program:

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

Allison N. Compagna
Lake Champlain Water Quality

- Lake Area 435 square miles with 8,234 square miles of drainage basin.

- 56% Basin in Vermont, 37% in New York & 7% in Quebec.

- Many stressors effect the lake including nutrient loading, storm/flooding events, sedimentation, cyanobacteria blooms, and more.
Lake Champlain Phosphorus Criteria (mg/L) in the Vermont Water Quality Standards
Lake Champlain Water Quality

- Blue Meets the Phosphorus Concentration Target, Red Does Not Meet the Target

- Average Phosphorus Concentrations Depicted By Coloring of Lake Segments

- The RCPP Target Watersheds Consist of Missisquoi Bay, St. Albans Bay & South Lake A & B.

- RCPP Target Watersheds Consistently Exceed Phosphorus Targets
Lake Champlain Water Quality

- The Majority of Sampling Events Depict Mean Phosphorus Levels Above the Water Quality Standards in Individual Segments.

- Data Trends Show Increasing Annual Mean Total Phosphorus.
• In October of 2014 the State of Vermont submitted a grant proposal for the Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural & Forestry Conservation Practices in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and New York through the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

• In April of 2015 the State of Vermont, in partnership with 25 organizations, agencies, businesses and non-profits was awarded the second largest grant in the country, totaling $16 million. In addition, these partners are contributing more than $20 million of match to this effort!

• The Lake Champlain RCPP will help landowners in the Lake Champlain Basin of Vermont and New York invest in conservation practices to improve water quality.
Lake Champlain RCPP Partners

• Federal & State Agencies
• Non-Profits
• Private Businesses
• Lenders
• Dairy Cooperatives
• Watershed Groups
• Farmer Groups
• Educational Institutions
• Cities & Towns

Vermont Has Been Fostering Unique Partnerships for Years!!
Lake Champlain RCPP Partners
Program Goals

- Increased awareness and knowledge of regulations and water quality impacts
- Increased number of farms in Lake Champlain Basin in compliance with regulations
- Increased interest and participation in going above and beyond regulatory standards
- Increased partner knowledge of water quality issues, resources and solutions
- Sustainable long-term working relationship with partners
- Improved business viability on farms, and increased knowledge of the connection between water quality and economic viability
Program Deliverables

• Technical Assistance & Best Management Practice Implementation

• Development & Implementation of Whole Farm Conservation Plans

• Forest Trails & Landings, Stream Crossings & Riparian Forest Buffers

• Agricultural Easements & Wetland Easements Outreach, Protection, Restoration

• Water Quality Monitoring
Lake Champlain RCPP Overview

Grant Timeline: May 1, 2015 - May 1, 2020

Budget:

~$8M for Agricultural and Forestry BMPs ($7M to VT, $1M to NY)

~$4M for Conservation Easements

~$1M for Wetland Restoration

$3M for Technical Assistance
Target Watersheds and Program Eligibility

- Priority to Applications in the Three Target Watersheds of:
  - St. Albans Bay
  - Missisquoi Bay
  - South Lake (A & B, Vermont & New York)

- Agricultural Applications Eligible if Producers Owns a Minimum of One Conserved Parcel

- Forestry, Wetland Easement/Restoration & Agricultural Easement Funding Available to Landowners in Lake Champlain Basin Watershed (No Conserved Land Ownership Requirement)
Agricultural Best Management Practices

- $6,833,450 in Vermont, $846,000 in New York

- Pre-Screening to Prioritize Small Farms & Farms with Conserved Lands

- All EQIP Practices Available for Funding

- Technical Assistance via RCPP Conservation Planners to provide individualized support.

- Primary Goal to Fund Projects in the Priority Watersheds with the Highest Water Quality Improvement Potential

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_MEDIA/stelprdb1236895.gif
Forestry Best Management Practices

- $357,800 in Vermont.

- Forest Conservation Practices for Forest Landowners Funded Through RCPP Include:
  - Controlling soil erosion on logging roads, including stabilizing stream crossings
  - Improving Stream Crossings
  - Restoring Forest Riparian Buffers Along Streams
  - Stabilizing Erosion-prone Soils

- Technical Assistance is Available via NRCS/FPR Foresters

Photos courtesy of Vermont Forest, Parks & Recreation
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- Agricultural & Wetland Easements

- $3,890,000 in Vermont for Agricultural Easements

- 3 RCPP Conservation Planners Available to Provide Individualized Technical Assistance.

- Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) Plans Are Site-specific & Promote the Long-term Viability of the Land by Sustainably Managing Natural Resources.

- Partners & RCPP Conservation Planners are Working with Landowners to Develop These Plans.
ACEP- Wetland Reserve Easements

- $920,000 in Vermont

- NRCS Enters Into Agreements with Partners to Leverage Resources to Carry Out High-priority Wetland Protection & Restoration.

- Vermont’s Clean Water Initiative Program (CWIP) has Developed a Wetlands Calculator to Determine “Above and Beyond” Incentives for Landowners.

- Consultant Contracted to Collaborate with NRCS & DEC to Update Current Data Regarding High Priority Projects, Develop Projects Packets Including Calculated Landowner Incentives and Provide Outreach & Project Support
Innovative Aspects of the Program

- Small Farms Outreach- RAPs Will Require Some Small Farms to Certify Through the VAAFM Small Farms Certification Program

- State of Vermont’s Wetland Incentive Calculator- Incentive Payments, RFP & Selection of Contractor to Collaborate with Partners to Implement High Priority Wetland Restoration Projects

- Increased Partnerships & Collaboration

- Contracted with the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts to Provide Landowners With Individualized Technical Assistance & Trial the “Case Manager” Approach

- The Vermont Environmental Stewardship Program
Unforeseen Innovative Aspects of the Program

- Level of Involvement of Partners
- Water Quality Trainings with Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, Vermont Land Trust & Dairy Cooperatives
- New Communication Sharing Tools - Flow Charts
- Opportunities for Efficiency & Improvement - Lean Events
- New Partners - Ben & Jerry’s, The Nature Conservancy & Keurig Green Mountain
- Platform for Social Indicators Case Study
Parallel Efforts Advancing the Program

- State Commitment Through the Vermont Clean Water Act (Act 64) Provides Additional Funding to Assist With Project Implementation.

- Vermont Agency of Agriculture (VAAFM) Providing up to 90% Cost-Share (Combination of State & Federal Dollars).

- Act 64 Increased Regulatory Authority of VAAFM Resulting In More Farm Inspections & Increased Regulations. Both Resulting in Farms Seeking Technical & Financial Assistance.
Efforts Remaining

- Assessment and Evaluation of Program
- Water Quality Monitoring

Challenges & Learning Experiences

- Workload Prioritization Challenges- NRCS Workload Already High, Difficult to Prioritize RCPP
- Low Milk Prices- Difficult Time to Incentivize Agricultural Producers Into the NRCS Programs
Final Remarks

- Enthusiastic & Motivated for the Opportunity to Provide Additional Funds into a Critically Impaired Area

- The Efforts Through this 5-year Grant Including New Partnerships, Increased Collaboration and Innovative Ideas Will Have Ripple Effects Into the Future
Thank you for listening!

Questions?