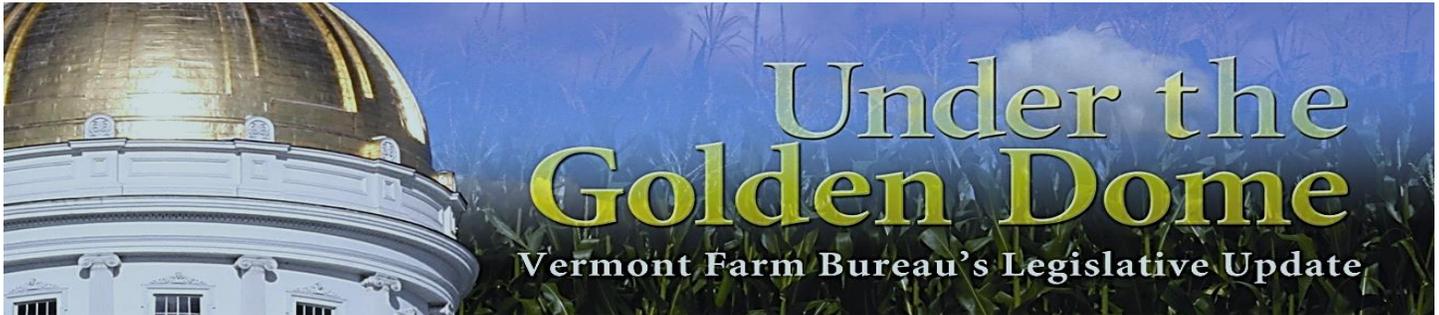


When you call the Sergeant-at-Arms: Please leave your *name & phone number*

Say, "I'd like to leave a message for __," Leave a clear message, such as:

"I do **not** support..." **OR** I am asking for your vote on __"

Please refer to a bill number or name whenever possible.



FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 11, 2019

The Vermont Legislature has returned to work, with Committee members for both chambers being assigned – some with major changes.

In the House, Carolyn Partridge returns as the Chair of the Agriculture and Forest Products Committee with the following members: Rodney Graham (Vice-chair), John Bartholomew (clerk), Terry Norris, Tom Bock, John O'Brien, Vicky Strong and Charen Fegard. The location is new; this Committee now meets in Room 32, the former Education Room. Former member Harvey Smith has been moved to Natural Resources, Mark Higley is on Energy, and Jay Hooper is now based in Education.

Upstairs, the new chair of the Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife Committee is Amy Sheldon, with Paul Lefebvre as vice chair. This Committee has grown from eight in 2018 to eleven this year but remains in the same room.

In the Senate, Bobby Starr remains as chair of the Agriculture Committee, but Chris Pearson is now vice chair; other committee members include Anthony Pollina, Brian Collamore and Ruth Hardy.

Chris Bray retains his chairmanship in Senate Natural Resources, with Brian Campion as vice chair; other members include Mark MacDonald, John Rodgers and Corey Parent.

To find other committee assignments, please visit legislature.vermont.gov and follow the links. You can find Committee agendas, House and Senate schedules, and all bills introduced so far. The website is very user friendly and offers a wealth of information.

DATES TO REMEMBER

January 22, 2019 – Join Vermont Farm Bureau members in the Statehouse Cafeteria for a Meet and Greet beginning at 8:00 am! It's a great way to say hi to your legislators and follow-up with a visit to their committee rooms. A free shuttle runs from behind the Department of Labor on Memorial Drive; it runs on the hour and every 20 minutes and after driving up to National Life, you will be dropped off at the Aiken Avenue side door of

the Statehouse. You can go directly down the hallway to the cloakroom (look for the bust of Abraham Lincoln), drop off your coat and boots, and climb the stairs to the back of the building where the cafeteria is located.

January 29-31, 2019 – The Vermont Farm Bureau will be hosting a booth at the Vermont Farm Show and is looking for members to donate 2 hours of their time to be in the booth and talk to visitors about our organization. Hours are Jan 29, 9 am – 5 pm; Jan 30, 8:30 am – 7:30 pm; and Jan 31, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Please call Peggy at 802-434-5646 or email her at peggyvtfb@gmavt.net to schedule a time.

March 20, 2019 – Another chance to visit the Statehouse for our 2nd Meet and Greet! This one is scheduled after Town Meeting and Crossover, so some of the bills will have made it out of committees, been approved on the floors and crossed-over to the other chamber for consideration. Keep updated with the UTGD and be prepared to question legislators on their votes and thoughts as we watch important language go through the process!

EXPLORATION OF THE FUTURE OF VERMONT AGRICULTURE

A report has been developed by UVM Extension, VT Housing and Conservation Board, VT Land Trust, VT Council on Rural Development and VT Farm to Plate to start a discussion about the challenges with agriculture into the future. Objectives include

- Articulating the crisis and overall situation
- Find consensus across stakeholder organizations and institutions
- Develop and assess a list of strategies and investments to address the situation

VTFB was not part of the original partnership but will be requesting a place at the table. If you are interested in the report, please let me know.

CURRENT USE BOARD SETS VALUES FOR 2019

At the January 4 meeting of the Current Use Advisory Board, members voted unanimously to set the following:

- Value for Agricultural Land: \$362.00
- Value for Forest Land: \$145.00
- Value for Forest Land located greater than 1 mile from a Class 1,2 or 3 road:
\$108.95

Reporting on the Forest Land indicates taps on sugarbushes have gone from one million to 5.5 million, and these figures are based on the forested land only, as there is no reporting or planning required on land enrolled as agricultural.

Board members also discussed the revision of the Current Use statute, as there are a number of issues not in the language but have become part of the protocol, such as including conserved land, including farm building enrollment and some outdated references to tax law. A study committee was formed to work through the summer and suggest to the full board some changes. It is hoped these can be considered administrative changes and can go through clean up without opening up the law itself.

It was noted there may be some policy changes to be considered, but the board was clear they only wanted to focus on fixing the protocol and not the policy at this point. The report will be out later this fall for consideration.

CLEAN WATER FUND MEETING

The Board responsible for presenting a budget to the legislature for clean water funding projects met in December to hear presentations from various departments (Agriculture, ANR, Transportation) and other entities such as VHCB which receives dollars from this fund. The Administration noted the governor – during his Budget address on January 24 – would offer a way to balance this request with a \$7 million appropriation from existing sources but did not reveal from where.

The VHCB request was reduced by one million dollars; these funds were used in the past to assist farmers who may not be able to offer a financial match for a water quality project. VTFB supports returning these funds to their request and will follow this closely.

ACT 250 REPORT

A 75-page report has been released after the Commission on Act 250 met throughout 2018, holding public meetings throughout the state and deliberating on results. There has also been a draft of legislation written but not as yet introduced.

While the Agricultural exemption has been left intact, there are many changes to the forestry section.

However, there is a new term called “critical resource area” with the following definition:

A “critical resource area” means a river corridor, a significant wetland as defined under section 902 of this title, land at or above 2000 feet, and land characterized by slopes greater than 15 percent and shallow depth to bedrock.”

This language appears throughout the draft legislation and will need watching as we learn how it will be interpreted.

Legislation may be introduced in the House Natural Resources Committee, as the chair of that committee (Amy Sheldon) also co-chaired the Commission.

If you'd like a copy of either the report or the draft legislation, please send me an email with that request. The links are pretty long!

Please stay tuned to future editions of the UTGD!

ACCESSORY FARM BUILDING ACT 143

Many folks remember our participation with a coalition to level the playing field for farmers diversifying into agritourism and finding out zoning decisions were not consistent across the state. Our attempt to fix this has resulted in some glitches, as evidenced by challenges faced by members in Chittenden County. I spoke with Chair Partridge of the House Ag Committee, and we will be working to schedule testimony from farmers who have been adversely affected by some misinterpretation at the local level. Please let me know if you would be interested in coming in.

WETLANDS ISSUES

The Agency of Natural Resources has developed several brochures and handouts to assist farmers in answering questions about wetlands. The Vermont Wetlands Program “Landowner’s Guide to Wetlands – What to know Before you purchase land or build” has detailed information and resources for you to use before starting a project. “Vermont Farming Activities in Wetlands and Buffers” is a rack card with contact and other helpful items.

This issue will probably be discussed in House Natural Resources and there may be legislation developed. We will be following the discourse and pledge to work with both the Agency of Agriculture and the Agency of Natural Resources to solve any problems adversely affecting our industry.

In the meantime, if you would like any of the items listed above, please contact the

Vermont Wetlands Program at 902-490-6100 or
<http://dec.vermont.gov/watershed.wetlands>.

THE TEAM AT THE STATEHOUSE IN 2019

President Joe Tisbert and I will lead the team at the Statehouse this year. Joe plans on being there at least 3 days a week, and I will be there every day. AnnaJo Smith will again help us on Thursdays.

Bernie Juskiwicz will be assisting us on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Bernie is a retired legislator from Cambridge who expressed interest in being at the Statehouse to observe legislative work on our behalf. He served on the House Appropriations Committee and is very knowledgeable about the process and the players. Welcome Aboard, Bernie!

Joe was also interviewing a UVM grad student who will be available every morning – haven't heard the results of that yet but my fingers are crossed.

And of course, we are always happy to see members and will make arrangements to visit your representatives and committees whenever you come down to Montpelier!

This is the first of your weekly reports. There haven't been any bills of interest introduced as yet, but those will come and we will keep you updated.

We WILL be doing Action Alerts this year as needed, and the information for you to call the Statehouse any time is above the UTGD heading on this report.

As always, if you have any specific questions on legislation, send me an email (crkdbrks@aol.com) or give me a call at home (802-426-3579).

Looking forward to having a great year! Joe, Jackie, Bernie and AnnaJo