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Julia S. Moore, P.E.
Agency Secretary

State of Vermont
Agency of Natural Resources

To: Vermont Joint Fiscal Committee
From: Julie Moore, Secretary of Natural Resources
Date: July 24, 2020
Re: CRF Request for Digitization of Use Value Records and Regulatory Modernization

1. Digitization of Current Use Records

Total Amount Requested: \$450,000. The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) is seeking funding to purchase three large format scanners to digitize use value appraisal records. Vermont's Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program enables eligible private landowners who practice long-term forestry to have their land appraised based on the property's value for production of wood rather than its residential or commercial development value under normal ad valorem taxation. There are currently more than 16,000 parcels enrolled in UVA statewide, and records for approximately 10% of the enrolled parcels need to be reviewed and updated each year.

Response to the Pandemic: The UVA Program is largely paper-based and requires landowners and FPR staff to come to a state office to review and update parcel records. Digitizing UVA forestland parcel records will allow the public to access records without having to come to a state office. Electronic records will also allow foresters and landowners to move away from "tail gate conversations" and enable social distancing during field visits. All of this promotes Vermont's efforts to actively and safely respond to the needs of the unfolding pandemic by allowing government business operations to be maintained while limiting in-person contact.

Urgency of the Request: There is a critical need for funding to support digitization that cannot wait until the appropriations process. The digitization of UVA records is a significant undertaking, however, it will also result in interim work products that immediately make records available to Vermonters. The UVA Program requires both new applications and applications to add acreage to already enrolled parcels to be submitted by October 1 each year. If able to start work immediately, FPR should be able to complete digitization of all records for enrolled parcels that are either critical for program administration or require timely access by the public prior to December, with some materials scanned and made available before October 1, thereby limiting the amount of in-person contacts required to complete that process. Electronic records will allow also be compiled in a statewide digital

GIS map layer of UVA-enrolled parcels for remote evaluation of eligibility by landowners and foresters, further reducing the need to access the office.

2. Regulatory Modernization

Total Amount Requested: \$1,400,000. The Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) is requesting funding to support retooling ANR's approach to regulatory review and environmental permitting to allow for and support increased telework, doing so in a manner that enhances technical assistance available to applicants, improves the timeliness of regulatory review and ensures public participation processes are maintained or enhanced. Specifically, the project will: (1) deploy a virtual "one-stop shop" to help Vermonters identify what permits are required for specific projects; (2) expand online application materials, payment, and report submissions to facilitate remote permitting by programs that are currently partially or fully paper-based; (3) develop and deploy a suite of tools to improve online technical assistance and permitting guidance; and, (4) convert select ANR paper records to electronic records necessary to facilitate remote transactions.

Response to the Pandemic: Historically, permitting programs have required significant, direct interaction between the public and those within government responsible for regulatory review. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the challenges presented by many current systems in completing regulatory work remotely. In particular, improving Vermont's regulatory review systems will help expedite review of a number of CRF-funded priority initiatives and allow government to continue to operate while limiting in-person contact in order to safely and effectively maintain operations during the pandemic response.

Urgency of the Request: There is a critical need for funding to support modernization efforts that cannot wait until the appropriations process. To maximize the benefit of each of these initiatives it is essential to start work as soon as possible. Improved tools will be rolled out as they are completed. As such, starting now will make more tools available to organizations and entities seeking regulatory review and environmental permits during the pandemic response and ongoing need for social distancing, including projects related to including CRF-funded priority initiatives.