What Does the Vermont Clean Water Initiative Mean?

The Vermont Clean Water Initiative now has the statutory support to strengthen efforts aimed at reducing water pollution, thanks to the new Vermont Clean Water Act that was signed into law by Governor Shumlin on June 16, 2015. The Vermont Clean Water Initiative will focus on reducing sediment and nutrient (phosphorus and nitrogen) pollution across the State from the six major sources. The Initiative will also help finance actions using a new Clean Water Fund. Here's how we can all work together to contribute to cleaner water in Vermont.

Agricultural Runoff

The Farmers' Role:

- Provide a minimum of 25-foot buffers along streams and 10-foot buffers along field and road ditches;
- Eliminate gullies that are eroding valuable agricultural land;
- Develop nutrient management plans and implement actions to keep manure, fertilizer and topsoil from running into waterways;
- Install fences to keep livestock out of streams and rivers where needed.

The State's Role:

- Train and certify businesses that apply manure to fields to minimize runoff in nearby waterways;
- Provide training for farmers and establish an annual certification for small farmers on how to comply with State standards by July, 2017;
- Increase farm inspections and technical assistance to ensure compliance with state agricultural water quality rules;
- Work with federal partners to increase support and funding to help farmers undertake water quality improvements on farms;
- Target support and funding to farms in the northern and southern segments of Lake Champlain Basin, where phosphorus pollution from agricultural sources are particularly significant;
- Evaluate and employ technical, regulatory and educational options for tile drain management. A report to the legislature on tile drains is due Jan. 15, 2017.

Stormwater from Developed Lands

Municipalities' and Developers' Role:

- Control stormwater discharges at existing developments with 3 or more acres of impervious surface that were never permitted or not compliant with the 2002 Vermont Stormwater Manual – the rulebook for new development projects that require a state stormwater permit;
- Develop and go forward with more municipality-wide stormwater runoff control plans in communities that are discharging a significant amount of untreated stormwater into rivers and other waterways;

The State's Role:

- Update the standards contained in the Vermont Stormwater Manual;
- Provide municipalities support in identifying, prioritizing and initiating stormwater control needs;
- Help municipalities, developers and property owners reduce stormwater runoff from unregulated impervious surfaces by employing practical and cost-effective best practices including *green stormwater infrastructure* — actions that mimic or employ natural processes to capture, reuse or filter stormwater and minimize the cost of collecting, transporting and treating stormwater runoff.
- Release the general permit for existing development by 2018 and a schedule to require retrofits in the Champlain Basin no later than Oct. 2023, and in the rest of the State no later than Oct. 2028.

Stormwater from Roads

Municipalities' Role:

- Reduce erosion and stormwater discharges being generated from municipal roads;
- Apply for permit coverage by July 1, 2021.

The State's Role:

- Reduce erosion and stormwater discharges being generated from state-managed highways;
- Support municipalities in conducting road inventories that identify and prioritize critical areas in need of erosion and sediment control;
- Increase support and funding for municipalities in implementing practices that improve the resilience of local roads to flooding while minimizing erosion and stormwater runoff discharging into streams;
- Issue a general permit by December, 2017.

River Corridors and Floodplains

Municipalities' Role:

- Comply with the National Flood Insurance Program;
- Qualify for incentives to adopt floodplain and river corridor protection standards that enhance flood resilience and insure that actions of property owners do not heighten the risk of flood damages to other property owners;
- Increase floodplain and river corridor protection and restoration projects.

The State's Role:

- Provide support to cities and towns, including financial incentives, to aid adoption of enhanced floodplain and river corridor protection standards and enhance flooding resilience;
- Establish a "Flood Ready" website to promote municipal flood resiliency planning and actions;
- Provide education and training to municipalities on stream and river management practices as well as support prior to and during flood emergencies.

Wetlands Management

The State's Role:

- Expand support and financial assistance to landowners in wetland restoration and protection;
- Partner with federal and state agencies, local partners and landowners to identify and undertake wetland restoration projects;
- Increase inspections to achieve greater wetland permit compliance;
- Target critical wetlands for State Class I wetlands protection for flood resilience and phosphorus reduction.

Forest Lands Management

Loggers' and Landowners' Role:

- Be encouraged to use low-impact timber harvesting technologies, such as portable skidder bridges, to reduce polluted runoff risks on timber harvesting operations;
- Control erosion on logging roads and at stream crossings by participating in cost-share programs offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- Improve watershed health by restoring river, floodplain and lake-side forested buffers, supporting forest conservation, expanding developed land forest cover and reducing invasive tree pests.

The State's Role:

- Enhance measures to protect water quality during timber harvesting operations by July, 2016;
- Provide technical assistance to forest landowners participating in NRCS cost-share programs;
- Develop and promote "climate-smart" forest adaptation strategies through the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative to support environmentally sound logging technologies.