



Bennington County Regional Commission

# News and Notes

July 2018

## BCRC July Meeting - Thursday, July 26, 2018

(note the date—one week later than usual)

5:30 PM at the

### Lake Shaftsbury State Park Group Picnic Pavilion

Join us for a free picnic at BCRC's monthly meeting ([click here for directions](#)).



The evening will include a required public hearing concerning approval of the Pownal Town Plan and a presentation on the [Green Mountain National Forest](#) by David Francomb, District Ranger for the Manchester section of the GMNF. The National Forest is a vital part of our region, covering tens of thousands of acres of upland forests, lakes, and streams. It contributes to the quality of our environment, provides crucial habitat for fish and wildlife, offers endless recreational opportunities, and is critical to the economic health of the region. Come out and hear what is new in your national forest and how your community can become involved with GMNF project planning.



*Inform the gate attendant that you are attending the meeting and proceed to the group picnic pavilion at the end of the drive. A variety of food, including vegetarian options, will be available.*

Some examples of GMNF activity planned in our region include:

- Somerset Integrated Resource Project - Multiple resource management to implement the Forest Plan across a large landscape area; includes activities such as timber harvesting, wildlife & fisheries habitat improvement, recreation & forest access opportunities, and restoration work.
- Trail and camping area improvements at Stratton Pond.
- Snowmobile trail work near Woodford Lake Estates.
- Hiking trail work near Woodford State Park and the Aiken Wilderness.
- Habitat improvement for neotropical migrant passerine birds and other wildlife species.

## **Municipal Planning Grant Program Announced – Webinar Aug 8<sup>th</sup>**

Municipal Planning Grants (MPGs) can fund a wide range of municipal planning activities such as development of town or village plans, economic development strategies, updating land use regulations, and special projects focusing on local resources and opportunities. This year a 10% local cash match is required for all grants, and the maximum individual project amount is \$22,000. Proposals addressing housing needs, vibrant centers, and necessary infrastructure improvements will be prioritized. For complete program information and eligibility, see the [Program Description](#). Contact [DHCD staff](#) for details about an informational webinar planned for Wednesday, Aug 8 at 12:15pm. BCRC staff is available to assist with applications. **Final applications are due October 1.**

## **Building Communities Grants Due July 31<sup>st</sup>**

Five grant programs are funded through this program, which aims to “help communities preserve important historic buildings and enhance community facilities.” Funds can support historic preservation, public facilities maintenance, creation of recreational facilities, or promotion of cultural activities and assets. Applicants must be a non-profit organization, regional economic development corporation, or municipality, with the exception of Barn Grants. All grants require matching funding. Complete information is available [here](#). Contact listed staff by grant program with inquiries.

## **Weather Safety During Outdoor Public Events**

Every year, there are hundreds of outdoor events in Vermont where participants are potentially vulnerable to hazardous weather. Unfortunately, the National Weather Service (NWS) is not aware of many of these events or does not have the emergency management point of contact to warn of impending hazards. The NWS would like to work closely with emergency managers and public safety officials, to provide critical weather information when hazardous weather approaches an event, for overall public safety.

The main weather hazards that can impact an outdoor venue with very little advance notice are thunderstorms and lightning. Other potential weather hazards include strong winds, potential flooding and extreme heat. To help maintain public safety and increase situational awareness, the NWS would like to be informed of any large outdoor events. For more information about this program and to sign up, please visit <https://www.weather.gov/aly/dssrequest>, or contact [Allison Strohl](#) at the BCRC: 802-442-0713.

## **New Program to Support Families**

[Catamount Connections](#) is a parent founded and led organization that provides a trusted, comfortable environment in an accessible location for parents to connect to each other and build a support network of peers and resources. Through hosting structured and informal opportunities, learning, and relationship-building, and collaboration, Catamount Connections focuses on the Protective Factors of strengthening families: Parental Resilience; Social Connections; Concrete Support in Times of Need; Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development; and Social-Emotional Competence of Children.

The space is located on the lower level of the Masonic Hall, 504 Main St, Bennington and is open MWF 9-3 and TuTh 1-7 during which time parents, caregivers, and children may come in for any reason: to meet a friend for playtime or socialization; browse resource binders; chat with staff; see what's going on in the community or get involved. Free art programs, cafe conversations, playgroups, and more are available, too. Schedule online [www.catamountconnections.org](http://www.catamountconnections.org) - The comfortable space includes a children's playroom, nursery area, dining and seating area, playroom, and art spaces.



## **Changes to the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund**

The Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) provides State funding to match Federal Public Assistance after federally-declared disasters. Public Assistance funds provide federal disaster assistance to state and local government organizations for debris removal, emergency protective measures and the permanent restoration or replacement of public facilities that are owned and operated by an eligible Applicant and may be provided to non-profit organizations that provide services of a governmental nature.

The Vermont Emergency Management division of Public Safety (VEM) administers the Public Assistance Program and reimburses municipalities for up to 75 percent of eligible costs that result from a disaster. Municipalities must contribute The State of Vermont contributes 7.5%. For communities that take specific steps to reduce flood damage the State will contribute 12.5% or 17.5% of the total cost. To increase that amount to 12.5%, municipalities must:

- ⇒ Participate in the National Flood Insurance Program
- ⇒ Adopt the Town Road and Bridge Standards
- ⇒ Annually complete and adopt a Local Emergency Operations Plan
- ⇒ Complete and adopt of a hazard mitigation plan

To be eligible for state funding of 17.5%, municipalities have two options:

(1) Enroll in the community rating system or CRS. This FEMA program provides means for communities to further enhance flood protection and help those with flood insurance reduce their rates. The program is complex and can take 12-18 months to complete the enrollment process.

(2) Qualify for River Corridor Protection by adopting a minimum regulatory requirement for River Corridors that are at least as restrictive as those outlined in the ANR Model River Corridor bylaws in effect at the time of adoption. This would include creating a River Corridor overlay district within their zoning bylaws for all streams and rivers draining greater than two square miles. In addition, the bylaws must regulate streams and a 50-foot setback from the top of bank of streams with watershed area between 0.5 and 2 square miles. That setback must be regulated as the River Corridor for such streams.

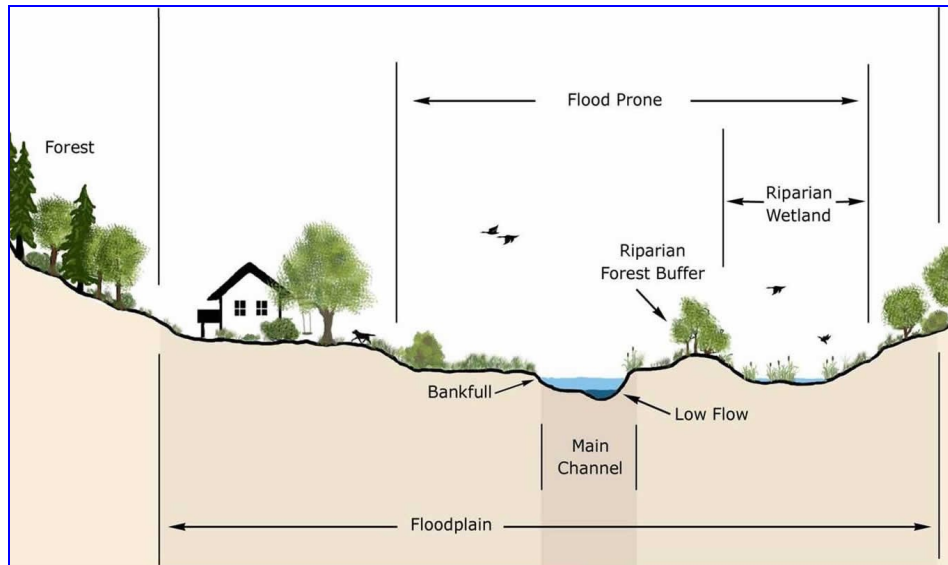
To give you an idea of what all of this means in terms of money, imagine public assistance funding totaling \$1,000,000.00. The table below shows the state and municipal share at each of the different ERAF rates. As you can see, qualifying for higher ERAF rates can save a town a lot of money.

	<b>7.5% ERAF Rate</b>	<b>12.5% ERAF Rate</b>	<b>17.5% ERAF Rate</b>
<b>Federal Share</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>	<b>\$750,000</b>
<b>State Share</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>	<b>\$125,000</b>	<b>\$175,000</b>
<b>Municipal Share</b>	<b>\$175,000</b>	<b>\$125,000</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

Now, here is where this gets complicated. Following recent updates to FEMA flood mapping and municipal bylaws regarding flood protection, some municipalities qualified as “early adopters” as they adopted partial River Corridor protection standards or protective flood inundation regulations prior to the ERAF rule going into effect on October 23, 2014. These early adopters remain eligible for the 17.5% ERAF cost share under the current ERAF rule. Originally, these municipalities were given two

years to adopt the full river corridor protection standards within two years of adoption by VT ANR of their updated river corridor map. That is now expected to occur later this year (2018). Now the ERAF rule is being amended and may include changes to the cost-share rate and/or the various qualifying activities for these municipalities to reduce their exposure to flooding. The amendment is likely to take two years, so early adopters will continue their eligibility until after completion of that process. To see if you are an early adopter, visit [http://floodready.vermont.gov/assessment/community\\_reports#ERAF](http://floodready.vermont.gov/assessment/community_reports#ERAF) and generate an ERAF Summary Report for your town.

In the meantime, stay tuned for new river corridor maps and model bylaws and other updates to river corridor protection and increasing flood resiliency.



## Invasive Plant Species as Hazards

Hazard mitigation planning involves assessing natural hazards such as floods and windstorms and developing means to reduce the potential impacts of those hazards. Invasive species represent a growing hazard as nonnative forest insects, such as the Emerald Ash Borer pose major threats to our forests while invasive plants, such as Japanese Knotweed, can out-compete native plants and reduce regeneration of forest and riverine trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. Research has found that many of these species pose direct threats to humans by harboring insects such as deer ticks that carry Lyme disease in greater abundance than native species.



Farah Ashe, the Batten Kill Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area Coordinator compiled a bibliography of research on this topic, and BCRC is making this available at our website. Visit <http://www.bcrvt.org/environmental-planning.html> and look for the graphic that says “The Hazards to Humans and Human Well-being From Invasive Plant Species in Arlington, Vermont” for both summaries of the articles and the original articles.

## Forestry and Climate Change in New England



A recent report from the Manomet Center describes potential changes to New England forests due to climate change. Average temperatures in Vermont have risen 2.7<sup>o</sup> F since 1941 with an increase of 1.5<sup>o</sup> F since 1990. Winter temperatures have risen more than summer temperatures. If these trends continue, the number of days above 90<sup>o</sup> F will likely increase and minimum temperatures also increase. The average annual precipitation in Vermont has increased 5.9” since 1960. This trend is predicted to continue so that Vermont streams will have higher flows and possibly experience more frequent and greater flooding events. Increasing temperatures will likely reduce total winter snowfall. If precipitation falls as rain in the winter, river flows will be higher due to the lower evapotranspiration. Freezing rain may become more frequent, with resulting damage to trees and shrubs.

These changes affect evapotranspiration from plants, flowering time, the timing of leaf out and leaf fall, the timing of seed set and the timing and amounts of peak levels of streamflow. Forests are vulnerable to such changes as :

- tree species and habitats for wildlife shift upslope with increasing temperatures;
- disturbance events such as storms, droughts and fires increase in frequency and magnitude;
- outbreaks of insects and diseases that affect trees increase.

Climate change will likely increase invasive species and forest pest species. Many invasive plant species interfere with native tree and shrub regeneration. New forest pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer are moving from the south and have decimated ash trees where they are abundant. Foresters and landowners can try to offset some of these likely impacts by:

- Maintaining the structural and age class diversity of species. This can help create varied habitat for wildlife. Forest stands that are structurally diverse can withstand these new stresses better than even aged/structured stands.
- Encouraging and enhancing deer management. Deer in large numbers can both reduce native species regeneration and encourage invasive species regeneration as they favor native over nonnative plants. Providing access to hunters can help mitigate high deer populations.
- Managing invasive species that may increase in abundance following forestry operations. Once established, most invasive plant species are difficult to eradicate, and if they became abundant, they can reduce tree regeneration success thereby impacting the wildlife value of forests and affecting future harvests.
- Conducting sustainable harvests by avoiding what may become an extended mud season and increasing storm events so as to avoid undue soil disturbance.
- Avoiding actions that stress hemlock stands as these will suffer from both heat stress and the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and Elongate Hemlock Scale.

For more information, look for the following reports online:

Wilkerson, E., Grund, S., Walberg, E., 2013. [Climate Change Adaptation for Forestry in New England](#). Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Plymouth, MA.

Galford, G.L., Hoogenboom, A., Carlson, S., Ford, S., Nash, J., Palchak, E., Pears, S., Underwood, K., Baker, D.V., 2014. [Considering Vermont’s future in a changing climate: the first Vermont climate assessment](#). Gund Institute for Ecological Economics.

## **New Handbook for Bennington Area Landlords**

The Bennington NeighborWorks of Western Vermont (NWWVT) office has completed a comprehensive guide to the pilot Rental Rehabilitation program that they administer within the Town of Bennington. This new eight-page handbook covers the origins of this grant-funded initiative, criteria for participation, lending and right through the actual construction process. NWWVT part of a broad effort by the State of Vermont to improve deteriorated rental housing throughout the state, but the project in Bennington is the first of its kind.

[Click to download the handbook](#)

“Having a really complete handbook for Rental Rehab is going to be a huge help,” said Rental Rehab manager David Traver Adolphus. “It’s not a complicated program, but there are a lot of moving parts and steps to follow, and being able to lay them out on paper is a lot easier than trying describe everything to a potential participant over the phone.” David added that the state was also very interested in having the document, as they are contemplating expanding rental rehab beyond Bennington. Contact David at [dtraveradolphus@nwwvt.org](mailto:dtraveradolphus@nwwvt.org) or (802) 440-5210 for more information.

## **\$2.4 Million in New Grants for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations**

Local governments, businesses, nonprofits, homeowner associations, electric utilities, and charging equipment providers will be eligible to apply for reimbursement grants to expand Vermont’s network of EV charging stations. Initial funding will target state-designated centers, interstate exits, major tourist destinations, colleges/universities, hospitals, public transit stations, park and rides, qualified workplaces, and multi-family housing developments. Program guidelines and the application will be available soon. For more information visit the [website](#) or contact [Gary Holloway](#).

## **New Tool: Making Room for Rivers**

The Department of Environmental Conservation has a new [Flood Training website](#) to help local officials get flood-ready. Flooding is Vermont’s most common natural disaster, and this site guides users through key [concepts](#), features Vermont [projects](#), provides [tools and resources](#), and offers [support](#) to help municipalities reduce the risk of future flood events. Join the [Flood Resilience Listserv](#) to get updates and check out the new [website](#) to learn more.

## **GNAT Programs Focus on Regional Economic Development**

Andrew McKeever, News Director at GNAT-TV, has hosted several interesting programs on regional economic development. Here are links to two recent shows:

[The News Project: In Studio – Forging Regional Cooperation](#)

[The News Project – Creative Economy to Get Planning Boost](#)