It is generally recognized that Vermont’s natural resources and rural landscape (including our waterways, timberlands, farms, forests, and other open spaces), are of great economic, cultural and social importance to both the people of the state and its visitors. Our rural lands and country-sides are valuable open spaces that are used and enjoyed by the Region’s communities, and working lands provide the basis for farm and forest enterprises and employment for many in the Windham Region.

The primary purpose of the Windham Regional Commission’s Natural Resources Committee is to develop strategies and policies to conserve, enhance and intelligently utilize these resources, consistent with the provisions of the Windham Regional Plan. The Natural Resources Committee may also educate and serve as a resource for the Region’s towns and communities on issues that affect our shared natural resources and ecological health overall.

Topics and issues relevant to the Natural Resources Committee:

- newly promulgated laws and regulations related to natural resources,
- invasive species that may threaten native ecosystems,
- forest fragmentation and wildlife connectivity,
- water quality and stream restoration,
- flood resilience,
- climate change and its associated impacts,
- landscape-scale land conservation,
- habitat protection and/or restoration,
- working lands awareness and advocacy, and
- agricultural and forestry economic development.

Consistent with this purpose, it is the Committee’s objective to:

1. Develop and recommend policies that support the appropriate utilization of the Region’s natural resources, while still retaining and conserving the valuable ecosystem functioning of an undeveloped landscape.

2. Engage with stakeholders who depend upon, utilize, promote and/or preserve natural resources and rural land values. Promote partnerships and cooperative efforts with and among these stakeholders to advance the Committee purpose, and to support the development and implementation of the Windham Regional Plan.

3. In recommending or creating policies related to natural resources, assess the validity, reliability, and utility of existing map data or layers of regionally important:
• animal, plant and aquatic habitat (including wetlands, wildlife corridors, natural communities, etc),
• geology and hydrology,
• land use, and
• land cover of the Windham Region.

4. Partner in and facilitate educational efforts concerning resource and land conservation methods, including both regulatory tools (zoning, subdivision regulations, etc.) and non-regulatory tools (grant funding, acquisition, binding agreements such as conservation easements, tax incentives, educational curricula, etc.).

5. Develop regional land and natural resource conservation policies and programs designed to assist towns and landowners in the implementation of Regional Plan goals and policies. When appropriate, help connect those entities with the resources and partnerships required for such implementation. Assist towns with the development of their municipal plans and the implementation thereof.

6. Review, comment and make recommendations on natural resource and land use goals, objectives and policies as needed to further the development, updating and implementation of the Windham Regional Plan and the municipal plans of the Region’s member towns.

7. Guided by the Windham Regional Plan, review, comment on, and make recommendations regarding legislative proposals, state agency plans and other proposed or pending actions of local, state, and federal government entities and non-governmental organizations which may affect the Region’s natural resources and rural lands.

8. As appropriate or needed on broad planning projects, coordinate with the other Windham Regional Commission Committees and provide input on natural resource and land use issues.

9. Act as the coordinating entity for the Clean Water Advisory Committee (CWAC). As such, host meetings and facilitate pertinent group discussions related to the implementation of Vermont’s Clean Water Act. When applicable, assist in the review, development, and prioritization of the Region’s Tactical Basin Plans.

10. Facilitate local and regional discussions, programs, or workshops on issues deemed relevant or of interest to the Natural Resources Committee that would aid in the implementation of the Windham Regional Plan.

11. Facilitate the education of Commissioners, town officials, and residents within our communities regarding regional issues of concern that affect the natural environment, ecosystem functioning, or landscape productivity.

Operating Procedures:

1. The Committee meets to discuss topics as identified above – and appropriate – with the aid of relevant literature, educational media and guest speakers. The Committee will meet its responsibilities as identified above with the assistance of the WRC staff. The Committee
will provide a progress report to be presented to the WRC Executive Committee on a regular basis.

2. Committee members shall, at the discretion and direction of the chair and staff, occasionally be asked to gather information, conduct outreach with people or organizations, and perform other activities between meetings of the Committee at large in order to assist in meeting Committee objectives.

3. In general, the Committee will meet monthly, or as needed, at an agreed upon time that is most convenient to the Commissioners. The Committee shall operate in compliance with Vermont Open Meeting Law and the bylaws of the Windham Regional Commission.

Reviewed and approved by Natural Resources Committee: April 26, 2018
Approved by Executive Board: May 09, 2018
Approved by Executive Board: May 14, 2019