Appendix A

Public Process:
The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Work with the White River Partnership and others on the White River Basin Plan

All elements of the basin planning process include public involvement. The public is consulted through meetings, mailings, interviews and contact with community groups. A draft basin plan is circulated to interested parties for comment during the year in which it is prepared. Certain recommendations or management tools in a basin may be of interest to specific segments of the public. These include, but are not limited to petitions for reclassification and water management type designation under the Water Quality Standards, or Outstanding Resource Water Designation.

Most of the work of the Department with the public in the White River Basin has been through the White River Partnership. By the time the Department began working with the Partnership, the group had already identified public concerns and they had begun work on solutions.

The White River Partnership

The Partnership was formed in 1996 and includes participants from local, state and federal agencies as well as local citizens. The mission of the Partnership is to help local communities balance the long-term cultural, economic and environmental health of the White River watershed through active citizen participation.

Through a series of public forums in 1996, the Partnership identified the following top concerns: water quality; riparian habitat; stream bank erosion; public awareness of problems; public access to the river; point source and nonpoint source pollution; and maintaining a working landscape (agriculture and forestry). The White River Partnership has developed project areas based on these concerns.

The Department and the Partnership were able to find projects on which to collaborate. These projects are based on the list of concerns from the forums and help the State meet its obligation outlined in state and federal law. These projects include improving public access to the river, developing a volunteer monitoring program, and stabilizing river channels.

Public Forums to Introduce Basin Planning

In the late fall of 2000, the Agency and the White River Partnership held three public meetings in the watershed to determine if any other concerns had emerged since the forums in 1996 and to obtain public comments on the projects in progress (i.e. solutions). About 100 members of the public and 30 members of state or federal agencies attended the meetings in Rochester, South Royalton and White River Junction. New concerns discussed included the health of fisheries and high *E. coli* levels in recreational waters.

In addition to the public meetings, the Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets invited the agricultural community in the watershed to a meeting in Randolph on December 7, 2000. Participants included 20 citizens and 20 members of state or federal agencies. The Department of Environmental Conservation and the Partnership led the discussion, which focused on the roles of the agricultural community in basin planning.

Local Concerns: A Summary by the Agency of Natural Resources of Discussions at the Public Meetings and Agricultural Meeting during the Fall of 2000 and Comments from the Survey

The meetings were successful in bringing together a variety of people to discuss a range of issues. Over 130 people attended the meetings including town officials, farmers, teachers, students, business people and people from state and federal agencies. The majority of the questions and concerns focused on the state basin planning process in the White River Basin, *E. coli* (bacteria) levels in the river, the use of volunteers in monitoring water quality, stream bank erosion, channel stabilization and public access to water. Other subjects raised by one or two people included the health of the fisheries and of specific streams flowing to Ayers Brook, the impact of sludge application and of stormwater runoff on water quality, the importance of mapping wetlands and concerns over the invasive Japanese knotweed. Surveys were handed out at all the meetings and thirteen were returned.

Overall people had positive comments about basin planning. Several people said that they would be concerned if the basin plan were to increase regulations, resulting in a loss of local control. Otherwise, people recommended considerations that should be made during the basin planning process. People suggested in both the meetings and in the surveys that limiting the number of issues addressed in basin planning is important. People at the meetings added that it is important to understanding the consequences of any recommendations and to use the planning process to consolidate state and federal efforts.

People responded to the explanation of the system for the classification and typing of waters with questions about how it would affect land use. Ten out of thirteen respondents to the survey felt it was important to ask for higher goals for water quality management than exists with the current classification system.

The concerns brought by the public included water quality, river access, *E. coli*, fisheries, stream bank erosion and stabilization. People wanted to know more about the water quality in the White River Basin and members of the agricultural community asked about how impairments were measured and how impairments would affect them. Eleven of the respondents agreed that developing a volunteer monitoring program is at least somewhat important.

With regard to river access, several landowners discussed the problems of having their property used for access. They described the public's general lack of respect for landowner's privacy and property. Property owners were also concerned about liability issues. Someone suggested that landowners could be paid to keep land open through tax

incentives. Twelve of the respondents to the survey agreed that purchasing access to popular river access sites was somewhat to very important.

The failure of the Bethel Wastewater Treatment Facility to disinfect treated water before discharging it to the White River during the summer of 2000 increased people's awareness of *E. coli* (bacteria). Many questions were asked at the Rochester and South Royalton meetings about *E. coli* in general. People also identified two schools in the area, Rochester High School and Sharon Academy, which were teaching their students to test for *E. coli*. Eleven of the respondents to the survey felt that it was at least somewhat important that notification regarding high *E. coli* levels be improved.

Fisheries were discussed primarily at the South Royalton meeting. People asked about the health of the fisheries in the basin and the effect of stocking on the wild populations. Some people had noticed a drop in the population of game fish. People mentioned a project on the Pomfret and Hartford town line that had improved fish passage by installing a fish ladder in a culvert.

Streambank erosion and stabilization discussions ranged from gravel removal to streambank revegetation. Some conservation commissions in the basin are working to develop protection for streams by encouraging their towns to incorporate mandatory set backs of buildings from streams in their permit review process. In addition the Connecticut River Joint Commission announced the completion of a series of brochures on riverside buffers.

The surveys indicated that stream and shoreline buffers were considered important for the protection of wildlife and fisheries. Most respondents felt that buffers could be best improved by providing educational material to the public. Providing plant materials to landowners and encouraging towns to protect buffers was a recommended approach by seven of the respondents. Two respondents also wrote in that buffers should be purchased.

The survey asked about the importance of maintaining free flowing rivers and twelve respondents answered that it was very important.

The discussion with the members of the agricultural communities focused on how we measured impairments and the expense of remediating problems. People stated that farmers must be assisted financially if they are expected to protect stream banks. They also wanted the importance of maintaining a working landscape to be balanced with the environmental objectives.

The meetings were congenial and could best be described as information sessions. Although the meeting facilitators asked for people's concerns and their proposed solutions, most of the people who spoke had questions.

Subsequent Public Outreach

2001

- **February 28 -** Letter sent summarizing comments received from the public forums to the 125 forum attendees, the White River Partnership mailing list, town officials and legislative representatives. Letter also requested further assistance from public in basin planning process.
- **March 1 –** Typing and classification presentation to US Forest Service and White River Partnership
- **March 22** –Typing and classification presentation in Randolph. A press release was issued and letters were sent to town officials in the basin. The meeting was rescheduled because of snow. The cancellation of the meeting and the rescheduled date were announced on local radio stations.
- **March 24** – Invitation to develop strategies for the basin plan, either as part of a focus group or by sending in comments. Invitation sent to people or groups who had responded to the February 28th letter, the White River Partnership and any other interested parties.
- **April 18** –Typing and classification presentation to the Chateauguay-No Town Committee and discussion regarding their interest in assisting ANR in bringing proposal to towns.
- **April 27** – Fielded questions at a display on basin planning in the White River at the Association of Conservation Commission's annual meeting.
- **May 4** – Meeting with Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the White River Partnership to discuss goals, objectives and strategies regarding agriculture.
- **June 19 -** Review of the working draft of the basin plan by state agencies, federal agencies and the White River Partnership.
- **July 3** – Stream instability and erosion focus group: Vt. Departments of Environmental Conservation and Fish and Wildlife, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- **July 12 –** Public access focus group: Green Mountain National Forest, Town of Hartford, landowners along White River (2), Upper Valley Trail Alliance, White River Partnership.
- **July 9** – Water quality monitoring focus group: Department of Environmental Conservation, River Network, and the White River Partnership.
- **July 17 and December 12 -** Fisheries focus group: Vt. Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, White River Partnership, Trout Unlimited.
- **Fall -** Review of the revised working draft of the basin plan by all interested parties. Announced in press releases and in letters to interested parties.
- **Winter** – Article on basin planning in the White River printed in ANR's *Out of the Blue*.

2002

- **March 13 –** Letter sent to town officials in the basin describing the process for typing and classification of surface waters and requesting a meeting to further describe the proposal.
- **April 18 –** Meeting with the agricultural community on balancing water quality with a working landscape. Twenty people attended.
- **Spring-Summer –** Presentation of the Agency's typing and classification proposal at seventeen selectboard and planning commission meetings and one conservation commission meeting in the basin. Four towns requested a letter describing the proposal instead of the meeting.
- **September 3, 2002 –** Public hearing on the final draft in White River Junction, Vermont. Sixteen people attended.
- **September 12, 2002 –** Public hearing on the final draft in Rochester, Vermont. Twenty-seven people attended.
- **September 18, 2002** – Public hearing on the final draft in Randolph Center, Vermont. Twenty-five people attended.