

1 **NATURAL AND WORKING LANDS**
2 **RCC - 3/12/16**

3
4 **PREAMBLE**

5
6 The following is a draft of observations and action steps that the Richmond
7 Conservation Commission has come up with thus far. As such, this document solely
8 reflects the draft views of the Conservation Commission.

9
10 The RCC started by incorporating existing RCC material, such as the Science to Action
11 Report and material provided by the Agency of Natural Resources. It then looked at
12 several other town plans, including those from Jericho, Northfield and Williston, to
13 gather ideas. Most particularly careful attention was given to the outcome of the 1/20/16
14 planning meeting where Natural Resources was a main topic.

15
16 This draft is organized around the vision statement and key goals from the 1/20
17 meeting. Importantly, effort was taken to include all the key suggestions from 1/20.

18
19 We also have included a brief summary of what prioritization steps might look like is
20 included as an appendix.

21
22 The CC would be most interested in any comments the community might offer with
23 regard to this draft. These should be sent to Judy Rosovsky, RCC Chair:
24 Judy.Rosovsky@jsc.edu

25
26 **AGAIN, THIS DOCUMENT ONLY REFLECTS ONLY THE DRAFT VIEWS OF THE**
27 **RICHMOND CONSERVATION COMMISSION.**

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1 KEY OBSERVATIONS

- 2
- 3 ▪ Richmond is situated in an ecological “sweet spot” between the state’s highest
- 4 peaks and fertile river valleys, making it home to a distinct diversity of natural and
- 5 working lands, and the resources associated with them. This diversity is central
- 6 to Richmond’s rural identity and its residents’ quality of life and sense of place.
- 7
- 8 ▪ Important defining features cover a range of landscapes and landforms. These
- 9 include forests, fields, pastures, watercourses, wetlands, floodplains, hills, ridges,
- 10 valleys, cliffs and outcroppings. This mosaic and the connections among its
- 11 elements supports distinct, healthy and mutually dependent communities of
- 12 species. It also provides habitat to individual species and the unique food
- 13 sources and refuge needs they require.
- 14
- 15 ▪ Richmond’s traditional settlement pattern is critical to our community’s identity
- 16 and the ecological integrity of the land. The pattern is characterized by clustered,
- 17 higher density development within the Town’s compact, village center and
- 18 surrounded by much less densely populated areas that include working farms,
- 19 contiguous forestlands and other important natural resource areas.
- 20
- 21 ▪ Town surveys identify Richmond’s natural setting as contributing significantly to a
- 22 high quality of life. Our setting attracts and retains people, visitors and
- 23 businesses critical to our community and its economic strength. More than
- 24 providing a beautiful backdrop, Richmond’s natural and working lands support
- 25 important ecological functions, significant recreational opportunities, the health
- 26 and well-being of residents, and educational programs focused on the natural
- 27 world around us.
- 28
- 29 ▪ A combination of internal and external forces continues to threaten our natural
- 30 resources. For example:
- 31 • Climate change has introduced new stresses and threats to the health and
- 32 integrity of everything from large forested tracts to individual species.
- 33 • Land use planning and zoning regulations have historically made only limited
- 34 use of science-based assessments of natural resources, contributing to
- 35 resource fragmentation and outright loss throughout the town. This has
- 36 increased the need for careful, targeted strategies to ensure the quality and
- 37 integrity of our remaining natural and working lands to support their
- 38 environmental functions as well as our community’s quality of life and
- 39 economic stability and growth.
- 40 • The lack of specificity / granularity in the Town Plan:
- 41
- 42 ○ Causes the Town to lose legal leverage such as for communications tower
- 43 location.
- 44
- 45 ○ Has allowed zoning regulations that, even when matched to the Town
- 46 Plan, have not reinforced lot size issues and have not reinforced

1 traditional settlement patterns in terms of new housing, with the number of
 2 parcels increasing by a much larger percentage than the percent by which
 3 population has been increasing.

- 4
 5 ○ Provides lack of clarity that puts Town and permit applicant alike at a
 6 disadvantage.

- 7
 8 • Lack of prioritization has compromised the ability to focus on the most
 9 important undertakings to maintain the integrity of our natural resources.

- 10
 11 ▪ Recent scientific studies of local resources now provide an unprecedented
 12 scientific evaluation and prioritization of their importance. This allows assessment
 13 of threats and opportunities that inform sound town planning.

- 14
 15 ▪ Richmond has the information, tools and will to employ a variety of proven,
 16 complementary non-regulatory and regulatory techniques to assure the integrity
 17 of the town's most significant natural and working lands. A variety of regulatory
 18 and non-regulatory strategies are available to develop win-win interfaces
 19 between human endeavor and our natural resources.

20 21 **VISION**

22
 23 **To wisely steward our natural and working lands, ensuring the beauty and health**
 24 **of our landscapes, waterways, open spaces, wildlife and agricultural resources.**

25 26 **GOALS**

- 27 • Protect the health of our rivers, streams, forests, floodplains, wildlife and habitat.
 28 • Maintain public access to open spaces and nature.
 29 • Protect our working and agricultural lands and soils.
 30 • Maintain the beauty of important vistas and scenic landscapes, such as town
 31 gateways.

32 33 **STRATEGIES**

34 35 **1. Protect the health of our water resources, natural communities and working** 36 **lands**

- 37
 38 ▪ Encourage commercial development in the village area, limiting such
 39 development in priority areas such as the Gateway district

40 41 Water resources

- 42
 43 ▪ Adhere to “best practices” for land stewardship, resource conservation,
 44 landscaping and storm water management on property that the Town owns or
 45 manages, including roadside ditches. On those properties, minimize erosion

- 1 and stream sedimentation, landscape with native plants, remove invasive
2 species, and employ rain gardens, grass swales, cisterns, porous surfaces
3 and other low-impact techniques to manage storm water.
4
- 5 ■ Monitor water quality as necessary to protect public health and recreational
6 use of public waters.
7
 - 8 ■ Protect rivers, streams, wetlands, lakes and ponds from encroaching
9 development, including roads and driveways, by incorporating into Town
10 zoning regulations adequate riparian setbacks and buffers. The goal is to
11 maintain and/or establish undisturbed, naturally vegetated riparian buffers for
12 surface waters to:
13
 - 14 ■ Protect water quality, riparian habitat, and cold-water fisheries (e.g. 75-100
15 foot minimum), as recommended by Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
16 and required by State law (Shoreline Protection Act-
17 http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/waterq/lakes/docs/shoreland/lp_ShorelandHandbook.pdf)
18
 - 19
 - 20 ■ Avoid and/or minimize impacts to designated source and surface water
21 protection areas that supply community or municipal water systems;
22
 - 23 ■ Avoid flood hazard areas to the extent feasible or, where necessary, design to
24 minimize flood damage and the loss of life and property;
25
 - 26 ■ Preserve or restore pre-construction runoff conditions.
27
 - 28 ■ Develop river restoration and water quality protection projects along the
29 Huntington River, based on the findings of the recent geomorphic assessment
30 (http://www.vtwaterquality.org/rivers/docs/FinalReports/rv_P1_Huntington.pdf)
31
 - 32 ■ Protect the natural conditions and functions of rivers and streams. Restrict
33 alteration of stream channels and discourage removal of woody debris from
34 channels except where it is an obstruction.
35
 - 36 ■ Establish requirements for storm water treatment at development projects that
37 are below the minimum state permitting thresholds.
38
 - 39 ■ Encourage parking lot landscaping, shared parking lots and driveways and
40 creative design approaches that minimize impervious cover while still
41 ensuring public safety and access for emergency vehicles.
42
 - 43 ■ Review local road standards and roads themselves on a recurring basis with
44 the goal of minimizing barriers to storm water management practices, and
45 identifying opportunities to reduce road widths, increase vegetation in the
46 ROW and minimize erosion.

- 1
- 2 ▪ Base surface water setbacks and buffer standards in zoning ordinances on
- 3 geomorphic standards and from VT DEC and VLCT model ordinances for all
- 4 streams and wetlands.
- 5
- 6 ▪ Protect groundwater recharge and Wellhead Protection Areas for active
- 7 public water supplies by limiting development in such areas and careful siting
- 8 when it is justified.
- 9
- 10 ▪ Develop and implement on a watershed level a “Water Resources Plan”
- 11 which addresses issues such as availability of potable water, erosion, stream
- 12 sediment, fisheries habitat, and other water quality subjects, on a watershed
- 13 basis.
- 14

15 Floodplains

- 16
- 17 ▪ Encourage protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested
- 18 areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion.
- 19
- 20 ▪ Explore participation in FEMA’s Community Rating System with the goal of
- 21 securing discounts on flood insurance for policy-holders.
- 22
- 23 ▪ Enforce regulations preventing development, including but not limited to
- 24 structures, filling, or substantial grading, within the 100-year floodplain and
- 25 Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas. Update these existing regulations based on
- 26 best practices determined by local, state and federal authorities.
- 27
- 28 ▪ Prohibit new development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river
- 29 corridor protection areas. Changes to existing development must not
- 30 exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.
- 31
- 32 ▪ Recognize in flood plain use the increased danger to flooding that is being
- 33 brought about by climate change.
- 34

35 Riparian areas, wetlands and vernal pools

- 36
- 37 ▪ Protect existing forest cover that allows for a minimum of 75-10 -foot riparian
- 38 buffers on streams, wetlands and vernal pools, including site-specific slope
- 39 and soil conditions to minimize surface water runoff, erosion, sedimentation
- 40 and pollution.
- 41
- 42 ▪ Target high quality areas for protection through the use of planning and
- 43 easement acquisition described in Part II of Conserving Vermont’s Natural

1 *Heritage: A Guide to Community-Based Planning for the Conservation of*
 2 *Vermont's Fish, Wildlife, and Biological Diversity*¹.

- 3
- 4 ■ Preserve vegetated buffers by restricting creation development or expansion
 5 of impervious areas in riparian areas and river corridors along all perennial
 6 streams, wetlands and vernal pools.
 - 7
 - 8 ■ Maintain naturally vegetated riparian buffers of sufficient width based on site-
 9 specific slope and soil conditions, necessary to minimize surface water runoff,
 10 stream bank and shoreline erosion, sedimentation and pollution.
 - 11
 - 12 ■ Advocate the purchase or acquisition of easements to protect particularly
 13 important and vulnerable wetlands.

14

15 *Natural communities, habitat and wildlife*

- 16
- 17 ■ Conserve and support the stewardship for relatively large patches of
 18 contiguous forest. Ensure the maintenance and conservation of existing
 19 contiguous forest habitat, and avoid its subdivision and parcelization.
 - 20
 - 21 ■ Identify and advocate that conserved lands or lands under long-term
 22 stewardship cover the full range of elevations and also encompass a diversity
 23 of landforms and natural communities, especially those that are unusual in
 24 the state, such as Rich Northern Hardwood Forests, [Dry Oak], Silver
 25 Maple/Ostrich Fern Floodplain Forest.
 - 26
 - 27 ■ Protect critical habitats and corridors between habitats that harbor wildlife,
 28 fish, and plant species, including but not limited to mast stands, vernal pools,
 29 and critical core habitat.
 - 30
 - 31 ■ Ensure that animals and plants are able to move freely between conserved
 32 lands, undeveloped private lands, contiguous forest habitat, and other
 33 important habitats, land features, and natural communities to meet their
 34 survival requirements, such as feeding, breeding, dispersal and adaption to
 35 climate or habitat changes. This may be accomplished by increasing the
 36 number of acres of connecting lands / corridors under land stewardship
 37 and/or that are permanently protected or conserved.
 - 38
 - 39 ■ Maintain and protect the functional integrity of deer wintering areas, bear
 40 habitat and mast stands.
 - 41
 - 42 ■ Install and / or relocate utility lines underground wherever feasible.

¹ 2013, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Download at:
http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_73079/File/Get%20Involved/Partner%20in%20Conservation/Conserving_Vermont's_Natural_Heritage.pdf

- 1
- 2 ▪ Encourage clustered housing strategies, such as Planned Unit
- 3 Developments, to protect the integrity of natural areas.
- 4
- 5 ▪ Avoid upgrading Class 3 or Class 4 roads wherever that would fragment
- 6 contiguous forest habitat.
- 7
- 8 ▪ Encourage and map wildlife sightings.
- 9

10 Working farms and forests

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- 12 ▪ Ensure the viability of working lands associated with a sustainable agricultural
- 13 and forest products economy due to their significant contribution to
- 14 Richmond's natural heritage and the many benefits the community derives
- 15 from them.
- 16
- 17 ▪ Encourage the conservation and stewardship of unfragmented and
- 18 contiguous forest lands of a minimum of ≥500 acres.
- 19
- 20 ▪ Foster conservation and long-term stewardship programs that protect farms,
- 21 forests, open space and natural resources on private lands from development
- 22 and parcelization.
- 23
- 24 ▪ Strengthen the continuing economic viability of working lands by promoting
- 25 practices that sustain their forestry, farming, habitat and recreation values.
- 26
- 27 ▪ Encourage all landowners to actively manage and conserve their resources
- 28 for the production of food and forest products, and the protection of wildlife,
- 29 scenic views and outdoor recreation opportunities. This might include
- 30 continued funding for the purchase of development rights; by-laws that permit
- 31 appropriate income-generating activities such as home industries compatible
- 32 with the zoning district within which they reside; and tax abatements.
- 33
- 34 ▪ Inform landowners of Vermont's Current Use program and other conservation
- 35 options.
- 36
- 37 ▪ Provision for the update and maintenance of the FLESA (Forest Land
- 38 Evaluation and Site Assessment) program.
- 39
- 40 ▪ Adopt by-laws to ensure protection of slopes, surface and groundwater
- 41 quality, aquatic life, local roads and neighboring properties.
- 42
- 43 ▪ Undertake extraction and quarrying operations by means that minimize
- 44 negatively the natural and built environment.
- 45

- 1 ▪ Endorse the protection of agricultural lands through cover-cropping and like
2 means.
3

4 Resilience to climate change

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- 6 ▪ Avoid non-climate stressors, such as forest fragmentation and riparian development
7 that increase ecosystem fragility.
8
 - 9 • Develop strategies to maintain ecological function and biological diversity.
10 ○ Protect and enhance habitat connectivity to allow plant and animal
11 species to shift ranges, such as by removing impediments to improve
12 access to new ranges.
13 ○ Use proactive management and restoration strategies to encourage
14 ecological transitions and climate change-induced habitat
15 reconfiguration.
- 16 ▪ Review emergency preparedness and response plans to account for an
17 increased frequency of extreme weather events.
18

19 Scenic Views / Ridgelines

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- 21 ▪ Update previous studies of scenic views and ridgelines, providing the public
22 with opportunities to identify those they consider important from ecological,
23 cultural and aesthetic perspectives, to guide policies regarding the location of
24 such facilities as for telecommunications and energy generation, and the
25 protection of sensitive habitats, steep slopes and prominent view sheds.
26 Exclude towers and other such structures in locations identified as providing
27 scenic views.
28
- 29 ▪ Consider regulatory standards that protect and preserve identified scenic
30 resource, such as subdivision siting standards, density bonus provisions,
31 screening standards, or access management policies
32
- 33 ▪ Maintain the scenic integrity of Richmond's Gateways through Gateway
34 District planning.
35
- 36 ▪ Undertake efforts to maintain unimpaired views of the night sky within the
37 Town's rural and undeveloped areas, scenic upland areas, and critical wildlife
38 habitat areas. Develop regulations that ensure that outdoor lighting minimizes
39 glare, sky glow, and adverse impacts on adjacent property owners.
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41 Steep Slopes

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- Respond to the practical constraints resulting from Richmond's topography by prohibiting development on slopes of 25% or more. Manage development on slopes of 15%-25% to minimize surface water runoff and erosion. *[Are those percentages low enough?]*

7 *Invasive species*

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- Avoid the introduction and limit the spread of invasive, exotic species that crowd out, destroy or otherwise harm the town's native species, natural communities and working farms and forests. Accomplish this through active management of municipal and public lands, landowner education, and landscaping restrictions under local regulations.

15 *Energy*

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- Exclude energy facility development, biofuel harvesting and resource extraction operations from locations where the adverse impacts of such operations on air and water quality, long-term forest health, primary agricultural soils, critical wildlife habitat, historic and scenic resources, adjoining properties and uses, public highways and other community infrastructure and services cannot be avoided or adequately mitigated.
 - Develop clear language regarding the permissible location of commercial renewable energy projects, such as wind farms, and where the town may want to protect ridgelines or wishes to mitigate impacts caused by development.

29 *Air quality*

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- Include assessment of potential air pollution in permit review.
 - Develop town policies that minimize air pollution from motor vehicle idling and like activities.

36 **2. Maintain public access to open spaces and nature**

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- Provide public information / brochures regarding walking exercise paths at key locations such as the Town web site, local medical / physical therapy practices and like locations.
 - Pursue opportunities to protect landowners who allow public access to private property.

- 1 ▪ Take advantage of locally available resources such as the VYCC to maintain
2 Richmond trails.

3
4 **3. Update, augment, and regularly maintain existing information and studies on**
5 **the Town's significant natural resources, and implement the recommendations**
6 **of those studies.**
7

- 8 ▪ Use newly available studies such as developed by the State Agency of
9 Natural Resources and Science to Action to identify and prioritize natural
10 resources for future protection as required by State Title-24, and identified by
11 the Town to be of special importance (See Appendix-I) to be updated every
12 five years and to include but is not limited to such features as:
 - 13 • All wetlands (Class I, II, and III including vernal pools.
 - 14 • Important wildlife areas and corridors.
 - 15 • Important landscapes – contiguous forests, connecting lands and high-
16 elevation lands required by species with large ranges.
 - 17 • Key natural communities – groups of species and their physical
18 settings that help conserve numerous resource values simultaneously.
 - 19 • Critical species – individual species needing special attention due to
20 the threats they face and the role they play in maintaining our area's
21 ecological health.
 - 22 • Steep slopes.
 - 23 • Soils classified by the US Natural Resource Conservation Service as
24 poorly drained, highly erosive or shallow in depth to bedrock or the
25 seasonal high-water table.
 - 26 • Surface waters, wetlands and associated riparian areas.
 - 27 • Public water supply recharge areas (mapped Source Protection
28 Areas).
 - 29 • Mapped flood, fluvial erosion and other known hazard areas.
 - 30 • Large blocks identified as designated as important for the integrity of
31 natural resources within and for maintaining wildlife connectivity.
- 32 ▪ Update this information every five years.
- 33 ▪ Establish policy to include extensive community and landowner opportunity
34 for involvement whenever substantive changes are made to Town
35 regulations that affect its natural resources.
- 36 ▪ Continue to fund the Conservation Reserve Fund.

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41 **4. Engage and educate the community through informational meetings, policy**
42 **reviews, publications and other means regarding the environmental,**
43 **recreational and educational values of Richmond's natural resources and the**
44 **effects of human activity on them.**
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- Implement annual programming that inform residents and landowners with regard to the importance of the Town's natural environment. Conduct community forums and other activities on a regular basis that educate landowners and the public on significant natural communities in town, their functions and health, the threats they face and how they can be properly stewarded.
 - Support outdoor recreation and education activities that focus on the importance of protecting critical ecological resources and functions.
 - Broaden landowners' access to information regarding options that will minimize impact such as voluntary conservation easements, transfers of development rights (TDRs) and the establishment of special conservation overlay districts promoting low-impact, low-density development and uses.
 - Update informational pieces such as maps, summary descriptions and brochures and make them available to the public at a clearly identified location on the Town's web site.
 - Develop and implement a plan to conveniently locate a Visitor Center that includes educational materials, trail maps and like materials important to fostering the responsible enjoyment of Richmond's natural resources by residents and visitors alike.
 - Support the use of the Town's natural resources as an educational tool for its schools.
 - Identify natural resources that could be developed as valuable recreational resources that provide access to natural resources, such that their protection through easements and like means.
 - Develop a landowner education program regarding the importance of naturally vegetated areas along rivers and streams, as a means to encourage the replanting and maintenance of buffers.
 - Organize information meetings regarding current best practices in forest stewardship.
 - Provide the community with opportunities to learn sustainable habitat management practices.

1 2 **APPENDIX – I: Natural Resources: Prioritizing**

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4 A key aspect of town planning is prioritization, and Natural Resources is no exception.
5 Fortunately, there are several examples of how the myriad, often inter-dependent
6 elements of a natural landscape can be identified and ranked for conservation. These
7 should be used as a starting point for community discussion and development of a land
8 use review process that ensures the integrity of the features and functions deemed
9 most important to Richmond residents.

10
11 One approach is illustrated in Conserving Vermont's Natural Heritage, put out by
12 Vermont's Fish and Wildlife Department (F&W) and Agency of Natural Resources
13 (ANR)². It describes a three-tiered method for comprehensively identifying and ranking
14 the elements of a natural landscape:

- 15
16 • **Species-Level Elements**: These are plants, animals and specific habitats with
17 outsized importance and needs, and requiring special attention. *Examples: Rare,*
18 *threatened and endangered species; deer wintering habitats; mast stands;*
19 *important bat habitat; important turtle habitat; grassland bird habitat; early*
20 *successional and shrub habitat.*
- 21 • **Community- Level Elements**: Groups of species and their physical settings, the
22 conservation of which protects multiple natural resource values simultaneously.
23 *Examples: Natural communities, wetlands, riparian areas, vernal pools.*
- 24 • **Landscape-Level Elements**: Large areas of undeveloped land encompassing a
25 diversity of natural communities, habitats and key individual species, and
26 required for the proper functioning of those individual elements. Conservation
27 and stewardship at this level will simultaneously protect multiple species and
28 communities, while most effectively addressing wide-ranging public interests in
29 recreation, public lands and environmental health. *Examples: Contiguous forest,*
30 *connecting lands, enduring landscape features.*

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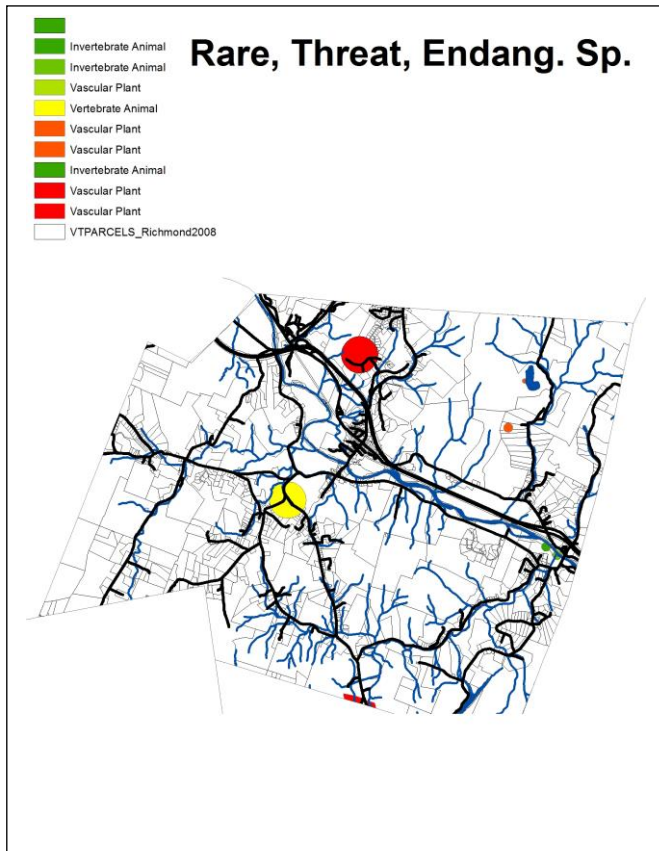
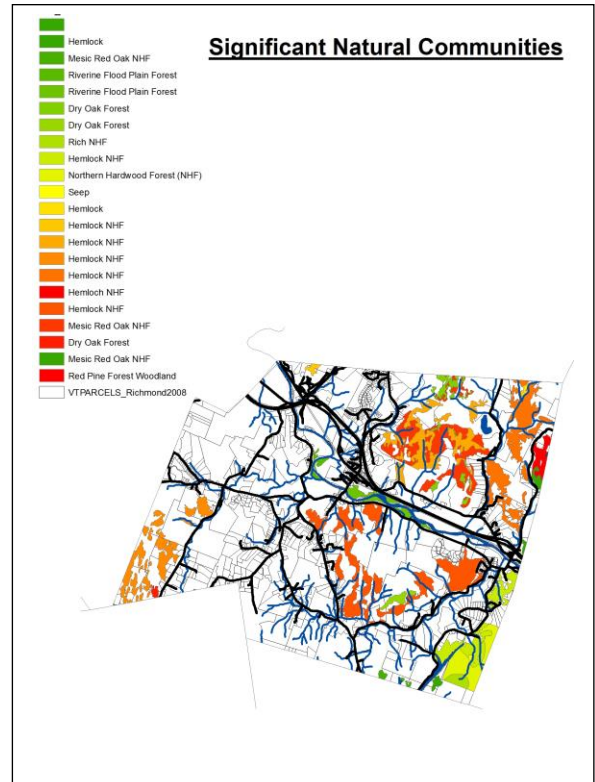
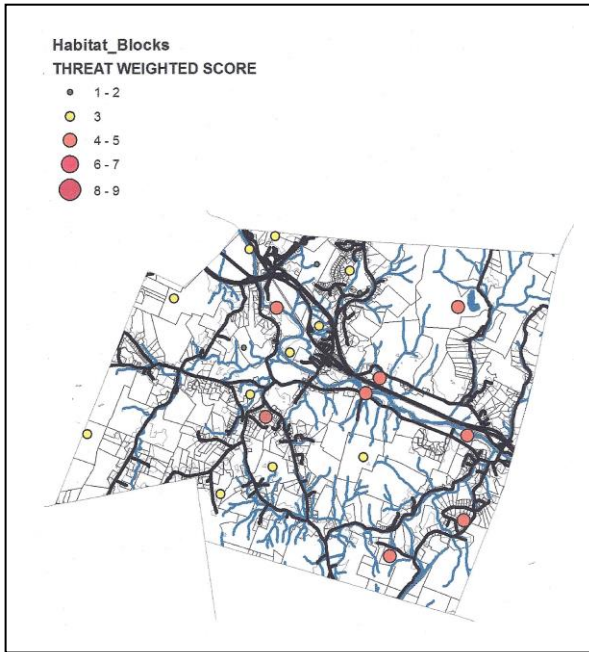
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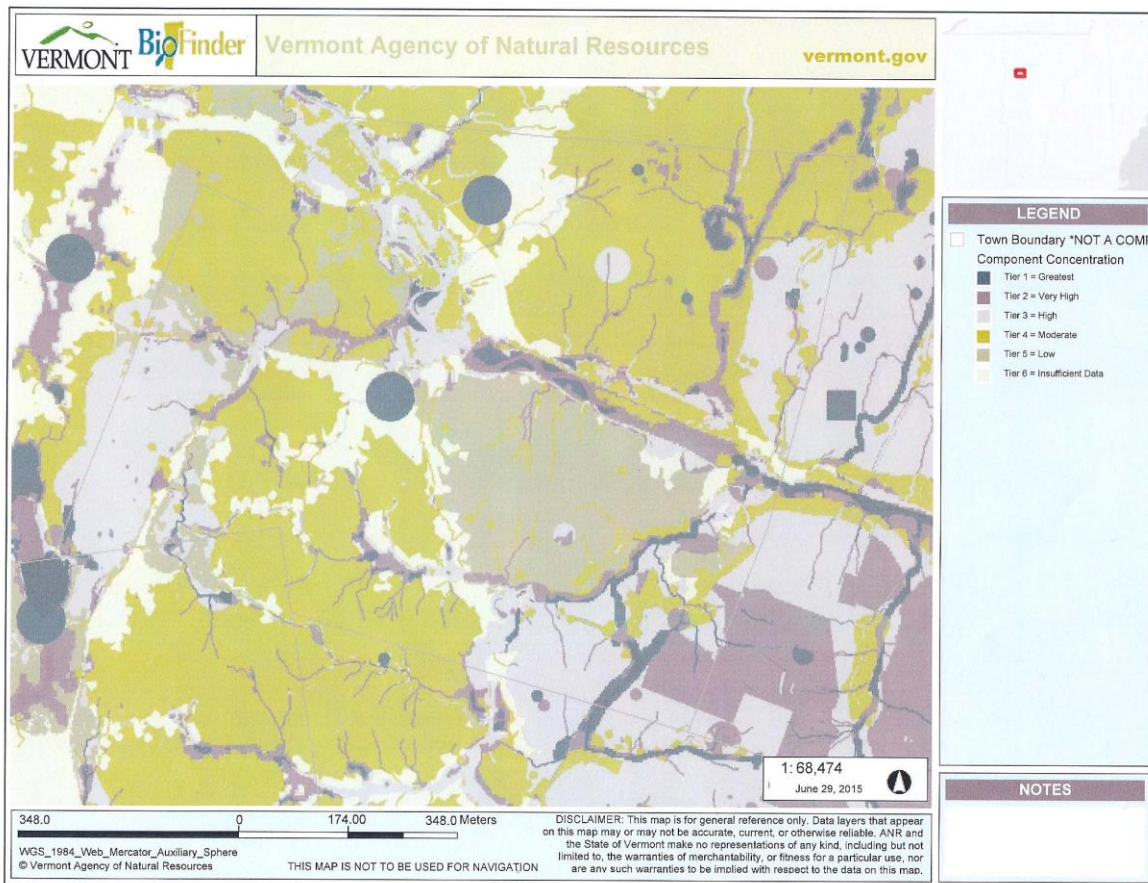
The 21 Components Contributing to Biological Diversity	
#	Component Name
Landscapes	
L1	Habitat Blocks
L2	Grasslands and Shrublands
L3	Rare Physical Landscape
L4	Representative Physical Landscape
L5	Connecting Lands (<2000ac)
L6	Connecting Blocks (2,000-10,000ac)
L7	Anchor Blocks (>10,000ac)
L8	Riparian Connectivity
L9	Wildlife Road Crossings
Aquatics	
A1	Surface Waters & Riparian Areas
A2	Representative Lakes
A3	Important Aquatic Habitats & Species Assemblages
Species & Natural Communities	
SN1	Rare Species
SN2	Uncommon Species
SN3	Rare Natural Communities
SN4	Uncommon Natural Communities
SN5	Common Natural Communities
SN6	Vernal Pools
SN7	Vernal Pools (Potential)
SN8	Wetlands
SN9	Mast production areas

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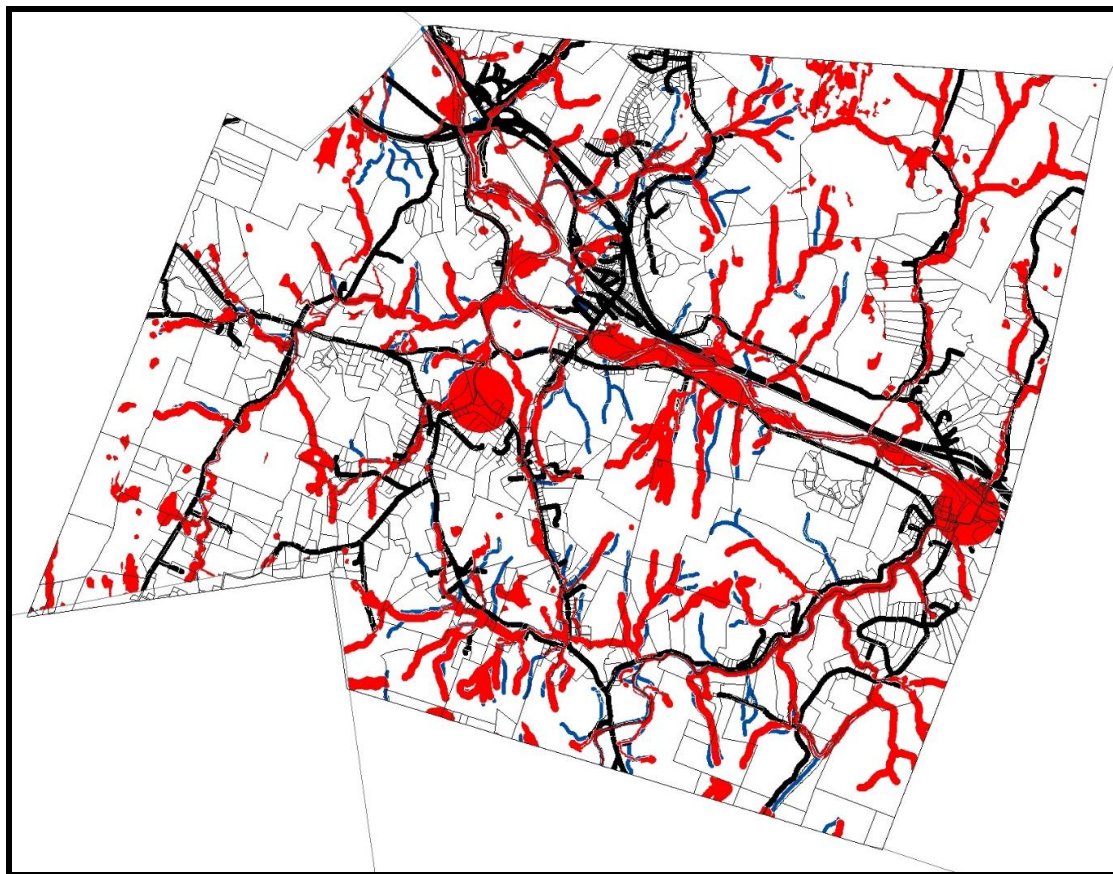


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2 The identification and mapping of these natural features has depended heavily on many
3 years of work undertaken by ANR available through the State's Biofinder program
4 (<http://biofinder.vt.gov/biofindermap.htm>). Components were put in three general
5 categories: landscapes, aquatics and species and natural communities. Components of
6 these features were then prioritized and mapped, with supporting details such as
7 acreage assigned to each.
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 2 Further informing Richmond of its natural resources has been the recent Science to
 3 Action study undertaken by Huntington's Arrowwood Environmental
 4 (<http://www.arrowwoodvt.com/>). The additional science-based information, important in-
 5 and-of-itself, has been combined with ANR studies and priorities to provide a tiered
 6 analysis for Richmond.
 7



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 10 **Primary Conservation Areas**
- 11 ▪ Rare, Threatened, & Endangered species element occurrences
 - 12 ▪ Wetlands & Streams (with 50' buffers)
 - 13 ▪ Riparian habitats as mapped by Science to Action
 - 14 ▪ Vernal pool with 100' buffer
 - 15 ▪ Natural communities: S1-Rare Species; S2- uncommon species; S3 rare natural
 - 16 communities

17
 18 The task at hand is to undertake a community review of its natural resource priorities,
 19 evaluating what has been provided by the State and such additional sources as Science
 20 to Action and establishing its own. This then involves the development and
 21 implementation of conservation strategies.