

INFRASTRUCTURE: WATER SUPPLY, WASTEWATER, STORMWATER & SOLID WASTE

GOALS

1. The water supply for the region will not be contaminated, depleted or degraded, and there will be sufficient quantity to support existing and future residential, commercial and industrial needs.
2. Residents, communities and businesses will have access to solid waste disposal, water supply, wastewater treatment systems and stormwater treatment methods that are cost-effective and environmentally sound.

WATER SUPPLY

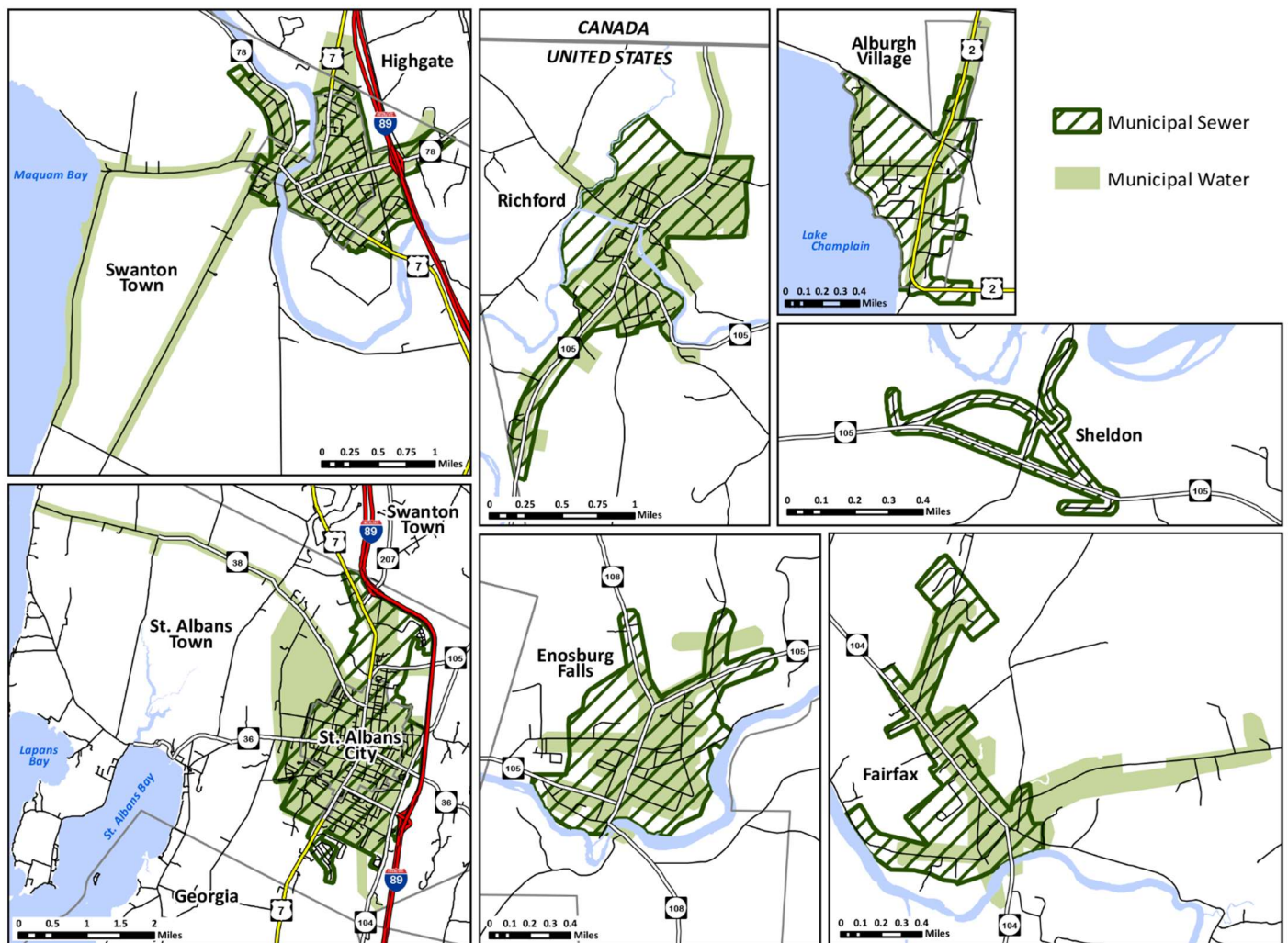
Residents of and businesses in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties access drinking water from a variety of sources. Some of the sources are referred to as public even if they are not public in the traditional sense¹, while the majority are private and small. Map 17 illustrates the service areas of larger public water and sewer systems in Franklin and Grand Isle counties. There are 30 public water systems in the region drawing water from 45 different source points. Lake Champlain is the source for all public water systems in Grand Isle County, and supplies the major portion of water to the St. Albans City system, the largest public water system in the region. Other systems in the region draw from groundwater or in some cases from specific streams. Most if not all the public water systems in the region are operating below 90% capacity, the threshold at which communities would need to begin planning for expansion. (Occasional shortages are experienced in some smaller systems reliant on groundwater.)

Public water supplies, whether from ground or surface waters, are challenging resources to manage and protect. Take groundwater, for example. It is important that groundwater aquifers are protected from pollutants because restoring an aquifer after it has been contaminated can be extremely expensive and take a very long time. One tool for protecting public water supplies is to map and develop plans for Source Protection Areas (SPA). SPAs delineate zones around a ground or surface water supply. Any contaminants reaching the SPA are reasonably likely to move toward the system's intake point. While operators of a water system do not have authority to control land uses on any land within the SPA unless they own the land or have specific legal agreements with the landowner, towns can adopt local ordinances or bylaws that restrict uses that are not compatible within a SPA. State regulations do not currently limit land uses within and buffering SPAs, although these areas may have bearing under Act 250, Vermont's Land Use and Development Law.

¹ In the context of water supply systems in Vermont, a "public" water supply system is one serving 25 or more year-round residents or having 15 or more year-round connections. The term also includes systems serving 25 or more people for shorter periods of time, ranging from 60 days to six months per year.

The water quality of Lake Champlain is particularly important to those communities for whom the lake is their drinking water source. This includes all towns in Grand Isle County as well as the St. Albans City and Swanton Village systems. Invasive plant and animal species are also a growing problem facing systems drawing water from the lake. Barring a breakthrough in control methods the cost of preventing infestation will rise substantially in coming years. As noted in the Natural and Cultural Resources section of the plan, other stressors to water supplies include nutrient loading from over fertilization, pathogens from animals and poorly functioning septic systems, toxic substances from contaminant release and pesticides, and acidity from atmospheric deposition. Threats associated with climate change include impacts from large storms (e.g., flooding) as well as drought.

MAP 17: Municipal Sewer and Water Systems



SOURCE: NRPC Collected Data

WASTEWATER

There are seven municipal wastewater treatment plants serving the northwest region with a range of treatment systems including chemical treatment, aerated lagoons and activated sludge. The majority of these systems have adequate capacity to serve future growth. Insufficient uncommitted capacity is a concern for growth in at least one village in the region. Some communities maintain combined wastewater and stormwater systems where both outputs are transported to a treatment plant by way of a network of sewer pipes and storm drains. Such combined networks increase demands on wastewater treatment facilities and during periods of highest stormwater flow may overwhelm treatment processes. The village of Fairfax has limited capacity for additional service connections thereby creating a potential barrier for future development in the growth areas. In addition to hydraulic capacity, wastewater systems are limited by the composition of the wastewater that must be treated. Particular problems to be monitored include phosphorus, organic compounds, industrial wastes, sludge production and disposal, and storm water runoff.

Most communities in the region do not have a municipal wastewater system and utilize private septic systems. This lack of infrastructure can limit the way in which a community can grow and attract economic development opportunities. In addition to striking agreements with neighboring communities (as was recently done between Swanton Village and the Town of Highgate), communities could explore the development of small-scale wastewater treatment systems or facilitate the building of multi-user systems to aid development in and around the community's growth areas. These community-scale wastewater treatment systems may also be appropriate for clusters of shoreland development where wastewater disposal is particularly challenging because of small lot sizes and close proximity to surface waters.

Several state and federal programs are available to provide grants and low or no-interest loans for infrastructure planning and construction. Examples include the Vermont Clean Water Revolving Fund and USDA Rural Development facilities programs. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and recently passed federal spending and infrastructure bills, more funding than normal is available for water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. The Towns of Highgate and South Hero are in the design phase for new public wastewater systems.

STORMWATER

For the majority of communities in the region, stormwater infrastructure consists of a system of culverts and ditches that moves stormwater from one place to another. Typically, these systems drain directly or indirectly into nearby waterbodies. In many cases, these waters move through the system without any retention or treatment. The result is whatever pollutants the stormwater carries are discharged. Because stormwater lines concentrate flows, they also increase erosion risk from the additional volume of water funneled into stream. Impervious surfaces such as paved or gravel driveways, sidewalks and roofs typically result in creating stormwater runoff as the water that hits these surfaces cannot be absorbed into the ground and drains off the site.

As development occurs in communities the ability to handle the volume of stormwater should be monitored. If stormwater runoff is not managed properly, it can impair water quality in local watersheds by carrying more

sediment and pollutants into streams, rivers and lakes. In recent years, the reduced water quality seen in Lake Champlain and its bays has brought greater awareness to the role of stormwater on water quality. As of 2013 both the City and Town of St. Albans were required to obtain a federal stormwater management permit for its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) and are implementing stormwater management programs to reduce the contamination of stormwater runoff and prohibit illicit discharges. In 2015, Vermont adopted Act 64 requiring municipalities to obtain coverage under a permit aimed at reducing stormwater-related erosion from municipal roads. The legislation also required development of new stormwater rules aimed at addressing stormwater on already-developed properties with more than 3 acres of impervious surface and no prior permit.

Communities benefit from encouraging sponsors of new and existing development to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff leaving their sites. Communities benefit still more by ensuring that storm water systems are maintained properly. This could be achieved in several ways; one of them is through implementing Low Impact Development (LID) Best Management Practices (BMPs) to effectively manage stormwater onsite. LID systems infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate and detain runoff to minimize stormwater runoff and pollution. Examples of these BMP methods include rain gardens, rain barrels, cisterns, vegetated swales, roof-top disconnection, infiltration trenches, green roofs, and pervious pavement. These systems are meant to be used in conjunction with traditional stormwater systems to treat the maximum amount of stormwater possible on site and reduce the burden on municipal infrastructure and impacts to water quality.

The State of Vermont regulates stormwater runoff on construction sites and on substantial development and redevelopment projects. Given the cumulative impact many small developments can have, communities should explore incorporating stormwater standards into their development regulations to address the stormwater created from all land development. The Agency of Natural Resources is currently updating their stormwater manual which may bring changes to the Agency's rulemaking and incentives for incorporating new measures.

The Franklin County Stormwater Collaborative was launched in 2014 to encourage residents and business owners to get involved in reducing stormwater pollution. The Collaborative is a partnership between the City and Town of St. Albans with the Northwest Regional Planning Commission. The City and Town of St. Albans are working together to encourage area residents to get personally involved in reducing stormwater pollution in Lake Champlain. This effort is being conducted as a part of a public education requirement of a federal Environmental Protection Agency stormwater system permit, called Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). The Stormwater Collaborative was designed to allow other municipalities to participate in the future.

Three communities, the City of St. Albans and the Villages of Swanton and Enosburg Falls, have combined stormwater and wastewater systems. In the City of St Albans, approximately 11% of the stormwater drainage area—or 160 acres with a total of 149 connected catch basins—goes into the combined sewer system. The City is planning for projects to create offline combined sewer storage as well as separate portions of the combined system where feasible. These will reduce the number and magnitude of overflows during rain events.

SOLID WASTE

All Vermont municipalities are required to adopt a Solid Waste Implementation Plan (SWIP; 10 V.S.A. § 6604) that details a comprehensive waste management strategy such as identifying services and how waste will be disposed. This plan must comply with the statewide Materials Management Plan. For the collection of waste and recycling in the region, all communities except Fairfax are members of the Northwest Vermont Solid Waste Management District. The Town of Fairfax has a separate SWIP and therefore coordinates the services for its community members.

The Northwest Vermont Solid Waste Management District's (NWSWD) current SWIP was adopted in 2020. It is renewed at least once every five years and is being updated as of the writing of this plan. Based on hauler reports in 2021, NWSWD estimates that the per capita waste generated in the region was 4.0 pounds/person/day, which is below the national average of 4.4 pounds/person/day. NWSWD estimates that 30% of this waste is recycled thereby reducing the amount of waste headed to landfills to 2.8 pounds/person/day.

In 2000, the NWSWD implemented a mandatory recycling ordinance in member towns. Recyclable material collected at NWSWD waste facilities is transported to its Georgia Recycling Center to be processed and sent to be recycled into further products. Overall, removing and recycling materials from the waste stream cuts disposal costs, reduces environmental impact of both waste disposal and goods production, and lowers energy consumption overall.

NWSWD has a list of 31 private haulers that operate within the district, and the Town of Fairfax has a contract with a private hauler for curbside pick-up. Six of the nine transfer stations are operated by NWSWD, the Highgate Transfer Station is operated by Casella Waste Management, and the municipalities of Grand Isle and Alburgh each operate a transfer station. In March 2023, voters in the NWSWD approved a bond of up to \$1.5 million to finance the cost of renovating the NWSWD Georgia Recycling Facility to increase capacity and improve safety; that project is anticipated to be completed in 2025.

The District offers collection of household unregulated hazardous waste--such as used motor oil, paint, and batteries--at the Georgia Transfer Station year-round and at special collection events throughout the year. In a typical year, 1500 households take advantage of these services. NWSWD contracts with a hazardous waste transporter to transfer and manage this waste efficiently; the material is typically shipped out of the Region and is often incinerated for fuel.

The majority of the landfill-bound waste collected in the area is shipped to the Highgate Transfer Station or the Williston Transfer Station. From there the waste is shipped in bulk to the Coventry Landfill. The NWSWD owns a 154-acre property in Sheldon intended to be used as a landfill site when existing landfill capacity is exhausted or export becomes less cost effective. The NWSWD received a permit from the ANR in 1997 to construct and operate a lined landfill on 7 acres of the site; this permit was recertified in 2011. The facility still needs to obtain Act 250 and local permits before commencing operation.

Legislation known as Act 148 (AKA the Universal Recycling law) was passed in 2012 to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills by banning recyclables, food scraps and yard or leaf debris from landfills.

Amendments to the law in 2018 established a new framework for waste fees, leaf and yard waste and food waste. Changes to the law in 2019 prohibited retailers and food establishments from providing customers with single-use plastic bags, straws, stirrers, or polystyrene containers.

FUTURE NEEDS

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources estimates “across Vermont there is more than \$2 billion of investment needed in drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems over the next 10 years, to both refurbish existing systems and to prepare this essential infrastructure for increasingly disruptive and potentially devastating effects of climate change.” According to a 2019 “report card” issued by the Vermont section of the American Society of Civil Engineers, these system are among the lowest scoring infrastructure categories in the state. This cost estimate does not include any additional capacity that might be needed to support increased housing growth called for elsewhere in this plan. Examples of water and wastewater-related investment priorities for the Northwest Region include development of systems in Highgate (in Highgate Center village as well as near the State airport), South Hero and Keeler Bay villages, Georgia and St. Albans Town. They also include the updating of systems in Swanton Village (including water line upgrades and significant wastewater plant upgrades to reduce phosphorus) and St. Albans City.

Climate change will have an impact all forms of water infrastructure, particularly from flooding and also drought. More frequent and more intense rain events can strain stormwater systems and impact drainage patterns. New and updated public drinking water and wastewater system design should consider climate change impacts, such as more droughts and more wet periods. Wellhead protection areas should take climate change impacts into account and can be integrated into land conservation and recreation objectives. Stormwater systems must account for changes in expected weather patterns. (Vermont Climate Action Plan, 2021)

With respect to solid waste needs, in Highgate, a significant solid waste related priority involves the site of the Highgate transfer station and previously capped landfill. Slope stabilization has been proposed at the transfer station to protect human health, the natural environment, and a town owned infrastructure.

GOALS AND POLICIES

- 1. The water supply for the region will not be contaminated, depleted or degraded and there will sufficient quantity to support existing and future residential, commercial and industrial needs.**
 - a. Land development shall not threaten to pollute or deplete groundwater resources or exceed existing or planned public water supply capacity.
 - b. Development that could negatively impact ground and surface water must not be located in identified water protection areas and groundwater recharge areas or where such development is likely to adversely impact water supplies.
 - c. Withdrawal of groundwater must not exceed the recharge rate over a reasonable period of time and must not interfere with the reasonable withdrawal of groundwater by other users.

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- 2. Residents, communities and businesses will have solid waste disposal, water supply, wastewater treatment systems and stormwater treatment methods that are cost-effective and environmentally sound.**
- a. New or upgraded wastewater management systems and community/public water supply will reinforce the desired settlement patterns of compact centers, neighborhoods and growth areas separated by rural countryside.
 - b. Creative inter-municipal and public/private partnerships that promote cost-savings for providing wastewater and stormwater treatment are encouraged.
 - c. Support improvements to existing water systems that improve the quality of drinking water.
 - d. Long-range community facility plans and capital budgets will guide the creation, upgrade or expansion of wastewater and stormwater treatment systems and will consider impacts from climate change.
 - e. New development that creates an undue adverse impact on solid waste disposal, wastewater treatment and/or stormwater treatment will contribute funds to increase the capacity of these systems.
 - f. The cumulative impact of development on stormwater facilities must be addressed in considering stormwater treatment options.
 - g. Stormwater management and facility design must incorporate: consideration of cumulative impact, low impact development techniques, green stormwater infrastructure and long-term maintenance plans.
 - h. Solid waste will be recycled, reused and composted to the greatest extent possible prior to disposal.